The Elements of Engagement
By C. Canney

Why is engagement important when it comes to taking classes – online or otherwise? It is because engagement fosters deep learning rather than superficial or surface learning.* For many students with IH, sitting in front of a computer screen is not an engaging experience and can create a soporific or sleepy (even hypnotic-like) environment for learning. However, when what's on the screen is highly interactive and/or particularly interesting, many students with IH are able to engage with the content.

Eight (8) elements affect student engagement in online courses (Canney, 2015):

1. **The Instructor's Presence Is Evident,** affirmed when the instructor participates in an obvious way in the course and in the students' learning;

2. **The Instructor Responds and Provides Feedback in Timely Ways** to student questions and assignments, which supports student progress, affects motivation positively, builds relationships between students and instructor, and allows students to work when able to. Otherwise, frustration and isolation can result;

3. **The Instructor Facilitates Peer Interaction Among the Students,** challenging students' thinking and compelling them to think deeply about issues and consider others' perspectives as they work collaboratively; a sense of belonging develops and affects learning;

4. **The Course Promotes Deep Thinking, Critical Reflection, & Learning from Others' Perspectives** when designed for active learning by ensuring adequate time to think, opportunities for dialogue, and required responses to thoughtful questions and varied perspectives; conditional upon completing the readings, being aware of one's own perspective, and finding transferable relevance in the topic;

5. **Connections Made Between the Course Content and Personal Experiences,** allowing the students to engage the content being studied by making meaning of the new content in personally meaningful ways based on what they already know;

6. **The Course Is Organized**, which minimizes student confusion, helps students plan and prepare for their work to better understand course goals, find course components, and progress without an undue amount of searching. Three (3) areas to consider are the navigation tabs, course content, and assignment links;

7. **Course Expectations Are Clearly Conveyed** and individual assignments have clear expectation, so students can plan and be involved in active, self-directed learning, which fosters engaged learning;

8. **The Course Is of Interest to the Student,** which shifts the challenge from becoming engaged to remaining engaged. If there is no interest, becoming engaged can be very challenging unless other elements are strong enough to maintain interest.

Canney, C. (2015). Elements that affect student engagement in online graduate courses. Unpublished dissertation. New England College.

*Additional Reading:

1. Ewell, P.T. (1997, December). *Organizing for learning: A point of entry*. Snowbird, UT: AAHE Summer Academy, subsequently published in the *AAHE Bulletin*, 3-6.
2. Kuh, G. D. (2003). What we're learning about student engagement from NSSE. *Change*, 35 (2), 24-32.
3. Weimer, M. (2012, November). *Deep learning vs. surface learning: Getting students to understand the difference*. Magna Publications, Faculty Focus. https://www.facultyfocus.com

**Approved by the Hypersomnia Foundation Board of Directors and
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