

Student Engagement & Community Building

Challenge:

1. Look at your course plan. How will students engage with each other?
2. Create at least one place in your course for students to connect with each other online.
3. Review the article [Top 13 Ways To Create Community In Your Online Course](#). Make a plan of how you will encourage and foster social interaction over the length of your course that incorporates 3 of the suggestions in the article.



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Learning is social; one important way we make sense of new information is through interacting and sharing with others (e.g., dialogue, debate, argument, storytelling, etc). Making friends can also be a highlight and big motivator for students. For some, it's easy to meet a classmate if you're in the same room, when students are on campus and attending face-to-face classes there are all sorts of informal ways they connect, outside of class time. They meet before class for a coffee or arrive early to chat with friends. They go out for a beverage at break or after class. They meet in study groups. They see each other at campus events. We've heard anecdotes that some students' favourite part of their day is connecting with their classmates, having a laugh and enjoying each other's company before, during and after class.

However, during the past few months they have been especially isolated, not even having the opportunity to meet friends at local clubs or to go to a movie or concert. They are missing social interaction on lots of levels. No one knows what will happen with things opening up a bit, but there are some easy ways that you can make space for your students to be social.

Think about it in terms of "creating space" as part of the approach and "designing activities" as another. We want to prevent students from [feeling isolated](#). We encourage you to think about these spaces and activities as places that you don't have to moderate as an instructor. These suggestions are not about increasing your presence or workload, but rather allowing your students to engage with each other.

So, this challenge is all about how to create an online environment that will encourage connection and foster community within your course.

Space

If you're using [discussion boards](#) or channels in your course, you may want to include one for a "water cooler", or "Student Cafe" or "Student Lounge" - a place for students to ask questions and chat with each other in a casual way.

During your lectures, or synchronous class time, use the breakout rooms to allow students to connect with each other and work together on activities. You may consider building in extra time into the activity to allow students some social time after they've completed the breakout task. Allow the students to engage with each other in an unmonitored, spontaneous way - similar to how group work happens in a classroom when groups finish up the task at hand.

Set up your course to allow students to connect directly with each other through the learning management system (LMS) by turning on the direct message or email functions (if this is permitted by IT and/or LMS).

Dedicate space for students to self-select into [study groups](#).

Activities

There are many ways you can design activities in an online course - you may consider group work or dyads or triads. For example, [McGill University](#) has an extensive list of to support [creating, curating and sharing resources](#), [collaborative authoring](#), [blogging](#), [mapping](#), [polls and quizzes](#), [surveys](#), [journaling](#), [e-portfolios](#), and [app](#) development. Any of these types of activities allow for students to collaborate, share and engage with the course material and each other.

You may also look for ways to incorporate more group work. Why not group students at the beginning of the semester and have them work together on assignments or presentations?

If using discussion boards, consider assigning pairs of students a week to [moderate the boards](#). As noted by Leah George (the instructor who suggested this strategy), this simple strategy accomplishes several pedagogical moves (e.g., students take ownership of the content, practice leading critical thinking and facilitation and peer assessment, and the instructor can participate in the discussion as a peer (or not!)).

Resources

[Five Ways to Build Community in Online Classrooms](#)

[Building community - e-Learning kit - Guides at McGill Library](#)

[7 Strategies to Promote Community in Online Courses](#)

[How to Build an Online Learning Community: 6 Theses](#)

