

Use the FORCE to Create Sociability and Connect with Online Students

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Online Learning

Social Presence

Facilitation strategies

Instructor Presence

Instructor Connection

Student perceptions



The Covid pandemic resulted in many higher education classes shifting to online instruction in the middle of a term and many institutions stayed online at least in part for several terms. Students taking these online courses did not choose to shift their modality and many would not have chosen an online over a face-to-face class. The purpose of this study was to identify facilitation strategies that resonated with students in classes that shifted online at one higher education institution, identifying which strategies increased motivation to learn and perceived course satisfaction. Additionally, students were asked what strategies helped them connect and trust their online instructors. We present the results of three open-ended questions on a large scale cross-sectional survey (N=739). Five themes emerged: Feedback, Organization, Response time, Communication, Empathy. We discuss how instructors can use the FORCE to create sociability and connect with their online students.

Introduction

As online classes grew exponentially during the Covid pandemic, higher education instructors faced the challenge of creating and establishing connections with students. Establishing an instructor-student connection is essential to the success of online courses, particularly asynchronous courses (Martin et al., 2018). Research has demonstrated that instructor presence relates to students' success or satisfaction in online courses (Brinkerhoff & Koroghlanian, 2007; LaBarbera, 2013; Swan, 2001), enhances student motivation to learn (Baker, 2010), and reduces the sense of isolation (Banna et al., 2015; Botton & Gregory, 2015; Whiteside et al., 2017). Sheridan and Kelly (2010) also found that students valued clear course requirements, instructors who were responsive to students' needs, and providing information and feedback in a timely manner.

In this study, we focused on the experiences and perceptions of higher education students, many of whom prefer the face-to-face environment but were unable to participate in their preferred mode of delivery due to the Covid pandemic. The focus of this study was instructor facilitation, not course design. Since many courses may be designed by other instructors or instructional designers, the researchers wanted to focus on how instructors create a welcoming environment in the online environment. These students shared facilitation strategies that enhanced their learning, motivation, and connectedness to their instructor and the content in their online courses.

Literature Review

In the following section, we will introduce instructor presence, instructor connectedness and instructor social connectedness along with various research-based strategies for creating a student-instructor connection.

Instructor Presence

Research has demonstrated instructor presence influences students in affective learning, cognition, and motivation (Baker, 2010; Dennen, 2011). Instructor presence has been defined as the instructor's actions and behaviors that project themselves as a real person (Richardson et al., 2015). Garrison and colleagues (2000) stated that teaching presence happens when instructors facilitate the flow of the course content. Richardson and colleagues (2015) stated instructor presence is the intersection of social and teaching presence. There are many aspects of instructor presence, such as providing encouragement to students (Martin et al., 2018), responding to student questions in a timely manner (Whiteside et al., 2017), and involvement in online discussions (Sheridan & Kelly, 2010). Instructor presence is important since it helps to bridge the distance and students feel less isolated in online courses (Creasman, 2012).

