



Student: “I know what I have to do, I just can’t seem to make myself do it.”

Faculty: “Why do I have to motivate students to learn? Shouldn’t they just want to learn?”

The brilliant fall colors have faded, the sun is setting earlier, and snow is forecasted for the next few days. The fall semester seems to drag on and for most students and faculty, Thanksgiving break cannot get here soon enough. Is it any wonder that students struggle at this time in the semester to stay motivated? Have you ever wrestled with the question, why should I have to motivate students to learn? Shouldn’t they want to learn; after all, they signed up for my course? Rather than asking how can I motivate students to learn, Benson (2019) challenges educators to ponder the broader question, “How can I impact student motivation, as a prerequisite for enduring learning?”

There are many reasons why students lack motivation and disengage from courses. For example, students may feel overwhelmed by complicated content, or the reverse, they might be bored from not being challenged enough. Some students fail to see the relevance of the subject or may not be interested in a course, especially one outside of their major. Although it is the student’s responsibility to be self-motivated, faculty can affect motivation positively or negatively through their teaching.

Benson (2019) discusses several ways faculty can foster motivation through carefully constructing content, using interactive pedagogy, and promoting effective learning environments. Students often need help to see the relevance between their classroom learning, course assignments, and real-world applications. Faculty can help to bridge this gap by designing opportunities to apply knowledge and clearly explaining the relevance of assignments. Students can gain a deeper understanding by using real life case studies, solving actual industry problems, and through service learning experiences. My students love to hear clinical stories that demonstrate key concepts. They enjoy watching a video clip or discussing a picture used to illustrate pertinent assessment findings or treatments related to a specific disease. Role play can also actively engage students and is useful across many disciplines. When faculty provide students with choices for their assignments, students may be more motivated to learn (Vanderbilt, n.d.). To promote effective learning environments, Benson (2019) also encourages faculty to pay attention to their physical settings, for example adjusting classroom temperature and lighting as needed and rearranging seats if possible. Faculty should foster a social environment that is inclusive, collaborative, and supportive of questions. One suggestion is to arrive early for class and stay late to talk to students because social interactions can positively influence motivation. Motivating students to learn might actually endure beyond your course, inspiring some to become life-long learners or for others simply the encouragement needed to pass your course.

Benson, S. (2019, September 20). Can we motivate students to learn? [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.scholarlyteacher.com/post/can-we-motivate-students-to-learn>
Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. (n.d.). Motivating students. Retrieved October 28, 2019, from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/motivating-students/>