

Social inclusion and academic engagement in online teaching

Online Education Faculty Mentor Session

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UBC contexts

- “The purpose of this letter is to propose **actionable ways in which online instruction may be adapted to better accommodate the diverse contexts** in which Teacher Candidates are working to complete their online coursework.”
- “it is our hope that they may later aid the Faculty in **planning for a more equitable delivery of online WT1 coursework** for incoming Teacher Candidates.”
- “Professors **offer flexible deadlines and do not penalize late submissions**, so long as work is submitted before the course end date or within a reasonable time frame”
 - (UBC Bachelor of Education 2019/20 Cohort; Date: May 29, 2020)

UBC Contexts

- I really want to have lots of collaborative learning activities
- I feel that working collaboratively and sharing experiences will be very valuable.
- My main concerns...: how to keep students engaged
- I need a 101-crash course on how to teach in ways that are socially inclusive and academically engaging.
- I'm really interested in creating a community learning environment in which my students get to know each other and feel safe in discussing issues of social justice and education.

- (Online Faculty Mentors Survey, July 2020)

UBC Context

COMMITMENT BY FACULTY

Based on the current situation and the information available, how certain are you that you will start your graduate program at UBC Vancouver in September?



Options	APSC	ARTS	COMM	DENT	EDUC	FRST	GRAD	LAW	LFS	MEDI	PHAR	SCIE	Overall
I am 100% committed to start	68%	80%	59%	50%	76%	69%	100%	56%	71%	87%	71%	69%	76%
Most likely I won't attend UBC in September	2%	2%	12%	0%	2%	0%	0%	6%	3%	1%	0%	3%	2%
My personal situation is up in the air (family, finances, health etc.) - the uncertainty makes it hard for me to plan	15%	11%	12%	0%	13%	20%	0%	28%	14%	7%	0%	15%	12%
Unless the global situation improves I plan on postponing my program start	8%	3%	12%	0%	4%	4%	0%	3%	2%	1%	0%	7%	4%
Other	5%	2%	6%	0%	3%	4%	0%	8%	5%	3%	29%	5%	4%
Prefer not to say	3%	2%	0%	50%	1%	2%	0%	0%	3%	1%	0%	1%	2%

If you travel to Vancouver, where would you be arriving from? (n = 1,637)

Options	Domestic	International	Overall
Already residing in Metro Vancouver	53%	11%	34%
From another Canadian province	28%	4%	17%
From British Columbia (outside of Metro Vancouver)	15%	1%	9%
From outside of Canada	5%	83%	40%

- About 20% of FOE students are not certain whether they could start
- About 40% of total students will arrive from outside of Canada; 83% are international students

(Incoming Grade Student Survey, 2020)

Research shows

- ‘online courses have higher attrition rates than in-person courses’ (Borup et al. 2020).
 - **Students from underserved and minority background** have higher attrition rates
- Learning and the production of knowledge is inherently contextual
 - **technology decontextualizes or re-contextualizes** certain forms of knowledge
- Importance of interaction, collaboration and engagement for effective online instruction:
 - the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky 1978), Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991), Community of Inquiry (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer 1999),
 - social capital and social network theories
- Online instructional tools
 - provide access to **learning resources** faster, create an **emotional bond** with peers and **harness available educational support** services

Purpose of this session

- In the context of Covid-19 some students
 - are isolated, disengaged, and physically distanced from their
 - peers, instructors, advisors and university administrators.
- Purpose of the session: What could we collectively do to create an inclusive and engaging environment through online classes?
- Barriers/enhancers to social inclusion
 - People
 - Learning Contents
 - Technology

People

- Peers
 - Extroversion, ableism, bullying, competitive/fast learners
 - Privileged/affluent family or community background
 - International vs domestic
 - Command over the medium of instruction (English)
- Support personnel
 - University administrator, supervisors, mentors, venting buddies, senior buddies
- Instructors
 - Lack of teaching presence
 - Unapproachable
 - Unconscious bias
 - Work overload
- Just online presence is not enough
 - Sense of belonging, togetherness, and community
 - Respect and value;
 - Pairs vs peers;
 - homogeneity vs heterogeneity
- Instructors and peers
 - as support personnel
- Empathy
 - Better understanding of learners (intellectual, social, and emotional)
 - (What instructors could have done if they were in the position of students who feel that are socially excluded)
 - University used to be their new community

Learning contents

- Unrelated to learners' contexts
 - community,
 - culture,
 - real world problems
- Unrelated to learners' experience
 - prior knowledge,
 - course,
 - program
- Include diverse/local/indigenous epistemologies
 - rather than western forms of knowledge
- Better understanding of
 - Previous knowledge
 - Academic, professional, community background
- If possible, revise learning contents
 - An evolving syllabus