Instructor Connectedness

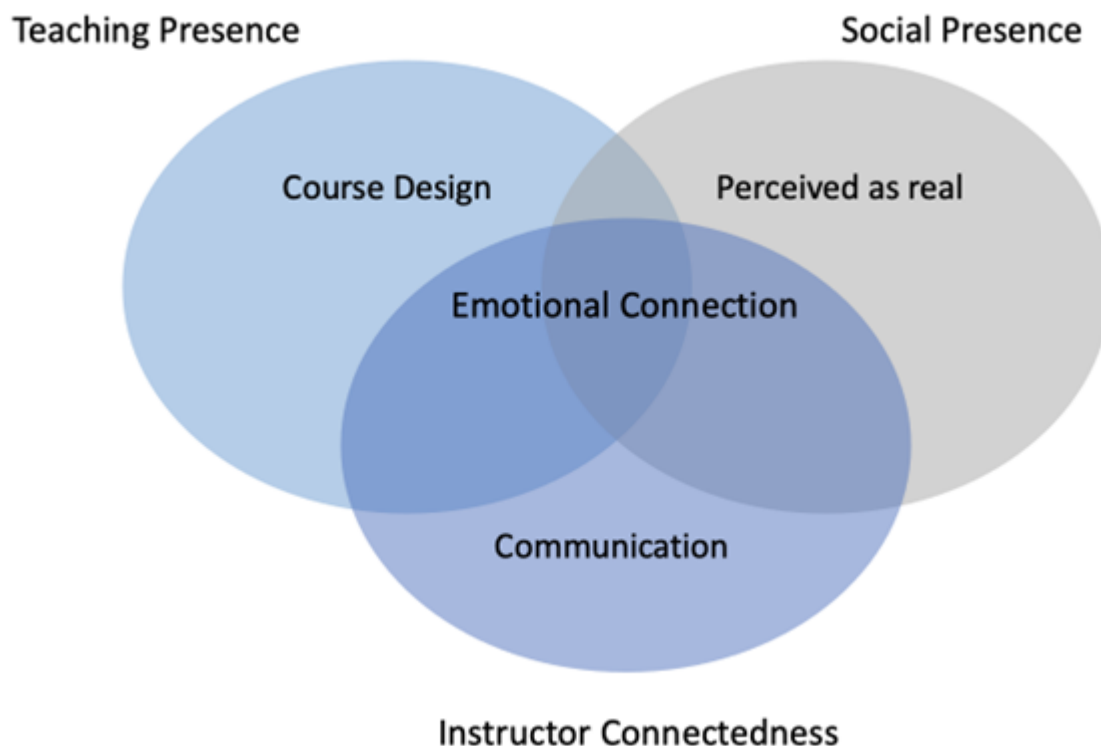
Instructor connectedness is how students perceive how connected they felt toward their instructor (Creasy et al., 2009). Research has found students who perceive a strong relationship or connect with their instructors have better learning outcomes, higher academic achievement, and increased confidence (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Martin et al., (2018) found instructor connection was established through interactive visual syllabi and the use of various features in synchronous sessions to interact with students. While synchronous capabilities may be available for some instructors, in asynchronous courses, this is not a viable option.

Instructor Social Connectedness

Although many researchers interchange instructor social presence and instructor connectedness, for the purpose of this research, we define instructor social connectedness as the ability to establish an emotional connection with students through multiple means of communication. Figure 1 demonstrates the emotional connection at the intersection of social presence, teaching presence, and instructor connectedness. While social presence can be developed through course design and facilitation (Garrison et al., 2000), the connection instructors make with students is established through multiple elements including building trust and providing timely and constructive feedback (Conklin & Garrett Dikkers, 2021).

Figure 1

Instructor Social Connectedness



A Venn diagram showing how course design, social presence, and communication creates an emotional connection.

Berge (1995) developed a framework for online course facilitation, which includes the following constructs: managerial, social, pedagogical, and technical. Managerial refers to administrative responsibilities such as course organization, due dates, and pacing. Within the social construct, instructors encourage and foster meaningful relationships. The pedagogical construct refers to the facilitation of student learning and motivation. The technical construct refers to providing materials and technology to students and creating a transparent environment. Although these are separate constructs, Berge (2008) suggested there may be overlap or instructor functions could be categorized in more than one group. Martin and colleagues (2018) identified twelve facilitation strategies which were categorized into the framework identified by Berge (1995) (see Table 1).

Table 1

Facilitation strategies in online facilitation framework (Berge, 1995; as seen in Martin et al., 2018)

Facilitation strategies	
Social	Video-based instructor introduction Instructor being present in the discussion forums Ability to contact the instructor in multiple ways
Managerial	Video-based course orientation Instructors' timely responses to questions Instructors' weekly announcement to the class
Pedagogical	Instructors' timely feedback on assignments/projects Instructors' feedback using various modalities Instructors' personal response to student reflections
Technical	Instructors' use of various features in synchronous sessions to interact with students Interactive visual syllabi of the course Instructor-created content in the form of short videos or multimedia

We highlight the research literature connecting the facilitation framework with foundational ideas of instructor social presence and connectedness.

Facilitation through Direct Interaction and Multiple Means of Communication

Students value the interaction between the individual and the instructor (Conklin & Garrett Dikkers, 2020; Martin et al., 2019). It is important for online instructors to utilize multiple methods for contacting the instructor (e.g., email, phone, discussion forum, Zoom). The interaction between students and the instructor can assist with students' satisfaction and retention (King & Doefert, 1996).

An important method for communicating with students is through the use of the announcement tool in Learning Management Systems (LMS). This method for communicating with the entire course ensures students are aware the instructor is with them through the learning process. Ko and Rossen (2017) found sending regular announcements was important as they can be used to get students' attention, send encouraging messages, and provide general updates and reminders. These types of quick reminders also assist students with managing their time (Eskey & Schulte, 2010; Kelly, 2014).

