

Steps to Build Community Online

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When planning an online class, there are some strategies that can be woven into it to foster community. Here are a few ideas:

- Include a Welcome Page within the course where you introduce yourself to the students. Include a picture of yourself. Encourage the students to introduce themselves in the same way and/or include a "Get to Know Each Other" discussion forum. Doing this can be a way to acknowledge each other's humanity and begin to connect with each other, establishing that you and the students are more than names and faces on a computer screen.
- Make your course expectations, rubrics, and policies explicit. Students in an online course have to coordinate multiple factors in order to take an online course. The more specific you can be with information that you share with them can be very valuable. For example, if there will be required synchronous components, give the dates and times for those from the beginning. Also explain why those particular components need to happen synchronously, and what effect missing a synchronous component would have on a student's grade. It can also be useful to provide web etiquette guidelines from the beginning.
- Include cooperative and collaborative learning to distribute workload and support connected learning.
- Include a brief orientation for students to get familiar with the terminology and tools used in the course management system. Sometimes, we assume that students are more familiar with technology than we should. Using technology to take a college class is very different from using technology for recreation, or even for research. Even if students know this information, a quick refresher will not hurt. Make sure that all students begin the course with a working knowledge of how to navigate the course, for example, how to submit their work, participate in a discussion board, and check their grades.
- Allow students to become process managers in the online course by directing them to take turns leading online learning experiences. This is a great way to build agency in students, increase their engagement, and foster a spirit of community within the class.

For other ideas, please see the items used to create this document, which are listed in the References section. Also, you can contact the CTLE if you have questions: CTLE@syr.edu.

References

Brown University. (n.d.). Teaching online? Be wise: Master these best practices!. In *Best practices for teaching online*. Retrieved April 30, 2018, from www.brown.edu

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