# Strategies for Increasing Student Motivation

“People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing - that's why we recommend it daily.” Zig Ziglar, American author and motivational speaker

Students spend hours on co-curricular activities, but can resist investment in coursework. Why is that? One possibility is low motivation. Jon Wergin’s motivation framework yields actionable strategies to influence motivation. Although Wergin’s framework focuses on faculty, his principles apply to all learners.

**Autonomy:** Having choice and ownership lead to high autonomy and contribute to positive motivation, and are easy for an educator to manipulate in her course. For example, rather than assigning an essay exploring the cultural forces leading to a specific event (e.g., the French Revolution), the educator could allow each student to choose which event they think best illustrates the core concepts (e.g., how does national identity contribute to the Arab Spring or the American Civil War).

**Community:** Humans, even introverts, are communal creatures. Educators can welcome students to the scholarly community of the classroom. They can adopt strategies like collective determination of exam dates, an email list or message board for anyone to post to, responsibility of students to others to promote their success (e.g., peer review approaches), and having the class norm of summarizing the previous comment before adding a new idea. These strategies and others help build a learning community.

**Recognition:** According to Dale Carnegie of *How to Make Friends…* fame “Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language”. I’d add “attached to praise”. Students do many praise-worthy things. Educators can make public affirmations (“Malcolm sent me this great website, let’s take a look”) and illustrate how past work becomes future affirmation (“Last term, Jackie Benson and Jerry Marshall drafted this model that incorporated at least seven different concepts”). Word spreads. For especially neat outcomes, alert your communications office.

**Efficacy:** Everyone is motivated to do things they are good at. The problem is that *good* requires a lot of practice and mistakes, two experiences most people choose to avoid. In addition, the point of learning is that one isn’t already an expert. To counteract our nature tendency to avoid new and challenging tasks, educators can create heavily scaffolded experiences and intentionally escalate the complexity of work. Then, refer to past success to point to the likelihood of future success.

By using these strategies, educators can create an environment that promotes student motivation.

**References & Additional Resources**

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**Submitted by:**

Ella L. Ingram

Associate Dean for Professional Development

Rose Hulman Institute of Technology

[ingram@rose-hulman.edu](mailto:ingram@rose-hulman.edu)