Additionally, students value instructor-created videos as a form of communication. Students perceive a connection with instructors who create their own instructional videos rather than using publisher-created content (Rose, 2009). Draus and colleagues (2014) also found a positive relationship between providing instructor-created videos and students' engagement, satisfaction, and retention.

Facilitation through Connection and Sociability

Key to instructor social presence is the connection students feel with their instructor. This connectedness aligns with the idea of sociability, as discussed in leadership theory. Sociability can be defined as having "an inclination to seek out pleasant social relationships," which is demonstrated through leaders' interpersonal skills and relationships (Northouse, 2022, p. 34). Mellor et al. (2012) defined sociability as "a striving need, or preference to be in proximity to others, seeking and maintaining contact, interaction, coordination, and patterns of connection (i.e., being close and staying close to others)" (p. 131).

There are multiple methods for illuminating instructors' sociability in online courses. One method is to include reflections as an essential component of the learning process, which allow the instructor to understand how each student has digested the course concepts and at the same time provide individualized responses either with positive affirmations or with suggestions to assist with student challenges (Martin et al., 2018; Whiteside et al., 2017). Building a course culture where students are asked for their feedback and instructors implement changes based on feedback or explain to students why certain feedback doesn't result in change is another example of sociability.

Facilitation through Feedback and Awareness of Response Time

Instructor feedback is essential for the learning process and enhances students' knowledge (Badiee & Kaufman, 2014; Thiele, 2003). Feedback provides reinforcement to students' knowledge construction as well as redirection to ensure students are correctly constructing the course concepts or retaining the information correctly (Wagner, 1994). Early and continuous feedback can positively impact student retention in the class, as well (Whiteside et al., 2017).

Providing timely feedback can be challenging in an online learning environment. Martin and colleagues (2018) provided creative suggestions such as developing a resource of common questions, problems, and responses over time. Some additional methods for providing feedback can include the use of text and video (Borup et al., 2012). Finally, another method for providing feedback is to chunk the assignments so students are continually working on a large project but receiving feedback at various stages (Schuessler, 2017).

In online courses, response time to student questions (e.g., discussion forums, email) is important due to the potential isolation of students learning on their own. Research has shown that students prefer a response time between 24-48 hours, which was also a significant variable in predicting online student success (Conklin & Garrett Dikkers, 2020; Miller, 2012; Sheridan & Kelly, 2010).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify facilitation strategies that resonated with online students, thus increasing their motivation to learn and perceived course satisfaction. Our research questions included:

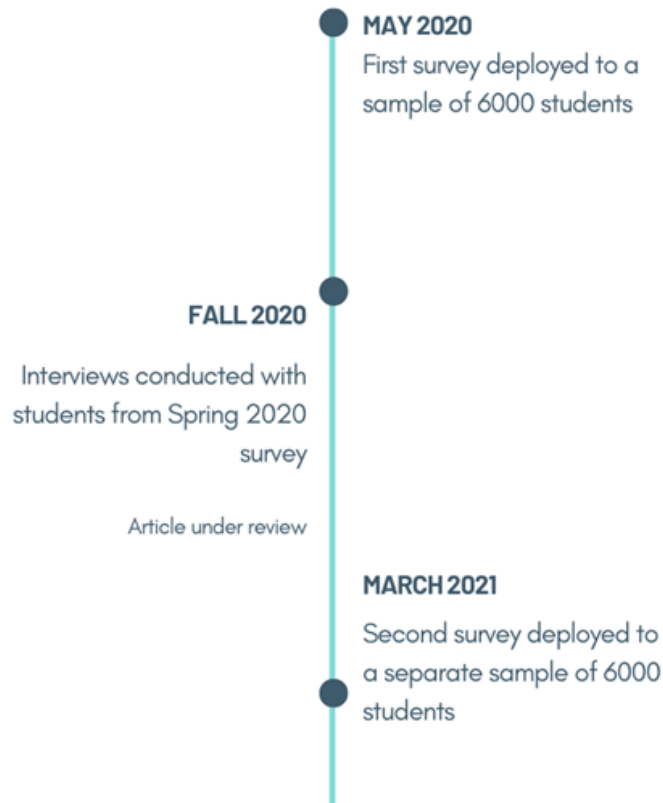
- What facilitation strategies did instructors employ during remote teaching to connect with their students?
- What facilitation strategies resonated with students?
- What recommendations can be made for faculty new to online learning or shifting face-to-face classes to an online environment to build community and connectedness in their classes?

