

Classroom Community in Online Courses:

An Investigation of how Community
Develops in Accelerated Online Courses

Patrick R. Lowenthal
Department of Educational Technology

Jesús Trespacios
Department of Educational Technology



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

Abstract

Community is a buzzword in education. Community takes on even more importance for online educators because online students typically do not have a chance to meet and learn in the same place and time, which research suggests in turn leads to feelings of isolation and loneliness and high attrition rates. Confronted with this reality, online educators regularly experiment with ways to create community online--in part to battle feelings of isolation and loneliness but also to align with prevailing theories of learning (e.g., social constructivism) as well to mimic the perceived ideal face-to-face learning experience. However, little is known about how community is developed in accelerated online courses and the role it plays with student satisfaction. Given this, **we investigated how community is developed in accelerated online courses (e.g., 7 week courses) compared to traditional length online courses (e.g., 15 courses)**. In this session, we will present the results of our mixed methods inquiry. We will focus on student perceptions of classroom community as well as instructional design decisions the instructors made to develop community in these fully online courses. We will conclude the session by discussing with the audience the implications our research has on designing innovative learning environments for student success.

The Problem



- Students report feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Higher dropout rate in online courses

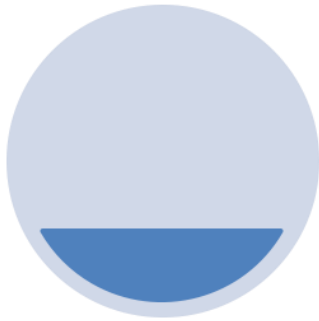
Possible Solution

**Social
Presence**

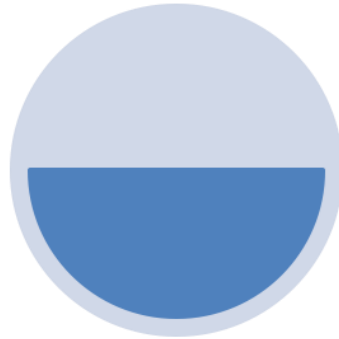
+

**Classroom
Community**

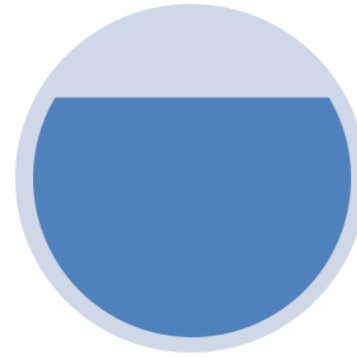
Social Presence Isn't Community



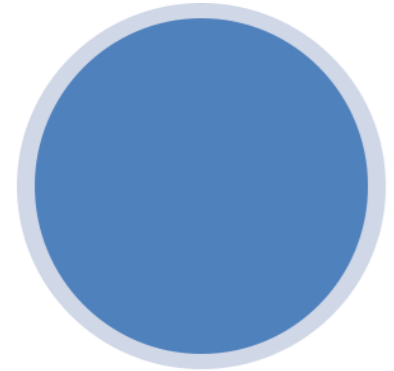
Interaction



Social
Presence



Collaboration

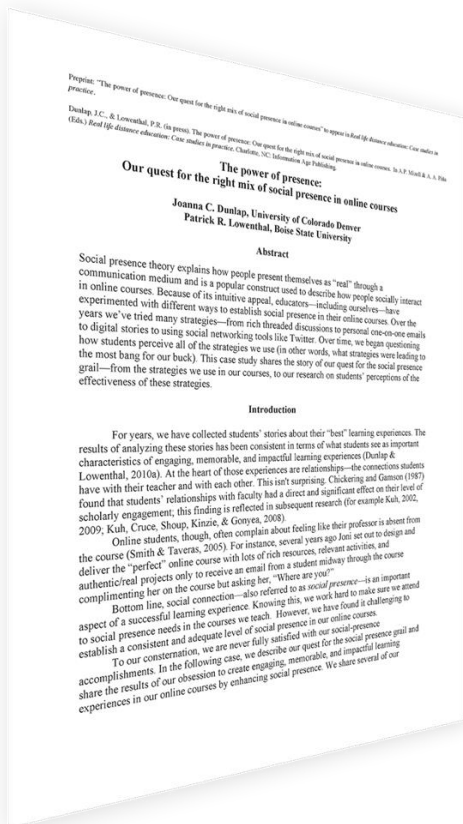


Classroom
Community

Social Presence

“Social presence theory explains how people present themselves as ‘real’ through a communication medium and is a popular construct used to describe how people socially interact in online courses.”

