

Course Engagement: A Student-Instructor Agreement

Engagement.

Noun:

- *An arrangement to meet or be present at a specified time and place*
- *Emotional involvement or commitment.*

(via Merriam-Webster)

Overview

For the purposes of our class, I am using engagement as a metric for measuring the way we interact with course materials, assignments, and activities. Some synonyms for engagement that you have probably heard include **'participation'** and **'ethos'**, and both are similar premises. However, I have chosen the word 'engagement' because by definition it achieves **a more equitable interaction between students and instructors**. While establishing a professional ethos and participating in a course are valuable skills, they often reinforce traditional power structures that keep things between instructors and students inherently unbalanced and therefore not conducive to effective and beneficial learning. Engagement is not only something I define with the expectation that students perform and exemplify certain behaviors when interacting with this course, but that I **reciprocate** with my own levels of investment in the course as your instructor.

I see engagement as a **contract between instructor and student**, something that we mutually agree upon as a group and as individuals to ensure all participants get what they want and need from our class. As stated in the definition at the top of the page, engagement means being **present** at a specific time and place, and having a **commitment** to a particular activity or circumstance. Though we will not be meeting in person this semester, engagement is also possible in a virtual asynchronous space and will involve the same kind of behaviors.

Assessing engagement, much like assessing other forms of participation in a course, can be a complex and fraught process. For this reason, we will be assessing engagement through **goal-setting** and **self-reflection**. As allocated on the syllabus, 100 points will be available to you as your engagement grade. Determining this grade will entail the following:

- At the beginning of the semester, you will submit a **memo** that details your goals for engagement in this course. You will be assigned this task during the first week of the semester and given guidelines for establishing effective and actionable goals. You will then receive feedback from me on the best ways to implement your goals. Points for this memo come from the points allocated to short assignments.
- At the end of the semester, at the same time as your final project, you will turn in a final **self-assessment** based on detailed instructions (provided below) that determine your own perceptions of your engagement with the course materials, activities, and assignments. This will consist of a memo wherein you detail your views of your engagement in the course over the semester and respond to your self-set goals. I will use this self-assessment to determine your final engagement grade.

Again, since it is often difficult to assign measurable goals to abstract concepts such as engagement, I have provided a list of behaviors, actions, and attitudes that will help guide you as you determine your levels of engagement and set your semester goals. I will rely on your honest self-assessments and my own observations of your work throughout the course to determine how many points you receive. I am also happy to clarify and go into detail regarding any of these behaviors and actions at any point in time during the semester, and am comfortable negotiating any adjustments needed for accommodations, mental health, and

wellbeing as the semester goes on. Goals should never be static and should be adaptable, negotiable, and subject to adjustment based upon circumstance.

Examples of High Engagement Behaviors

Communicates frequently and effectively with instructor and classmates. Shows enthusiasm for learning material. Responds to discussions and readings with in-depth and thoughtful responses. Reads assignment sheets and engages with course content thoroughly. Respects classmates and instructor. Respects texts and materials. Reviews course materials and available information to gain answers. Asks productive questions. Takes responsibility for personal mistakes or misunderstandings. Engages with feedback and incorporates it effectively into revisions. Strives to understand and speak effectively about their work and the choices they make. Understands connections between major project work and uses early project work effectively as a foundation for later project ideas and execution.

Examples of Low Engagement Behaviors

Communicates infrequently with instructor and classmates. Disinterested in learning material. Responds to discussions and readings minimally and without evidence of investment. Skims assignment sheets and course content without processing or engaging with material. Treats classmates and instructor with minimal or no respect. Engages with texts and materials in careless or disrespectful ways. Does not ask questions or review material to gain answers. Deflects responsibility for misunderstandings or mistakes. Ignores or views feedback as superficial and revises only minimally. Reluctant to communicate and speak about their work and their choices. Sees projects as disjointed and disconnected, uses early work disparately and separately from the full spectrum of the course.

Engagement Goals Memo Assignment

(adapted from work by M. McMullin)

Overview

In order to develop your engagement goals, consider how you can craft goals that are achievable within the scope of the course. Making concrete goals you can keep track of means you will be better able to talk about your personal performance with me during the course of the semester. As you think about what you want to achieve in this class, consider what you can achieve in a way that is tied to your behaviors and abilities. To do this, we will make use of four major guidelines to determine if your goals will work for the purposes of this exercise.

Consider the following for your goal:

M - Is it **Measurable**? Is it a goal that is countable? Is it something you can document?

O - Is it **Observable**? Is the goal tangible (something you can perceive with your five major senses) or something you can materially experience?

R - Is it **Reliable**? Is it a goal that at least two people could agree upon observing?

S - Is it **Specific**? Is your goal results focused in all of the above ways? Is it about one singular thing, even if that goal ties into your other goals as a whole?

To demonstrate these principles, referred to as **MORS** principles, in action, I will share with you how I enact them in my own life and in establishing my goals for the semester. As a graduate student in the final year of my PhD program, my primary work focus when I'm not teaching all of you is completing my dissertation.

Here is an example of a regular direction for my workload:

"I'm going to work on my dissertation every day this semester."

This is not a MORS-based goal or plan. It is vague, abstract, non-specific, and therefore difficult to track or observe.