Methods

The current study utilized a pragmatic worldview, one that is problem-centered and oriented toward real-world practice (Creswell, 2009). Researchers were seeking to understand student perceptions of connectedness in classes that shifted to remote instruction in order to impact instructional practice within the specific context of a comprehensive university in the southeastern United States of America. A cross-sectional survey design, used to make inferences about a population at a certain point in time, was utilized with a mix of open- and closed-ended questions. This provides an opportunity to generalize results to the larger student population (Sedgwick, 2014). Figure 2 provides an overview of the timeline of the research study. The institution shifted to remote instruction in March 2020. Fall semester 2020 continued to be mostly remote, with 48% of the classes asynchronous and 21% of the classes synchronous. Spring 2021 semester was a mix of online, hybrid, and F2F with 48% asynchronous and 17% synchronous.

Figure 2

Timeline of Research Study



Timeline of studies starting in May 2020 with the first survey deployed to 6000 students. Interviews conducted in Fall 2020 and the second survey deployed in March 2021.

This manuscript focuses on responses from students in the March 2021 survey. This was the third semester of impacted instruction at the institution due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was sent to a representative sample of 6000 undergraduate and graduate students compiled by the institution's Office of Institutional Research. In order to determine the overall picture of the student online experience at the institution, we asked for a sample that was representative of all students. The survey was sent out using Qualtrics with three reminders to complete the survey over three weeks. There was a response rate of 12% (N=739).

The respondent demographics align with the overall student population at the institution. Respondents were overwhelmingly female; however, this matches the institution demographics for 2020-2021 with an overall undergraduate population as 65% female and 35% male. Additionally, 81% of the respondents were undergraduate, which matches the institution demographics of 81% undergraduate, 18% graduate. The students also identified courses from multiple disciplines. Most students were from the College of Arts and Sciences which encompass the social sciences, sciences, and humanities. There was also representation from all other colleges/schools in the university. See Table 2 for respondent demographics.

Table 2

Student Demographics		Frequency (N)
Gender	Male	154
	Female	563
	Prefer not to say	5
	Non-binary	10

Student Demographics

	Transgender	6
	Total	738
Academic classification	Freshman	106
	Sophomore	137
	Junior	180
	Senior	174
	Master's	93
	Doctorate	8
	Certificate	2
	Post-Baccalaureate	2
Age	18 – 24	579
	25 – 34	90
	35 – 44	19
	45 – 54	7
	Over 55	4

Instrument

The survey instrument contained five basic demographic questions, 19 Likert-scale questions based on Creasey and colleagues (2009) SIRS-9, and three open-ended questions. SIRS-9 provided a certain context around connectedness and anxiety. The other aspects we were researching were specific facilitation strategies not addressed in the SIRS-9 scale; therefore, we asked students to 1) identify a course they found successful keeping them connected to the instructor, content, and their peers, 2) describe what an instructor can do in a fully online course to make them feel connected, and 3) describe what helps them overall connect to or trust their instructors. The focus of this article is on the qualitative responses from the students to these open-ended questions. The SIRS-9 connectedness and anxiety data will be reported in another manuscript.

Data Analysis

Data analysis techniques included established and emergent coding of qualitative responses from the survey open-ended questions. Established codes were based on findings from Conklin and Garrett Dikkers (2020). The research team took several steps to check for the accuracy and reliability of findings. First, both researchers read through all of the open-ended responses to gain an overall sense of the data. Second, the researchers individually analyzed a sample of open-ended responses from the survey and met in a series of meetings for consensus agreement (Creswell, 2009). Throughout the coding process for all open-ended survey data, the two researchers met regularly to cross-check codes and share their analysis, another measure to establish the reliability of the research findings. The original codes connectedness, instructor responsiveness, empathic facilitation, and online learning best practices were refined based on the student responses. The emerging codes of sociability (e.g., use of humor, instructor personality), organization, feedback, and communication were added.