Dunlap & Lowenthal



Why Social Presence?



Satisfaction



Community



Learning

How to Social Presence?

Student Social Presence Strategies

Introductions



Discussions



Social Media



Collaboration



Music



Instructor Social Presence Strategies

Introductions



Orientations
& Feedback



5-minute



Personal



Announcements



Classroom Community

“Classroom community is a specific type of community based on the following characteristics:

(a) the setting is the world of education;

(b) the primary purpose is learning; and

(c) the community is based on a fixed organizational tenure, that is, a set length of the course or program in which members are enrolled ...

The four components of classroom community as theorized by Rovai and Lucking (2000) are spirit, trust, interaction, and learning” (Rovai, 2001)

Why Classroom Community?

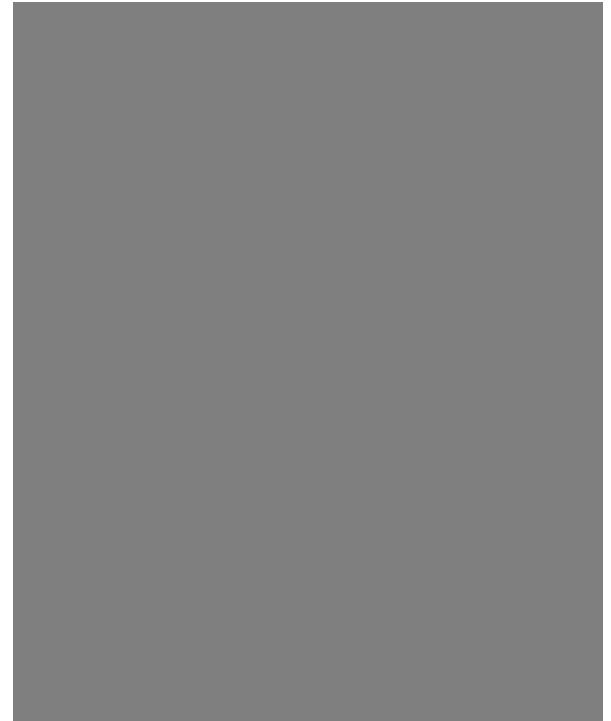
Provides a social context for learning

Students feel more connected within a community

Bridge between school & work environments

Issue of Time

- Establishing and developing social presence and, in turn, classroom community takes time.
- Increasing universities are offering accelerated online courses.



Purpose of Study

Investigate how community is developed in accelerated online courses (e.g., 7 week courses) compared to traditional length online courses (e.g., 15 courses)



Methodology

Sample: Identified 6 courses taught by same instructor in summer term (7 weeks) and fall term (15 weeks) by the same instructor.

Surveyed Students: Using Rovai's Classroom Community Scale (n=X total participants)

Results

Sense of Classroom Community Summer (7wk) vs. Fall
(15wk)

| | Summer Average n=86 | Fall Average n=102 | Total Average n=188 |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Sense of Classroom Community | 56.15 | 53.68 | 54.86 |
| Connectedness Subscale | 25.69 | 23.25 | 24.42 |
| Learning Subscale | 30.46 | 30.43 | 30.44 |

Results

Comparison of Course by Course Summer (7wk) vs. Fall (15wk)

| | Summer | | | | Fall | | | |
|-----|----------|-------|---------------|----------|----------|-------|---------------|----------|
| | <i>n</i> | CC | Connectendess | Learning | <i>n</i> | CC | Connectendess | Learning |
| 501 | 19 | 54.74 | 25.42 | 29.32 | 18 | 47.61 | 20.72 | 26.89 |
| 502 | 12 | 60.33 | 27.17 | 33.17 | 32 | 57.47 | 23.44 | 34.03 |
| 503 | 7 | 53.14 | 24 | 29.14 | 8 | 49.38 | 23.13 | 26.25 |
| 504 | 10 | 52 | 23.3 | 28.7 | 4 | 50.75 | 21.75 | 29 |
| 505 | 19 | 57.68 | 26.74 | 30.95 | 22 | 60.18 | 27.41 | 32.77 |
| 541 | 19 | 52.53 | 23.42 | 29.11 | 18 | 47.61 | 20.72 | 26.89 |

Stay Connected

web: patricklowenthal.com

email:

patricklowenthal@boisestate.edu

twitter: [plowenthal](https://twitter.com/plowenthal)



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY