I had at least one professor who made me excited about learning

Excitement about learning can be transformative. Gallup found that students who had at least one professor who made them excited about learning were 1.5 times more likely to thrive in life after college. That excitement often starts with how a course is introduced, how students are invited into the material, and how curiosity is supported.

Here, you'll find small, easy-to-implement, faculty-tested approaches to making learning engaging, meaningful, and personally relevant.

Strategy	Details	Resources/Examples
Prior or at the beginning of the semester		
Welcome Message and Welcome Video	Prior to the semester starting, post a welcome message and a brief (1-3-minute) video posted on the course LMS homepage or send to students to introduce the course and set a positive tone for the semester.	Example
Post a photo of instructor on course homepage	Prior to the semester starting, post a photo, especially of the instructor engaged in an activity they enjoy, allows students to view and connect with the instructor as a real person.	Example
Course introduction discussion on course homepage	A the start of the semester, make a discussion post in which you encourage students to introduce themselves and interact with each other. Consider offering bonus/extra credit points to encourage creativity and engagement.	Example

Survey students about themselves	Administer a survey to students at the beginning of the semester to get their input on ways to make them excited about learning.	Example
Class activity for students to get to know each other	Create activities for students to get to know each other at the beginning of class.	Example mixer activity for students to ask each other questions. Example Mix & Mingle Bingo Game, where each participant has a "bingo card" filled with various statements or characteristics. The objective is to find individuals who match these statements and have them sign the corresponding squares.
During the semester		
Begin each class with high energy	Create an active learning atmosphere in the classroom within the first 5 minutes of class.	Example: 5-Minute Starts. This resource provides 15 ideas on how to ignite your class to set the stage for active learning, focus, trust, and shaping the atmosphere of the entire session.
Greet students at the door every class	Greet students at the door so they know that their presence (and absence) matters.	
Take Roll	Do a roll-call to learn students' names and how to pronounce them correctly, so they know you value them as people, and their presence in class.	

“Ice-Breaker” Engagement Activities	Use short activities that get students talking, thinking, and comfortable with each other (even competing with one another)!	Example 1: “Fish-bowl” questions such as "If you could go back in time, what would you change?" or "If you could, what animal would you shrink to miniature size?" or "What would be your ideal superpower?" Example 2: Form small groups of student,s giving 5-minutes to choose their "top 5" concepts/terms from the assigned readings and then report out. Then use the lists as a foundation for class discussion
When utilizing group work, rotate or diversify how students are grouped.	Encourage interaction beyond their usual circles by intentionally mixing group members. Start with low-stakes, warm-up group sharing activities to build comfort and trust.	Use tools like LMS group assignments or templates to rotate members.
Utilize a variety of group work assignments	Using a variety of group work assignments promotes collaboration, accountability, and deeper learning.	Campus Resources Scavenger Hunt – Have groups explore and present on campus resources to increase awareness and engagement. Accountability Partners – Pair students to support each other’s progress and keep one another on track. Scaffolded Real-World Project – Guide students through a semester-long, real-world project to apply their learning

		Think-Pair-Share Activities – Ask students to think individually, discuss their thoughts with a partner, and share with the group. Group Discussion Boards via LMS – Use discussion boards for collaborative analysis, problem-solving, and peer feedback Collaborative Reading & Annotation – Use technology (e.g. Perusall) for group annotations and discussions on assigned readings. VoiceThread Reflections – Allow students to share voice or video reflections to engage with course concepts.
Connect students with real-world experiences and enhance their learning	Utilize institutional resources such as service learning programs and opportunities, the International Center, campus career center, tutoring, counseling, academic support, undergraduate research programs/opportunities, mentoring, etc. Encourage student engagement with global learning, professional development, internships, and job search resources. Invite presenters for guest lectures, provide information on research opportunities and funding, and regularly share updates through course materials, announcements, or the LMS to keep students informed and connected.	

Field trips, tours and/or site visits to bridge course content with real-world applications	Connect course content with real-world contexts and applications. Utilizing tours of campus (i.e., graduate programs, law schools), Alumni building, campus career center, field trips, off-campus visits, student competitions, etc. Plan the tour in advance, schedule it during class with multiple options, document the date in the syllabus and calendar, offer an alternative assignment for absent students, and include a reflective task connecting the tour to course material.	
Facilitate opportunities for students to engage with alumni and employers	Foster professional insight and career readiness by facilitating opportunities for students to engage with alumni and employers *Contact alumni and local employers for support and participation, use university networks, career fairs, and faculty connections to find speakers and mentors, plan the event with clear goals and student engagement, promote through email, social media, and flyers, and consider funding from university, departmental, or organizational sources, as well as grants or shared resources, to cover expenses.*	Examples include: establishing and managing an alumni board, organizing alumni panels for student Q&A and industry insights, hosting employer-led workshops on industry trends and essential skills, pairing students with alumni mentors for career guidance, co-op/internships for credit, college credit for work experience, and facilitating virtual networking events to connect students with alumni and employers from diverse locations, among others.
Continuous Student Outreach	Engage students continuously throughout the semester, including through:	• Canvas Gradebook Messaging: use the "Message Students Who" feature to reach students based on

