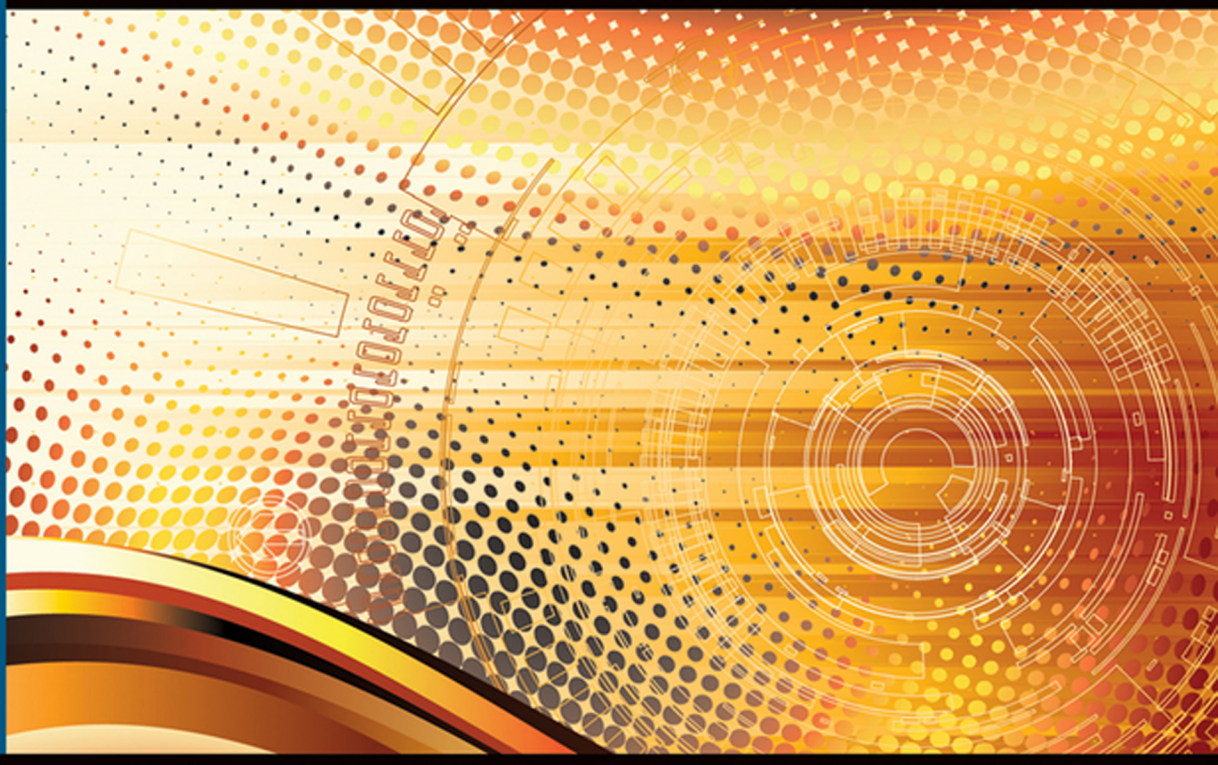
JOSSEY-BASS GUIDES TO ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Motivating and Retaining Online Students

Research-Based Strategies that Work

Rosemary M. **LEHMAN** Simone C. O. **CONCEIÇÃO**



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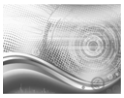

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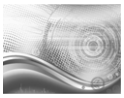

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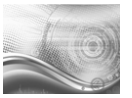

Preface

Participation in online education continues to grow in the United States (Allen & Seaman, 2010, 2011). However, concerns for online student retention and factors for student persistence must be taken into consideration. We know that among the reasons for student dropout are feelings of isolation, frustration, and disconnection; technology disruption; lack of contact with faculty; inadequate contact with students on the part of faculty; lack of student and technology support; lack of instructor participation during class discussion; lack of clarity in instructional direction or expectation; and lack of social interaction.

Based on the literature, we also know some factors that have a positive influence on retaining students and reducing dropout rates. Among these factors are previous experience in online courses, student preparation for online education, relevance of the course to students, learning community engagement, desire to complete a degree, and workplace support.

In preparation for writing this book we conducted a comprehensive literature review on student retention and persistence in online higher education. There was a dearth of information on strategies to retain and motivate students in online courses. To fill this gap in knowledge and expand on the existing

literature, we conducted a study to investigate motivation and support strategies that could reduce online learner dropout in higher education (Conceição & Lehman, 2012, 2013).

