

Resource Guide

Defining and Supporting Participation Expectations for Learners

Many instructors include “participation” as a component of a student’s grade. For some, this may mean regularly speaking during class (e.g., asking questions, responding to questions, offering new insight or perspective on a reading, etc.) or engaging with different learning activities or in-class assignments (e.g., group work, written reflection, active listening, etc.). For assessment purposes, “participation” may also correlate with attendance – where any unexcused absence *lowers* a student’s final participation grade. Without clearly defining what it means for you and your students, “participation” can be difficult to support and assess. Below are a few questions to get you thinking more intentionally about student participation.

- **Defining Participation:** What does “participation” mean for you and your students? Consider drafting a syllabus statement that highlights different ways students can meet expectations for participation in your course. Consider face-to-face, online, verbal, and nonverbal forms of participation. Discuss your expectations at the start of the course.
- **Supporting Participation:** What types of learning activities, readings, or assignments will support student participation throughout the course? Consider creating multiple opportunities for participation in a variety of forms. Consider how student differences in culture and identity may impact when and how they choose to participate.
- **Assessing Participation:** How will you track student participation? How will you determine the *quality* of participation for assessment purposes? Consider creating a participation rubric to help ensure that you are equitable in your grading and be transparent with students about how their participation is being assessed.

Resources

Anderson, R., Baxter, L. A., & Cissna, K. N. (2004). *Dialogue: Theorizing difference in communication studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. In P. Cranton (Ed.), *Transformative learning in action: Insights from practice. New directions for adult and continuing education* (pp. 5-12). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Slavich, G. M., & Zimbardo, P. G. (2012). Transformational teaching: Theoretical underpinnings, basic principles, and core methods. *Education Psychology Review*, 24, 569-608.

Stohl, C., & Cheney, G. (2001). Participatory processes/paradoxical practices: Communication and the dilemmas of organizational democracy. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 14, 349-407.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center at cttl@slu.edu.