	• Personalized check-ins via LMS or email to recognize achievements (kudos), support struggling students, and keep students engaged. • Interactive office hours, including flexible formats like virtual Q&A sessions, mid-course check- ins, or themed discussion hours. Schedule a mix of in-person, virtual, and asynchronous office hours to accommodate different student needs and preferences. • Surveys or reflection assignments to assess engagement and make adjustments; Periodic progress report check-ins, midterm grade feedback, etc. can also provide an opportunity to let students know how they are performing.	performance, such as unsubmitted work, low scores, or outstanding achievements. • Conduct a mid-semester survey to gather student feedback, then share the results and discuss which changes can be implemented and which cannot, explaining the reasoning behind each. (The linked survey was designed to incorporate into a "Survey" within the Canvas Learning Management System.)
Positive Feedback and Rewards	Add positive comments or verbally express to students when they submit good work or do well on an exam. Offer opportunities for students to gain bonus points if they go above and beyond on an assignment or do extra work that helps reinforce the material they learn.	
Turn Review Sessions into Competitive Games		Create interactive games for review sessions on the Kahoots platform Powerpoint template for a connect four review game.

		Powerpoint template for a jeopardy review game.
Exit Tickets	At the end of each class, ask students to write down one key takeaway from the class or a question they still have before leaving. (face-to-face)	
Post-Lesson Reflections (PLR)	The post-lesson reflection (PLR) is an opportunity for students to assess what they think they learned in the day's lesson (face-to-face) or the end of the module (online). The brief (~3-question) reflection will allow the instructor to identify aspects of the lesson that students enjoyed, related to, struggled with, and/or found unclear. It also provides an avenue for students to request additional help, instruction, practice, or support before moving on to the next lesson.	
Start/Stop/Continue Surveys	At the end of a lesson, use this structured approach to providing and receiving feedback, focusing on what to continue doing, what to stop doing, and what to start doing.	
At the end of the semester		
Key Resource Document with personalized takeaways from the course	Students can develop a structured document that includes personalized takeaways from a course. This is a tool for learners to consolidate knowledge and reflect on their learning journey. It can contain information such as but not limited to: • Course overview	

	• Key concepts and definitions • Learning resources • Connecting concepts to real-world applications • Set future personal goals	
End-of-Course Awards/Badges	End-of-course awards (face-to-face) or badges (online) can recognize various achievements and contributions, going beyond just academic excellence. Instructors can develop categories throughout the semester. Examples may include: Best Team Player, Most Enthusiastic Leader, Most Humorous, Best Questions, Most Creative, Most Helpful, Student's Choice Award, etc.	
"Token" to take with them	An "end-of-semester token" can be a small gift or item given to each student as a way to recognize and "thank them" for their hard work and efforts throughout the semester. These tokens can be practical items, comforting treats, or even personalized items to help them relax and celebrate their achievements. Examples: For students in a Women's Health course, a small compact mirror was given which had the following on the front: *"Sometimes you forget you're beautiful, so this is your reminder."* For students in a Foundational core course, a key chain with the following inscription	

	was given, *"May you be proud of the work you do, the person you are, and the difference you make."* For students in an intro or first-year experience course, you can give them a die and a notecard highlighting the "The Big 6" experiences and a reminder to be intentional with your time because your college journey is not a roll of the dice.	
Simple Survey	"What are two things you learned as a result of this course?"	
Reflection: a note to future self	An end-of-semester reflection for college students should encourage them to examine their academic journey, identify areas of growth, and plan for future success. The "Note To Future Self" allows students to recollect their experiences, acknowledge both successes and challenges, and identify areas for improvement. This reflection can also help students connect their current academic journey to their long-term goals and aspirations. The flow may go as follows: ● Start with an introduction where students briefly summarize the semester and how it has shaped them. ● Address accomplishments to acknowledge successes ● Offer themself advice by discussing the lessons learned and the advice one would give their	

	younger self, considering their current perspective. • Express hopes and dreams by outlining aspirations for the future and how they can be achieved Close with a positive message with optimism and encourage future self to continue pursuing their goals.	
Keep close ties with students after class has finished.	Let students know that they will be invited back for future courses as former student panelist, guest speaker, student instructor leader, peer mentor, learning assistants, jury panelist, etc. Linkedin could be a useful resource to keep track of former students.	

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