

# Understanding and Increasing Student Motivation

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# Definition of Motivation

- A student's willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in, the learning process" (Bomia et al., 1997, p. 1)
- Motivated students "select tasks at the border of their competencies, initiate action when given the opportunity, and exert intense effort and concentration in the implementation of learning tasks; they show generally positive emotions during ongoing action, including enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, and interest" (p. 3).
- Less motivated or disengaged students, on the other hand, "are passive, do not try hard, and give up easily in the face of challenges" (Skinner & Belmont, 1991, p. 4).

# The Nature of Motivation

- Motivation is not dichotomous
  - Little utility in thinking a student “is” or “is not” motivated
- Motivation is dynamic and continuous
  - It is a probability that an individual will engage in and maintain a certain activity.
- Motivation is therefore subject to numerous factors
  - Instructors have no affect on some factors but may have significant affects on other factors

# Influential Factors

- Student Factors
  - Interest
  - Perceived usefulness
  - General level of achievement motivation
  - Self-efficacy and Self-confidence
  - Persistence
- Instructor Factors
  - The same

# A Simple Way to Break it Down

- Importance
  - How important is doing well?
  - How important is doing the work?
  - How important is the class?
- Confidence
  - Self-efficacy for material
  - Self-efficacy for evaluation procedures

# A Digression to Types of Motivation

- Extrinsic
  - Engaging in behavior to attain a reward or to avoid a punishment from an external source.
- Intrinsic
  - Engaging in behavior out of curiosity, sense challenge and an internal sense of gratification.

# Research on Student Motivation

- Over-reliance on extrinsic motivators can decrease achievement and student perceptions of motivation
- Greater intrinsic motivation is associated with:
  - Higher achievement
  - Higher confidence
  - Longer retention of concepts

# Some Thoughts of Others

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- Students want individualized instruction. They all want to have their individual needs met. They want to feel like they are more than part of a crowd, that their individual talents and abilities are respected.
- They want teachers who are *real* people, who recognize them as human beings -- teachers who care about them -- not just their test performance.
- They want to be challenged, not decimated.
- They want caretakers who check on them regularly, who support their individual learning, who inform them individually of their progress, and who assign a variety of tasks that give them the opportunity to learn in modes that fit their individual styles.
- They like teachers who talk at their level, who can joke and take a joke, and who let them talk and learn with other students.
- They like clear, complete explanations and concrete examples, thorough (but brief) explanations of difficult concepts, and opportunities to have their questions answered.

# Some Points of Intervention

- Your style
- Course design and content
- Extrinsic reward structure
- When students come to talk with you

# Your Style

- Create a context where you relate to them do not force them to relate to you
- Hold high but realistic expectations
- Use the language of community not separation
- Tell students what they need to do in order to be successful in your course
- Be enthusiastic
- Use humor
- Avoid creating intense competition between students
- Avoid using grades as threats

# Example: Relating

- Small writing assignments or discussions
  - Use a movie you have seen in the last 6 months to explain or describe a concept
  - Use a TV show now and from your childhood
- Find contemporary movies to show illustrative clips
- Find areas of commonality around issues important to students. Use these areas in your lectures.
  - Twenty questions

# Course Design

- Find out what drives them and adjust the course accordingly
- Let students have some say in choosing what will be studied
- De-emphasize grade and emphasize mastery
- Vary your teaching methods
- Increase course difficulty as the semester progresses

# Example: Importance/Confidence

- Can be done as part of getting student information
- 1-10 scale of Importance
- 1-10 scale confidence
- Why a X and not a Y
- What can you do to increase X to Y
- What can I do to increase X to Y
- What barriers are in your way

# Example: Student Generated Syllabus

- Provide an example with goals and objectives
- Set up a smorgasbord of requirements
  - Essay Tests
  - Multiple Choice Tests
  - Papers
- They turn it in for your feedback
- Works well for smaller classes

# Extrinsic Rewards

- Give students feedback as quickly as possible
- Reward behaviors that you desire
- Frequent quizzes
- More rather than fewer tests when possible

# Rewarding Desired Behavior

## Reading Assignments

- Survival Cards
  - Students turn in 3X5 cards of notes they took on selected readings
  - Discuss reading as usual
  - Return cards to students on the day of the test to use on the test
  - Stamp or mark the card so that you know it is the card you gave to them

# Rewarding Desired Behavior

## Attendance

- Random reaction papers
  - Randomly distribute assignments through semester. These are part of the grade, not extra credit
  - Assign a helpful point value (3 – 5 points)
  - Use topics that are of interest and related to the material
  - Use them to gauge the understanding of a concept, to get info for an upcoming lecture, to help students think critically
  - Discuss responses anonymously in class

# Rewarding Desired Behavior

## Preparing for Class

- Jeopardy Game – Helps you with boring material or material your don't know as well
  - Students read and take notes on material to be covered
  - They also write Jeopardy style questions (answers) to turn into you
  - You create Jeopardy style game with those questions. You may have to write some yourself
  - Play the game is 3 or more groups. Keep score.
  - Turning in notes get some EC points
  - Winning team gets some EC points

# Out of Class Interactions

- Students do not come to your office for you to talk to them. They show up because they want you to listen
- Ten minutes of active listening gets you more than 30 minutes of preaching or lecturing
- The goal is for the student to articulate to reasons to succeed and for you to tie in their reason to the behaviors you desire

# Active Listening

- As the listener, you are a mirror; a mirror with a twist.
- Use reflection and open-ended questions to understand what motivates and reinforces the student.
- Summarize what you hear
- Tie the goals of the class with the students motivators and reinforcers

# Active Listening Flowchart

- Start with open questions
- Listen and reflect
- Summarize what you hear or what you want them to hear again
- Ask key/evocative questions
- Set a plan
- Meet again to evaluate

# Take Home Message

- Show and share your interest
- Think in terms of importance and confidence for you and your students
- Use but do not over-use extrinsic rewards
- Individualize as much as possible
- Listen as much as possible
- It's your agenda through their eyes