



## *Encouraging Student Motivation Series*

### **PART 1: Motivation in the Classroom**

Motivation is perhaps the most critical non-academic factor to positively affect student performance on coursework (Ambrose et al., 2010; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Increased motivation has been linked to increased academic achievement (Paulsen & Feldman, 1999), success in handling stressful situations (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000), and better study skills (Robbins et al., 2004).

#### **Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation**

Ryan & Deci (2000) explain that sources of student motivation tend to fall into two broad categories:

- Extrinsic motivation: grades, degree requirements, competition, family pressure, incentives
- Intrinsic motivation: genuine interest, personal learning goals, relevance to learner

The various social and cultural contexts that a student experiences, from their personal background to the new contexts they encounter in the university, have the potential to affect the types of motivation they experience. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are also potentially reinforcing; research has shown that students who start out with solely extrinsic motivation for a course can develop intrinsic motivation as they gain competence in the subject matter (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). For underrepresented students, a recent study by Hernandez et al. (2013) indicates that a desire to develop competence rather than demonstrate performance (which is strongly related to intrinsic motivation) predicted increased GPAs for African-American and Latinx students. At the same time, social psychologists have argued that an approach that places undue value on intrinsic motivation may be tied too strongly to individualistic societies (Cohen et al., 2005).

#### **How is motivation tied to relevancy?**

Linking coursework to student interests can increase intrinsic motivation and help improve student performance (Ambrose et al., 2010). Emphasizing the relationship between coursework and students' daily lives, real-world tasks, or academic/professional lives can be especially motivating for students. Below are a few suggestions to help you get started:

Strategies	Activity Examples
Consider connecting material to students' existing interests. For example, you could link the topic to pop culture or current events.	American History example: <i>Discuss changing political campaign techniques between the past and present. Pull video excerpts from recent campaign speeches and have students identify the central issue being discussed and what type of persuasive technique is being used.</i>
Try to make course material real-world relevant. For example, you could create practical assignments that might be useful in daily life.	Engineering Example: <i>Ask the class how many bikes a UNITRANS bus can hold at full capacity and follow up with the question, "How would you most efficiently expand that number?"</i>
Illustrate how the material can transfer across subjects. For example, you could make explicit connections with other classes or areas of interest.	Psychology example: <i>Discuss memory structures in class and have students practice techniques to help improve memory. Ask students how these techniques could help them in their other classes, and prompt them to try the techniques in at least one other class and record their results.</i>

#### **How can I demonstrate my enthusiasm for the topic?**

Sharing your enthusiasm for a subject can inspire student interest and motivation to learn. Adopting a personable and engaging classroom manner can help pique student interest in coursework and help



students to meet learning objectives (Allen, Witt, & Wheelless, 2006). Students who have several positive interactions with faculty are more likely to have high levels of satisfaction with their college experience (Astin, 1984). Here are a few suggestions for communicating your enthusiasm positively to a class:

Strategies	Discussion Examples
Make yourself more approachable by sharing positive, relevant, and appropriate examples from your life with the class.	These examples should help to connect course concepts with the “real world” by demonstrating your own experiences with these concepts.
Consider starting a conversation with your students about what first attracted you to your field; then, encourage them to discuss what attracted them to the field.	Art example: <i>As a child, my favorite type of books to read were comic books. My favorite issue was by an artist who combined watercolor with photographs to create collages for each panel. I wanted to know how they’d done it, so I picked up a camera to start figuring it out. What drew you to photography?</i>
Make classwork active and engaging by switching up activities and lecture. This can help prevent your class from becoming monotonous.	Medical example: <i>Pass out cups of water - don’t let students drink them! In some of the cups, place a few drops of one non-toxic chemical reagent. Ask students to form small groups and have one student pour a bit of their water into the others’ cups. Switch up the groups and repeat three times. Walk around and place one drop of the trigger reagent in each cup. The cups that have been “infected” will turn red. Ask students to trace the path of infection and use this as a spring-board to discuss transmission vectors.</i>

### Additional Resources

- On integrating effective classroom practices, visit the [CEE teaching support website](#)
- For academic technology support, visit either [Academic Technology Services](#) or [EdTech Commons](#), a site designed to help support teaching with technology.
- For the TA handbook and instructional materials, visit the [CEE’s TA orientation webpage](#).

