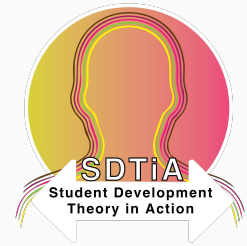


# Open Each Class with a Check-In



## Pedagogical Rationale

Beginning each class session with a probing question can serve as a deliberate pedagogical choice in teaching student development theory. An instructor could ask their students: “What’s new? What’s happened with you since we last met?” or “Where have you recognized theory in real life since our last class and what’s shaped that?” This practice recognizes that students arrive in the classroom shaped by ongoing sociopolitical events, campus climates, personal responsibilities, and community contexts. It affirms that learning is situated—rooted in time, place, and lived experience—and that developmental processes unfold within dynamic, intersecting environments. The check-in positions students’ realities as legitimate sources of knowledge, aligning with feminist, intersectional, and critical developmental approaches that center context in understanding learning and growth (Haynes et al., 2025; Tuitt et al, 2023).

## Implementation Strategy

At the beginning of class, the instructor invites voluntary updates from students in response to the question. Shares may include personal experiences, campus happenings, work-related moments, or sociopolitical events influencing their week. The instructor listens attentively, acknowledges themes, and—when appropriate—connects what emerges to the upcoming lesson or broader course concepts. The practice is brief and low-pressure, functioning as a grounding ritual that eases students into the learning space while creating opportunities to surface contextual factors that might inform discussions of theory.

## Instructional Value

This opening check-in enhances teaching and learning in several ways. It humanizes the classroom, supports relational trust, and bridges student development theory with the lived experiences that give theory meaning. The practice also helps instructors gauge students’ emotional, cognitive, and developmental readiness for the day’s material. By surfacing the sociopolitical and environmental factors shaping students’ lives, the check-in naturally situates curriculum knowledge within its broader context—illustrating how developmental theories interact with real-world conditions. Ultimately, this method makes explicit that learning in higher education is both contextually grounded and relationally constructed.