Top Ten Tips *for Engaging Students in an Asynchronous Online Course*

01 Communicate, communicate, communicate

The UM Learn platform offers faculty many different avenues to communicate with students. The course email and discussion area are the standard ways of communicating, but audio/video discussion via Cisco Webex and announcements are also tools available to you. Making use of the Intelligent Agents, to send out reminders, is a good way to stay connected with students and save yourself time, particularly for those of us with large class sizes. The more that students see that there is a responsive person on the other side of the computer, the more likely they are to engage with the course. A video introduction is a great way to start the course at the beginning of the term. Provide virtual office hours and, if doing group work, ask students to send you an invitation to at least one of their video-chat group discussions.

02 Prepare your syllabus carefully

Besides ensuring that your syllabus is ROASS compliant, you should pay particular attention to ensure that your syllabus provides all the information students would normally receive in your first class. Consider including a welcome letter with a statement about remote learning. How is your course going to be run now that it's operating in a remote environment? Will students be expected to check in daily, weekly, now that they are not required to be physically present in a class?

03 Orient your students to the course

Which tools will students be required to use and are there support instructions? Where should they check for updates and announcements? How many hours should they typically be spending online in a week? Is the course structured module by module or week by week? Point them to the important parts of the syllabus: assessments, due dates, VW date, unusual requirements like field trips, data collection expeditions, etc. Finally, explain to students why you have structured the course in this way.

04 Provide a virtual helping hand

Many students will be unfamiliar with the technology and will need a helping hand in the first few weeks. Set up some time at the beginning of the course to help those students who need extra support, or assign this as one of the TA tasks in the course.

05 Use Active Learning

The more students are required to engage with the learning materials and each other, through class activities and assignments, the more engaged they will be in the course. Assigning students, as groups or individually, to collect and analyze data, discuss case studies, or problem solve are some great ways to engage them and create an effective learning community. Be sure to align the learning activities to your desired learning outcomes. Further active learning strategies for remote teaching can be found here:
https://resourcecenter.odee.osu.edu/course-design-and-pedagogy/active-learning-online-course

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06 — Make learning social

Consider adding a Twitter badge to your course and using a hashtag to push posts with course relevant content to your students.

07 — Feedback

Regular feedback to students is vital to keep them engaged. Various tools in UM Learn can be used to provide feedback: instructor or TA comments on the discussion forum, emails, announcements, badges, comments on assignments, etc. Adding badges to your course, when students have completed readings or they have met the discussion forum posting requirements, is a very good way to motivate students to engage with the materials. Quick responses are key and help keep students on track. Students should not be required to engage in the next assessment without having received feedback on their previous assessment.

08 — Self and Peer Assessment

Giving opportunities for both self and peer assessment, encourages students to engage with their peers in a meaningful way and also take some responsibility for their own learning. Facilitating and then grading discussion posts is a good way to motivate students to engage with each other and evaluate their own contributions to the activity. Attaching a rubric to the peer or self-assessment activity will help students understand the criteria for assessment. When students are assigned to groups, peer assessment guided by a rubric, should form an important part of the final evaluation of the process.

09 — Try different forms of media within the course

To accommodate and celebrate students' diverse needs and abilities, consider moving away from a solely text-based/print media course. When teaching remotely, make use of the technology that we have available. Videos and podcasts, as both methods of delivering information and collecting student feedback and assessments, are both mediums that students are familiar with and can easily complete using their mobile devices. Instead of asking students to write their responses to questions on a discussion forum, video and audio files can be uploaded, providing a more engaging way for students to interact with each other.

10 — Build in Accountability

Despite all of the encouragement you can provide, sometimes, to ensure that students log in to UM Learn and complete the readings, assigning grades to discussion posts and creating grade-linked quizzes are effective ways to get students engaged with the content. Create a rubric for the discussion posts, based on quality and quantity of posts (e.g. must post 5 times) to ensure participation. Linking the iClicker classroom response system to grades, is also a very effective way to ensure active participation.

For best practices in promoting engagement in a synchronous classroom, all of the above tips would be applicable, as well as the information provided at this link:
https://dl.sps.northwestern.edu/blog/2017/06/best-practices-synchronous-sessions/

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