Technology

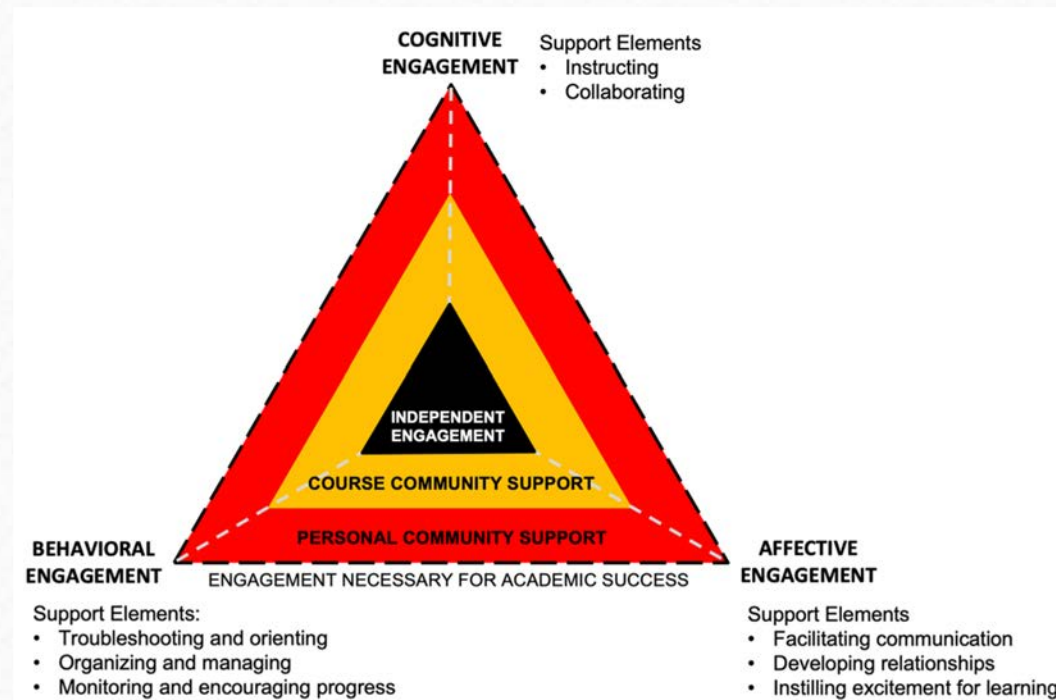
- Some LMS Tools could be difficult to use/learn
 - self-directed learners?
- Low bandwidth of Internet
 - International students
- Land, buildings, cafeteria, and other social spaces
 - Can they be replaced by LMS?
- Sufficient time to navigate LMS (Canvas)
- Contact information of IT (ETS)
- Synchronous mode as a simulated f2f environment
- Asynchronous for anywhere/anytime learning
- Blended mode as the best of both worlds

Collaboration

- Collaboration
 - A key for community building
 - a tripartite instructional contract between the teacher, the students and the learning contents mediated by technologies
 - Increases sense of community, learner engagement, avoid the feelings of isolation and reduce attrition
- Synchronous (real-time meetings)
 - Simulation of f2f instruction
 - Similar attributes to a campus community
- Asynchronous discussion
 - Formal: knowledge intensive, pedagogic, graded, contributes to learning (e.g. threaded discussion on questions/talking points)
 - Informal: reflective, casual, ungraded, out of LMS context contributes to community building (e.g. Coffee talk)

Student Engagement

(Borup et al. 2020)



Academic engagement: Collaboration

- Successful online teaching relies on successful collaboration
 - a higher level of academic achievement,
 - deeper levels of learning,
 - retention of learned information for longer times,
 - better problem solving, and
 - higher-order critical thinking skills
- (Saqr et al. 2018)

Academic engagement

Barriers

- Social loafing
- Dysfunctional group dynamics
- Lack of appreciation of values
- Absence of a stimulating task
- Lack of preparation
- Lack of social skills

What can be done?

- Active coordination of group dynamics
 - Group learning agreement
- Discussion moderators and scaffolding by instructors
 - Vygotsky (1978): Zone of Proximal Development
- Stimulating environment
 - questions/prompts/problems

How to manage asynchronous discussion?

Benefit

- Reflective discussion posts: relate a learning content/idea with the experience of the student
- ‘nearly unlimited time to compose and send messages and to respond to others’ (Hung and Chou 2014, 166)
- Encourages in-depth and thoughtful discussions among diverse students (Johnson 2006).

What to do:

- Monitor how the discussion is going on and provide immediate feedback
- Has everyone logged into the course and started to participate in the discussion thread? (Check Analytics)
- Are all groups (learners) achieving the expected level of online learning curve?
- Is anyone feeling isolated, excluded, highly inclined to selected peers only?
- Has the discussion digressed from the learning contents?

Co-construction of knowledge

- Highly cited online teaching models such as Community of Inquiry (COI) are based on:
 - The theory of social constructivism
 - Knowledge is constructed
 - rather than something existed already
 - Allow/encourage to critique the learning contents rather than just to learn them
- Aim of discussion is helping other students in
 - Learning the course materials
 - Expanding the key concepts
 - Achieving key learning objectives
- One major assignment on
 - Leading discussion and/or
 - Presentation as a chance for teaching

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