Forging New Paths Toward Improved Retention with the QM Rubric

Wren Mills, Ph.D.

Center for Faculty Development
Western Kentucky University
wren.mills@wku.edu

Session Objectives

After this session, participants should be able to:

- Discuss findings from the literature on retention in online courses

- List the Standards from the QM Rubric that can facilitate better retention in online courses.

- Describe methods of building social presence in courses and which aspects of the QM Rubric address this.

- List possible assignments, materials, and techniques to engage and interact with students to aid in retention

Community Building

❖ Sadera, Robertson, Song, and Midon (2009) found "a strong correlation between learner interaction and engagement, <u>sense of community</u>, and success in online learning" (p. 282).

❖ Boston et al. (2009) found that <u>when students feel more a part of a learning community</u>, they are retained at higher rates.

❖ QM Standards: 1.8, 1.9, 5.2

Instructor Social Presence

■ Other studies have found a strong relationship between **better retention and success** and an **instructor's social presence in a course** (Boston et al., 2009; Ley & Gannon-Cook, 2014; Motteram & Gorrester, 2005; York & Richardson, 2012).

❖ Ley & Gannon-Cook (2014) shared this includes interactions such as
  ❖ emails
  ❖ discussions
  ❖ timely feedback
  ❖ responsiveness to queries

❖ QM Standard: 5.3

Instructor Social Presence, cont

❖ York & Richardson (2012) found students:

    ❖ prefer to hear their instructor's voice via audio feedback sometimes, saying it reduces "perceived distance" (3.4, 5.3)

    ❖ like when all introductions are responded to (1.9)

    ❖ appreciate returned emails within 12-48 hours (5.3)

Instructor Expectations

- Motteram and Gorrester (2005) and Sheridan and Kelly (2010) both linked

  - ❖ clear directions and expectations of what to do & how to do it
    - ❖ 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.7, 3.2, 3.3, 4.2, 5.4

                                                  to lower dropout rates, too.

Assignments and Feedback

❖ Integrating certain types of assignments into online courses has also shown to be effective in keeping students enrolled and helping them to learn

  ❖ Mooney, Southard, and Buton (2014) offered their "suspense model" for discussion boards (3.4, 5.1, 5.2)

  ❖ Sancho-Vinuesa, Escudero-Viladoms, and Masia (2013) shared results about frequent practice tests and weekly assessments (3.4, 3.5)

❖ The type and timeliness of feedback received also play a role (Ley & Gannon-Cook, 2014; Sherdian & Kelly, 2010; York & Richardson, 2012). (5.3)

Most Important Instructor behaviors

■ Sheridan and Kelly (2010) found these instructor behaviors positively influenced retention:

❖ Clear requirements

❖ Clear due dates

❖ Clear expectations

❖ Timely feedback

❖ Easy to navigate course

❖ Keep promises made to students

❖ QM Standards: 1.1., 1.3., 1.4, 3.3, 5.3, 8.1
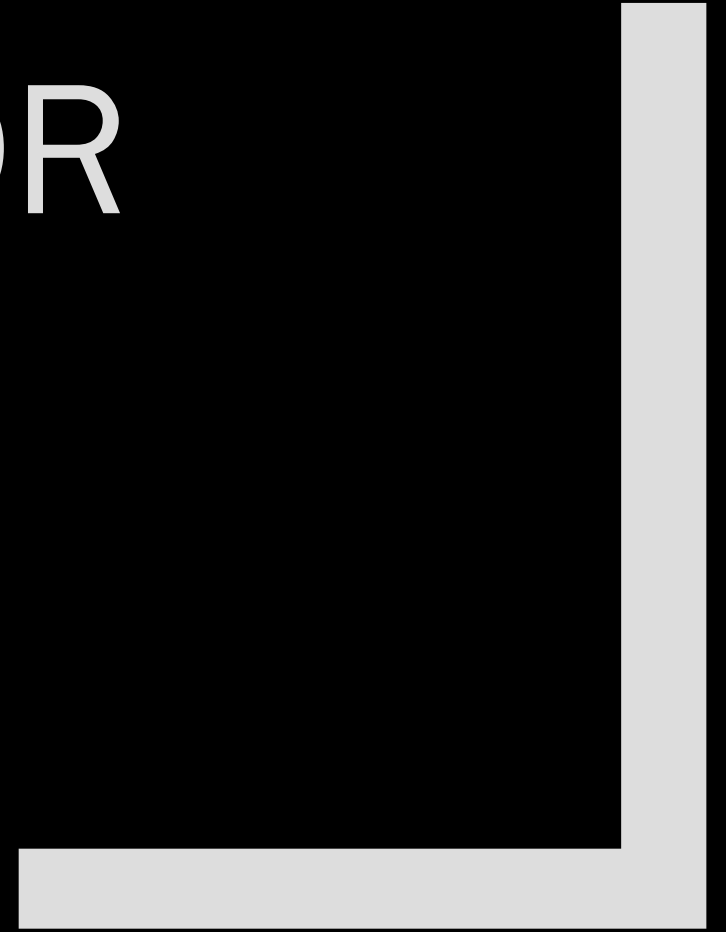
Most Valued Instructor Interactions

■ Ley and Gannon-Cook (2014) documented "most valued instructor interactions"

❖ Emails

❖ Discussions

❖ Announcements

❖ Examples

❖ Timely feedback

❖ Responses to inquiries

❖ QM Standards: 4.5, 5.3, 5.4

Mapping to QM Rubric

These ideas from the literature on retention map to 26 of the 43 Specific Standards

PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR RETENTION

Build a Learning Community

Have a Strong Week 1

- ❖ *Get to know each other (1.8, 1.9)*
- ❖ *Discuss your discipline and make it relevant (1.2)*
- ❖ *Set the tone for the way class will work (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5., 3.2, 3.3, 5.3., 5.4)*

Community = Safe Space

Learning Community: a Safe Learning Space

❖ If students feel tempted to cheat/plagiarize, safe spaces make it more likely that they will ask for help.