To turn this goal into a MORS-based principle, I can say the following:

“In order to achieve my dissertation goals this semester, I will:

- Write at least 250 words a day, 3 times a week.
- Edit at least 5 pages a week.
- Touch base with my advisor every Friday.
- Transcribe and code an hour of interview audio a week.

This is a MORS based goal because it details countable actions (**Measurable**), is a tangible action (**Observable**), is something other people can witness (**Reliable**), and goes into clear detail about the parameters (**Specific**).

Deliverables

You should submit a brief 1-page memo detailing your goals for the semester. I encourage you to create a minimum of **three** MORS-based engagement goals for the semester. As long as your goals can be aligned with these MORS principles, you will fulfill the parameters of this Engagement Goals Memo Assignment.

The Engagement Goals Memo is due on Brightspace on **Friday, September 4th by 11:59pm**.

You will receive feedback from me on how I can work with you to enact your goals throughout the semester.

End-of-Semester Engagement Assessment

Your end of semester engagement assessment should accomplish multiple points:

1. **Respond to** and **reflect upon** the goals you set at the beginning of the semester.
2. **Showcase** the work you have accomplished during the semester.
3. Make a case for what your **engagement grade** should be.

This self-reflection assessment not only gives you the opportunity to **advocate for your own level of engagement in the course**, it gives you the opportunity to **practice valuable skills that will be useful in your future** as you continue to write and create across multiple forms of media.

This reflective assignment is **not due until the last week of the semester**, however, I have a few recommendations for work habits that will make this assignment easier to complete at that time:

Keep a Work Log

Make a note of your class-related experiences including **successes, challenges, and breakthroughs**. Keep track of the moments when you feel you go **'above and beyond'** general class requirements. If you have a record of your work, reflection on the highlights at the end of the semester will be easier. I provide an example below.

Reflect on Your Work as You Go

As you get assignments back, work on revisions, participate in generative work, or find your work impacted by reflection, take a few minutes to **write about what you're learning**. Use **specific examples** and explain how your examples demonstrate your engagement with the multimedia principles we study during the course of the semester.

Include Anything and Everything that seems Relevant

While you shouldn't feel like you need to disclose private or personal information, when it comes to tracking your work and progress in this class, be sure to **take note of the behaviors and work you engage in**, no matter how minor or small they may seem. Anything could be helpful in your assessment of your work by the time the semester is over.

I have provided an example of some of the processing notes I make on my current major project: my dissertation. The following page is a collection of worklog notes from this past summer when I was teaching, writing my dissertation, and conducting case study interviews. You can keep your log differently, this is just one way to do things:

Worklog Example: July 27th - August 2nd 2020

Monday, July 27th

- Summer class prep, week 7, Brightspace Announcements. 25 mins.
- Grading and Feedback. 35 mins.
- Dissertation: 286 words. 20 mins.
- Grading and Feedback round 2. 25 mins.
- Notes: Check status on laptop repairs. Prep for Job Group.

Tuesday, July 28th

- Job Market Zoom meeting. 1hr 30 mins.
- Dissertation: 283 words. 20 mins.
- Grading and Feedback. 40 mins.
- D&D Character design chat. 2 hrs.

Wednesday, July 29th

- Office Hours. 1 hr.
- Grading and Feedback. 1 hr.
- Dissertation writing: 300 words. 20 mins.
- Reading, Kumbier Introduction. 30 mins.
- Feed sourdough starter.

Thursday, July 30th

- Emails and communications. 30 mins.
- Dissertation writing: 264 words. 20 mins.
- Reading, Kumbier Ch1, Ch2. 1 hr 20 mins.
- D&D prep: random encounter tables. 1 hr.

Friday, July 31st

- Dissertation writing, 500 words. 30 mins.
- Fall course prep. 30 mins.
- D&D prep: NPC creation. 1 hr.

Saturday, August 1st

- Organization: August. 30 mins.
- D&D. 8 hrs.

Sunday, August 2nd

- Grading and Feedback. 1 hr.
- Dissertation reading: Kumbier sec 2 introduction. 1 hr.

End of Semester Engagement Assessment: Completion Guidelines

Please use guidelines assigned at the beginning of the semester and the following instructions to complete this assignment:

In order to create your semester engagement assessment, develop a short memo that includes all of the following:

- Reflect on the **specific, results-oriented goals** you set at the beginning of the semester that were based on capacities you wanted to develop, as opposed to a grade you wish to earn. Cite specific examples of how you have met those goals.
- **Reflect on your work log** where you documented time spent, breakthroughs, questions, deliverables, and successes. How did you engage with and use your time in the class? What work habits did you develop?
- Identify at least **three specific examples** of successful work that indicates engagement with the course, and explain the rhetorical choices that made your resulting work successful.
- Give yourself an engagement grade for the semester out of 100 points and summarize your rationale for this grade.
- Create a memo that includes each of the elements listed above.
- Submit the document on Brightspace.

A lot of this work is stuff you've been putting together all semester. Pull from your reading journals, assignment feedback, and engagement with course content to develop your memo. Use specific examples and explain how your examples demonstrate your engagement in the course.

The engagement assessment has **no page or word count requirement**: it should be as long or as short as it needs to be in order to address all of the items listed above. Reach out with questions to clarify information or get early feedback as needed during the course of the semester. I am happy to work with you to ensure you get the most out of the exercise.