

Keeping Your Students Supported and Engaged

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PURPOSE

This job aid outlines strategies instructors can use to ensure students feel supported and stay engaged with both the college community and course content—especially during periods of stress, transition, or uncertainty.

BACKGROUND

Instructors play a vital role in students' academic success and overall well-being. The quality of interactions between students and faculty or staff directly influences students' engagement, sense of belonging, and ability to persevere through challenges. Research from the College Transition Collaborative emphasizes that when students feel they belong and believe they can succeed, they are more likely to remain engaged and thrive in their learning environment.

This job aid offers evidence-informed practices to help faculty create supportive, inclusive, and motivating learning experiences.

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT AND ENGAGE STUDENTS

Communicate consistently.

Use tools like email, Moodle announcements, or Teams chat to maintain regular contact with students. Reiterate that you're available and invested in their learning.

Humanize your approach.

Share your personality and use warm, encouraging, and lighthearted communication where appropriate. A caring tone fosters trust and connection.

Create a sense of safety.

Students learn best when they feel safe—psychologically, emotionally, and physically. Help students feel they belong, are capable of success, and are supported in their learning environment.

Foster a sense of community.

Remind students that they're part of a learning community, whether in-person, blended, or online. Consider incorporating brief informal check-ins at the beginning or end of classes.

Provide informal opportunities for connection.

Encourage moments of casual interaction—like short social activities, open discussions, or virtual hangouts—to strengthen peer and instructor relationships.

Use optimistic and inclusive language.

Frame challenges as part of the learning journey. Communicate high expectations while expressing belief in students' capacity to meet them.

Encourage peer connection.

Invite students to share contact information or form study groups. Some may feel uncomfortable initiating this on their own, and instructor facilitation can help.

Reaffirm your availability.

Let students know that you're approachable and welcome questions or concerns. A simple “I’m here if you need anything” can go a long way in building trust.

Promote awareness of campus support services.

Regularly direct students to supports such as Student Success Advisors, Indigenous Affairs, the Learning Curve, and the Library. Make this information visible in course materials and announcements.

Acknowledge diverse student contexts.

Students bring a wide range of experiences, responsibilities, and access to resources. Be mindful of differences in learning conditions and remain flexible where possible.

Proactively reach out.

If you notice a student disengaging or struggling, reach out personally to check in. Students may be hesitant to initiate contact, and your outreach may open a door to needed support.


CONCLUSION

Supporting and engaging students is foundational to their academic success and well-being. By fostering clear communication, creating inclusive environments, and connecting students with resources and community, instructors can empower learners to overcome challenges and thrive throughout their educational journey.

REFERENCES

College Transition Collaborative. (n.d.). *Guidance for Instructors*. Retrieved March 5, 2021, from <http://collegetransitioncollaborative.org>

Imad, M. (2020, March 17). *10 strategies to support students and help them learn*. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/03/17/10-strategies-support-students-and-help-them-learn>



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