



UNIVERSITY OF  
**TORONTO**  
MISSISSAUGA

# Building Community in- person & online

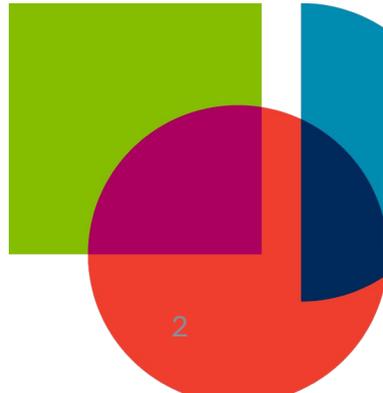
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# Agenda

1. Importance of Community Building
2. Strategies for Building Community: In-person
3. Strategies for Building Community: Online
4. Developing your “Welcome Plan”
5. Q & A





# Importance of Building Community

# What is “community”?

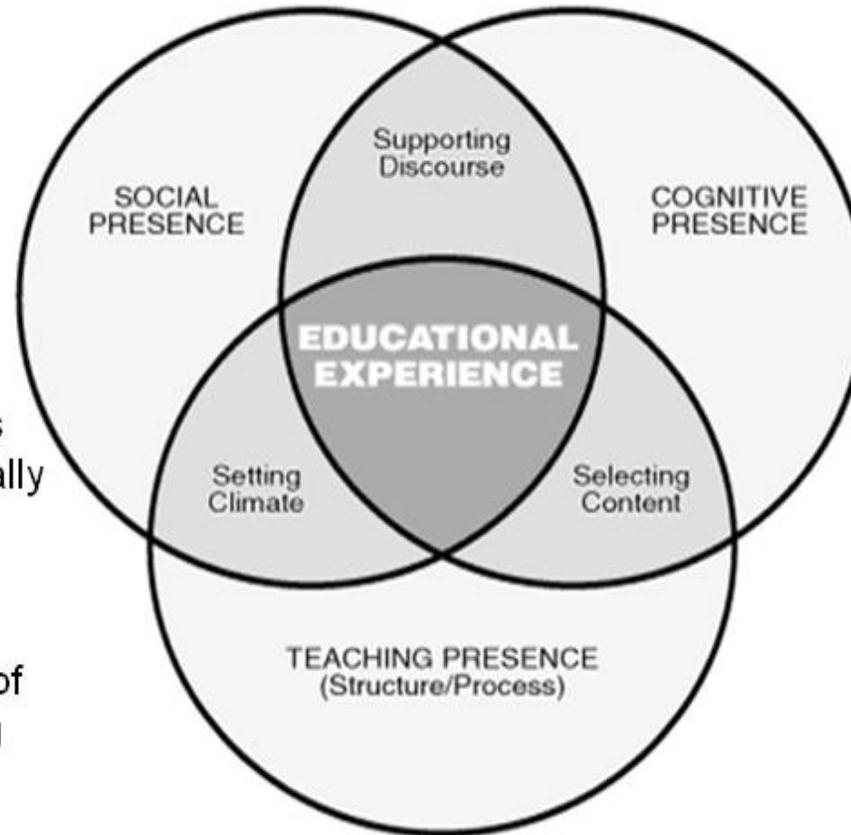
- Community is built on belonging, trust, and shared connection
- Strong communities directly enhance engagement and academic success
- Creating thriving communities requires intentional design and ongoing effort



# Community of Inquiry

## Social Presence

The ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally as 'real' people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used.



## Cognitive Presence

The extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical community of inquiry.

## Communication Medium

## Teaching Presence

The design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes.

Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000)



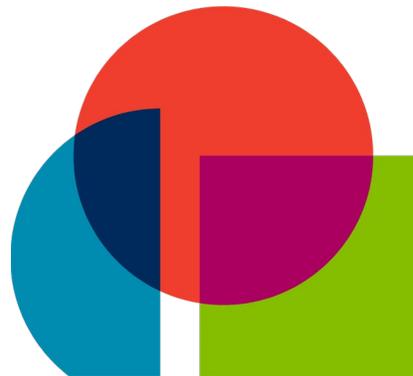
# Linking Community to Student Success

- Community building and belonging directly enhances perceived cognitive learning, student engagement and learning outcomes
- Strong evidence suggests community building supports retention
- Belonging to a community serves as a protective layer that helps students overcome obstacles



# Impact across in-person and online

- Community building principles remain consistent across in-person and online formats
- Online environments require proactive measures to mitigate disengagement
- Intentional design is crucial regardless of modality





