Building Community Online: Student Introductions

Creating intentional opportunities for students to get to know each other at the beginning of (and throughout) a course helps build trust and foster a sense of community (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011). These initial activities also provide a low-stakes opportunity to engage with the technology of the course, which is particularly helpful to students who are new to online learning. Introductions should serve as a fun and non-threatening icebreaker to ease students into the course, the course technology, and the learning community. Effective introduction activities, such as the ones suggested below, can require that students

- share something personal,
- read one another's entries,
- respond to other entries,
- find something in common with several others in the learning community, and
- be imaginative or to express genuine emotions or openness.

Some good introduction discussion prompts include:

- What experience do you have with this course topic?
- How does this course topic relate to your career or personal goals?
- If someone were to visit your town or your state for the first time, what are your top three recommendations of things to do, places to eat, or sights to visit?
- What was the best class (online or in person) that you ever had? Why was it so good?
- What was the worst class you ever took? Why was it so bad?
- What is your biggest fear or hope about engaging in online classes?

After posting an initial response to the prompt, ask students to find and reply to at least two or three students with whom they have something in common and two or three students who shared a perspective or experience different from their own. Instructors might also consider posting a brief hello or welcome message to each student as they introduce themselves as a way to let them know that you see and acknowledge them.

Note: In a large class, create smaller discussion groups (around 10 people) to keep discussion posts manageable.

Source

Conrad, R. M., & Donaldson, J. A. (2011). *Engaging the online learner: Activities and resources for creative instruction.* Jossey-Bass.