Online Student Engagement

Increasing Student Engagement in Online Courses

You might be hard-pressed to find an educator who doesn't support the idea that student engagement is a hallmark of good teaching. However, achieving buy in from learners can challenge even the most seasoned educator in the classroom. The asynchronous nature of the online environment can pose a unique set of challenges for teachers, since online learners often need to be motivated to log-on and "log-in" to virtual learning.

Here are a few ideas for increasing and ensuring higher levels of student engagement in online courses:

1. **Communicate in Multiple Formats**
   Online education provides instructors with multiple avenues for communicating with students. Course email and discussion forums tend to be the standard communication tools, but don't overlook embedded audio and video, chat rooms or instant messaging, broadcast text messaging, and home page announcements. Explanatory screencast videos tend to be well received by students, and are increasingly easy and inexpensive to create

2. **Provide Active Learning Opportunities**
   A common misconception about online learning is that students only sit in front of their computers. That might be true if the course is designed that way, but one way to engage online learners is to get them out of their chairs (or beds) and get them involved in active learning. One definition of active learning is "hands-on learning," although that could probably include "hands-on your mouse," which is not the suggestion here. Assign your online students to interview people working in the field, or to otherwise bring their learning out into the community where they live. Case studies, group projects, or gathering and analyzing local data are just a few of the many examples of active learning.

3. **Make Learning Social**
   Many instructors are looking at social media as ways to spice up their courses and engage students in topical learning. Consider adding a Twitter badge to your course homepage and then using a hashtag to push posts with course-relevant content to your students. Social platforms, if used effectively, can help build a sense of classroom community among the students and between students and instructor.

4. **Add Elements of Gamification**
   There are many ways that you can add gamification elements to online courses, without going the route of building a full game-based learning course from start to finish. As a more intermediate step, consider adding badges to your course for recognizing student accomplishments along the way. Badges that are rewarded on the basis of achieving particular competencies can be offered as a way of rewarding student performance and encouraging continued engagement.

5. **Provide Timely and Useful Feedback**
   Feedback to students about their performance is extremely important in the effort to keep students

> **KEY DEFINITION**
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> ## Student Engagement
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> In education, student engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education. Generally speaking, the concept of "student engagement" is predicated on the belief that learning improves when students are inquisitive, interested, or inspired, and that learning tends to suffer when students are bored, dispassionate, disaffected, or otherwise "disengaged."
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> *Source: "Student Engagement" The Glossary of Education Reform (2016).*

engaged in the learning journey. Quick responses to discussion posts and email questions can help keep students on track for the next assignment or activity. Turnaround time on grading of assessments can also have an impact on future student efforts. Students should never have to engage in the next assessment without receiving feedback on the previous assessment. Feedback that is detailed and positive in nature tends to be more effective than faint praise or unclear messages.

6. **Add Self-Assessment Opportunities**
Provide opportunities for self-assessment, allowing students to take more responsibility for their own learning. Grading their own discussion posts, or providing input for their own grade for course participation can be a motivating and sometimes humbling experience. A course-based ePortfolio or learning plan can be used to encourage students to build their own personal learning plans while identifying their preferences for multiple assessment methods.

7. **Improve Course Accessibility for All**
This last category is not one that is commonly thought about when talking about the importance of student engagement. However, student engagement can be reduced for all when course content is provided in a way that causes problems with web accessibility. Regardless of whether a student relies on assistive technology or not, having course materials that don't create barriers to learning is an ongoing need for students in online education. Taking minor steps toward accessibility improvement of course materials is a good practice for educators to engage in on a frequent, periodic basis (Dahl, 2015).

Additional Resources

Student Engagement Resources on the Web

- Active Learning in Online Courses from *University of Florida*
- Communicating with Your Students from *University of California, Davis*
- The Use of Social Media for Blended Learning (PDF) from *Journal of Educational Research*
- How to Use Social Media as a Learning Tool from *Edudemic*
- Gamification in Education Module from *Carleton University Open Courses*
- 15 Ways to Gamify Online Learning from *Growth Engineering UK*
- Engaging Online Students Through the Gamification of Learning Materials (PDF) from *ascilite*
- Strategies for Providing Feedback in Online Courses from *Illinois Online Network (ION)*
- Constructive Criticism in an Online Environment from *Online Learning Consortium (OLC)*
- Formative Assessment In eLearning from *eLearingIndustry.com*
- How to Effectively Assess Online Learning - By John Orlando, Ph.D
- Online Learning Journals from *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology*
- Web Accessibility in Mind (WebAIM.org)

Source: Dahl, B. (2015, November 12). *7 Tips for Increasing Student Engagement in Online Courses*. Retrieved from D2L eLearning Blog: https://www.d2l.com/blog/7-tips-for-increasing-student-engagement-in-online-courses