

Building Community in Your Online Course

One of the big questions for faculty as they begin a new course online revolves around ways that they can create community in a classroom when they have not physically met the students. Prior to the pivot to remote instruction, faculty had met with their students face-to-face. Now that instructors and students again have the opportunity for face-to-face interaction. Here are some ideas to create community in the learning environment.

1. Be deliberate and intentional about this aspect of learning. Community arises in instructional spaces because faculty are deliberate about creating it.
2. Let students get to know you. Introduce yourself with more than name, course, and academic background. The delight of viewers as their newscasters incorporate [pets](#) into [news](#) segments indicates just how much people like knowing each other as humans. The solidarity expressed by many families with the [BBC dad](#) similarly suggests the hope for community built around a shared challenge or experience.
3. Consider recording feedback by voice only or video rather than simply writing it on work and sending it back electronically. This practice can take less time for you and your students.
4. Require students to introduce themselves to the class. Require students to provide more information than name and major.
5. Consider activities such as "5 shared and 5 unique" in which students identify 5 things they share with other students in the class or group and 5 things that make them unique from other students in the class or group.
6. If at all possible, schedule synchronous sessions with students.
7. Assign students to work in groups, and build at least one task on having the students introduce each other. Again, require more than name and major.
8. If classes are large, use the groups to work out synchronous meetings so that each of the students gets some time to interact with you.
9. Encourage students to suggest ways to build community with empathy.
10. For cultural and social differences that may arise, engage them and encourage appreciative questions rather than disputes over the "right" or "best" way to engage.
11. Use discussion boards with clear directions. Be sure that students know how to engage and demonstrate that you are checking on their engagement.
12. Plan to spend time on this aspect of your teaching.