

Resource Guide

Giving Students Agency

Feeling a sense of agency, or “the intention and capability to take action with respect to one’s learning,” can be an empowering experience for students (Clarke et al., 2016, p. 30). However, many instructors find it challenging to design courses that give students multiple opportunities to act in this way. When developing a course, consider how its structural components (e.g., policies, assignments, deadlines, expectations, etc.) might work to foster a greater sense of agency for your students. Here are three ideas to get you started.

- **Give students options.** Create opportunities for students to make choices about their learning throughout the semester. For example, if you assign ten reading response papers with one due at the beginning of each week, ask students to only turn in eight of those papers for an actual grade.
- **Involve students in creating rubrics.** Create opportunities for students to help identify and define criteria for their assessment. One way to do this is to involve students in creating rubrics for course activities, assignments, or projects. By helping develop their own assessment tools, students may have a greater understanding of the assignment and feel more empowered to complete it.
- **Ask students for feedback.** Create multiple opportunities for students to give feedback about their learning throughout the course. Vanderbilt University’s [Center for Teaching](#) offers several strategies for gathering this type of feedback from your students (e.g., in-class, online, and group feedback). You can also contact the Reinert Center to request a [Small Group Information Feedback](#) (SGIF) session, a short focus group with students initiated at the request of an instructor and intended to collect anonymous feedback that can be acted upon in the current semester.

Resources

Clarke, S. N., Howley, I., Resnick, L., & Rosé, C. P. (2016). Student agency to participate in dialogic science discussions. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 10, 27-39.

Hyslop-Margison, E. J. (2004). Technology, human agency and Dewey’s constructivism: Opening democratic spaces in virtual classrooms. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology*, 20, 137-148.

Lindgren, R., & McDaniel, R. (2012). Transforming online learning through narrative and student agency. *Educational Technology & Society*, 15, 344-355.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center at cttl@slu.edu.