

Motivation and Retention: Examples from Literature

To increase online learners' motivation and improve retention in online courses, instructors, and sometimes institutions, draw guidelines from motivational design models or adapt their existing instructional design within a course. Two frameworks we found particularly helpful are:

- ARCS Model of Motivational Design (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction) - (Keller, 2010)
- MUSIC® Model of Motivation (eMpowerment, Usefulness, Success, Interest, and Caring) - (Jones, 2009)

We reviewed papers where instructors reflected on their course design to improve motivation and retention and used these two frameworks to categorize a series of strategies into often interrelated themes. These examples from literature along with [strategies that UofT instructors use in their large online courses](#), provide a starting point for instructors of large online courses who are designing or redesigning their course with the intention of promoting motivation and retention. The list provided here covers a wide variety of courses from different disciplines. However, it is not exhaustive. The context of a given large online course is a major determining factor in how specific strategies may be more effective in keeping learners motivated and engaged with course activities.

Student Orientation

- Online students at a multi-campus community college are required to participate in student orientation to become confident with the college's LMS environment and its tools. (Britto, & Rush, 2013)
- Course orientation can include information about communication with the instructor (**Djafarova**, Zefi, 2013; Sull, 2007) and expected course participation from the students. (**Djafarova**, Zefi, 2013)
- Course orientation enables the instructors to emphasize the importance of innovative course activities that students may have not experienced before. In an Algebra course, for example, the instructor had integrated a note taking activity

with each lecture video. Students were reminded of the importance of this activity during course orientation (Hegeman, 2015).

- The instructor of online courses in Humanities used course orientation to boost students' confidence about online learning environment where the course was offered. Students demonstrated their knowledge of the learning environment and their confidence in using it by submitting a "reflective survey" following course orientation (Steiner 2016).

Ongoing Communication

- In a large accounting course, the instructor and the students communicated using twitter (Braga, Gunter, Carneiro, 2015)
- Student newsletter in a community college informs online students about available academic and administrative support (Britto, Rush, 2013)
- Instructors of "IT for Learning" course sent course-related reminder text messages to the students using the mobile extension of the course LMS (Chaiprasurt, Esichaikul2013).
- Weekly live sessions in a humanities MOOC allowed facilitated communication between course instructor and the students (Hew, 2016).
- Students in a computer application course received bi-weekly motivational emails from the instructor. The email reminded students of the learning objectives, commended students on their achievement, and offered contact information and assistance (Huett et al., 2008).

Varied Content, Interaction, and Assessment Design

- To accommodate students varied preferences, an English course included both individual and collaborative activities. (Braga, Gunter, & Carneiro, 2015)
- In a teacher professional development course, students were given the opportunity to revise and resend their discussion posts based on feedback that they received from TAs. A rubric was used to assess the depth of critical thinking based on the students' discussion posts (Guo, Chen, Lei, & Wen, 2014).
- The instructor of an Algebra course mainly used videos to present the course content. Each video was accompanied by a guided note-taking template (Hegeman, 2015)

Peer-review and Collaboration

- Students in an English course created a collaborative virtual glossary (Braga, Gunter, & Carneiro, 2015)
- Students in a creativity MOOC evaluated their peer's submissions by checking the completeness of the submissions, and providing suggestions as to how the idea could be improved (HokansonMcCluske2014).
- Academic Partnerships course PHIL 1370: Philosophy of Knowledge
- To facilitate peer assessment in a large online philosophy of knowledge course, the instructor designed two peer assessed short-essay assignments. In each assignments, students were organized in small groups where they shared a draft of their essay with their peers, received feedback, revised the paper and submitted their assignment for grading (Smith, 2014).

Small Cohorts within Large Classes

- Students in an English course were divided into groups based on their field of study (Braga, Gunter, & Carneiro, 2015)
- Small groups of students (4 to 6 students) could assist each other with assignments and homework (Djafarova, & Zefi, 2013)
- In a teacher professional development course, small groups of seven to 10 teachers were formed for course discussion (Guo, Chen, Lei, & Wen, 2014).
Using smaller groups for discussions is recommended elsewhere (Panagopoulos, 2007)

Increase Interest

- In a programming MOOC, learners participated in weekly contents by submitting tutorial videos. Weekly winners competed for a tablet in the last week of the course (Hew, 2016).
- Advanced students in a programming MOOC participated in coding challenges that were beyond the scope of the course. Challenger winners were recognized in a public website (Hew, 2016).
- Instructors of a creativity MOOC prepared a weekly visual collection of students work (Hokanson, & McCluske, 2014)
- Controversial topics in humanities courses can increase students interest (Steiner, 2016)

Individual Assistance and Technical Support

- An integrated system of early assistance, online advising, case management advising, and online tutoring is in place in a community college to detect learners who are behind course work and may need extra assistance. All online students have access to online advising and online tutoring (Britton, & Rush, 2013).
- Instructors of an online course send feedback to students mobile devices based on LMS information to remind at-risk learners of deadline and offer assistance (Chaiprasurt, & Esichaikul, 2013).
- The instructor asks students who need more assistance to contact him via email with a detailed description of their question (Hegeman, 2015)
- A humanities MOOC instructional team offer weekly office hours to the students (Hew, 2016)
- A large blended psychology course (more than 1,000 students) created an instructional team including the course instructor, a graduate assistant and five undergraduate assistants (Hudson et al., 2014). The course staff contacted at-risk students, those who missed an assignment or a class. Low achieving students were required to meet with the course instructor to develop a study plan.
- Students in humanities courses can access their instructor's feedback in the "My Grade" section of Blackboard and ask questions if needed (Steiner, 2016).
- In-person or individual meetings with struggling students can help them make progress (Sull, 2007)

For examples visit <http://www.ocw.utoronto.ca/projects/motivation-retention-examples>

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