

Engaged Learning at Webster

Webster strives to create transformational educational experiences for our students and to empower students to take ownership of their own learning. We aim for faculty and academic partners to collaboratively create an environment where students feel like their voices and perspectives matter and where they feel inspired to grow as intellectuals and professionals. We have identified five principles crucial to cultivating engaged learning in our community.¹

I. Foster Student Ownership of Learning

We seek to develop our students' intrinsic motivation while also understanding the many external forces that impact their learning. By creating an environment where students feel that they have the personal and intellectual resources to meet academic challenges, we can increase students' autonomy, engagement in learning activities, and intrinsic motivation to grow as intellectuals. When we recognize and respect the diverse external factors affecting students (such as grades, family pressures and responsibilities, and career goals), we can better help students see how course content connects to their lives.

II. Build Relationships and Communities

Research shows that students learn best when their learning is social and collaborative, and students who feel a sense of belonging are more motivated and engaged, so we seek to build meaningful relationships and inclusive communities. We believe that faculty are in perhaps the best position to nurture these relationships—both instructor to student and student to student—and to promote a sense of collective identity and belonging among students.

III. Create a Network of Opportunities

We strive to help faculty become aware of the many services and opportunities available to students so that they can help direct students to various resources, and to empower faculty to generate learning opportunities for students through networking, collaboration, and research. Since we know that some of the best learning happens outside of the classroom, we aim to strengthen the interactive learning ecosystem through the sharing of practices, services, and resources among faculty and academic partners.

IV. Guide Students toward Lifelong Growth

Webster aspires to provide students with an educational experience that prepares them for a lifetime of learning and success. We aim for our students to develop a mindset of curiosity and discovery, to embrace learning skills that contribute to lifelong personal growth, and to acquire the ability to be self-reflective global citizens. Faculty play a key role in helping students to develop skills they will use throughout their academic, professional, and personal lives, such as critical thinking and effective writing, and in helping students to shape their multifaceted, intersectional identities.

V. Promote Inclusion through Active Learning

We expect great things of Webster students—we want them to become leaders, innovative thinkers, and self-starters—so we expect them to take on these very roles in our classrooms. We know that students learn best when they engage in active learning activities such as discussions, group work, writing, and peer learning. These activities also allow our students to assume roles of power in the classroom, and they create space for all of our students to have a voice. By redistributing power away from the traditional top-down classroom hierarchy, we give students more agency, which not only supports effective teaching and learning, but increases student engagement and the transformative potential of education.

¹ Webster's Reflective Teaching Community developed these principles over the course of two years of study and collaboration, drawing inspiration from diverse resources on learning but especially from the work of education scholars Nick Zepke and Linda Leach on student engagement as well as the research of psychologists George Slavich and Philip Zimbardo on transformation: Zepke, N., & Leach, L. (2010). Improving student engagement: Ten proposals for action. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 11, 167-177; Slavich, G., & Zimbardo, P. (2012). Transformational teaching: Theoretical underpinnings, basic principles, and core methods. *Educational Psychology Review*, 24, 569-608. For more information, contact the Faculty Development Center at askfdc@webster.edu.