

Resource Guide

How to Encourage Cross-Cultural Engagement: A Brief Primer

Student engagement can be conceptualized as a complex interaction between the personal characteristics and preferences of the student and the learning opportunities designed by the instructor (Barkley, 2010). Motivation, which broadly explains why people engage in any specific behavior, is a student characteristic that may be influenced by the type of learning experiences students encounter. It is important to clarify that engagement and motivation are not the same, as a student with high motivation may seem engaged even if the learning activities are not traditionally “high engagement.”

Barkley (2010), Fink (2010) and others suggest active learning as a means through which greater student engagement can be achieved. Active learning strategies often emphasize the instructor doing less “showing” while students do more. Giving students time to reflect on their learning and providing application opportunities that are relevant to their interests and experiences can also support active learning. While active learning is likely to increase engagement, there are additional considerations you may want to think about to ensure you’re being culturally responsive in your pursuit of student engagement.

- **Identify Your Assumptions about Engagement**
 - What does “engagement” look like? Your answer to this question may vary depending on your own cultural assumptions. You may expect frequent interaction in discussion, but some cultures may emphasize deference and quiet as ways to show respect and engagement in a classroom. You may find students show their engagement in different ways, which is why it may be helpful if you offer multiple ways for students to engage.
- **Consider Offering Multiple Ways for Students to Engage**
 - Chavez and Longerbeam (2016) identify cultural approaches to learning as generally varying on a continuum from individuated to integrated. When reviewing the active learning opportunities in your course, consider whether engagement can be demonstrated in both individuated and integrated ways. For instance, when asking for participation in a group-based discussion are students also afforded an alternative, individuated option, such as posting in an associated discussion board or writing a response individually before sharing with a larger group? Adding options for participation may help you recognize when students are engaged but had not demonstrated their engagement in ways you recognized due to your own cultural assumptions.
- **Be Transparent About the Cultural Influences Represented in your Course/Content**

- Barkley (2010) points out that student engagement may vary due to differences in the cultures represented in the classroom, particularly when the course materials are presented through a different cultural lens. Making the cultural context of the “facts” of your discipline salient may help students expand their cultural knowledge, while inviting opportunities for approaching the course content from other cultural perspectives. For instance, in a Classical European Music course, students may explore how other cultures influenced classical European music or how European classical music interacted with the musical traditions of other cultures to produce new musical styles.

Resources

Barkley, E. F. (2010). *Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. John Wiley & Sons.

Chavez, A. F. & Longerbeam S. D. (2016) *Teaching across cultural strengths: A guide to balancing integrated and individuated cultural frameworks in college teaching*. Stylus Publishing.

Fink. L. D. (2013). *Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses*. John Wiley & Sons

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