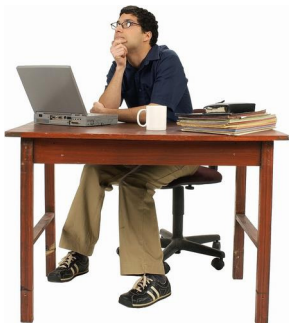


## Building a Learning Community: Face-to-Face and Online

Peer learning can be one of the most energizing aspects of any course, when students are able to help each other learn. The simplest form of this is when students form their own study groups to help each other prepare for exams. However, there are many other ways that you can foster this community development. Each of these in-class activities also has an online equivalent.

To support students' sense of openness and need to be heard, provide an opportunity for class members to introduce themselves. You may all be surprised to find out how many things you might have in common with each other from hobbies to past work or life experiences. Icebreakers can be an easy to inject some fun energy into your course. Online, you can use the Student Homepage feature or an initial Discussion Board forum for this getting-to-know-you process.

As the course goes on, you might want to save a few minutes at the end of every class meeting for general questions and announcements. Maybe someone in class needs a ride home for a holiday weekend. It's perfectly all right to spend a little time tending to social needs in class. Online, a special forum like the "Student Lounge" feature can serve that same purpose.



Classroom presentations by students are not intended to put them on-the-spot but to give them a chance to show what they have learned. In this spirit, the students can feel more a part of the learning enterprise, rather than being processed through it. Online, making use of collaboration tools like group space and letting students put up some materials, too, can give them that same sense of co-authorship.

Establishing a proper climate of academic discussion is important to each student feeling valued. In the classroom, you may have students who have strong disagreements. Embrace that. The university is one of the last places where it is safe to be confronted by and exposed to views that differ from our own. Let students know the ground rules; that it is acceptable to take issue with another person's arguments but never to make personal attacks. Providing rubrics for good online discussion board postings do the same thing in keeping the discussion on point and in a proper tone.

### For Further Reading

Paloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (2003). *The virtual student: A profile and guide to working with online learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

