THE NUTS & BOLTS OF
REGULAR AND SUBSTANTIVE
INTERACTION

The U.S. Department of Education requires that online courses for which students use federal financial aid "ensure...regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors." In practice this means that **every online course should be characterized by frequent, planned, instructor-initiated communication directly related to its primary academic subject matter**.

WHY DOES IT
MATTER?

Instructor engagement and interaction are among the most important factors affecting student satisfaction with online courses.*

Research shows both **student persistence and learning** are greater in courses with very high levels of interaction.*

DESIGN AND ASSEMBLE
AN INTERACTIVE COURSE
WITH THESE ESSENTIAL PRACTICES

Clear expectations for interaction describing how frequently students will hear from you. Include information about your typical response time, availability, and preferred contact methods.

Direct instruction involving your own explanation, illustration, and discussion of concepts. Take steps to make the course yours; never rely solely on materials provided by a publisher.

Facilitated discussions that encourage various types of interaction and in which you are a regular participant. Monitor and guide the discussion with the same care and attention you would bring to your face-to-face classes.

Weekly announcements foster engagement and connect upcoming activities or assignments to other units, concepts, current events, and relevant topics.

Personalized feedback should be provided frequently. Effective feedback is more than just a grade; it should always include specific, constructive suggestions for improvement.

Frequent assignments, at least one each week, that contribute directly to the course objectives. Choose projects and assignments that support active learning and promote interaction or collaboration.

Online office hours ensure students have a regular chance to ask questions and receive individualized attention. Use videoconferencing, chat, or voice communications tools to improve the immediately of online office hours.

QUESTIONS? CONTACT THE eLEARNING TEAM
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*Sources:
Croxton, R.A. (2014). The role of interactivity in student satisfaction and persistence in online learning. *MERLOT Journal of Online Teaching* 10.2, 314-325; Sher, A. (2009).Assessing the relationship of student-instructor and student-student interaction to student learning and satisfaction in web-based online learning environment. *Journal of Interactive Online Teaching* 8.2, 102-120; Woods, R.H. & Baker J.D. (2004). Interaction and immediacy in online learning. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* 5.2, 1-13.

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