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How to create a sense of community in eLearning courses

The lack of direct interaction typical of many online courses can help to dampen students' enthusiasm. Here are 5 ideas to create a sense of community within online courses.

The **advantages of learning online** are so often praised that they have almost become a mantra: instant access 24/7, the possibility to take courses from anywhere, wider choice of subjects, lower costs, etc.

Yet, among the many advantages of online training, there is one element that can help to dampen the user experience and reduce the completion rates of courses: the lack of a sense of community.

As we saw when we talked about the " **loneliness of the online student**", the lack of direct interaction typical of the online environment can make some users feel isolated and lacking feedback, especially those who need to be guided and receive continuous encouragement

So what can be done in an online learning environment to foster and support a sense of community and collaboration?

First of all, you need to implement the classic "community" features (such as chats, forums and bulletin boards) that encourage students to talk to each other, and which are very often underused.

But there are also other elements that can encourage the spread of **collaborative logic** within online courses. Let's see them below.

1. Set clear challenges

Competitions motivate students to exceed their limits. In this sense, smaller and regular challenges work better than larger ones, especially when they are limited in time, for example with a weekly deadline.

To encourage collaboration between students, assign challenges to pairs or groups. Depending on the scope, duration and number of students, it may make sense to plan long-term **group projects** that help create teams.

2. Use gamification

Add **gamification elements**, regardless of the age group of users following the course: everyone loves points and prizes!

Gamification can help foster a **sense of community** when, for example, a student who has made progress feels qualified to answer questions on the course board. An extra badge, star or trophy next to your name can make you a valuable source of help for other students

3. Be available on social media

Interacting with your students on **social media** not only helps create a sense of community, but also serves as a marketing tool. Prospective students who see you engaged in a lively conversation with your students will see that you are an open and caring course provider and that your students are free to communicate with you.

For these reasons it is preferable to interact with students not only in **private forums** (which only registered students can access) but also on public social media.

In addition, you can use social media to publicly answer questions from potential students and improve your online reputation.

4. Provide contact information, even for 100% self-taught courses.

Being available and responsive is a fundamental requirement that many online courses leave out. Even in courses that do not involve a tutor and are 100% automated, students need to have a **way to contact you**.

This may not affect student collaboration, but it helps to create a sense of community, because the user knows that they are never really alone and that they can contact you if they need to.

5. Hold live events

Live events (web meetings, **webinars**, etc.) stimulate group discussion and provide answers to questions from already enrolled students or potential students.

To increase the sense of community of an online course, it is therefore extremely useful to plan a series of live events, not necessarily related to the course, that facilitate interaction and exchange of ideas or resolve students' doubts.

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