Results

In the following section, we present the analysis of the results along with a discussion of key findings. The pragmatic focus to understand student perceptions at a time when students were unable to participate in their preferred modality provided key data. Five large themes emerged from the open-ended questions: feedback, organization, response time, communication, empathy (FORCE). Many of these themes are intertwined. For example, many students stated they responded to timely and quality feedback. Additionally, feedback is a form of communication, but students specifically

mentioned the quality of feedback and how it guided their learning. We present each of these themes and connect them to an overarching finding related to student perceptions of instructor's sociability.

Feedback

Instructor feedback can be diagnostic, formative, or summative and is essential throughout the course "so that learners can sense how they are doing and progressing" (Lehman & Conceicao, 2010, p. 83). For the current study, we coded when students discussed the value of feedback, what types of feedback they preferred, why they needed feedback, etc. Feedback was mentioned 301 times in the survey open-ended responses. Students often mentioned 'quality' and 'timely' regarding feedback. With feedback, students also mentioned 'care' which indicates an emotional connection to the instructor when students receive timely, quality feedback. Students want to feel validated that the instructor has taken the time to review their work. The importance of feedback was stated by one student, "I really like if an instructor can honestly give me feedback about the material I have provided. It shows that they have done as much work as I have analyzing and preparing for the assignment." Another student stated, "I also love quality feedback from teachers because you can tell that they took the time to think about their response." Additionally, students alluded to the fact that personalized feedback on assignments demonstrates caring; "Any written personal feedback beyond a limited standard response makes me feel that the instructor cares personally about my success." The absence of feedback can increase tension and anxiety, as one student explained:

I enjoy connecting emotionally and relationally with my professors, but the highest priority is receiving timely, helpful, and consistent communication/feedback. Online professors should take the utmost care to make sure there is no confusion for students about what is going on because that leads to a lot of discouragement and stress.

Feedback is an important learning tool as another student stated:

Quality of feedback is most important because I want to be able to understand exactly what I am doing wrong so I can fix it. Also, the depth of good feedback really boosts my personal morale and helps me to understand what I am doing right.

Additionally, the feedback denotes caring and can motivate students:

Every assignment that is turned in is graded and responded to with words of encouragement and constructive criticism on what can be improved upon. This timely feedback helps to keep me focused and working ahead on upcoming assignments and it actually makes me feel like this instructor cares adding to that connection.

Organization

Although we asked students for facilitation strategies that helped them feel connected to their instructor and the course content, students focused on elements of quality course design, and discussed ways in which the instructor could, should, or did organize the overall course shell, specific modules, or individual assignments in order to improve their learning experience. Designing an "intuitive, organized learning environment" has been demonstrated to impact students' perceptions of social presence in online courses (Whiteside et al., 2017, p. 181). In the current study, students mentioned some element of course organization 127 times throughout the open-ended responses. The way a course was designed and organized seems to reflect a student's first impression of the instructor and impact their learning and satisfaction in a course. For instance, one student stated:

An instructor can help me to feel connected and trusting of them when they are organized in their lessons and schedule for the semester, as well as provide materials that include their words, video, or voice. Additionally, when they demonstrate that they are objective in their grading. This can be done by presenting guidelines and a rubric for assignments.

Another student stated:

Course design and organization impact me the most. It makes me feel like they want me to succeed by laying out the course in a way that allows me to easily see what is due each week so that I do not have to worry about missing an assignment because it is hidden on another page.

Additionally, having an organized course with consistent due dates makes students feel at ease and allows students to plan around their schedule:

I respond the best with a very well organized and weekly designed course. I like when instructors set up each week with each assignment that needed to be completed and do not overwhelm students with a million things on the course at once or with no assignments and just exams.

Showing the intersection of the elements that build instructor presence, another student stated how the “course design is a large part of how I connect with the instructor, and whether they offer multiple forms of communication.” Students stated they could tell the effort the instructor put into designing the course which gave them a sense of connectedness since the students perceived the instructor cared about their content and students. Students preferred weekly modules with consistent due dates (e.g., assignments due on the same day) as one student described, “It is set up by each week so I do not feel overwhelmed with work. She explains each week in a quick short video and also includes a weekly checklist.” Students largely felt course organization established expectations for communication, demonstrated planning, and created connections with the instructor.

Response Time

Response time was mentioned in combination with the students’ expectations and the need for timely feedback on assignments. However, there were a number of open-ended responses to the survey where students detailed the value of a quick response time to questions and concerns, particularly when using email communication. Quick responses were essential in order to help them feel like they were on the right track with their learning and learning *in community with* their instructors.

