

Student engagement during in-person class sessions

As we approach the end of the semester, you may find that your students do not appear to be as engaged during the in-person class sessions or missing these sessions entirely. While the current context of COVID means in-person attendance cannot be a factor in final grades, students are still expected to attend in-person courses when they are able. Here are some questions to think about in order to foster student engagement and in-person attendance.

What value is added by attending in person?

Reflect on the design of your course and ensure that the in-person components are adding value to your overall course and foster a learning environment that is positive and autonomy supportive (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017. See the [Center for Self-Determination Theory website](#)). Then, make a point to clearly and directly communicate this added value to your students. In other words, spend some time reflecting on how attending the in-person portions of your course is beneficial to students and contributes to their success. Alternative assessments and online participation provide a level of equity to all students during the pandemic, but they are, by definition, *alternatives*, not the same as the value of working in person with other students and you. Students forced to quarantine or isolate need to continue to make progress in the course, but we hope they will want to get out of quarantine as soon as possible so they can be present in class again.

Can your students succeed in your course without attending the in-person components?

The extent to which the answer to this question is “yes,” the less likely students will feel the need or motivation to attend the in-person class sessions. Especially in the current context -- when the default of in-person attendance might be called into question -- if students don't understand the value, relevance, and usefulness of their presence in class, then they are less likely to perceive their attendance in class to be worth their time.

In order to add value to your in-person class sessions consider the following:

- Begin the in-person class session by asking students what they would like to do today to achieve the class outcomes/objectives or by asking what is still unclear from previous class sessions or material that they consulted online, or problem sets they tried to complete. This will help students feel part of the learning community, which will foster their sense of belonging and desire to attend class.
- Ask students about their interests and/or goals for the remainder of the semester and use their responses in class problems or examples. By using content that is of direct interest and relevance to students, you are fostering a greater connection to what matters to students and encouraging their participation and attendance.
- Use simple strategies like Think-Pair-Share to foster discussions and engagement in class: During the Think-Pair-Share, you pose a question to your students, provide them

a few minutes to think on their own first, then you ask students to share what they thought about with a partner, and then have students share with the whole class. Experiment with variations, and be transparent about the rationale for these activities so that students don't see them as "busy work."

- Check out the IMPACT Access PDF, "[Fostering Engagement: Creating Connections](#)" on the Innovative Learning website, and resources on the [Active Learning Community of Practice \(ALCoP\) website](#) and available online through [Purdue Libraries](#), such as Elizabeth Barkley's (2016) *Learning assessment techniques: A handbook for college faculty*.
- Ensure that all in person lectures, discussions, or activities are relevant to the students current academic tasks, homework, projects, or assessments.
- Select in-person activities that absolutely need to be conducted in person. Make the schedule of these activities available on the course Brightspace so students know what is planned for that day. Consider reminding students of the daily in-person activities by sending an email to the class through Brightspace.
- Make the in-person class time very intentional and emphasize to your students the need, purpose, and rationale for conducting these activities in person. Ideally, connect the activities to course learning outcomes which will determine student success in the course.
- Structure the in-person activities to help ensure that students make progress toward learning outcomes (e.g. milestones, benchmarks), while providing space and time for students to ask questions and discuss their work with other students in class.
- Group work conducted during in-person class sessions is a good way to foster student engagement and encourage attendance. Strategies for student engagement using group work can also be found on the "[Fostering Engagement: Creating Connections](#)" PDF.