

What is student engagement?

Student engagement is defined by Glantz et al., (2021) as “a constructivist approach to teaching and learning: less “sage on the stage” and more learning by doing”. One of the [strategic goals at Edith Cowan University](#) is to “provide world-class, inclusive and engaging learning experiences of comparable quality in all physical and virtual spaces” (ECU, 2022).

Unit communications, learning materials, and learning activities online and on-campus should address the three dimensions of engagement as described by Fredericks e al., (2004). These are affective (students feel noticed and included), behavioural (students are participating) and cognitive (students are learning). The dimensions are mutually reinforcing, so paying attention to each one supports the others.

Strategies for sustained engagement

The following sections outline some practical strategies for sustaining online student engagement.

[Be present in the unit site, in some form, 3-4 times per week](#)

Students need to know you are ‘there’. This means that you need to make your presence known through a mix of intentional strategies.

[Observe and guide student activity \(teaching presence\)](#)

- At the beginning of the week, [post an announcement](#) that gives an overview of the topic and activities for the week ahead. You could [do this as a short video](#) (1-3 minutes) so that students can see and hear you.

- Read and answer questions in the [general Canvas course discussion](#) every 1-2 days.
- If you notice student confusion (e.g. about content, participation expectations, assessment) [post a short video](#) in Canvas Discussion to clarify and post an announcement with a link to it.
- At the end of the week post an announcement that recaps the week, and briefly suggests how students might prepare for the following week.
- [Monitor student engagement](#) and follow up with any students who are not engaging.

Foster a learning community (social presence)

- Ask students to share their experiences of learning off-campus and share your own experiences of teaching off-campus. You could encourage students to do this via a Canvas Discussion post, or an image or [Panopto video](#).
- Use the '[Groups](#)' feature in Canvas to divide a large class into smaller, informal 'study groups' of 10-20, or show students how to do this themselves – either in a [Canvas Discussion](#) or [Groups Page](#), or informally in [Microsoft Teams](#).
- Encourage purposeful student-to-student interaction; for example, don't respond to every post or comment and instead direct students to consider those of their peers (e.g. "Gina makes an interesting point – what does everyone think?")

Set learning activities that encourage students to visit the unit site 3-4 times per week

Just like teachers, students have complex, busy lives. If they have no good reason to visit the unit site, they will probably prioritise other things.

- Encourage engagement through communicating a clear set of expectations: how often should students be creating/responding to posts, completing activities, attending live online sessions etc.?

- Regularly post links to topical videos, images or websites and ask students to discuss how it relates to the course. You could also ask students to respond with their own links.
- Use open-ended questions on Canvas Discussion: “Why do you think that?”; “What alternatives can you imagine?”; “What new questions did this generate for you?” This can encourage discussions to unfold over a period of days. Read ‘[Discussions for Learning](#)’ for further ideas for student engagement in online discussion.
- Set simple, [formative quizzes](#) so students can check their understanding regularly.
- Embed [quizzes in a Panopto video](#) to provide opportunities for active learning and self-assessment.
- Leverage [MS Teams tools](#) like polls, breakout rooms and a shared whiteboard, to provide an engaging live online classroom experience.

Provide clear ‘student consultation’ opportunities

You will need to find ways to replicate ‘consultation times’ online. With no office to visit, students need to know how to ask questions, seek clarification, and check that they are on track.

- Ask students to use the general [Canvas Discussion](#) for all unit-related questions.
- Set ‘virtual office hours’ – fixed periods of time (e.g. 1 hour) during the week when you will be online and available for questions.
 - These could be scheduled as live sessions with [Microsoft Teams](#), recorded in Panopto and posted in Canvas for all students.
 - These could also be conducted in the general Canvas Discussion at set times.
- If appropriate, invite students to request short, individual appointments that can be conducted on Microsoft Teams, and [scheduled in Outlook](#).

- You can create scheduler [appointment groups](#) in the Canvas course calendar to block a time when students can meet you. Remind students to [subscribe](#) to the Canvas calendar feed to their student ECU Outlook account.

Act on student survey feedback

Taking the 'pulse' of students' experience can be done at various points in the semester to get feedback on what works well and what could be improved. A short survey can be administered using the [Canvas Survey](#) tool.

Visibly acknowledge student feedback and explain how you will act on it. Create an announcement or a short video summarising the most common feedback (positive and negative) and how you plan to respond.

Your response might include a link to [ECU support for students](#) and the [Learning Technologies Support Portal](#), where students can consult support services and resources to address challenges with well-being, financial hardship or technology.

What next?

If you want to explore more strategies for engaging students, you may find the following resources helpful.

- Read the EDUCAUSE article on '[Improved student engagement in higher education's next normal](#)'.
- Consider how the [teaching strategies](#) listed in the menu on the ECU Curriculum Design page might be adapted online.
- Explore this infographic on how to [Humanise your Online Class](#).
- Watch these videos of educators talking about [Engaging Online Facilitation](#).

References

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