How to retain and engage students – checklist

On the first day of the course

1. Start off strong by introducing yourself, why you are a teacher and what your view on the taught subject is.
2. Give students an icebreaker to get to know one another.
3. Hit the ground by giving students significant content.
4. Organize the course content in an easy- to-grasp manner with assessment, schedule, assignments, deadlines, teaching resources and instructions readily available in the used virtual learning environment (VLE). Make it accessible to everyone.
5. Give an assignment on the first day to engage the students. This will force them to get acquainted with the VLE.
6. Greet the students at the door and take the time to learn their names.
7. Start and end the class on time.
8. Have students share their expectations for the course before you run through the course details. This can be done as pair work on slips collected from students.
9. Express your rules and stick to them. Keep pointing out throughout the course that it is every students responsibility to come in to each class well prepared as that is the key to learning.
10. Promote self-seeking behavior by prompting students to find your counselling hours in the VLE as well as other contact information. Keep reminding them of these possibilities regularly.

Build connections

1. Set up a buddy system so that students can contact one another or form study groups.
2. Use different models for teaming up students. Sometimes it might be advisable to let students form the groups themselves, whereas sometimes you may wish to go for mixed groups.

Motivate students and make each class relevant to their needs

1. Have students set goals for the course, for individual assignments, for teamwork and for their future careers.
2. Make sure students understand the importance of each lesson you are teaching them. What is gist of each lesson learnt and why will the student need the skill or piece of information in the future?
3. Plan each class carefully by following the class model of a starter, main body and plenary. Each class should follow a lesson plan. Don’t go into the classroom and wing it but be prepared. Allocate each class one main lesson to be learnt and avoid carrying out monologues at length.
4. Use various media and modes of presentation to guarantee student engagement. Don’t lecture for more than 15 minutes at a time. Go for videos, PowerPoint or Prezi, blogs, H5P activities or even role-play.
5. Let the students get their hands on to learn. Allow moments when students can share their thoughts by interacting. Having students collaborate and discuss has each learner engaged. Vary solo, pair, share, small group, learning café and other interaction models.
6. Use real-life examples and have them solve real problems. You can go for current events or have the students work on a work-life commission given by a local company.

Offer support for learning

1. Try to catch problems early.
2. Keep posting current events and deadline reminders in the VLE news. Allow students to ask questions, too, and have them answer one another’s questions.
3. Create a safe learning zone in your classroom enabling each student feel safe to ask any questions they like.
4. Advice students on study-related services provided by your HEI, such as the library or any other relevant services.

Provide feedback and prompt assessment

1. Provide feedback on assignments as soon as possible.
2. Remember to be encouraging.
3. Use non-graded feedback when applicable. Create quizzes, give oral feedback or use any CATS techniques (Classroom Assessment Techniques).
4. Maintain a gradebook or make grades accessible to students so that they can keep up with their progress.
5. Enable students to see what they will be able to achieve at the end of each class and at the end of the course. Have your objectives readily available and make sure they can be understood by the student, who is not a pedagogically trained teacher.