

5 Tips to Help Structure Courses to Engage Students

Many instructors face a difficult challenge in their classrooms – students are not as interested in the course content as the instructor. This disengagement takes many forms – “working” on their laptops, texting, sleeping, and many others. The tips provided below may reduce these behaviors, promote student engagement, and help students understand your interest in the course content.

1. Discuss the importance of the course in the lives of the students beyond the classroom. Point out both applications of the course content as well as general skills such as critical and creative thinking that might be learned. This will help students understand the relevance of the course.
2. Provide students the opportunity to work in multiple ad-hoc group activities throughout the semester. Talking with many other students increases the opportunity for them to learn different perspectives and practice explaining or applying the content.
3. Include a few points for students helping other students with course content both in and out of class sessions. This can be accomplished with a discussion board for students to ask questions and seek input from other students. You will be able to see who is helping and monitor the quality of the assistance. Students like to earn points to help their grades from helping other students. These points are a way to show students you value learning both in and out of the class sessions.
4. Use activities that ask students to apply content a few times each class session. Getting students to “play” with ideas in the classroom demonstrates that you value students wrestling with ideas and that their ideas can be a welcome addition to the classroom.
5. Provide firm deadlines for assignments. Students report feeling frustrated when a professor changes the due dates for assignments because it interferes with other assignments in other courses. Firm due dates tell students when they are being formally assessed which may motivate them to stay engaged with course content, especially as a due date approaches.

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