

Strategies to engage disengaged tertiary students

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Student engagement is a critical factor in academic success and personal development - particularly at the tertiary level. Disengagement can stem from a range of challenges, including lack of motivation, unclear goals, poor connection with course content, and other external pressures.

Understanding Disengagement

Before implementing any strategies to combat disengagement it is important to identify why students are disengaged in the first place. Common causes of disengagement include - unclear relevance of course material to career aspirations; feeling 'disconnected' from peers or teachers; an overwhelming workload or external commitments (including work and/or family); lack of support structures (academic or wellbeing); and - learning fatigue.

Strategies for Re-Engagement

There are targeted approaches that educators (and administrators) can adopt to foster engagement among tertiary students including -

Personal Connections – by way of active communication (encourage open dialogue between students and lecturers. Simple gestures like using students' names, holding regular Q&A sessions, or sending personalised check-ins can make students feel valued) and *Peer Mentoring* – through establishing peer support programs or study groups, where experienced students guide newer ones, building a sense of community.

Connecting theory to practice utilising real-world examples, case studies from Australian workplaces, or guest speakers from industry to demonstrate the practical applications of course content and *highlighting career pathways* clearly outlining how assignments and subjects relate to potential career outcomes, internships, or further study.

Utilising blended delivery offering a mix of online and in-person learning and *making resources accessible* using multiple formats (videos, podcasts, written notes) and provide support for students with disabilities or learning challenges.

Ensuring *interactive activities* that incorporate group projects, debates, simulations, or problem-solving tasks that require students to collaborate and apply knowledge. In addition, *using technology creatively* that is leveraging platforms like discussion boards, quizzes, and polls to maintain interest and foster interaction.

Promoting support services by regularly informing students about counselling, academic support, and financial assistance available through the campus or external organisations. Wherever possible/feasible encouraging breaks, promote healthy habits, and support mental health initiatives (e.g. RUOK Day, on-campus mindfulness sessions and the like).

and

Providing timely feedback that includes constructive, prompt feedback on assessments, so students can see where they are improving and where to focus next. And equally important - *celebrate Achievements* which would include acknowledging milestones, such as assignment submissions, participation, or improvements, either publicly or privately.

The list of ideas is not exhaustive – but does form the basis of a solid approach to engagement.

Engaging disengaged tertiary students requires a holistic, empathetic approach. By building personal connections, making learning relevant, offering flexibility, fostering participation, supporting wellbeing, and recognising achievements, educators can significantly improve student engagement. These strategies, when implemented consistently, can help students feel more connected and motivated, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes.

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