# Strategies for Building Community In-person

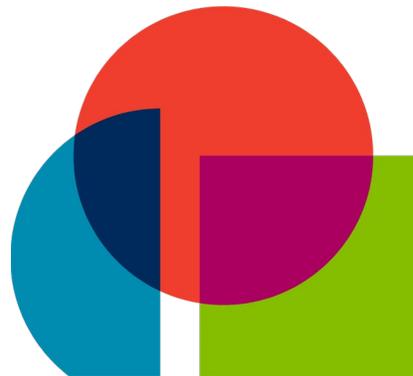
## Setting the Tone: Expectations and Community Agreements

- Establishing positive tone from day one through co-created community agreements
- Focus on shared responsibility and inclusive participation
- Maintain agreements through periodic reinforcement



# Fostering Interaction: Active listening and Rapport Building

- Instructors model active listening and genuine engagement
- Create multiple opportunities for personal connections
- Structure activities that deepen peer connections



# Practical Activities: Social Icebreakers & Metacognitive Activities

## Social Icebreakers

- Use thoughtful icebreakers to reduce anxiety and build connections
- Implement ongoing community-building activities beyond the first day

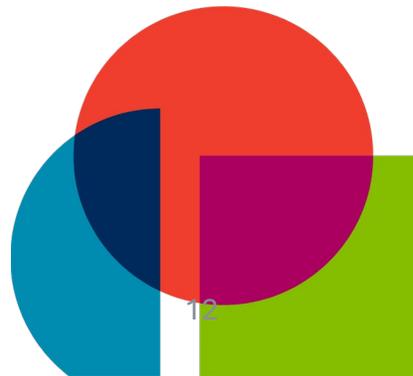
## Metacognitive Activities

- Encourage collaborative metacognitive reflections



# Considerations for Large Courses

- Consider ways to make student interactions more intimate and workload manageable
- Consider alternatives to every student group reporting back
- Consider assigning community building activities in advance, which can be used to facilitate a whole class discussion or in-class polling





# Strategies for Building Community Online

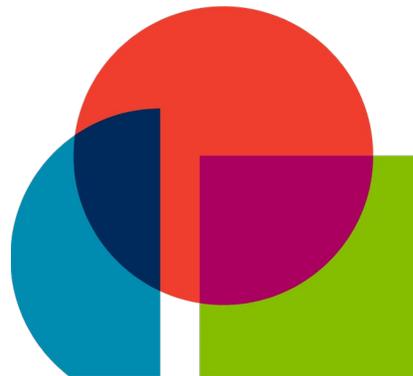
## Instructor Presence: Making yourself visible in the online space

- Add a profile picture (and course card) in Quercus
- Create an introductory video about yourself and the course
- Provide clear expectations of how students can reach you and TAs
  - Make Yourself Available both online and in-person
- Be approachable and friendly



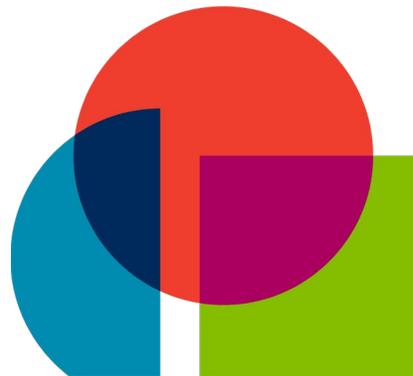
## Provide Clear Learning Outcomes

- Establish and share learning outcomes with students
- Provide clear schedules for the course
- Create weekly announcements or discussions in Quercus
- Provide timely, actionable and substantive feedback



## Clarify Expectations for Students

- Have students collaboratively create guidelines for acceptable behaviour in the online environment
  - Model appropriate behaviour and expectations of participation
- Incorporate early activities to familiarize students with the technology



## Create Verbal and Non-Verbal Opportunities for participation during lectures

- Encourage students to use the "Hand up" feature on zoom, Teams. Create breaks in lecture specifically for questions
- Non-verbal
  - Backchannel (chat) during online lectures or meetings
  - Reactions, voting, or polling



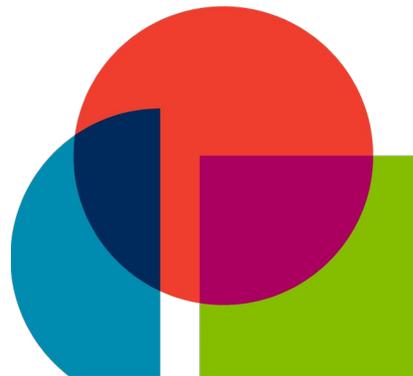
## Keep Accessibility and Inclusiveness in Mind

