UCDAVIS
Center for Educational Effectiveness
Office of Undergraduate Education

Spark Session: Motivating Students

Exploration: Think-Pair

Think about a time when you felt completely unmotivated as a student. What do you remember? What factors contributed to your lack of motivation? How might you use your experience to spark motivation in your courses?

On a sticky note, write down **one** potential spark. Then, discuss with a partner.

Why does motivation matter and what can I do about it?

Motivation has been identified as perhaps the most critical non-academic factor to positively affect student performance on coursework. Increased motivation has been linked to increased academic achievement, success in handling stressful situations, and better study skills (Ambrose et al., 2010; Struthers, Perry, & Menic, 2000; Robbins et al., 2004).

Faculty influence motivation. Try these strategies![1]

- Connect material to students' existing interests.
- Design course material for real-world relevance.
- Illustrate how the material can transfer across subjects.
- Share your own reading, note-taking, and response writing strategies.

When are students motivated?

Students are motivated when they

- Perceive the **learning environment** as **supportive** (mediated by **you**, the instructor)
- See the **value** of the work they're doing (e.g., professionally, academically)
- Feel they have the **tools to succeed** (a positive expectancy known as a sense of **"efficacy")**
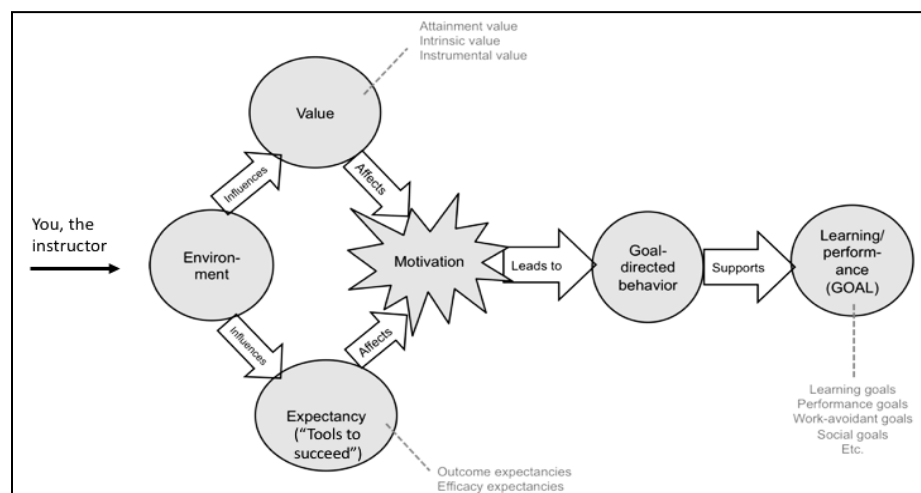
The illustration above, adapted from Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman (2010), depicts the relationship between value, expectancy, learning, and performance.

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[1] Find more at: http://cee.ucdavis.edu/JITT (p. 26).

Activity: Thinking about Motivation

Scenario	What strategies might you use to motivate these students?
The students in your class this quarter are very capable and might be described as the **"top of their high school class"** before they came to UC Davis. Perhaps because of this, **they don't appear to be studying** as much as you think they should, and their grades on their tests and papers aren't great, either. **You've provided a number of resources** to help them with their assignments, and **you have held extra office hours** prior to exams, but no one has come to your additional office hours. You overheard one student, Lee, tell another in the hallway that the class is interesting, but **it doesn't apply to her future profession,** as people in her field don't need to know this material. Lee said she'd rather invest her time in her other classes. The other student agreed.	*Value*: Yes / No *Efficacy*: High / Low *Environment*: Supportive / Non-supportive

Activity: Strategies for Increasing Student Motivation

Skim numbers 1-6, below. **Look for a motivational strategy that catches your eye as interesting or as something you already do or would consider trying.** After you've found one (take about 20 seconds), **turn to a colleague and take a couple of minutes to discuss the strategies you both chose.**

