

Motivate Your Students to Succeed

Overview

Why does it seem that some instructors inspire students to perform to the best of their abilities while others do not? Instructors who are successful in motivating students convey their faith in their students' ability to succeed, translate the content of the course to real-world situations, and provide students with as much control over their learning as possible. The successful instructor can motivate students to learn by utilizing some of the practices outlined below.

- **Set high standards, but convey to students that you have faith in their ability to succeed.** Students often enter classrooms with worries that they cannot perform at the same level as their peers. We know that fear and anxiety can reduce the capacity for students to think well, and the best instructors emphasize their trust in their students' ability to develop core competencies. Setting high but realistic standards conveys to students that they are held to a high standard but that the challenges they face are not insurmountable. Make this practice a regular part of your instruction; for example, offer to review difficult assignments in class or during office hours and mentor students to develop the skills they need to succeed in the class and in the workforce.
- **Connect the goals of the class to students' personal and professional goals.** Often, students want to understand why a concept or technique is useful before they invest time in learning about it. Spend time discussing the applicability of skills learned in the classroom to complex problems that they might face in real-world situations. In particular, use examples from your own professional experiences. Students who understand how they might apply course content in their own personal or professional lives are more motivated to engage deeply with the content and are more satisfied overall with their courses. Consider distributing an instrument that measures students' motivation, such as the one found on the next page.
- **Give students as much control over their learning as possible.** Students who feel that they have more control over the learning environment tend to be more successful and more motivated to succeed. For instance, you could give students more control over their learning by encouraging them to choose topics for group work or papers that are of particular interest to them. You could also encourage students to bring to class readings that represent their voice and perspective, even if that differs from your own.

Resources

Bain, K. (2011). What the best college teachers do. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Vanderbilt University, Center for Teaching (n.d.). Motivating Students.
<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/motivating-students/>

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Motivation Assessment Survey

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
I find my instructor to be both challenging and supportive.						
I feel that the course material will prepare me for the workforce.						
The examples provided in class help me connect the course content to my professional goals.						
I feel that I have some flexibility in choosing materials that represent my perspective.						
Overall, I believe that my instructor is committed to motivating me to learn.						