

Creating a sense of community outside the classroom for online college students

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Introduction

Research indicates that learning and engagement/connection opportunities for students outside the online classroom are essential to ensure growth for online students throughout their college career (Chapman, 2016).

BUT

There is limited research on what strategies are used by faculty, in addition to the academic activity in the online classroom, to help their students feel connected and enhance the learning experience...

which is why we are here!

What will we discuss?



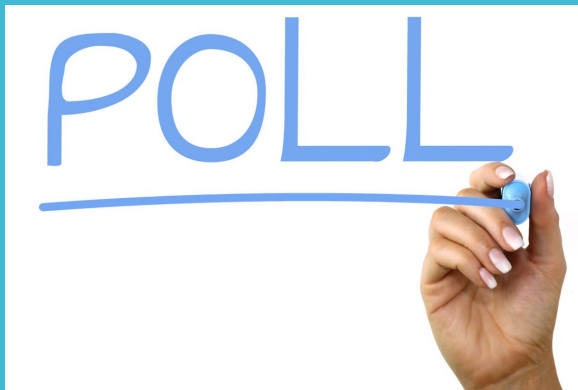
- Why is creating a sense of community for online students outside of the classroom important?
- What methods can be used to create this sense of community?
 - Faculty Initiated
 - Social Media outlets
 - Accountability partner program
 - University-wide programs
 - Group study sessions
 - Alumni mentoring programs
 - University specific networking and discussion groups

Student Engagement and Connections – what does it mean?

- "In education, **student engagement** refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education."
- Students learn more when they have opportunities to question and are motivated and **connected**.

(Great Schools Partnership, 2016, para. 1)

Poll



Question 1: Do you feel you know how to and have the resources to engage your students and create a community within your online classroom?

Question 2: Do you feel you know how to and have the resources to engage your students and create a community outside of your online classroom?

Most online instructors can say "yes" to Question 1, but not Question 2. Hopefully after this presentation you will be able to say "yes" to Question 2 as well!

Importance of creating a sense of community for online learners

- In the online classroom, students have more accountability and less traditional relationships with faculty and peers.
- "...a sense of community outside of class is critical for students' growth throughout their learning experience. For online students, extracurricular learning communities create an avenue to engage with other students and share knowledge, regardless of where students are." (Chapman, 2016, para. 1)
- University Faculty and staff need to work together to ensure students feel connect and engaged. This should not be done in a vacuum as student learning experience is influenced by experiences inside and outside of the classroom.

Methods
for creating
sense of
community
outside the
online
classroom –
faculty
initiated

For online courses, it is important to create other spaces for students to engage in other conversations outside of course content (Wehler, 2018).

- Social Media
 - Facebook
 - LinkedIn
 - Twitter
 - Instagram
- Peer Mentoring
 - Accountability Partner program

Social media outlets and implications

- "social network sites may function to improve the transition to college by helping students socialize to their new environment and establish a sense of connection with their institution. Research by Haythornthwaite and Kazmer (2002) supports the notion that social media can be utilized to develop student-to-student and student-to-instructor connections" (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield & Fiore, 2012, p. 16)
- There are some aspects to consider when creating social media outlets for students:
 - Privacy
 - Guidelines for discussions
 - Maintenance of site



Example of our Facebook group

UOPX Students Making Connections

Closed group

About

Discussion

Chats

Members

Events

Photos

Moderate Group

Search this group

Personalize Your Group

Did you know that you can add a photo or illustration here?
Pick one that shows off your group's personality.


Upload Photo Choose Photo

Joined Notifications Share More

Good morning everyone! How are you ending your first week in your new class?



DON'T HAVE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS OR THINGS YOU CANNOT CONTROL. INSTEAD INVEST YOUR ENERGY IN THE POSITIVE PRESENT MOMENT.

 /DailyHealthGen

  Jennifer Penry Romano and 1 other

5 Comments Seen by 21

Peer mentoring

- "Yet another way students can participate in support services is through peer mentoring programs...One advantage of peer mentoring is that students may be more honest and supportive of one another than a student may be with a faculty member. Peer mentoring programs may be established by the institution or built into the design of online courses by individual faculty members" (Crawley & Fetzner, 2013).
- We are creating a more informal form of peer mentoring by setting up optional "Accountability Partners" for students in our introductory college courses.

Accountability partner program example

- Foundations for University Success Course (1st course in Introductory Course Sequence)
 - In Week 1, provide option for students to have an "Accountability Partner"
 - Check in at least 1x a week via "Messages", Phoenix Connect, phone, email
 - Discuss struggles, strengths, provide assignment support, motivation, etc.
 - At end of course, send optional survey to students that participated for feedback.

Importance of
creating a
sense of
community
outside the
online
classroom –
university
initiated

Online students need to be involved both socially and academically, however, not much attention has been given to the social and academic integration of students in distance programs.

In one study, researchers concluded students had limited possibilities to connect University-side with other students (Exter, Korkmaz, Harlin, & Bichelmeyer cited in Bolliger & Inan, 2012).

Methods for
creating sense
of community
outside the
online
classroom –
University
initiated

- Group study sessions
- Alumni mentoring
- Networking and group discussion areas



Group study sessions example



The image shows a Facebook event page for a "MARCH STUDY SESSION". The event is scheduled for Thursday, March 28, 2019, from 5:30 p.m. PT to 8:30 p.m. ET. The page features a collage of food-related images, including a large bowl of mixed nuts and dried fruits, and several smaller bowls of snacks. A blue "RSVP" button is visible. To the right of the event information is a login form with fields for "Username:" and "Password:", a "Login" button, and links for "Forgot Username/Password?", "New to campus? Sign up here", and "Go to Inbox".

- Study sessions are 100% online and take place right in the event section of our University Facebook page once a month.
- Students can complete schoolwork as normal and still participate in the session.
- Study sessions do NOT count for participation in class.
- The most current University of Phoenix post will always be pinned to the top of the discussion.

Alumni mentoring

- "Mentors and mentees form a supportive relationship built on the shared experience of attending University of Phoenix. Your mentor may share personal stories, offer advice, or suggest helpful industry resources. It's a valuable relationship that can complement your classroom-learning program, making for a richer educational experience" (University of Phoenix, 2014).

Become a UOPX mentee

October 22, 2014



Mentors can inspire, encourage and support you

A mentor is a guide—a resource who can help pave the way for you by sharing what he or she learned in their own career. Alumni often sign up to be volunteer mentors because they enjoy helping others succeed. A volunteer alumni mentor can contribute to your professional development, while helping you build your network and stay motivated.

Networking and group discussion opportunities

- University-wide internal online site – PhoenixConnect
 - Established groups with many different Commonalities:
 - Locations
 - Interests
 - Cultures
 - Majors
 - Allows for supporting each other, networking opportunities and an overall connection with other students



Final thoughts and takeaways

- Engagement and connectedness of online students both inside and outside of the classroom is necessary.
- Various faculty and university-initiated strategies can be used to provide engagement and connectedness – try one out!

Poll - Which strategy discussed today will you try or would you recommend to your University to try using to engage your students outside of the classroom?

Type your answers in the Chat!

Questions and comments?



Feel free to contact us!

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- Lauren – lauren.critchley@phoenix.edu

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