

# Engaging students in online courses: assessing the effects of an evidence-based course redesign on student engagement

Engaging distance students is challenging. However, the recent student engagement literature has identified several strategies to foster student engagement in online classes. Some of the most commonly named strategies are:

- interaction between students (Fletcher, Dowsett, & Austin, 2012; Grosso, Smith, & Grosso, 2012; Purarjomandlangrudi, Chen, & Nguyen, 2016; Strandberg & Campbell, 2014; Weiler, 2012);
- teacher engagement (Acosta-tello, 2014; Carr, 2014; Pentaraki & Burkholder, 2017; Purarjomandlangrudi et al., 2016; Weiler, 2012; Yates, Brindley-Richeards, & Thistoll, 2014) and
- clear instructions (Boyle, Kwon, Ross, & Simpson, 2010; Kresse & Watland, 2016; McBrien, Jones, & Cheng, 2009; Strandberg & Campbell, 2014).

In an attempt to increase students' engagement with a project-based, elementary-level online course in Human-Computer Interaction, we re-designed the course in accordance with the engagement-fostering strategies proposed in the literature. The changes made centered on 1) increasing students' interactions with each other through group work, peer review assignments and within-group individual assignments in the course forums, 2) increasing teacher's visibility through weekly virtual office hours and three synchronized course sessions using a virtual meeting room and 3) increasing instructional scaffolding through project-level and assignment-level templates.

Our NU presentation will revolve around the effects those potentially engagement-fostering changes in the course setup have had on students' self-reported and observed engagement during the first iteration of the new course design. Self-reported engagement metrics will come from the course evaluation forms submitted by course participants, while observed student engagement will be based on different quantitative and qualitative course-related metrics, such as the number of participants in the synchronized course sessions, the number of non-mandatory forum posts per student and the assessed quality of one of the course's key assignments. We will then describe how we are using these results in shaping our continued work with the further development of the course, and exemplify different concrete ways that can, based on our experience, effectively increase student engagement in online courses.

## Referenser:

- Acosta-tello, E. (2014). Tools for Engaging Online Learners: Increasing Student Involvement in Online Classes. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies*, 15, 1–5.
- Boyle, F., Kwon, J., Ross, C., & Simpson, O. (2010). Student-student mentoring for retention and engagement in distance education. *Open Learning*, 25(2), 115–130.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680511003787370>
- Carr, M. (2014). The online University classroom: One perspective for effective student engagement and teaching in an online environment. *The Journal of Effective Teaching*, 14(1), 99–110. Retrieved from [http://uncw.edu/cte/ET/articles/Vol14\\_1/Carr.pdf](http://uncw.edu/cte/ET/articles/Vol14_1/Carr.pdf)
- Fletcher, G., Dowsett, G. W., & Austin, L. (2012). Actively promoting student engagement within an online environment: Developing and implementing a signature subject on “Contemporary Issues in Sex and Sexuality.” *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 9(3).
- Grosso, S. S., Smith, T. L., & Grosso, J. E. (2012). Interactive Questions Concerning Online Classes : Engaging Students To Promote Active Learning. *International Journal of Education Research*, 7(1), 49–60.
- Kresse, W., & Watland, K. H. (2016). Thinking Outside of the Box Office: Using Movies to Build Shared Experiences and Student Engagement in Online or Hybrid Learning. *Journal of Learning in Higher Education*, 12(1), 59–64.
- McBrien, J. L., Jones, P., & Cheng, R. (2009). Virtual Spaces : Employing a Synchronous Online Classroom to Facilitate Student Engagement in Online Learning. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 10(3), 1–17.  
<https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v10i3.605>
- Pentarakis, A., & Burkholder, G. J. (2017). Emerging Evidence Regarding the Roles of Emotional, Behavioural, and Cognitive Aspects of Student Engagement in the Online Classroom. *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning*, 20(1), 1–24.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/eurodl-2017-0001>
- Purarjomandlangrudi, A., Chen, D., & Nguyen, A. (2016). Investigating the drivers of student interaction and engagement in online courses: A study of state-of-the-art. *Informatics in Education*, 15(2), 269–286. <https://doi.org/10.15388/infedu.2016.14>
- Strandberg, A. G., & Campbell, K. (2014). Online Teaching Best Practices to Better Engage Students with Quantitative Material. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies*, 15, 1–14.
- Weiler, S. C. (2012). Quality Virtual Instruction: The Use of Synchronous Online Activities to Engage International Students in Meaningful Learning. *Journal of International Education & Leadership*, 2(2), 1–8. Retrieved from <http://proxy.govst.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=80417603&site=ehost-live>
- Yates, A., Brindley-Richeards, W., & Thistoll, T. (2014). Student Engagement in Distance-based Vocational Education. *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*, 18(2), 29–44.  
<https://doi.org/doi:10.4324/9780203810163>