Social presence in online learning

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Learning goals

• Define social presence in online learning
• Explore the criticality of managing perceived social presence
• Describe strategies for establishing and sustaining social presence online
• (Very quickly) identify ways to build faculty social media presence
Social presence: theory and practice

When “being there” is virtualized
What is social presence? A little learning theory

“Social presence involves a level of connectedness among instructors and students that determines how motivated participants are to take an active role in their own and their peers' meaning-making processes. …

Learning is the social negotiation of meaning that involves reification (making meaning from abstract information) and participation (active involvement in the social process).”

-Educause

Social presence maximizes reification and participation
A gestalt shift for most faculty

- Physical and social presence experienced as a simultaneous (for most)
- Social presence assumed to be a byproduct of embodied presence

https://teachonline.asu.edu/2014/10/important-instructor-presence-online-course/
A gestalt shift for most faculty

- Social presence is not a given in online learning
- Building and maintaining social presence will not come naturally to many faculty

https://teachonline.asu.edu/2014/10/important-instructor-presence-online-course/
The imperative of social engagement

• Without social engagement, “learners typically experience isolation and alienation in online learning environments.”

-Wei, Chen and Kinshuk

The imperative of social engagement

- Without social engagement, “learners typically experience isolation and alienation in online learning environments.”
- Effective online learning requires intentional facilitation of “perceived social presence.”

- Wei, Chen and Kinshuk

- “Engagement is not a set of activities; it’s a state of mind.”
- Anna Seferian

https://innovagility.com/2018/10/10/remote-teams-and-virtual-facilitation/
Building social presence and engagement

• Don’t try this at home all at once
• Different tips, tricks and techniques for various contexts
• Start small
• Be authentic
Design with Assessment in Mind

“If social connectedness is a goal in any learning experience, that goal must be connected with course outcomes, activities, and assessments.”


• Start with backwards design
• Scaffold learning – breaking down learning into manageable steps
• Provide formative feedback as students progress toward summative assessments
• Give students the opportunity authentically demonstrate what they know and can do
Design with four types of interaction in mind

1. **Student to Student**
2. **Student to content**
3. **Student to instructor/instructor to Student**
4. **Student to world**

[https://ctl.byu.edu/tip/social-presence-and-interaction-online-classroom](https://ctl.byu.edu/tip/social-presence-and-interaction-online-classroom)
Design with learning science in mind

- Tap into students’ interests/feedback
- Survey students and incorporate responses into class
- Have students work together to set expectations or create self-evaluations

- Provide multiple ways of acquiring information and knowledge on the same topic
  - Readings, videos, audio, screencasts, narrated decks
  - Provide support choice for students (pick 3 of 5)

- Provide students with multiple ways to demonstrate learning
- Faculty, students co-construct deliverables and process of completion

http://udlguidelines.cast.org/ An excellent resource in good times and bad
Tactical tips, tricks and techniques

Don’t forget the basics
Provide a space for introductions and replies, from students and faculty at the start of the course - consider multimedia options (voice, video, discussion threads) … use PADLET-style bulletin boards for intros. See here for more ideas.

Multidimensional presence
Communicate with students across multiple channels (discussions, announcements, rubrics, voice comments, videos, narrated presentations), engage students as a whole, in groups, individually, and not just on an exception basis

Be available
Have 1:1 conversations with each student or small groups of students in first week; host multiple zoom office hours for open-house style assistance, conversation, community building etc. – rotate floating availability
Tactical tips, tricks and techniques

Unsucking discussions Pt. 1

Make discussions about application, not regurgitation: orient prompts around Bloom’s Higher Ordered Thinking Skills (HOTS) – analyze, evaluate, synthesize

Unsucking discussions Pt. 2

Develop and share a process for responding to students in discussions – i.e. PQP: Praise something you liked, Question (professionally) something about others’ ideas, suggest (politely) ways for others to Polish ideas

Students hate groupwork

Wait till week 2-3 to set up groups so that you have time to learn more about learning habits and behaviors and can optimize group composition

“Strategies and Principles to Development Cognitive Presence in Online Discussions”
https://coi.athabascau.ca/publications/cognitive-presence/
Class Café …

Create a classroom space for faculty to share real-world, real-time articles, events, news related to course content, solidifying theory-to-practice continuum … Or post a socially engaging survey/quiz (outside LMS) each week:
https://quizizz.com/

Be mindful of screen time

Watching long, recorded lectures, repeatedly reading long documents, participating in extended video-enabled sessions is straining – cognitively, psychologically, emotionally; provide chance for high- and low-tech activities (i.e. pen and paper reflection)

A note on vulnerability

Many of the things often considered out of scope for academic settings are now inextricably bound to teaching – cats will bomb the screen, sickness and death are with us, people need to know that faculty are human too …
Managing professional personae online
A crash course
The basics of social media presence

• Know your institution’s policies
• LinkedIn and Twitter are most common professional platforms
• Create a manageable social media presence
• Decide who you want to be (expert, commentator, aggregator, etc.)
• Remember TAP: thesis, audience, purpose, even in tweets
  • What is your point, who do you want to speak to, and why are you doing this?
  • LinkedIn = other professionals, Twitter = the world, Instagram/TikTok = students
  • Expertise may drive choice of platform (YouTube, Instagram, etc.)
• Additional ideas to consider
Public engagement and writing

• Topicality and timeliness are the coin of the realm
• Subscribe and read daily newsletters
  • IHE, Chron, Politico education report, NYT learning network, Dive, AAC&U, etc.
• Identify preferred genre
  • Letter to the editor (usually ~150 words, can be longer online)
  • Op-ed (usually ~500 words, written for educated non-specialist)
  • Comments posts (resist the undertow of snark and crankiness)
  • Blogs and magazines (usually associated with professional organizations)
  • LinkedIn Publishing (reach other professionals quickly)
  • Twitter (it’s not as easy as it looks)
Students and public engagement

• Consider ways to make public audiences more than theoretical for students
  • Consider how genres from previous slide work as learning activities
• Co-present and co-author with students as appropriate
  • Know institutional policies and procedures
• Identify student work that can become learning resources
• Encourage students to engage in professional orgs, society’s platforms
• Nota Bene: Policies and rules for student engagement apply on social media
Managing social-media conflict

• Learn how to manage accounts (blocks, hides, mutes, etc.)
• When something you say generates conflict/controversy
  • If you’ve screwed up, apologize
  • Clarify honestly asap (but breath first)
  • Be authentic and transparent
  • Encourage direct interaction
  • Don’t jump platforms
  • Address, don’t delete, comments
  • Know when to hold or fold ‘em
• Distinguish between trolls and readers with legit points that sting’
  • And be the latter not the former when responding to others’ posts
• Know what to do when conflicts cross the line
  • Resources and recommendations here and here
It’s a crowdsourced, hive-minded world

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Discussion

douglas.harrison@umgc.edu | LinkedIn