Ambrose et al., 2010

Strategies that Establish Value	Use	Interested	More info
1. Connect material to students' personal interests			
2. Provide authentic, real-world tasks			
3. Highlight real-world applications			
4. Demonstrate relevance to students' current academic lives (help students identify skills they can transfer from other courses into yours and vice versa)			
5. Show relevance to students' future professional lives			
6. Show your own passion and enthusiasm for the discipline			

Strategies that Help Students Build Positive Expectancies	Use	Interested	More info
7. Ensure alignment of objectives, assessments and learning activities			
8. Identify an appropriate level of challenge by knowing who your students are (e.g., have students fill out a questionnaire on the first day of class; examine the syllabi of courses in your department that precede your course; talk to colleagues in your department)			
9. Create assignments that provide the appropriate level of challenge			

Strategies that Help Students Build Positive Expectancies	Use	Interested	More info
10. Provide early success opportunities (e.g., early, shorter assignments for a smaller percentage of the grade before you assign a larger project)			
11. Articulate your expectations clearly and often			
12. Provide rubrics and targeted feedback			
13. Encourage students to see success and failure as related to factors they control (e.g., study strategies, good time management, hard work) rather than as related to inherent qualities (e.g., not being good with numbers)			
14. Be fair (especially relevant when multiple graders, e.g., TAs, are involved)			
15. Describe effective study strategies in your discipline			
16. Provide students with flexibility and some degree of control			
17. Give students an opportunity to reflect on their assignments			

Nilson, 2010

Your Persona	Use	Interested	More info
18. Deliver your presentations with enthusiasm and energy			
19. Explain your reasons for being interested in the materials, and make it relevant to your students' concerns			
20. Get to know your students			
21. Give students a chance to have input by holding a mid-quarter evaluation			
22. Use humor where appropriate			
23. Maintain classroom order and civility			

Your Teaching	Use	Interested	More info
24. Explain to your class why you have chosen the teaching methods, readings, assignments, in-class activities, policies and assessment strategies that you are using			
25. Use examples, anecdotes and realistic case studies freely			
26. Teach by inquiry when possible (pose questions or scenarios for students to first consider, rather than starting with lecturing)			
27. Use a variety of student-active teaching formats and methods, e.g., discussion, debates, press conferences, symposia, role playing, simulations, academic games, problem-based learning, case method, problem solving, writing exercises and so on			

Assignments and Tests	Use	Interested	More info
28. Reinforce the idea that all students can improve their cognitive and other abilities with practice and are in control of their academic fates			
29. Provide many and varied opportunities for graded assignments so that no single assignment counts too much toward the final grade			

Assignments and Tests	Use	Interested	More info
30. Give students plenty of opportunity to practice performing your learning outcomes before you grade them on the quality of their performance			
31. Sequence your learning outcomes and assignments to foster student success			
32. Give students practice tests			
33. Provide review sheets that tell students what cognitive operations they will have to perform with key concepts on the tests			
34. Design authentic assignments and activities—those that give students practice in their future occupational and citizenship activities			
35. Let students assess themselves			
36. Reduce the stress level of tests by lowering the stakes. Test early and often			

Christophel, 1990

Instructor Immediacy Behaviors	Use	Interested	More info
37. Call on students by name			
38. Use terms like "we" and "us" to refer to the class			
39. Allow for small talk and out of class conversations			
40. Look very little at board or notes while talking to the class			
41. Move around the classroom while teaching			
42. Use vocal variety and appropriate gestures while talking to the class			
43. Ask students how they feel about things			
44. Smile at the class while talking			

Extension: Motivation Inventory

Later, take some time to carefully read the above list. Assess each strategy for its relevance to your classroom using this checklist. Check column "1" (above) if it is a strategy **you already use** in your class. Check column "2" if it is a strategy **you are interested in using** in your class, and check column "3" if it is a strategy **you would like to get more information on** before using it.

References Cited

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If you'd like to discuss this Spark Session and/or other topics related to teaching, learning, and assessment, contact us at CEE@ucdavis.edu.