Motivation

Student motivation is a key ingredient in a successful course. Two major components of motivation, as identified by Ambrose et al., are

I. The **expectations** that students bring to the classroom, and
II. The **value** that students place on the course material and tasks.

Ways to address students' expectations:

1. **Set attainable goals.** Students are best motivated when they feel optimally challenged – when the course and assignments are challenging, but students feel that they can be successful with some effort.
2. **Let students know your expectations.** Communicate your course goals, and how students can achieve those goals. Align instruction and assessment with those course goals – so that students can practice, and see whether they are achieving those goals. This helps to establish realistic expectations. The use of grading rubrics can help make your expectations of student performance on a task very explicit.
3. **Give students feedback.** Without feedback on their performance, students may lose sight of their progress towards a goal. Feedback is most effective when it is timely (i.e., without a long time delay), targeted (i.e., focused on a specific student performance on a specific task), and constructive (i.e., focusing on strengths and future action as well as weaknesses).
4. **Give students a sense of control and self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy is a very important ingredient to student motivation. Provide students with opportunities to feel successful early in the course. Be sure that your grading standards are seen as fair across students and over time. Provide students some flexibility and choice (for example, on assignment topics). Giving feedback on student progress towards well-articulated course and assignment goals can also enhance students' sense of efficacy and control. Also, help students focus on things that they can control (such as study habits), rather than personal characteristics (such as intelligence). **Avoid** threats and framing your course as competition among students, as these are typically demotivating.

Ways to address students' value of the material:

1. **Highlight the relevance of material and tasks.** Students are motivated to engage with material that relates to their personal interests, everyday lives, and academic or professional paths. Show students how these skills and ideas will relate to future courses and careers. Create assignments that are authentic and relevant; ensure that homework problems can pass the “Why should anyone care about the answer to this problem?” test.
2. **Get students to reflect on what they have learned.** *E.g.*, ask students to write a short paragraph on what they learned from a class or an assignment, and how it applies to an interesting or important problem.
3. **Be enthusiastic.** Your own passion and enthusiasm can be a powerful motivator for students.

*For more information about how to effectively use motivation in your teaching strategies, see Chapter 3 of How Learning Works (Ambrose et al.), and CWSEI 2-pager: Motivating Learning at www.cwsei.ubc.ca/resources/instructor_guidance.htm.*