The Importance of the Learning Community

- Research continues to show that the construction of a learning community, with the instructor participating as an equal member, is the key to successful online course outcomes and is the vehicle through which online education is best delivered.

- Intentional work on the development of presence online as well as other means by which community can emerge are important and significantly impact both student learning and satisfaction with online courses.
Fitting the Pieces Together to Form Community
What Online Learners Want!

- Clear instruction about course expectations and assignments
- A high level of instructor interaction
- A reasonable workload
- Reassurance that they are on track
- Prompt, unambiguous feedback
Instructor Feedback Should…

- Educate
- Motivate
- Empower
Presence as a Critical Component

Community of Inquiry

Teaching Presence
- Instructional Design & Organization
- Setting the curriculum
- Establishing time parameters
- Utilizing the medium effectively
- Establishing etiquette

Social Presence
- Interaction
- Continuing a thread
- Referring to others’ messages
- Asking questions
- Complimenting
- Expressing agreement and appreciation

Cognitive Presence
- Exploration
- Divergence
- Information exchange
- Suggestions
- Brainstorming
- Conclusions

Setting Climate
Selecting Content
Supporting Discourse
Where the Concept of Community Should Be Incorporated
The Role of Presence

instructor

presence

visible

actively engaged

aware of and sensitive to
student needs.

Savery, (2005)
Social Presence Online Correlates With:

- Increased participation
- Increased learner satisfaction
- Greater depth of learning
- Increased perception of learning
- The sense of belonging to a learning community
- Decreased isolation
Social Presence

- Is not just about the use of discussion/interaction although the use of discussion helps to create presence

- It is about finding ways to create human to human contact
The “Presence” of Presence

How do you create presence in your online classes?
Begin the course by focusing on the development of social presence.

This can be achieved through the posting of bios and introductions and enhanced through the use of icebreaker activities that are fun and designed to help students get to know one another. Use the first week of the course for these activities.
Develop Presence By:

- Creating a warm, inviting course environment
- The use of ice-breaker activities
- Posting introductions and bios
- Promote social discourse, either asynchronously or synchronously
- Incorporate collaborative activity
- Welcome each learner to the course
- Provide prompt, unambiguous feedback as the course progresses
More Techniques for Creating and Sustaining Community

- Establish guidelines for engagement

This can be achieved by posting a set of guidelines or expectations developed by the instructor and asking for a response to them by students OR students can be given a set of parameters within which they can negotiate and develop their own “rules for engagement,” thus creating a group charter by which that engagement is guided.
More Techniques

- Establish minimal participation guidelines

The minimum expectation for participation should be included in the guidelines, with an understanding that more is better! The instructor should model good communication through regular participation in discussions and prompt feedback on assignments.
And One More…

- Develop courses that are exciting and challenging and that incorporate collaborative activity and opportunity for reflection

Collaboration helps to develop and sustain the online learning community. Working together in smaller groups helps to develop
Evidence of the Presence of Community

- Active interaction
- Collaborative learning
- Socially constructed meaning
- Free sharing of resources
- Expressions of support and encouragement as well as willingness to critically evaluate one another’s work
And in the end...