

Engagement Considerations in Mentoring in Higher Education

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Paper presented at the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education Annual Meeting on March 3-7, 2022 in New Orleans, LA.

Traditional aspects of student engagement have focused on how students feel or think about their instructor, the content being taught, the design of the course, and occasionally the institution, barely extrapolating what truly is meaningful for the student. As documented in various systematic measuring of the student experience, historically, the focus has been on pedagogical approaches, educational practices, and student evaluations of teaching practice (Bowden et al., 2021; Grebennikov & Shah 2013). According to Boulton et al. (2019), the numerous and varied interactions students have with their learning programs, including lectures, seminars, peer group discussions, and *ad hoc* interactions with teaching staff, as well as other aspects of campus life such as participation in sports and student societies, are harder to record, requiring innovative methods for their capture. With this thought in mind, researchers have struggled to find validity with how students truly feel connected or what motivates them to engage in their learning with fulfilled expectations. As 21st-century education is upon us, the typical way instructors and post-secondary institutions portray student engagement is morphing into a holistic approach for teaching and learning, combining aspects of social, emotional, and academics to engage students. Student engagement is looked upon as a predominant ‘meta-

construct' in which an eco-system of students, educators, faculty, and institutions cooperate to create enriching tertiary experiences (Bowden et al., 2021; Junco, 2012; Kahu, 2013; Trowler, 2010; Zepke, 2014). The traditional practices of higher education institutions must change to keep pace with the expectations of 21st-century learners and the manner they engage in learning.

The teaching and learning process at all levels can be challenging for instructors to sustain learners' attention, and it's paramount for instructors to be engaging and implore strategies of engagement to maintain students' interests. Examsoft (2021) stated that most engaged learners exemplify a solid commitment to their education and learning. However, according to Tech Advocate (2020), increasing student participation and engagement was cited as professors' number one priority for enhancing their practices. Instructors must take inventory of their current practices to examine what gets students to take ownership during discussions or promote them to go the extra mile when executing a project. The instructor also has a responsibility to put the student as the focal point throughout the learning process to maximize engagement and interaction. Masika and Jones (2016) focused on facets of student engagement, including student-to-student learning, consideration of diverse student populations being served, the feeling of belonging in academics and extracurricular behaviors, and integrating communities of practice (CoP) an organizational practice. At the same time, Sharma and Chachra (2020) found that active learning strategies were the highest reported technique in their study to increase student motivation, engagement, and participation. This finding supports the need for more small group collaborations and tasks rooted in problem-solving and reflection for students; these types of student-centered learning enhance engagement.

The learning environment can influence the level to which students engage in learning. Whether the environment is a traditional classroom setting or a virtual learning environment; engagement can still be of concern. Martin and Bollinger (2018) shared student to content, student to instructor, and student to student as three basic engagement techniques of online learning that cause online learners to be more engaged. Glantz and Gamrat (2021) shared collaborative technologies for sense-making, student experts for learning and technology support, back channels for informal communication (i.e., Zoom chat), breakout sessions, and supplemental recording (SR) for learning spaces as top engagement strategies revealed during the global pandemic of 2020 that prove to be beneficial for instructors and students in traditional or virtual settings. Student and instructor individual perceptions of the learning environment can detract from or enhance participation in the learning environment. Designing learning environments where a student's voice is immersed with innovative and evidence-based pedagogical practices can help bridge the gap of stagnant student engagement.

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