

## LE1: Building Community

**Alyson Snowe, PhD, Professor, English Department, Community College of Rhode Island** [00:00:14] The introductory post is really essential in helping my students feel more comfortable getting to know one another. Students are asked to post a picture of themselves as well as some basic information about where they live and what their career goals are. I also ask them to just talk candidly about some of their interests.

**Denisses, Student, Community College of Rhode Island** [00:00:42] I love introductions because that just sets the tone for the class. That was my first online class that I saw pictures of the students, which made it awesome because you can like, see, you can, like, relate maybe, you know, just to know who the people that you're talking to, it's always great. You feel more comfortable, and more comfortable with, even to share your ideas, which is great.

**Alyson Snowe, PhD** [00:01:06] It allows students to make connections with one another. And I feel that the more comfortable the students are with one another and the more they can connect with one another, the more engaged they are in the class and the more excited they get about working with one another and completing assignments together.

**Beth O. Anish, PhD, Associate Professor of English, English Department, Community College of Rhode Island** [00:01:25] So I set up this watercooler forum. This is the first, very first week of class, when students are still settling in and I have them introduce themselves.

**Beth O. Anish, PhD** [00:01:36] I really start, the very first week is kind of an introduction week. And I have all the students introduce themselves to one another, to me, on what I call a watercooler section of the discussion board. And I, I don't ask them questions so much as I model the introduction for them. I'd write my own introduction and that's the first one in the watercooler every time. So they can kind of see, I talk about, you know, how long I've been at CCRI and what my education is like, I talk a little bit about my kids and hobbies.

**Nancy Student, Community College of Rhode Island** [00:02:10] Professor Anish introducing herself in the beginning of the class really helped me get to know what type of teacher she is and what to kind of expect and how she teaches, her, the way she teaches, and the way she talks to students. So it really gives me an idea of how she is as a person.

**Alyson Snowe, PhD** [00:02:32] I look through the introductory posts and I make comments on what the students say. I always try to connect with something they've said. So if they say that, you know, they have pets, you know, I might talk about my own dog and, you know, you know, how much I enjoy having a dog. Any way that I can connect with them so that they, they, they feel more comfortable with me. The more real and human I seem to them, I think the more comfortable they are reaching out to me and asking for help.

**Sydney Student Community College of Rhode Island** [00:03:10] I've definitely had online courses where the professor didn't know anybody's name, wasn't very interactive with the students. And by knowing that my professor wants to get to know me a little bit and cares about each of her students or their students definitely makes me feel a little more inspired that I can complete this class, that I have someone backing me.

**Nancy Student** [00:03:35] In class, I'm usually shy and I'm usually, like, I don't want to introduce myself. But even the watercooler, it's like you're in the comfort of your own home and you're introducing yourself and you're getting to know the other, your peers, the other students that are in your class and what their lives are like and where they work, or so you really get to know them in a personal way.

**Julie Candio Sekel, Adjunct Instructor School of Humanities and Global Studies, Ramapo College of New Jersey**

[00:04:05] The very first week of the semester, I form students into accountability groups, and essentially what this means is I group them, groups of four or five students, typically with people who are in their major or in their school, which I know because they complete a survey at the start of the semester, and I assign them into these groups. And the first thing they do is engage in a discussion forum with their groups, get to know their group members, introduce themselves. And this replicates what you may have heard is called a group-noticing routine in face-to-face courses, which is shown to increase students' sense of belonging and also to improve attendance rates in class.

**Julie Candio Sekel** [00:04:50] In these groups, what you're going to be doing is you're going to be completing a final project and have deliverables that you're working toward with those teams, but you're also responsible for each other. So in these synchronous sessions, each time we start, I'm going to start the session by asking someone to report out who from your accountability group is missing from the class session. So you are responsible for knowing if someone in your group is not present and reporting out. But your other responsibility is to follow up with that missing team member, let them know what they missed, fill them in, if there were any important announcements made on the Zoom let them know, and encourage them to continue to participate in future sessions.

**Julie Candio Sekel** [00:05:36] This act of just noticing and knowing that someone's noticing whether you're present or you're not, makes students more likely to attend the synchronous session. What this essentially does is it helps students feel accountability to one another, but it also holds them accountable for their participation in the course, and it makes them more engaged because they know that they have group members they can go to for anything throughout the semester. But also they're completing an assignment at the end of the semester and have deliverables toward that throughout the semester with these same group members.

**Jack, Student, Ramapo College of New Jersey** [00:06:10] When I'm in this accountability group, there's people who are counting on me to help them succeed in the class as well. So if I let myself down, I'm letting them down as well. And JCS definitely reminded us of that every week in class, and you really have not only this responsibility for yourself, but for your classmates.

**Julie Candio Sekel** [00:06:26] I have heard people argue that they don't want to put students into groups the first week because it's not past the Add/Drop period. They might have students dropping out of the course and they might have to rearrange the groups. But on the flip side of that, if you actually put students into groups the first week, they're less likely to drop out of the course because they have other students who are there, who are relying on them, who know them by name, and who they're already starting to work on a project with.

**Sam, Student, Ramapo College of New Jersey** [00:06:53] By establishing our accountability groups during the first week of classes, I felt so secure because there was a group of people that I was linked with from day one who I could count on and who could count on me to help me keep myself on track and to make sure that I knew what assignment I was supposed to be handing in that day. It was, it was just the best thing ever.