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PAYING ATTENTION TO THE STUDENTS' MENTAL WELLBEING IN ONLINE LEARNING

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INTRODUCTION

This document provides educators with guidance on:

- o the warnings signs that a student is “struggling” mentally during an online course
- o how they can support these students
- o additional references for further research on the topic

This information applies to all types of online teaching: synchronous, asynchronous or hybrid

1. Recommendations from the IDEA Quality Assurance Framework

Course design and preparation:

- Students are informed on the psychological support that they can expect from the institution/the instructor or the pedagogical team or from other students, and how to take advantage of it

Course delivery

- Monitoring mechanisms are in place to allow early identification of difficulties among students and avoid drop out
- Measures are taken to avoid isolation of students and/or ensuring diversity in the groups



2. Examples and recommendations

2.a. Students are informed on the psychological support that they can expect

Students play an important part in managing their mental wellbeing as well. An educator must inform the students that they can always seek support from their professor or ask support directly from the university mental health support specialists in case they:

- feel isolated and lacking social interaction
- are unable to get motivated and enjoy their student life
- sense of depressed, anxious, or stressed
- become overwhelmed and exhausted by digital learning
- experience personal and family events

2.b. Monitoring mechanisms are in place to allow early identification of difficulties among students and avoid drop out

1. In between and during the online courses, there are some signs that can warn an educator that a student might be “struggling, such as:

- frequently not showing up to classes
- repeated delays in submitting assignments and coursework
- always having the camera turned off
- not reacting (facially / reactions/ emojis/ chat) during online classes
- lack of active participation in breakout rooms and groupwork

2. How can an educator ensure that he/she detects these signs on time?

- o He/she should have direct communication channels with the students, that allow to observe the emergence of the warning signs. These channels can include:
 - videoconferencing tools during group and 1-to-1 meetings
 - emails
 - messaging using the university platforms/forums

3. There should also be coordination between the lecturers and the support and counselling services, to help detect at-risk cases and provide guidance timely. Such coordination can happen through:

- o weekly/ monthly department meetups
- o ad-hoc exchanges as and when required

2.c. Measures are taken to avoid isolation of students and/or ensuring diversity in the groups

The lecturer can resort to several tools and strategies to ensure the inclusion and engagement of all students, such as:

- giving equal time and attention, as much as possible, to all students
- overseeing the group activities and discussions, ensuring that all group members are actively involved
- ensuring diversity within the groups, as much as possible
- following-up directly with students that drop out frequently or miss successive sessions
- assigning a significant part of the overall course grade to group assignments and encourage interaction among peers
- factor in time for group studies in the course preparation and encourage this behaviour among your students



3. Additional material

- An article which discusses the benefits and challenges of online examinations, and best practices to alleviate students stress when taking them: Jones, E., Priestley, M., Brewster, L., Wilbraham, S. J., Hughes, G., & Spanner, L. (2021). Student wellbeing and assessment in higher education: the balancing act. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 46(3), 438-450
- An article that discusses implications of online learning on students' mental wellbeing, especially among disadvantaged groups: Alibudbud, R. (2021). On online learning and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic: Perspectives from the Philippines. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, 66, 102867.



Other fiches created by the IDEA project offer more practical examples of engaging activities in online teaching that can help prevent students' drop-out and support their mental well-being. Please have a look at the fiches:

- o Tools to support the delivery of an online course
- o Ice Breakers in online courses
- o Didactics in online courses: student-centred learning

