

Strategies to Encourage Student Success in Online Courses

Currently, many of our online students are either 1) taking online courses for the first time, or 2) taking a larger number of online courses than they would normally take. Both of these situations present challenges for both student and faculty.

Here are a few strategies and tools that you should consider employing in your online or blended courses.

Think Student First

Place yourself in the position of your student. Does your course navigation make sense to the student? Can students find content easily and does it make sense? Do your instructions make sense? Can a student read your instructions and understand? Do NOT assume that your students know everything that you know and do NOT assume that your students understand everything that they are supposed to know. Make the directions and instructions as clear and as plain as possible. Be direct, and specific. Provide guidelines and rubrics. Make next steps obvious and apparent.

Instructor Presence

Be “present” in your course. Instructor presence is easier in face-to-face courses. In online and blended courses, presence has to be well-thought out, considered, planned, and acted upon. Presence comes through in how often you send announcements, how quickly you respond to email and provide assignment feedback, and how available you are to students. Presence also comes through in how enthusiastic and friendly you are in student communication, whether teaching through recorded videos or webinars or responding electronically. Be friendly, warm, and encouraging. Be available, as well, but make sure you let your students know when and how it is appropriate to contact you.

New Online Instructors

If you are new to online instruction, do NOT adopt a multitude of apps that students must adopt, sign-up for, etc. Stick to simple things. Learn the Canvas LMS and do simple things like posting announcements and setting up assignment submissions. Teaching online can be challenging----do the simple things well to set yourself up for success. You can always adopt new apps or tools later after you have become more comfortable teaching online.

Communication with Students

Send reminder announcements via the Canvas Announcement tool each week. Remind them of upcoming assignment due dates and quiz/test dates. Summarize what they learned last week.

Always respond to student email as quickly as possible. A 24-hour response time is the standard but strive to respond more quickly.

Be friendly and encouraging when communicating with students.

Establish clear guidelines regarding how to contact you and when, and then stick to them. If you tell students you will respond to email between 8 am to 7 pm daily, then respond at that time. If you tell students you are available to speak with students in Microsoft Teams on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2 pm to 6 pm, then stick to that time and respond.

In terms of classroom discussions, if you are tired of the typical text-based discussions you can try [FlipGrid](#). FlipGrid also integrates with Canvas.

Groups

Regardless of the size of your class roster, splitting up your students into support groups can be very helpful. Support groups may or may not include complete group assignments. Instead, you can divide your students into support groups and give opportunities to discuss issues, course related or not, via discussion boards, web-conferencing, or social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.

Short-Term Goals

Organize your course into a series of “short-term” achievable goals or “save points.” “Save-points” is a gaming terminology where game players save their game as they play. There are several “save points” throughout the game. Consider organizing your course into short-term, attainable goals similar to save points.

This is also called “chunking.” Organize your course into easy to consume, timed modules. Use the Canvas Modules page to create modules and open them according to due dates.

Feedback on Assignments

Provide meaningful feedback on assignments quickly. For long assignments, a 2-week turnaround is the standard but strive to provide feedback more quickly. Also, personalize your feedback. *Talk to the student, not at the student. Use your rubrics or grading guidelines to start a conversation with your student(s).*

Video/Audio (Multimedia)

Include engaging content using audio and video when possible. Text does provide information, but the more engaging the content the better.

When to use multimedia:

1. Short learning module introduction videos
2. Video lectures that are chunked into 15 to 20-minute segments
3. Assignment instructions/directions
4. Student feedback on assignments
5. Course announcements
6. Video discussions (FlipGrid)

Video Tools:

1. [Kaltura Media Platform](#) (Integrated into Canvas)
2. [Screencastomatic](#)
3. Microsoft Teams (videos go directly into your Microsoft Stream account.)

Web-Conferencing

Many of you will be tempted to use Microsoft Teams or Zoom as an exact replacement for teaching in the classroom. While these types of tools can be used to teach as you would teach traditionally, it is recommended that you do so sparingly. Instead, use synchronous meetings to allow students to ask questions to you or to each other, work on projects, or engage in experiential/problem-based learning together. The point is, asking students to attend all of their classes online while staying online for an hour or more at a time to listen to lectures is challenging to students. Remember, many of these students did not choose online learning; they are engaging in online learning due to the uniqueness of the situation. Even in the best of times, it is well-advised to limit the number of synchronous, required lecture meetings.

Instead, consider flipping your classroom. Record short, mini lectures for your students and provide projects or problems that they need to resolve before they attend your synchronous class meeting. Then, during the Teams/Zoom meeting, discuss what the students learned, answer any of their questions, re-teach important concepts you want them to know, ask them more questions, and work on projects together.

Teacher, Not the Tool

Student engagement and success in an online class can depend upon the actions of the teacher. It is the teacher, not the tool, that can make the largest impact. The teacher influences student success by being present in the course, communicating with students, by being friendly and engaging, by providing feedback on assignments and responding to email, and providing engaging audio/video material in key spots. Web tools, apps, and software can help you, the teacher, but your engagement, interest, and actions in the online course will more directly influence student success.

If you would like to discuss ways to encourage student interaction and engagement in your online course, please feel free to reach out to Online@JSU. We would be glad to assist you and discuss your online teaching needs.

You can also see our [presentation and workshop schedule for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021](#). Additionally, you can find more [resources and tutorials in our resource archive](#).

Email us at online@jsu.edu.