Engaging your students

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What does 'student engagement' mean to you?

'Student engagement' means the active involvement of my students in their learning. Without involving students in their learning, it is difficult for them to relate to the concepts and principles that they encounter in the classroom. In order to engage students, the classroom experience must be relevant to the students’ own experiences and stimulate their curiosity so that they want to take their learning one step further - 'I want to find out more about this'. Students must be intrinsically motivated to gain knowledge not just for the sake of completing assessment tasks but more importantly to apply that knowledge in their everyday lives - both personal and professional.

What steps do you take in the planning of your courses that address how to better engage students?

In order to motivate my students to learn, I ensure that my course materials are current and relevant. I am an active researcher in my discipline area. I contribute to international research journals and I attend conferences to stay in touch with the latest developments in my field. I also use these opportunities to develop strong international academic networks that expose me to teaching practices around the world. These experiences assist me to develop teaching strategies and learning activities that are engaging and motivating.

What strategies do you use in your teaching to engage learners?

I teach both onshore and offshore in numerous courses that are provided in several different teaching models. I therefore use a variety of strategies to engage my students. Firstly, however, I believe that a key factor in engaging students is the lecturer’s approach to teaching. For this reason I teach with enthusiasm and passion. As teachers, we lead by example. By demonstrating my enthusiasm and knowledge about what I am teaching, I motivate my students to want to learn regardless of where I am teaching or the diversity of my student cohort.

In addition, these are some of the strategies I use to engage my students:

- Conducting interactive classes where my students are asked to provide real-life applications of the theoretical principles studied in previous classes. In order to facilitate this exercise, I provide a comprehensive suite of external links on the Learning Hub that include journals, international finance associations and global organisations. Many international students use this opportunity to analyse their home country’s financial markets and these classes sometimes provide lively discussion amongst the students.

- Bringing current newspaper articles into the classroom and relating the content of those articles to the content of the lecture/course.
• Facilitating classroom discussions, which analyse research articles that address practitioners’ views of theoretical concepts. Students find that these articles provide important insights into the theories addressed in lectures.

• Dividing the class into small groups of 4 to 5 students. Each group works on a problem or case study for 10 to 15 minutes and reports the outcome of their analysis to the class.

• Conducting ‘Question and Answer’ sessions in which students are able to ask me to clarify or review any aspect of the course undertaken to that point in time.

• Initiating ‘Reflective Moments’ when I ask students to reflect on what they have learnt so far in that class or so far in the course, and to share their thoughts with their peers.

• Keeping it simple - I use simple language and uncomplicated frameworks to explain concepts that are complex.

• Making myself accessible - I encourage my students to email or contact me at any time so that they can clarify doubts/issues as soon as possible. I respond to students’ emails promptly, I take time to speak with my students individually, I share some of my own personal experiences with them so that they feel that they know me as a person not just as their lecturer, and I attempt to make them laugh . . .