

APRIL 1, 2021

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Collaboration is the key to innovation.

Dr. Laura Smith

ENGAGEMENT POINTS

Thank you, Dr. Smith, for your willingness
to share and collaborate!



Student Engagement Points

Educational research consistently shows a strong positive correlation between student engagement and student achievement, retention, persistence, and satisfaction. Providing multiple and varied opportunities for engagement is an essential component of course design. Historically, educators have also leveraged the grading system to motivate student engagement. "Attendance points" are familiar to most students and are generally perceived as transparent and fair as long as an accurate attendance record is kept. However, simple attendance does not assess student engagement in any meaningful way, so a wide-spread shift to "participation points" provided a more focused way to measure student participation in specific learning activities. More recently, in online and blended learning environments, the vocabulary is shifting again to describe "engagement points." This new moniker is an effort to draw attention to the active learning, collaboration, and critical thinking required for student-directed learning.

Engagement points are meant to make student engagement visible to the instructor as well as provide clearly defined expectations for students. Communicating specific opportunities and expectations for engagement is particularly helpful for students who are inexperienced with blended and online learning.

What motivated you to reinvent the participation points in your course?

I was in a continuing education training, and utilizing engagement points vs. participation points was discussed. Engagement implies a deeper level of participation, that would hopefully encourage students to take ownership of their learning. This seems to be especially meaningful at the graduate level. I mentioned this idea in the hybrid teaching panel and was asked how I graded it, and thought that a rubric might help with clarity for this assignment.

How do you "grade" engagement?



It started with changing the name from "participation" to "engagement points". After trying that for one semester, I worked with my doctoral level co-teachers to create an engagement rubric to provide clarity of expectations. I created the rubric in a way that would give students more ownership of how they engage with the class content. I created 5 categories, where expectations to "meet" each category varied. Students could earn full credit on a category if they "met" my expectations of engagement. If they did not meet them, then they would lose varying amounts of points, depending on the amount of work they did complete. It was meant to allow students to choose between categories, so that they balanced out. So if someone "did not meet expectations" in one area, but "exceeded" in another area, they could still get full credit on their engagement points. By providing multiple ways to earn credit, I could assess students' knowledge and understanding of the material in ways they found more useful to their own learning.

The two pieces of my course I wanted to see engagement increase the most were watching the lecture videos to completion, as well as moderating their own discussion board posts. The replies to peers were included in their discussion board grade, but I wanted them to go back and have a conversation with those who commented on their initial post.

Other categories included a section on communication with the instructor to encourage students to reach out when they were struggling with an assignment or the course, instead of after the fact. Another category encouraged students to ask content related questions on a discussion board specific to that purpose. The biggest change for engagement points I made this semester were optional Coffee Chats. These were open meetings, at least once a week to talk about whatever the students wanted to address. I made sure to poll students for preferable times to meet most students' needs.

One tip I have after using the rubric for the first time (attached below), is to track the progress of engagement along the way, and not try to go back through emails and discussion boards after the fact. I did this by creating an excel spreadsheet that included each category to help track the information weekly. I also made sure to remind students of ways they could earn engagement points throughout the course when I noticed a lack of engagement from certain students.

What impact has the shift to engagement points had on your course?

I saw a much greater response from students in regards to moderating their own posts. There were some weeks I could barely keep up with them! Out of 25 students, all but 3 came to at least one coffee chat, while others came to 3-4 in an 8 week period. I had more students reaching out ahead of time with concerns that affected their academic performance. I think the video viewership was about the same and is hard to measure as this was a new class.

How did your students respond to the engagement points?

I enjoyed this class and the coffee chats had along the way!

Thank you for all of your responses on my discussion threads over the past 7 weeks. I learned from you all and I was encouraged by your feedback. I look forward to more classes together in the future.

To start with I must say I have really enjoyed this class, the help and support that has been offered throughout this class, the coffee chats, and help discussion meeting we had was super helpful and everyone has been so nice. I wished I could have attended more than 2 of the coffee chats, but sometimes life is busy.”

... the strong sense of socialization that was thoughtfully planned was a great benefit to me. This is probably the thing that surprised me the most, is the capability to have socialization through an online program. In the back of my mind when I applied to LWC I felt comfort knowing I could transfer to a local campus of LWC after COVID to fulfill that socialization desire I wanted from my cohort. Surprisingly, because of Dr. Smith's willingness to provide this during coffee chats, etc I no longer feel I will be lacking socialization from an online program.

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ENGAGEMENT RUBRIC

Engage