

TEACHING TIP OF THE MONTH

Teaching Tip of the Month

November 2022

Theme: Encouraging Creativity

Tip 1: Genius Hour

Genius Hour is a concept that originated in the business world. The term was initially coined by Jen Shefner, assistant vice president at Columbia Credit Union in Vancouver, WA. (see Pink, 2009). Pink describes Genius Hour as “big think work.” At Google, which uses the term “20% Time,” developers are allowed to use 20% of their time to work time on projects that interest them. Tools such as Gmail and Google Talk were byproducts of their version of Genius Hour.

A Kesler Science YouTube video, [“What is Genius Hour? Introduction to Genius Hour in the Classroom,”](#) presents the process for Genius Hour in a middle school course. The process starts with a question that conveys what the student wants to learn. If the answer to the question can be found easily on Google, it needs to be modified. Next, students engage in research. The last step is to share their project with the class and the world. Given the time constraints of college courses, Genius Hour can be adapted in the following ways:

- **Group Genius Hours.** Designate one or two class periods as genius hour days when students engage in small group research that connects what they learn in that period to the learning outcomes. Students brainstorm and come up with creative ideas or projects by the end of the class period. The instructor can adopt some of the ideas later in the semester or in subsequent semesters.
- **Flipped Genius Hour.** Use a few minutes of one class at the beginning of the semester to introduce the idea of a project. Students work on their projects outside class and either post updates to the online forum or have informal check-ins during class. Students make final presentations of their genius hour projects at the end of the semester, tying their projects to course outcomes.
- **Scaffolded Genius Hour.** Implement genius in stages throughout the semester as part of the preparation for a larger, high-stakes project due at the end of the semester. Each genius hour segment during the semester can have a specific goal, and students document their progress as they prepare for the final project.

Tip 2: Info Sponging

Info sponging is the practice of spending a few minutes each day reading or researching a topic outside of your domain or discipline. The term was coined by Priceline founder Jeff Hoffman and is described in his Ted Talk, [The Power of Wonder](#). Hoffman explained that over time, info sponging helped him discover patterns and trends that eventually led to innovation in his field.

Here are a few ways we can apply info sponging to support student learning and success:

- Brainstorm ideas for a paper, speech, or project
- Identify interdisciplinary connections to support learning across courses
- Connect or apply course concepts with industries not related to the course as a form of career exploration

Pink, D. (2009). “The Genius Hour: How 60 Minutes a Week Can Electrify Your Job.”

<https://www.danpink.com/2011/07/the-genius-hour-how-60-minutes-a-week-can-electrify-your-job/>.

More Info on Teaching Tips

“Teaching Tips of the Month” began as a project of Program for Active Learning in STEM (PALS) and Teaching to Increase Diversity and Equity in STEM (TIDES) grants. Many thanks to Ray Gonzales and Alla Webb, who served as Principal Investigators of the TIDES grants. You can view archived Teaching Tips of the Month on [The Hub](#). We welcome feedback and invite you to submit ideas for this publication to Angela Lanier, angela.lanier@montgomerycollege.edu