Response time to inquiries was mentioned 115 times on the survey. One student stated that they become discouraged if they wait more than three days for a response. Particularly in remote learning, students felt a more immediate need to hear back from their instructors. Typically, in the face-to-face environment, students could talk to the instructor after class. Students alluded to being lost without a response from the instructor, whether it was a question in an email or feedback to an assignment. One student explained, “If there isn’t timely responses to emails with questions about homework or course material it can be easy to fall behind.”

Many students mentioned needing clarification on assignments, hence the need for a quick response from their instructors. Another student mentioned having a quick turnaround time can alleviate stress, explaining, “Also, it can be stressful, as a shy student, to constantly have to follow up with professors and feel like a nuisance, so quick responses make it easier to reach out again in the future.” Instructors who respond to student inquiries in a timely manner are ones who seem more approachable to the students.

Communication

Communication in online learning takes many different forms - whole-group, one-on-one, via email, announcements, feedback, audio, and video recordings, etc. Students discussed the value of multiple methods of communication and the impact of communication with their instructor on their learning and satisfaction. Communication was specifically referenced 68 times in open-ended responses. Many students used the term *open communication*; however, they also referenced dialogue, instructors *checking in* with them, and specific methods faculty used to communicate, such as email, announcements, and discussion board posts. Additionally, they valued instructor-created videos and felt this was another form of communication.

One student who took an online course in Fall 2020 with a communicative instructor and another in Spring 2021 with an instructor who did not communicate effectively reflected, “Reflecting back to the fall course, what a difference communication makes but especially with online courses.” Another student discussed how communication with the

instructor made the online course more personable, explaining, "Having a maintained line of communication via email or canvas is very important. That the relationship is with them and their course, not just with the online course, therefore making the online course more personable."

Communication goes beyond response time, as many students suggested the instructor initiating communication built trust with the students. One student stated the value in having their instructor "[send] encouraging weekly emails and encouraging but honest comments on assignments." Another student expressed instructors reaching out to students personally created a sense of trust and caring, explaining, "I appreciate personal reminders. Example: "Hey John, Remember assignment x closes tonight. Best of luck!" It makes me think they care and are checking in and reminding me that they look forward to receiving my assignments."

Overall, students valued instructors who maintained open lines of communication throughout the semester and responded to emails but also initiated contact with reminders and words of encouragement.

Empathy

A desire for encouragement and caring connects with an overarching sense of value in instructor empathy. For the purpose of this study, we define empathy as demonstrating understanding, care, and concern for students and their learning. Students described many empathic traits they valued in their instructors. They used terms such as 'empathy', 'struggles', and 'humanize'. Terms such as these were coded 146 times in the open-ended responses. Since many of the students were forced into an online environment when they would prefer face-to-face; they wanted the instructors to understand their struggles with Covid as well. One student stated, "I do not want to hear from an instructor that I have been doing online now for a year and I should be use to it and good at it."

Students acknowledged that times were different and difficult for all parties including instructors but wanted instructors to also acknowledge that students were also struggling during Covid. One student mentioned, "I think the more understanding they are the more they can connect to their students and the students will be more confident and comfortable around them."

Sociability

Empathy contributes to sociability. For the purpose of this study, sociability for instructors is an extension of one of the foundational definitions of social presence (perceiving the other as real in the online space) to feeling the instructor is aware of the specific situations of students and knows their audience, being "sensitive to others' needs and show[ing] concern for others' well-being" (Northouse, 2022, p. 34). One student described how their instructor created a sense of belonging and showed concern for their students:

I have noticed that myself and other students have been really appreciative of professors checking in with their students to discuss their feelings and feedback about the course, the semester, etc., especially this semester. It's encouraging to know that our instructors care about our feelings and wellbeing, especially during such an odd time. I wish more professors took the time to humanize themselves and build a sense of report with the class.

The degree to which a person is perceived as "real" in computer-mediated communication is one of the foundations of social presence research. Students in the current study affirmed that desire for humanization and connection. As one student explained, they valued instructors "showing that they are also just another person that has a life outside of class. Connecting on a non educational level."

