What is Faculty Engagement?

Faculty engagement in the online and blended learning environments is thought to be the most important predictor of successful student outcomes. Faculty engagement includes how you communicate and interact with your online students. It is the degree to which you, as the leader of the online learning community, build essential relationships with your students. Many studies have implicated interaction as the single-most accurate predictor of online success (Doherty, 2000; Kearsley, 2000; Vrasidas & McIsaac, 1999; Woods, 2002).
Why is Faculty Engagement Important?

Many researchers maintain that faculty interaction may be a critical predictor of eLearner satisfaction (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Fich, 2007; Blignaut & Trollip, 2003; Willging & Johnson, 2004). Here’s what the research says:

The top two online student concerns are:
• Communication with online faculty
• Online instructor feedback (Blignaut & Trollip, 2003, p. 347)

The lack of faculty communication results in:
• Feelings of student isolation
• Higher dropout rates
• Lower student satisfaction ratings (Ouzts, 2006; Smith, 2006)

How Do You Engage Online Students?

“Online presence requires action.”
Blignaut & Trollip (2003, p. 347)

“No interaction, no education.”
Anderson (2003, p. 16)

Social presence, according to Short, Williams, and Christie (2006) -- the feeling of community an online learner feels within the online environment -- is the student’s most important perception and is fundamental to communication. You can create a strong online “social presence” by providing:

• Frequent individualized feedback that challenges the learner to reflect
• Graded assignments within 48 hours
• Replies to emails within 24 hours
• Regular and substantive participation in discussion forums
• Clear instructions
• Responsiveness (online learners measure time often in mere minutes ... not hours, days, or weeks)
• Multiple opportunities for collaboration

• Group projects
• Instructor-to-student: perceived by students to be of the highest value (Anderson 2003)
• Student-to-instructor
• Student-to-student
• Multiple pathways for communication
  • Discussion forums
  • Wikis
  • Chats
  • Blogs
  • Portfolios
  • Interactive whiteboards
  • Texting
  • Instant messaging
  • Web conferencing applications (FaceTime, Skype, etc.)
  • Shared workspace applications (Google docs)
  • Email
  • Phone
  • Secure social media application

• Genuine encouragement
• Friendly and conversational dialogue, using the student’s name
• Student-centered learning environment

Baker (2004) also suggested that online instructors provide (noting that lengthy delays in responding to students creates distance, much like unreturned phone calls and locked classroom doors):

• Daily reminders
• Weekly announcements
• Periodic commentaries
• Frequent updates

Faculty-initiated communication, helps you create your leadership “presence” (albeit a virtual presence) within the online classroom; the dialogue between you and your student may have the most impact overall, as it “sets the stage for a more collective classroom effort” (Arbaugh, 2001, p. 45).
References:


