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## Send Messages of Encouragement and Support

Feelings of discouragement can set in as early as the second week of a course because the assignment requirements and due dates start to feel overwhelming and beyond the student's available time for learning (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011). Students who are getting behind or are struggling in the course may be encouraged by a personal and supportive email from the instructor (Stavredes, 2011).

Below are practices that can encourage students to persist in your online course.

**Hold virtual office hours.** Require students to meet with you at least one time early in the course. A positive experience during this initial meeting increases the likelihood that students will reach out to you if they need support throughout the course (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). Regularly remind students of your virtual office hours to ensure that they understand you are eager to help and support them.

**Address early warning signs by offering support.** The gradebook function in your Learning Management System (LMS) allows you to identify students who have not posted an assignment or discussion. Rather than wait until a student is dangerously far behind, instructors can quickly reach out to them regarding a delayed or missing assignment or post. This type of communication lets the student know that the instructor is attentive and cares (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). For example,

*Hi Morgan! I notice that you missed the discussion board deadline this week. So, I wanted to check in and see if everything is okay? Are you having any trouble with the material? Please let me know if there is anything I should know or any help I can offer. I look forward to hearing back from you and helping in any way I can!*

**Send reminders with encouragement.** When you send reminders about assignments, let students know that you understand it can be challenging to keep up with coursework. Let them know that taking small steps to get started and making daily efforts can help prevent feelings of being overwhelmed (Allen, 2015). Expressing empathy and confidence in their ability to overcome obstacles will also help them develop self-confidence and feel encouraged to persist through the challenges. For example,

*Greetings all! Happy Monday! As I mentioned last week, this week's module is a challenging one because we will be grappling with the complexity of medical ethics. I've designed this week's assignments to introduce you to the topic, give you a chance to test your understanding, discuss with your peers, and then apply the concepts to real-life*

*scenarios. I will be sending you daily reminders to help keep you on track because I know it can be difficult to keep up with this coursework along with everything else you have going on in your busy lives. I also know that every single one of you in our learning community has what it takes to rise to this challenge. So, I look forward to another week of engaging discussions as we grapple with life-and-death situations!*