

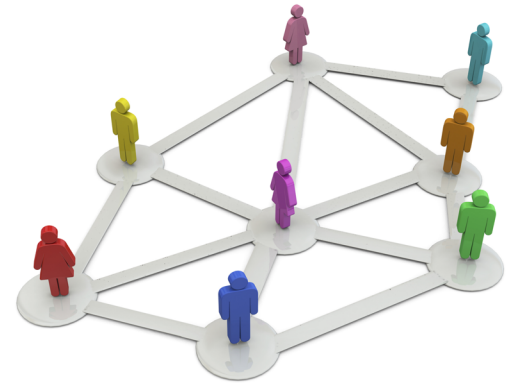
KEEPING STUDENTS ENGAGED IN ONLINE COURSES

INTRODUCTION

In online courses, engaged students will have better learning experiences. As you instruct in an online course, the communication strategies and course design are the main factors that impact student engagement and success.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

In an online course, communication between students and the instructor is key to maintaining student engagement. This will include your participation in discussions, timely responses to students' inquiries, and constructive instructor feedback on assignments.



Discussions

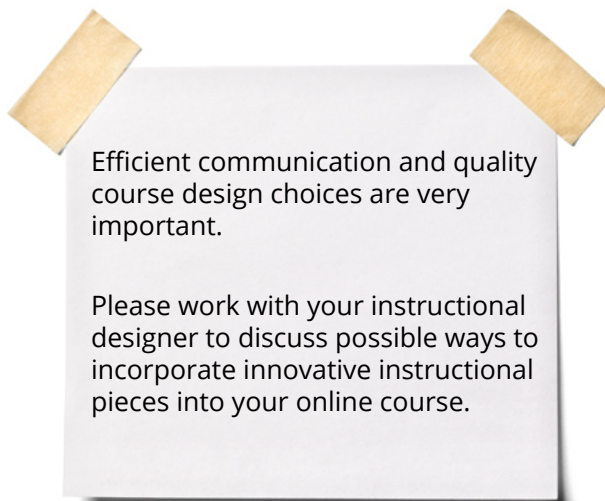
In online course discussions, you want to give students space to explore and develop ideas on their own, but you also need to respond and participate. Generally students appreciate when instructors add to a discussion by responding and then also adding follow-up questions, or introducing a related concept, or a different angle on the topic. Students expect the instructor to provide insights and guidance in online discussions to keep them engaged and the discussion growing.

Timely response

Naturally you will get questions and inquiries from students throughout your course. They may come to you via email or through an ask-the-instructor forum. Students will typically expect a response from you within 48 hours. In the course syllabus, it is a good practice to include a statement about what students can expect from you regarding checking emails and question forums. This should include information about what days of the week you will or will not reply, and so on.

Constructive feedback

When you are grading assignments, constructive feedback should be provided rather than just a score. You also want to let students know your general time frame for providing feedback on their work so that expectations are clear. Using rubrics can help you provide objective feedback based on students' performance.



COURSE DESIGN

Making your presentations interactive, linking course content with real-world practice, designing assignments to meet students' needs, and creating a positive peer learning environment can all be very helpful in keeping students engaged and actively learning in your online course.

Interactivity in lectures or presentations

Adding practice quizzes is a good way to keep students engaged when they are listening to or reading your presentations. These break your lecture into chunks and help students to remember key information that you want to emphasize. Simulations or animations can also be very effective when you want to explain complex systems or concepts.

Connection to real-world practice

Students will find the assignments and discussions more meaningful when they are related to real-world problems and practices. This might involve assignments revolving around current events or real-world examples.

Assignments to fit students' needs and interests

Many instructors use an initial student survey or initial discussion questions to find out students' interests, career plans, and goals. Then they encourage students to write assignments based on their own interests and needs. These assignments can be created with flexibility so that students get the most benefit from doing the work. You can also use student feedback to modify future offerings of your course by providing alternative assignments and discussions.

Peer review and comment

In the formulation of discussion topics, you can group and assign projects to students with similar interests and background, or students with different perspectives. When you assign group projects, because they can be complex, be sure to do a thorough evaluation and develop an improvement plan to make projects better the next time.

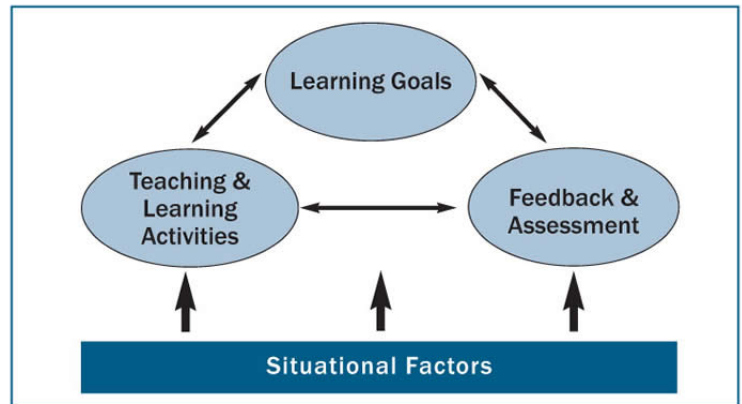


Figure 1: Adapted from Fink, L.D. (2003). *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*, Jossey-Bass.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Engaging Online Students; Faculty Focus.

Available at: <http://www.facultyfocus.com/tag/engaging-online-students/>

Keengwe, J., & Schnellert, G. L. (2014). *Cross-Cultural Online Learning in Higher Education and Corporate Training*. IGI Global. Available from: <http://my.safaribooksonline.com/book/e-learning/9781466650237>