

Expert Insights

Narrator [00:00:01] Look to your left, then look to your right. One of you won't be here next year. Weeding out students used to be a mark of high standards. Not anymore. Today, 70% of high schoolers continue to college, but many drop out. Only a small percentage get a BA. When we consider how many jobs that pay a living wage require a college education, these figures are a problem. Some of the reasons are out of our control: the cost of tuition, the time involved, and work or family obligations. But there are techniques we can use in class that do help students persist, that increase intrinsic motivation.

Jane Muhich, MEd, Director, Pathways to Completion, Seattle Central College [00:00:40] A persistent student is one who continues to put forth effort when faced with challenges and adjusts strategies. They persist from term to term. They continue to enroll and complete successfully towards their degree and certificate.

Narrator [00:00:55] Psychologist Edward Deci and others show that intrinsic motivation is a more powerful force for sustained learning than extrinsic carrots and sticks. This desire from within really gets going when we have some control over the task--it's something we can get better at and ultimately master--and when the task holds larger meaning for our lives. So to give students a greater sense of control, you can co-construct course outcomes. You'll learn what they want to get out of class and you can make material more relevant. Offer them a choice in class activities, assignments, and assessments, and assign group projects where students select topics, divvy up tasks, and develop work schedules.

Jane Muhich, MEd [00:01:39] If you let students, or engage them in choosing or designing their own assignments, you have the highest probability really of them being engaged in their own choice, as opposed to, like, this assignment coming down from above.

Narrator [00:01:54] Now, to help students progress toward mastery, you can provide tools for self-direction, such as assignment checklists, writing samples, and grading guides. You can offer specific feedback, especially early in the term, so there's time to improve and require revision of first drafts into final submissions.

Jane Muhich, MEd [00:02:12] You can see reasonably, if you don't think you're going to get better, that you wouldn't persist, because if you're not going to get better then, whatever, I'm going to put my energy toward something that I'm going to, you know, that that I'm actually good at.

Narrator [00:02:23] Finally, what are your students' aspirations and how does your course help them pursue this larger purpose? Take time to learn about and reflect on their goals. The more relevant and useful you can make course objectives, the more motivated students will be. Your classroom culture should also convey that learning takes effort and effort makes a difference. Carol Dweck shows that students often believe they're either smart or not. This belief can either be global or related to a specific subject. A negative fixed mindset can sap students' academic energy. They may believe that no amount of effort will result in better performance, or they may believe that being smart means you shouldn't have to try hard or ask for help, and fail to seek the help they need. Now, students with a growth mindset believe they can develop their abilities, that achievement results from effort, and welcome opportunities to learn and improve. And with a growth mindset, students are more likely to persist through challenging tasks. To promote a growth mindset, emphasize the process of learning, not just the

outcome. Move students from "I don't get it" to "I don't get it yet." This communicates that learning is a matter of time and effort and they're on a continuum of understanding. Offer specific praise for work that results in improvement. For example, the steps in your calculations are clearer or your analyzes are really improving. Finally, how you grade can support or hamper a growth mindset. Grades without information or an opportunity to learn and improve can demoralize and demotivate, especially if students believe that no amount of effort will bring them success. Now, assessments with information and opportunity to improve can help students understand their progress as a measure of what a student needs to know and needs to work on to improve mastery. The importance of a college education is greater than ever. With what we know about motivation, we can help students persist to complete our courses, to enroll into the next term, and to graduate and go on to rewarding lives and careers.