THE FOCUS OF THIS BOOK

This book focuses on strategies instructors can use to retain online students in higher education. It offers design, student, and support strategies for instructors to motivate and support online students in institutions of higher education. This book is written for instructors from the point of view of both students and instructors. The main purpose of the book is to assist instructors when designing, teaching, and supporting the online experience of students.

WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS BOOK

This book was written primarily for instructors to assist them in using effective strategies for online learning and teaching. By using these strategies instructors can better motivate and retain students in their online courses and successfully design and teach online courses. For new instructors, the book can serve as a practical guide for designing strategies to motivate and support students. Experienced instructors can use the student strategies in this book to guide students for more efficient and effective learning. Instructional designers and consultants, who work with programs and organizations, can also use this book as a guide when developing and administering online programs or assisting instructors when creating and delivering online courses.

OUR BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING AND TEACHING

The strategies in this book emerged from an analysis of the student and instructor perspectives in our study, as well as our own experiences designing and teaching online for more than 10 years. Our thoughts about online learning and teaching are based on our core belief that education in general is developmental in nature. Students must be allowed to learn and grow at their own pace. Many of the courses we teach allow students to develop skills throughout the course period. Placing the student at the center of every task has been the hallmark of our teaching and writing. In the online

environment, a learner-centered approach requires a sense of presence—in other words, a sense of the instructor's "being there" with online learners throughout the learning experience.

As educators we believe that we must take into account the unique nature of each student. Each individual is different in terms of past experiences, learning preferences, and interests. Therefore, we believe that instruction must be designed in ways that allow for individual differences. We always place ourselves in the role of a learner. Placing ourselves in this role helps us foster confidence, enthusiasm, and transparency in our teaching.

As our teaching experiences reach out to students globally, it is essential for us to teach using strategies that address different perspectives and provide options for the diverse learners. Having an open perspective about learning and teaching can help learners meet their own needs, think and reason more broadly, and select what is most relevant to them. We believe in intentional design, a method that involves purposeful actions and takes into consideration learner characteristics, the learning environment, and the teaching process. This book takes the view that intentional design is the foundation for developing courses that are successful at online student retention.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

Chapter 1, "Concerns and Opportunities for Online Student Retention," addresses the challenges that higher education is undergoing related to online student retention. The chapter explains the causes for increased enrollment and the state of higher education and online learning. The chapter describes concerns for online student retention and opportunities for online education. The chapter also identifies new learner behaviors and skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the study we conducted to expand on existing literature, which served as the basis for our writing this book.

Chapter 2, "Design Strategies for Retaining Online Students," looks at intentional design for online courses, design elements and strategies to help students stay motivated online, and the impact of intentional design for online course success. The chapter concludes with design strategies for retaining online students.

Chapter 3, "Student Strategies for Staying Motivated Online," focuses on the strategies identified by the students for staying motivated in online courses and the pathway that emerged from our analysis of the study findings. The chapter also explains the study findings from a motivational perspective and concludes with a discussion of ways to incorporate student strategies into course design.

Chapter 4, "Support Strategies for Helping Online Students Persist," begins with students' perceptions about receiving support that emerged from our study and then suggests support strategies, with examples, to help online students persist with their courses and programs. Instructors can incorporate these support strategies when teaching an online course.

Chapter 5, "Pulling the Strategies Together," brings together the established findings and major contributions from our study related to online student retention. The chapter offers a model for instructors to help students persist in an online course and explains how to put the model into practice. The chapter discusses times of change for learning and instructors' skills for meeting students' 21st-century fluencies. The chapter ends with implications and conclusions for learning and teaching online.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is the third book in the *Jossey-Bass Guides to Online Teaching and Learning* series that we have co-authored. We continue to use the same enjoyable and rewarding process for writing our books. For this book, our writing process has become so natural that we often finish each other's sentences. This time, we met in person only twice, making use of mobile technology for communication, Google Drive for synchronous writing, and Dropbox for digital storage.

We are indebted to the students and instructors who participated in our survey and gave us insightful information based on their perceptions and experiences. Their insightful information will be a valuable resource for other students, instructors, instructional designers, practitioners, and administrators. We are also grateful to Tammie Rivera, who pulled together a literature review on student retention and persistence; the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Consulting Office for Research and Evaluation (CORE) for helping us with the quantitative data analysis of our findings, especially Professor Cindy Walker; our colleagues Johanna Dvorak and Chip Donahue for sharing their stories; and