❖ Encourage questions– in person or via email (5.3)

❖ CLEARLY share resources for help (7.1, 7.2, 7.2, 7.4)

　　❖ Tutoring

　　❖ Counseling

　　❖ How to reach common campus offices– financial aid, for example

Other Ideas on Community?

Are there other activities you've used to build community?

Build Instructor Social Presence

❖ Weekly announcements to wrap up and preview units (4.2)

❖ Consider how you respond to emails (5.3)

When students write to you with questions:

– *"First, know that you are never bothering me with questions– I am here and happy to answer them whenever they arise."*

– *"Did that make sense? Do you have any more questions? If so, please do ask them!*

When students write to you about problems:

– *"Hi, Alex. I'm sorry to hear of your family issues at the moment– I realize that must be very stressful on you, so I'm glad you reached out to let me know what's going on and to let me know you need help."*

Social Presence & Interaction Online

❖ Discussions and blogs are best for peer-to-peer and group collaboration (5.2, 5.4, 6.2)

❖ Journals are best for "just my teacher and me" (5.2, 5.3, 6.2)

Other Ideas on Social Presence?

Are there other activities you've used to create social presence?

Assignments that Encourage Retention

Build in chances for feedback

- ❖ **Auto-graded quizzes** (3.5)
- ❖ **Adaptive Release** to have answer key shown once practice assignment is submitted (3.2, 3.4, 3.5)
- ❖ **Self-reflections** on progress/particular assignments (can do with journals or emails) (3.4, 6.2)
- ❖ **Progressive discussions** (release a new aspect of the prompt every 2-3 days) (3.4, 5.2, 5.4, 6.2)

- ❖ Have **clear directions**– this may mean prompts are longer than you use in FTF (5.4)
- ❖ Provide **examples** from past students if possible (4.5, 4.6)

Consider Course Design

❖ Can students easily find materials they are to access/complete? (8.1)

❖ How many clicks does it take? (8.1)

    ❖ Ask a colleague, student worker, or friend to find X in your course– how easy is it for them to find it?

❖ Make sure any technology/tools used align with learning objectives (6.1)

❖ Think carefully about your use of color (8.4)

Share Your Ideas

■ Course Elements that create

– *Community*

– *Social presence*

– *Other aspects that relate to retention?*

– *How do they map to the QM Rubric?*

QM Principle: Continuous Improvement

Periodic Feedback + Discussion of Results

Students have a unique perspective on our courses that neither we nor our colleagues can provide when we revise.

❖ Gather input about a specific lessons as you go along

❖ Gather input about course as a whole at the end

❖ Whenever you do it, go over the results with the students

  ❖ *Email*
  ❖ *Announcement*
  ❖ *Video*

References

- Boston, W., Diaz, S.R., Gibson, A., Ice, P., Richardson, J., & Swan, K. (2009). An Exploration of the Relationship Between Indicators of the Community of Inquiry Framework and Retention in Online Programs. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 13*(3), 67-83.

- Ley, K. and Gannon-Cook, R. (2014). Learner-valued interactions: Research into practice. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 15*(1), 23-32. Retrieved from http://www.aect.org/pdf/proceedings13/2013/13_16.pdf

- Mooney, M., Southard, S., & Burton, C. H. (2014). Shifting from obligatory discourse to rich dialogue: Promoting student interaction in asynchronous threaded discussion postings. *Online Journal of Distance Education Administration, 17(1)*. Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring171/mooney_southerland_burton171.html

- Motteram, G., & Gorrester, G. (2005). Becoming an online distance learner: What can be learned from students' experiences of induction to distance programmes? *Distance Education, 26*(3), 281-298.

- Sadera, W. A., Robertson, J., Song, L., & Midon, M. N. (2009). The role of community in online learning success. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 5*(2), 277-284. Retrieved from http://jolt.merlot.org/vol5no2/sadera_0609.pdf

- Sancho-Vinuesa, T., Escudero-Viladoms, N., & Masia, R. (2013). Continuous activity with immediate feedback: a good strategy to guarantee student engagement with the course. *Open Learning, 28*(1), 51-60. doi: 10.1080/02680513.2013.776479

- Sheridan, K., & Kelly, M.A. (2010). The indicators of instructor presence that are important to students in online courses. MERLOT *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 6*(4). Available at http://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no4/sheridan_1210.htm

- York, C.S. & Richardson, J.C. (2012). Interpersonal interaction in online learning: Experienced online instructors' perceptions of influencing factors. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 16*(4), 83-98. Retrieved from http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/jaln_main

QUESTIONS?

Wren Mills, Ph.D.

Center for Faculty Development

Western Kentucky University

wren.mills@wku.edu