



Work Toward Creating a Positive Faculty-Student Rapport

UDL CHECKPOINT 9.2¹: Develop awareness of self and others

— Being present, available, and approachable to learners throughout the semester helps to build a positive relationship, which can improve learner engagement in a course as well as their success in their academic lives.

What is it?

Faculty-student rapport is the created relationship between instructor and learner. The optimal relationship is one of support, encouragement, and trust, where mutual understanding and respect are privileged. Within this created dynamic, communication is key so that the relationship is positive. Creating this rapport can be accomplished by the instructor's approach within the classroom as well as outside the class (including office hours, email communication, and comments/feedback on assignments).

Why do it?

The classroom (on-ground and online) can be daunting for many learners. This can cause fear and anxiety within learners of varying levels, which create barriers for their success in the class as well as in their academic journeys. However, when instructors create a welcoming experience in which respect, understanding, support, and community are present, learners can feel more comfortable and confident. When learners have a positive rapport with their instructor, they can feel more able to reach out for help with the course, including clarification with specific course concepts. All of this leads to improved success in their learning.

How can I apply it?

Here are some ways that you can create a better rapport with your students.

- **Personalize communication.** Create individualized welcome messages (in email or in a discussion board) and check in with learners throughout the semester. Additionally, specific and positive feedback on assignments/assessments can help learners feel more comfortable with the instructor and course.
- **Be timely with digital communication.** Whether it be an email or Canvas comment from a student, make sure to reply as soon as possible—preferably within 24 hours, at most. Doing so shows learners that their questions and concerns are heard. This also helps them to understand the material (since they are having their questions answered).
- **Create a positive, respectful, and enthusiastic class environment.** The saying goes, “Enthusiasm is contagious.” And this is applicable to the classroom. Ensure that you are creating a positive class experience (digitally or on-ground) in which all voices are encouraged.

¹ Using UDL Guidelines 3.0

- **Offer virtual office hours.** Many learners who are taking online classes (synchronous as well as asynchronous) are often doing so for a reason (including an inability to attend on-ground classes due to their schedule). These learners, then, are often unable to come to on-ground office hours. However, by offering virtual office hours and working with a learner's schedule, learners can discuss their questions and concerns with the instructor, which can lead to a better learning experience.

Summary

Simply conveying the information to learners is only part of the instructor's job. In addition to being competent with the material, instructors need to be present with their classes and their students. By creating a positive faculty-student rapport both in and out of the classroom, learners can become more engaged in the material, which can lead to their success.