- Ensure course materials and design are in accessible formats and comply with accessibility standards
- Diversify the course content, use inclusive language
- Incorporate UDL principles



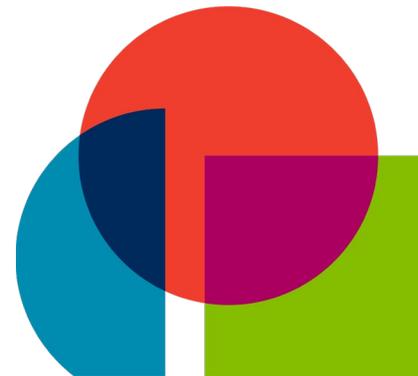
## Provide Opportunities for students to interact with one another

- Facilitate icebreaker activities at the beginning of the course
- Use arrival activities at the beginning of classes to foster engagement
- Encourage students as experts and allow for resource sharing
- Threaded Discussion boards and weekly "respondent" duties



# Embrace Online facilitation of Collaborative Work

- Incorporate team-based, collaborative or problem-solving activities
  - Group work using the Quercus groups function
  - Breakout rooms during online lectures
  - Peer Review assignments
  - Social Annotation
- Embrace the flexibility of the online environment
  - Provide multiple means of participation
  - Incorporate flexible assessment modalities such as papers, podcasts, blog posts



## Encourage Reflection

- Solicit feedback using online survey tools on course as a whole/specific topics or guest lecturers
- Provide time and space to reflect on the learning experience





# Developing your “Welcome Plan”

# My Welcome Plan Essentials (5 minutes)

## Pre-Course Setup (How will you reduce first-day anxiety?)

- Essential information students need: \_\_\_\_\_
- How you'll communicate accessibility/support: \_\_\_\_\_

## First Class Focus (What will help students feel oriented and capable?)

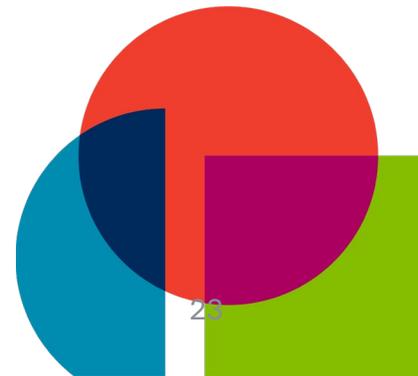
- How you'll help students understand what to expect: \_\_\_\_\_
- One way to show students their perspectives matter: \_\_\_\_\_

## Reducing Barriers (What obstacles can you remove?)

- Information/resources you'll make easily accessible: \_\_\_\_\_
- How you'll signal inclusivity without requiring disclosure: \_\_\_\_\_

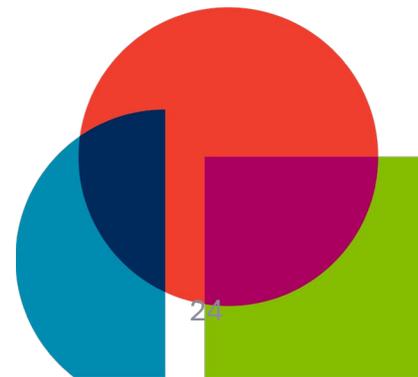
## Authentic Connection (How will you show up as a real person?)

- How you'll share your teaching approach/values: \_\_\_\_\_
- Way to learn about students without putting them on the spot: \_\_\_\_\_



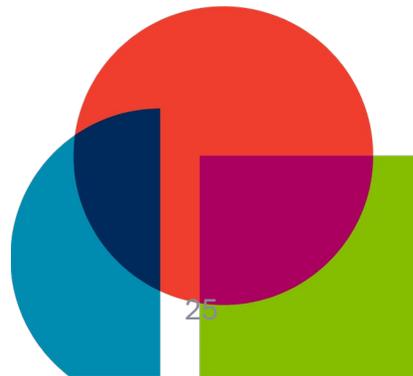
# Share with a Peer (3 minutes)

- Find a partner
- Share ONE strategy from your plan that you're genuinely curious about trying.
- Your partner's job is to help you think it through:
  - What might make it feel more authentic?
  - What could get in the way?
  - What would you want to know if you were the student?"



# Reflection as a group

- How did experiencing these welcome strategies affect you as a learner today?
- What's the first step you'll take to implement your welcome plan?





# Q & A

# Resources

- [Building Community Online](#)
- [Community Agreements](#)
- [Building community in the classroom](#)
- [Building community in large classes](#)