Several students mentioned the importance of an instructor who was relatable, sharing humanizing personal stories or experiences relevant to the course. One student explained, "Getting a tad more personal builds trust and connections." Students mentioned the importance of this personal connection and interpersonal relationship, giving specific examples of how a timely response to emails is important, as discussed above, but they value personalization in those emails, "asking how I feel about the course, and what I struggle with," or students who value other check-ins, "when they ask for updates on how we feel throughout the semester." Another student stated, "Talk to me like a person, not just a

student.” While another stated, “Be off-topic with us. Just sit and shoot the breeze – we get so little social interaction. It’s nice to see human instructors who aren’t so robotically locked on the topic at hand.”

Discussion

The results of this study corroborate existing literature regarding the value of timely feedback, email response time and course design for student learning in online courses (Martin et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2019; Whiteside et al., 2017). There have been many studies on communication strategies and the appropriate technology tools (Borup et al., 2012), yet the students in this study stated they are not as concerned about the technology tool as they are with continuous and regular communication. With regular communication, students feel they are seen more as a person rather than a number.

One area the researchers noted is that although the Berge (1995) framework separates managerial and pedagogical strategies, these are intertwined for an instructor. In order to provide timely responses to emails as well as timely and quality feedback (pedagogy), an instructor must manage their time around due dates, particularly with large assignments. One recommendation to assist instructors with time management would be to break large projects into smaller chunks; therefore, the instructor will be providing continuous feedback without a large investment of time (Schussler, 2017).

In instructor-recorded videos, being conscious to project warmth, confidence, and trustworthiness rather than apathy or hardness also creates a sense of connectedness and trust. Finally, when reviewing the student data, the facilitation strategies overall create a sense of sociability (see Figure 3) not just implementing one strategy over another. The combination of feedback, organization, response time, communication, and empathy creates transparency for the students and a sense of sociability from the instructor.

Limitations

There were limitations to this study. First, this study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic; therefore, many instructors’ and students’ situations were not typical. Instructors were teaching under varying circumstances, and many were still teaching in either a blended or fully online environment which was outside their comfort zone. Additionally, while the survey questions were designed to address instructor connectedness, students may not have knowledge specific to instructor connectedness to provide appropriate answers to open-ended questions about teaching. However, we were explicitly seeking to understand students’ perceptions. Currently, the researchers are conducting a sequential exploratory mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2009) to further determine student perceptions on instructor connectedness and the impact of satisfaction and perceived learning. Finally, students received multiple surveys from various campus departments which may have resulted in survey fatigue thus explaining the low response rate.

Conclusion

By making minor tweaks to an online course, an instructor can create a community of students. Although these tweaks may not create social presence among the students, the students will feel connectedness with the instructor, thus assisting with motivation and student satisfaction (Baker, 2010; King & Doefert, 1996). (See Table 3)

Figure 3

Feedback, Organization, Response Time, Communication, Empathy Contributes to Sociability

