



STRATEGIES TO CREATE AND FOSTER COMMUNITY

OSUN Teaching Resources

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Principle: Welcome students to the course and set an inclusive tone in advance.

[pre-semester, asynchronous optional engagement]

Strategies:

1. **Welcome Video:** Record and share a video welcoming students to their new learning community. Email students before the start of the semester to invite them to log into the course site while also sharing a link to this video.
 - a. **Share resources or relevant links.** Share additional resources and materials before the course begins--this might be content that is tangentially related to the course. Think of this as a way to grab students' attention and invite them to familiarize themselves with the course site (and get excited for day one).
 - b. **Meet the Group Forum:** Invite students to introduce themselves to one another using a discussion forum. Provide a suggested format for the introduction, encouraging everyone to contribute something visual (picture, video) along with a short bio. You should do the same in order to model the kind of responses you want students to make.

Principle: Create a supportive learning environment.

[ongoing, asynchronous, synchronous]

Strategies:

1. **Ongoing Icebreakers.** Icebreakers are often used at the start of a semester in order to encourage students to get to know each other, paving the way for a room of students to bond as a cohort. These activities help students feel comfortable and encourage the group to develop their own rapport and connections. In an online or blended environment, including icebreakers throughout the semester helps to

reinforce community and give students multiple opportunities to reinforce and strengthen their connections to one another.

from *Engaging Online Learners*

2. **Proactively foster personal relationships with students.** Whenever possible, leave personalized responses to student's work:
 - respond to their discussion boards posts,
 - send personal (not only group) emails,
 - provide feedback to their work when possible via voice (Jing and VoiceThread programs allow you to record your screen image, including cursor movements, and your audio comment on images, documents, and videos)
 - Check in on non-performing students by leaving an individual video message (Skype, Whatsapp, Zoom)

3. **Offer a range of informal spaces to gather that are not directly linked to class sessions.**
 - **Host a Virtual Coffee Hour.** Invite students to gather to discuss current events and common interests.
 - **Create an intentional space for celebration.** Creating virtual spaces and rituals for celebrations and socializing can strengthen relationships and lay the foundation for future collaboration. Find ways to shorten the affinity distance.

Principle: Create multiple opportunities for students to engage and interact.

[ongoing, asynchronous, synchronous]

Strategies:

Student – Content Interaction

- *Organize content in small, manageable “chunks.”* Present multiple versions of the same content using different forms of media.
- *Encourage transfer.* Invite students to connect new knowledge to what they already know (experiences or previously covered concepts).
- *Guide the Learning Process.* Offer strategies and examples to help students as they engage with content on their own (i.e. demonstrations or simulations, visualizations, concept maps, etc.).
- *[Flipped Classroom](#):* Students read and/or watch course content on their own before any synchronous meetings. This enables students to learn content at their own

pace, in the style that works best for them. Class time (synchronous) can then be used for discussion and active learning.

Student – Student Interaction

- *Assign student-led discussions* in the online forums when giving text or video content to learn.
 - *Note sharing*. Invite students to take turns sharing class notes so that everyone can learn from one another's note-taking style.
- *Design more activities to be done in pairs or small groups*:
 - *Set up small study groups* so students can learn from one another and receive informal mentoring.
 - *Create joint assignments* (with clear guidelines) so students can work together on a project, meeting and communicating outside of class time.
 - Encourage students to *study in teams* with their own deadlines and regular meetings, set a purpose for each meeting.
 - *Study Buddies (E-Buddies)*. Invite students to complete an activity in pairs, connecting with one another online as a way to support time and class work management. Ask students to share how effective the buddy system was by submitting summaries of what was accomplished.
 - *Writing Groups*. Create writing groups early in the semester. These should be groups of 4-5 students who vary in their experience and ability. The group will meet for peer review and feedback throughout the entire course, creating a smaller, supportive writing community within the larger class.
 - *Structure Student Interactions*. For any student – student interaction, make sure that students know what is expected of them and how they will be evaluated.
 - *Inclusive Discussion Strategies*:
 - *Sayback Activities (Thought Chains)*. Practice active listening by inviting students to follow this process when speaking:
 - [Name of person who just spoke], I hear you saying [summarize or reformulate what the person just said into one's own words], but/and/or I wrote/think...
 - *Create "Guidelines for Discussion" collectively as a class*. Invite students to reflect and share what they need in order to be fully present and engaged in the class. What do you appreciate from your classmates? How should we communicate with one another in order to maintain a supportive, safe space?
 - The group should agree on these guidelines and they should be shared on the course site. Guidelines can be returned to, enforced, and changed as the semester progresses.
 - *Invite students to come to class with a "burning question."* This works particularly well in a synchronous environment because the students direct the discussion, not the professor.

- *Begin each class (synchronous) with an informal “check in.”* Create a routine of beginning class with a social ritual—this might be an ice breaker or something as small as asking everyone how their week is going.

Principle: Design your course presence intentionally.

[ongoing, asynchronous, synchronous]

Strategies:

- **Grab Students’ Attention.** Use visuals and media to give students a sense of your personality.
- **Create Routines.** Communicate reliably on the same days and times, for example, you might consider sending out a weekly email on Sunday afternoons letting students know what the week’s content and activities will be. Students will expect this weekly point of contact and will see it as an invitation to engage.
 - *Weekly announcement.* Post an announcement (on your course site) at the start of each week offering an overview of the upcoming week and a recap of the previous week’s topic. You might also choose to do this via making video or audio recordings.
 - *Office Hours.* Hold regular drop in online and by appointment office hours (planned with time zones and varying schedules in mind).
- **Participate.** Devote a certain amount of time each week to “visible, meaningful engagement.”
 - *Respond to questions, host Q & A discussion forum.* Make yourself available to answer questions as they come up, encouraging students to post questions regularly.
 - *Interact and chat.* Participate in discussion forums and chat informally with students.
 - *Offer Timely Feedback.* Let students know how long it might take you to respond to their written work. Constructive and positive feedback is crucial to student engagement, and students respond best when they know when to expect your comments.
- **Share information in a friendly, explicit and transparent way.**
 - *Assignments and Directions.* Write down the directions for an activity or the steps for a writing assignment as if you were explaining them in conversation.
 - *Share an example of a successful piece of student work.* Models and examples help to clarify what an assignment asks of a student and what they will need to work towards in order to be successful.