

EDTC 816 Advanced Building Online Communities

Dr. Laura Zieger

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Assessment 3:

Design of an Online Community

By Emily Vandalovsky

Student Retention for All

<https://sites.google.com/site/studentretentionforall/>

The idea for the online environment that I am interested in creating came out of the need. My hope that this need is shared by others in higher ed community (Fogelson, Brown & Touchberry, 2013). On the grand level, this need is of national proportion, and on the micro level, this need concerns many higher ed institutions. This need is to promote student retention. While the problem of preventing students from fleeing colleges and, particularly community colleges, is not new, it has become clear that new approaches are needed for solving it (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015).

With the institutional-level retention trends being studied and reviewed using Big Data learning analytics models, the role of individual faculty and staff members remains essential, yet not well defined in cultivating this process. Based on data from the EAB research, some of the best practices showcasing the increase of student retention at the community colleges are faculty-driven, but there are very few existing mechanisms for sharing or promoting those practices (Rehel, 2018).

The goal of the online community Student Retention for All located at <https://sites.google.com/site/studentretentionforall/> is to establish a connected and informative environment for promoting, sharing and collaborating on best practices of student retention on multiple levels. By recognizing and cultivating initiatives across constituencies, online community Student Retention for All will become a learning community, which will allow peripheral, initially passive participants to engage and move towards more active participation and praction (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

By creating the online community, I seek to reach out to individuals interested in improving retention rates in their colleges. Types of audiences may include students, academic advisors, researchers, higher ed staff members, administrators or just anyone genuinely interested

in the topic (Fogelson, Brown & Touchberry, 2013). With the overarching goal to retain more students in college classes, this online community may start by focusing on the faculty-driven and analytics-driven retention ideas. It will provide access to recent publications on the topic and will establish a friendly environment for communicating and collaborating. By designing the online community on classroom retention, I pursue to fulfill the following purposes: (1) help faculty understand their role in the overall process; (2) provide communication channels for exchanging ideas and sharing best practices; (3) encourage connection with learning analytics and ways of adapting it to the multiple levels; (4) promote collaboration on the development of new topics related to student retention; (5) grow a list of resources devoted to research and best practices in retention approaches.

Driven by the above-listed purposes, this community is designed as a support type but may over time grow some elements of insight community. Typical for support communities, it will offer its participants (practitioners) the opportunity to share their practices and collaborate on strengths and challenges (Wenger, White & Smith, 2012; Claveria, 2019).

The website <https://sites.google.com/site/studentretentionforall/> for Student Retention for All includes a combination of informative and interactive components. Such wide-spread design will account for inclusiveness of environment and open participation for all (Kraut & Resnick, 2016). While “free browsing” of the informative component may serve as a hook, signing up for the interactive part of the community with an ability to post and provide comments is a design decision. It is aimed at strengthening the relationship within the group and contributing to the membership growth (Kraut & Resnick, 2016).

Since this community is created out of the need to fulfill the existing gap, it will rely on need-based commitment. Such a level of commitment is continuous and based on the incentives

associated with group membership. It pays off to be a member of such a group. The hope is that the need-based committed person will continue with their membership because they are better off this way (Kraut & Resnick, 2016). It is also possible for some members to start under normative commitment, which may later grow into need-based. Under the normative commitment, members may experience obligatory motivation to be a part of the group just because it feels right (Kraut & Resnick, 2016).

As the name suggests, Student Retention for All is designed to welcome participation and collaboration. Individuals may leave comments on several public pages and sign-up using for further participation. Specially designed Google Form is used for the sign-up process. The Forum / Sign-up page welcomes visitors with a friendly message and encourages their participation. A simple set of participatory guidelines is posted for reference on the same page. All these design elements contribute to engaging newcomers and strengthening their commitment (Kraut & Resnick, 2016).

The purpose of Student Retention for All online community is similar to the one of the Student Success Analytics (SSA) Practitioners Community Group (CG) by EDUCAUSE (EDUCAUSE, 2019). Both communities provide a professional forum for individuals interested in implementing new initiatives to promote student success and focus on collaboration and exchange. While SSA Practitioners CG focuses on learning analytics, Student Retention for All, welcomes pluralism of perspectives on student retention, from faculty to staff to other interested parties. Using learning analytics is one of the contributing factors to increasing student retention.

The major difference between SSA Practitioners CG and Student Retention for All is the scope of magnitude. Housed and supported by EDUCAUSE, SSA Practitioners CG is centrally hosted and managed website with a professional level of support (EDUCAUSE, 2019). It is a

community of the national level with connections to partnering organizations, professional conferences, and sponsored research. My version of the online community includes fundamental tools for providing feedback and encouraging participation but may lack additional resources of a grand-level community, such as Slack communication channel.

I believe that designing Student Retention for All helped me reflect on meeting the objectives of this course. I can recognize the purposes of the online communities and depict their differences. I distinguish between the communities of practice and the practices of communities. I am now familiar with some tools used to design online communities and practiced using them. I value the importance of rules and guidelines in community management. Overall, my experience is this course contributed to shifting the mentality of the online communities in general, and their use in education, in particular.

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