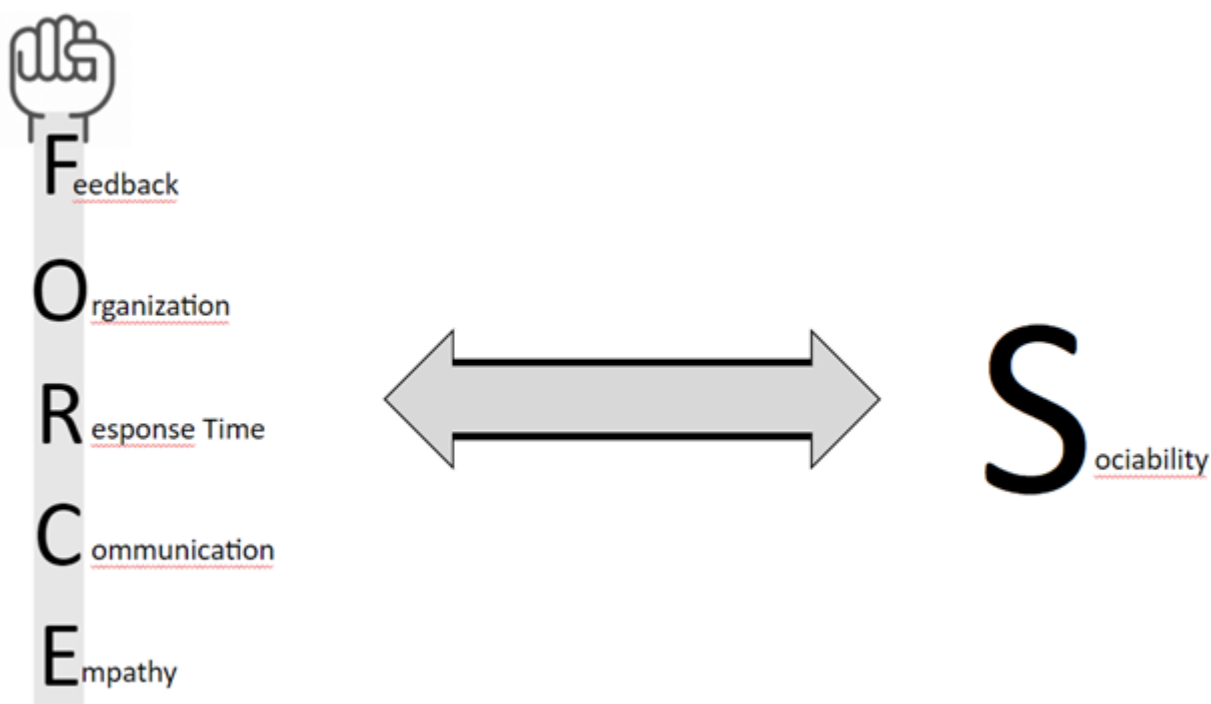


Image showing how Feedback, Organization, Response Time, Communication, and Empathy create Sociability.

Table 3 offers suggestions for using FORCES to create connections with students in the online environment. The FORCES can take instructor presence to another level from projecting themselves as a real person (Richardson et al., 2015) to creating a sense of comradery and trust with the student.

Table 3

FORCES with student examples and applications

Theme	Student Examples	Application	Things to Remember	Illuminating Quote
Feedback	Constructive feedback, yet with at least one positive point. Add what could be improved but end on a positive note.	Use a conversational tone with feedback (text-based) For example, add video feedback using TechSmith Capture: https://www.techsmith.com/jing-tool.html	Create feedback loops in online classes. Have students submit parts of large projects throughout the semester.	Provide feedback on assignments that shows they actually took the time to read and give back advice. Timely and detailed feedback is highly important, especially on the first graded assignments so I can adjust for future assignments.
Organization	Simple Easy to find materials Weekly modules Authentic learning activities	Organize content (assignments, content, etc) into weekly modules Change cumulative tests to short answer Chunk large assignments/projects into smaller checkpoints for feedback loop	Build in redundancies so students can access content via multiple clear paths.	Organization is an expectation of my instructors, if they expect me to be organized I expect the same from a professor. It also allows me to do my assignments without misunderstandings or miscommunication.
Response Time	Responses within 12 - 24 hours Knowing how to contact instructors Regular reminders of due dates	Send weekly email/announcements with reminders Use an Ask Your Question forum or something similar to funnel questions to one place.	Even if the answer may take longer, students appreciate getting an email that says, thank you for asking the question, I will get back to you within [x] days.	Just as important is the response rate. Even if/when an instructor can't fully answer your email at the time it's read, a response to let the student know it hasn't escaped the "to-

Theme	Student Examples	Application	Things to Remember	Illuminating Quote
			List typical response time on the syllabus and in the Canvas shell.	do" list of said instructor is important.
Communication	Announcements Email Optional Zoom meetings Asynchronous content videos	Set up weekly announcements to organize due dates Send emails on regular basis to connect students to content Offer Zoom or Teams work sessions Create asynchronous content videos with instructor presence	Students value videos created by their instructors over sending them links to other people's work.	I feel that weekly announcements and a to-do list are also helpful in creating and maintaining an online course.
Empathy	Students used the words care[ing] and understand[ing] when describing their successful instructors Note student situations Be positive in nature Demonstrate care for students and student learning	Send individualized emails Offer sincerity Send positive messages	Students value the message, not the mode of delivery.	I want them to understand the situation from our point of view as a student.
Sociability	Conversational tone Humor	Be yourself in videos Use a conversational tone in writing and in videos Tell a story about yourself	Instructional videos do not have to be polished.	Be kind, happy to see their students, excited for the class. Share their own experiences.

Instructional designers and faculty new to teaching in the online environment can use the FORCE to create a sense of sociability, helping students to perceive their instructors as real and feel more connected. This contributes to increased satisfaction and motivation to learn.

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