INCREASING STUDENT MOTIVATION

This job aid explains the importance of motivation in learning and describes internal and external motivation.

This job aid will help you to:

- rate your ability to increase your students' motivation
- add motivational strategies to your course and lesson plans

net Includes techniques for online courses.

What is motivation?

Motivation is what causes people to behave as they do and research has found that motivation is very complex. Motivation is:

- an unconscious psychological process, rather than a logical one
- individual
- variable over time
- often a social process involving others
- often affected strongly by experiences from many years ago

Internal and external motivation

Many educators think the best motivation is *self*-motivation or *internal* motivation. In the classroom, self-motivation operates independently of the instructor. However, learning can be improved by *external* motivation supplied by the environment or the instructor.

Research finds that if people are bored or passive, learning is not efficient. Also, if people are insecure or scared, learning is inefficient and they make hasty, incorrect responses. Difficult learning tasks may require lots of motivating feedback from the instructor.

Are you an instructor who improves student motivation?

The following checklist will help you rate your ability to increase your students' motivation.

To motivate my students:

☐ I show enthusiasm for my subject and for teaching

☐ I communicate high expectations to my students

☐ I avoid sarcasm and put-downs

☐ I listen carefully in order to understand my students' concerns

☐ When students have been absent, I let them know they were missed

☐ I connect students' current knowledge and skills to new learning

☐ I treat all students equally and fairly

☐ I make positive comments when responding to student work

☐ I communicate clear learning outcomes for students

☐ I use well-designed, open-ended questions to promote critical thinking skills

☐ I use visuals (overhead transparencies, models, videos) with lectures to stimulate interest

☐ I use brainstorming at the beginning of a lesson to get students involved

☐ I encourage students to apply what they have learned to situations outside the class

☐ I wait 5 seconds after I ask a question before I call on a student

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Adding motivational strategies to your course plans*

Plan to include motivational strategies in your classes throughout the term.

At the beginning

Most decisions to leave a course are made by students in the first few weeks of the course. They then sit, unmotivated, throughout the rest of the term. You must pay particular attention to motivational strategies at the beginning of term. For example:

• Get to know the students individually through their transcripts, private interviews, or a non-graded paper
• Be explicit about your expectations and classroom policies
• Teach students the study skills they will need—they may not know how to do assignments, take notes, or work in groups (resource materials on developing study skills are available from the Learning and Teaching Centre)

In the middle

To maintain high motivation as the course proceeds you can:

• Give assignments or quizzes every couple of weeks so students know where they stand
• Offer help outside of class and make personal contact with students
• Show students respect—be collegial and don't "talk down" to them
• Model high standards in all activities
• Use visuals to clarify concepts and emphasize key points
• Use examples and anecdotes to keep students mentally engaged with the subject matter

At the end

To maintain student motivation as they leave your classes, in the last week you can:

• Review what they have learned—help them to pull together the concepts and issues
• Show them how these concepts and issues can help them in their future
• Inform them about related courses that follow yours

Adding motivational strategies to your lesson plans*

To increase your ability to inspire motivation in your students you need not throw out all your old lesson plans. Strategies may be added to existing plans quite simply.

Use the following checklist to step through this process.

To ensure my lesson plans contain motivational strategies, I have:

- ☐ Specified the learning outcomes in each lesson plan

- ☐ Estimated the amount of class time to spend on each topic

- ☐ Checked my plans against possible motivational strategies

- ☐ Added motivational strategies in any areas not covered

- ☐ Checked that I have included motivational strategies at the beginning, the middle, and the end of my lessons

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*adapted from *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn* by Raymond Wlodkowski (1985)

net What about motivating online learners?

Your ability to inspire motivation in your online students is no different than in your face-to-face environment, except that some of your strategies will change.

Some key motivational elements of online instruction are: engaging and maintaining student interest, establishing relevance, setting expectations for time, and providing continuous encouragement. Sound familiar?

Plan to incorporate the following motivational strategies when you build your online lesson plans.

To engage and maintain interest:

- Incorporate interactive features that involve students in practice, reflective thinking, and problem-solving
- Specify the learning outcomes and their long-term benefit
- Challenge student responses in discussion threads by posing questions that have students consider the topic at a deeper level

To establish relevance:

- Appeal to, and encourage sharing of, students' life experiences as they relate to the course content and outcomes
- Provide real life scenarios, case studies, and examples that your students can connect with

To set expectations for time:

- Use your course's calender function to post due dates for activities and assignments
- Let students know an estimate of time for each activity or assignment
- At the beginning of the course, provide students with a course overview that helps them navigate the course material and resources, according to the course schedule, at a reasonable pace
- Provide the students with a module-by-module guide to assist them with readings and assignments (for term-based courses)

To provide continuous encouragement:

- Email students your course announcements
- Post module summaries or discussion thread responses that articulate student contributions and achievements to date
- Incorporate journaling into your student assignments (have students email you summaries of their progress or concerns a few times throughout the course)

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