### Citation

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## *Encouraging Student Motivation Series*

### **PART 2: Teaching Strategies for Motivating Students to Attend Class & Complete Tasks**

Motivation is perhaps the most critical non-academic factor to positively affect student performance on coursework (Ambrose et al., 2010; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Increased motivation has been linked to increased academic achievement (Paulsen & Feldman, 1999), success in handling stressful situations (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000), and better study skills (Robbins et al., 2004).

#### **How can I encourage students to do the assigned readings for class?**

Careful framing of reading assignments is an important way an instructor can encourage students to critically engage with course texts, and can influence how much effort students’ devote to assigned readings. Below are suggestions you might consider incorporating into your course design, adapted from Bean (2011):

Strategies	Teaching Suggestions
Incorporate reading guides.	Reading guides can help students understand how to engage with difficult texts. Your guide could define key terms, explain necessary background knowledge and the reading’s rhetorical context, and/or ask questions for students to consider as they read.
Establish relevancy for readings.	Establishing the relevancy of a reading can help students understand how a text relates to the rest of the coursework. One way you might do this is to consistently refer to specific aspects of the readings during lecture to directly tie the readings to class work. Another way could be to ask students to cite key concepts from course readings in their work.
Avoid summarizing in class.	Consider avoiding summarizing assigned readings during class, as this can send the message to students that completing assigned readings is not necessary.
Remind students that they are novice readers of scholarly works.	Let students know that scholarly publications are meant for a specialized audience, and that therefore it is natural to struggle a bit with the language and content. This gives them an explanation for the difficulty besides personal failing.
Share your own strategies.	Share your own reading, note-taking, and response writing strategies, and discuss how they differ among different genres of writing. Students may feel nervous when faced with academic reading assignment, and your strategies may help alleviate some of that anxiety.

Additionally, here are a few suggested assignments to encourage student engagement with readings:

Activities	Teaching Suggestions
Reading quizzes.	Online assessments or a brief pencil-and-paper or clicker quizzes at the beginning of class can help you quickly assess reading comprehension. If you want student to engage more critically with a text though, consider using assessments that require application or inference of central topics--this can encourage more deep reading and avoid sending the message that students should skim assigned readings for the “correct answers.” (Bean, 2011)
Marginal notes approach.	Consider using a marginal notes approach, where students are encouraged to explain each highlight or underline they make in a text--for example, is it a



	particularly compelling piece of evidence? Something that is unclear? A key term? This strategy helps students to develop stronger reading comprehension skills as they actively engage with the text instead of just passively reading it. To bring this into the classroom, you could start class by asking students to read aloud from their marginal notes.
Says/Does activities	Says/Does activities ask students to closely analyze each paragraph of an assigned text by reflecting in writing on both what it says (a summary of the content) and what it does (its purpose or function within the article). This can heighten understanding of structure and encourage close reading.
Summary tasks.	Asking students to summarize a text can be one way to emphasize students' ability to separate main points from supporting details, and to encourage students to suspend their own judgements and focus on an author's points. Consider giving students the option to summarize the reading with a graphic organizer: a flowchart, diagram, concept map, or drawing. A popular addendum to this activity is to have a second short writing that responds to, argues with, questions, doubts or goes beyond the original reading.
Mock author interviews.	Ask students to write mock interviews with the author, in which they pose questions and the author responds from their particular intellectual standpoint.

