Instructor-Student Interaction

Teaching Online Requires a Different Mind-Set than Teaching Face-to Face

When teaching face-to-face, the instructor is typically the focal point in the classroom. Here they lecture, ask questions, answer questions, and guide discussions. In the online classroom, however, these interactions cannot take place. Students interact with the elements in the online course design rather than a live instructor. If the instructor does not purposely build meaningful connections with their students, the student can easily disengage and lose motivation.

Is There Evidence that Instructor Interaction in Meaningful?

There is much research that shows that online courses with high levels of instructor-to-student interaction have a positive impact on student satisfaction and learning. For example:

- Students who perceived that they had high levels of interaction with the instructor also had high levels of satisfaction with the course and reported higher levels of learning, compared to students who thought they had less interaction (Swan, 2001).

- Dixson (2010) and King (2014) stress that consistent interaction with students at the individual and group levels help set academic expectations among students.

- The role of the instructor in course interactions is among the most critical for student success in online courses (Arbaugh, 2008; Eom. Wen, & Ashill, 2006)

How Do I Create Meaningful Instructor Interaction?

The main opportunities for online interaction are similar to those in the classroom; the difference is that instructors must perform them through a Learning Management System, which requires different ways of designing instruction and interacting with students.

Welcoming the class

As in the classroom, the “first day” goes a long way in setting the tone for the course. Your Course Introduction message, which should be ready the first time the student logs into the course, is an important element of building your presence and creating a sense of community in the course. Introducing yourself and the course should be in included in the “Start Here” portion of your course.

Participating in discussions

In many online courses, discussion forums are the major interaction channel. The level of instructor participation in class discussions varies on the course, the nature of the discussion, and the instructor’s style. However, instructors can participate through necessary comments when students are on the wrong track, or with a summary at the end of the discussion.

Instructor-Student Interaction

Providing feedback

In addition to grades, individual feedback lets students know that the instructor has closely evaluated their work. Canvas Speedgrader allows instructors to leave confidential, personal feedback to students in a variety of ways.

Office hours

While even on-campus students may not take advantage of office hours, students like the reassurance of knowing that there are times when they can contact the instructor with questions or problems. Online, this can be as simple as setting a time when students can contact you by email and know that they will get a quick response. Other options for online office hours include using Zoom or other web chat or conferencing applications.

Consistent communication

Unlike teaching in the classroom, it's easy for an online instructor to "disappear." Even if you are checking into the class, reading and grading assignments, monitoring discussions, and responding to individual emails, these activities are invisible to students. The Announcement tool in Canvas is an easy place to communicate with the entire class, even if only once a week. News items can include:

- Reminders or previews of upcoming assignments
- Comments on or a summary of a current discussion
- General comments on how the class did on a test or assignment
- Remediation on a misunderstood or muddy learning point, based on student work
- A link to a relevant video or article
- Personal news you'd like to share with the class

References

Arbaugh, J. B. (2008). Does the community of inquiry framework predict outcomes in online MBA courses? International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 9(2).

Dixson, M. D. (2010). Creating effective student engagement in online courses: What do students find engaging? Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 10(2), 1– 13.

Eom, S. B., Wen, H. J., & Ashill, N. (2006). The determinants of students' perceived learning outcomes and satisfaction in university online education: An empirical investigation. Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative education. 4(2), 215-235.

King, S. B. (2014). Graduate student perceptions of the use of online course tools to support engagement. International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 8(1). doi:10.20429/ijsotl.2014.080105

Instructor-Student Interaction

Swan, K. (2001). Virtual interactivity: Designing factors affecting student satisfaction and perceived learning in asynchronous online courses. Distance Education, 22(2). 306-331.