Course Design for Student Retention

Course design refers to intentional decisions made by an instructor prior to class. This includes setting up the LMS, welcome message, application of learning outcomes through assignments, and how learning is measured by assessments. Course design is the third most common reason why students drop out of an online program, suggesting that designing courses for student success and satisfaction may increase retention.[i] Below are tips designing courses for student retention.

Tips for Course Design
- ❑ Learning outcomes that align with course components and assessments.
- ❑ Flexibility built into assignments and assessments. [ii]
- ❑ Submission windows on assessments rather than a single due date. [iii]
- ❑ Exam extension options for when life conflicts with school. [iv]
- ❑ Clear instructions on assignments and assessments. [v]
- ❑ Support on assessments. [vi]
- ❑ Test only as much as is needed to measure learning.[vii]
- ❑ Automatic reminder emails on assessments with links to student support services. [viii]

Tips for Interaction

Rapport between faculty and peers increases retention.[ix],[x] Classes with a high level of rapport have the following characteristics [xi]:
- ❑ Connect course content to students' careers early and often.
- ❑ Survey students in the first week of class to learn about their career plans.
- ❑ Give clear explanations for assignments and instructional materials.
- ❑ Post a photo of yourself with your contact info and response time.
- ❑ Invite students to contact you.
- ❑ Leave timely feedback that has a positive tone and is personalized when possible.
- ❑ Set up automatic LMS feedback for assignments and assessments.
- ❑ Organize the course to ease navigation.
- ❑ Include instructions of how to use the course and what to do each week.
- ❑ Describe each assignment and how to complete it.
- ❑ Briefly explain why each assignment is important to students' careers.
- ❑ Schedule warm, encouraging weekly announcements that direct students to assignments and instructions.
- ❑ Narrate slides, preferably with video.

[i] Greenland, S.J. & Moore, C. (2021). Large qualitative sample and thematic analysis to redefine student dropout and retention strategy in open online education. *British Journal of Educational Technology*. Retrieved from https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/bjet.13173

[ii] Ibid.

[iii] Ebert, L., Watkins, S. Dowse, E. (2021). Students together with academics ensures retention and success: The STARS project. *Nurse Education Today 97*.

[iv] Greenland, S.J. & Moore, C. (2021). Large qualitative sample and thematic analysis to redefine student dropout and retention strategy in open online education. *British Journal of Educational Technology*. Retrieved from https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/bjet.13173

[v] Ibid.

[vi] Ibid.

[vii] Ibid.

[viii] Ebert, L., Watkins, S. Dowse, E. (2021). Students together with academics ensures retention and success: The STARS project. *Nurse Education Today 97*.

[ix] Glazier, R.A. & Skurat Harris, H.S. (2020). How teaching with rapport can improve online student success and retention; Data from two empirical studies. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education 21*(4)1-17, 73. Retrieved from https://www.proquest.com/docview/2546655575?parentSessionId=HVseae6e%2BFNaq0wIjfS17T%2B6So%2FQjn9rrW%2FK7TcfpQk%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=7113

[x] Leary, M. Tylka, A., Corsi, V., & Bryner, R. 2021. The effect of first-year seminar classroom design on social integration and retention of STEM first-time, full-time college freshmane. *Education Research International.* Retrieved from https://www.hindawi.com/journals/edri/2021/4262905/

[xi] Glazier, R.A. & Skurat Harris, H.S. (2020). How teaching with rapport can improve online student success and retention; Data from two empirical studies. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education 21*(4)1-17, 73. Retrieved from https://www.proquest.com/docview/2546655575?parentSessionId=HVseae6e%2BFNaq0wIjfS17T%2B6So%2FQjn9rrW%2FK7TcfpQk%3D&pq-origsite=summon&accountid=7113