There are a range of ways students interact with their instructors both within and outside the classroom. Such interactions can influence students’ orientation to and investment in their university experience and shape future learning. Good interactions offer great value to both students and instructors.

You can learn more about U of T student and faculty interaction on our Faculty Profiles page.

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Both student and faculty at the U of T experience challenges to good interactions.

**For students:**
- Some classes are large
- Attending office hours can be intimidating
- It’s hard to know the right questions to ask and how to approach instructors
- It’s difficult to navigate the university and find supports

**For faculty:**
- It’s challenging to deal with a range of classes and many students
- It’s hard to find enough time to meet or respond to individual inquiries
- Social media can be intimidating
- Students have diverse interests and needs
- However, focusing on interactions between students and faculty can create opportunities for development.

**For students:**
- Enhancing opportunities for learning
- Seeing faculty as mentors and guides for learning
- Motivating current learning

**For faculty:**
- Improving capacity for mentorship

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**CENTRE FOR TEACHING SUPPORT & INNOVATION (CTSI)**

**ROBARTS LIBRARY, 130 ST. GEORGE STREET, 4TH FLOOR, TORONTO, ON M5S 3H1**

(416) 946-3139, CTSI.TEACHING@UTORONTO.CA, HTTP://TEACHING.UTORONTO.CA
- Enhancing awareness of students’ needs
- Inspiring students as learners

**FINDING STRATEGIES FOR YOUR CLASS**
When determining what strategies to begin with, consider the areas of your teaching you would most like to enhance, for example:

- Do you feel your current strategies allow you to connect with as many students as possible?
- Do you feel you understand how well your students are progressing with the assigned material?
- Have the assignments and tests been sufficient to inform you about your students’ learning?
- Are there potential meeting places outside of lectures?
- Are you interested in trying new strategies related to technology?

**EFFECTIVE PRACTICES IN SUPPORT OF STUDENT-FACULTY INTERACTION**

**Strategies that incorporate technology:**

- Post a weekly “digest” or “FAQ” of responses to common student questions (weekly or at particular times of year)
- Post help session videos online for common help topics and FAQs
- Use Twitter or texting during lectures to post ideas and pose questions (or, designate certain periods of class, break, or pre-class time when you can receive questions)
- Use clickers in large classes to ask questions and generate feedback from the instructor

**In-class strategies:**

- Share relevant personal or research anecdotes during lecture as a way of personalizing the topic
- Use tented namecards in class (with first names only) to help get to know students’ names
- Facilitate small group reflection sessions in class periodically, where the faculty member responds/adds to what is shared based on their own experience
- Spread teaching team members (TAs, team faculty) throughout the classroom to engage with students during group discussion/lecture

**Strategies for office hours & meetings:**

- Use faculty-led Q&A sessions for related courses, particularly large grouped core courses
- Hold group office hours, drop-in or Q&A sessions in bookable library space or classroom, allowing students to ask questions while working on assignments, and interact informally
- Supplement office hours in an informal setting such as a student “home” space, or cafeteria
- Use a small amount of in-class time to respond to general assignment concerns
- Allocate time after lectures to answer questions from students who linger
- Arrange early to class to answer questions and gather informal feedback

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Strategies for assignments and course design:

- Create a small “get to know you” assignment early in the course, so students can familiarize themselves with the course website, syllabus, and your expectations about communication
- Assign small group projects and consult with each group over the term
- Schedule field trips as part of an assignment, to nearby locations or further abroad if funding and course size allow
- Include simulations or hands-on activities to break down hierarchical relationship between student and teacher

Networking and social interactions:

- Invite students to serve on department committees, governance and special interest groups
- Initiate regular meetings between Chair/Dean/senior faculty and student council groups
- Host a “Lunch and Learn” series in which faculty lecture on current research or a relevant topic
- Co-host an event with the students in your course, where they play a role in coordinating logistics, finding speakers, doing introductions.
- Evening social events such as debates, movie screenings, public lectures
- Work with student groups to involve faculty in student events (Pub Nites, Fundraisers, Club events, Formals)

For assistance in integrating any of these strategies into your teaching, or to discuss or share additional approaches, please book a consultation with CTSI.