**How can I motivate students to attend class?**

Class attendance has been linked positively to class grades, and is a stronger predictor of college GPA than standardized test performance or study skills (Crede, Roche, & Kieszczynka, 2010). Simply noting this to students is a simple way to promote attendance. Below are some suggestions for encouraging attendance:

- Low-stakes active learning activities can encourage student attendance. For example, short reading quizzes, think pair share activities, free writes, etc.
- Another option is to incorporate small-group activities into your classes. This will allow students to benefit from active learning techniques (Bligh, 2000; Prince, 2004) and provide an experience that is not available through webcasting/podcasting a missed lecture. Active learning has been proven to benefit students of all backgrounds across a wide variety of course topics and classroom settings (Freeman et al., 2014; Reimer et al., 2016).
- While small-group activities result in more interaction, the use of clicker questions can also be a useful form of formative assessment. Not only can you gain a better picture of your students' understanding, but this in-class work can also double as low-stakes participation activities.

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***Encouraging Student Motivation Series***  
**PART 3: Motivating Students through Feedback and Clear Expectations**

Motivation is perhaps the most critical non-academic factor to positively affect student performance on coursework (Ambrose et al., 2010; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Increased motivation has been linked to increased academic achievement (Paulsen & Feldman, 1999), success in handling stressful situations (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000), and better study skills (Robbins et al., 2004).

**How can I communicate clear expectations for student performance?**

Students tend to perform better when they know what is expected of them and are given guidance on how to meet those expectations (Davis, 2009). Below are suggestions on how to set expectations in the classroom:

Strategies	Teaching Suggestions
Provide lesson objectives.	Try to provide learning objectives for each lesson that tell students what they will learn, and ensure that students are aware of these learning objectives and any assessments. You could do this by starting each class period with either a one-slide presentation of the day’s learning objectives or writing the learning objectives on the board. An example from Linguistics might be: “Today we will be discussing morphemes. By the end of the class, you should be able to define what a morpheme is, differentiate free versus bound morphemes, and be able to generate examples of each type.”
Make your expectations clear in the syllabus.	Use the syllabus to clearly define what students need to do to be successful in your class, and provide them with explanations, timelines, and additional resources for each assignment.
Post rubrics well in advance of due dates.	Whenever possible, post assignment grading rubrics for the students to peruse before starting the assignment. This allows students to evaluate their own work according to your expectations prior to grading and gives guidelines for improvement. Here are a <a href="#">few examples</a> from Carnegie Mellon’s <i>Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation</i>
Provide examples from previous students.	If possible, provide examples of successful student work along with rubrics. This can give students a model to reference as they work on their own project.
Tell them you believe they can meet your expectations.	In addition to communicating what the important learning objectives are, let your students know that you expect that they will meet these goals--you believe they can do it. This is especially important for underrepresented or underprepared students.

**How can effective feedback help motivate my class?**

Studies show that students tend to value feedback that is “timely, individualized and focused” (Hyland, 2013). Below are some suggestions on providing effective feedback:

Strategies	Teaching Suggestions
Practice effective feedback strategies.	Providing students with timely, task-specific positive feedback increases intrinsic motivation to learn and helps students stay on-task during classroom learning activities (Cameron & Pierce, 1994). For more suggestions on how to provide effective feedback to students, see our <a href="#">“Effective Feedback Series.”</a>



Avoid singling out specific students for praise or comparing one group of students to another.	Instead, praise the class as a whole for performance on tasks. For example, you could say: “Overall, the class did very well on the exam/problem set/writing assignment. I’m very pleased with your performance. If you weren’t happy with your performance, please come see me and we’ll work on a plan to help you get your grade to where you’d like it to be.”
Provide individual written/verbal praise on specific assignments.	Individualized feedback helps the student to feel that they stand out and prevents feelings of anonymity. The <a href="#">Speedgrader tool</a> in Canvas can help make the process of composing feedback easier as it provides a quick and direct way to give each student individual feedback and grades for work submitted online.
Ensure the feedback is returned in a timely fashion.	This encourages students to pay attention to your feedback, and to incorporate that feedback into future assignments.

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