

Social presence in online learning

May 11, 2020



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS

Learning goals

- Define social presence in online learning
- Explore the criticality of managing perceived social presence
- Describe strategies for establishing and sustaining social presence online
- (Very quickly) identify ways to build faculty social media presence

Social presence: theory and practice

When “being there” is virtualized



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS

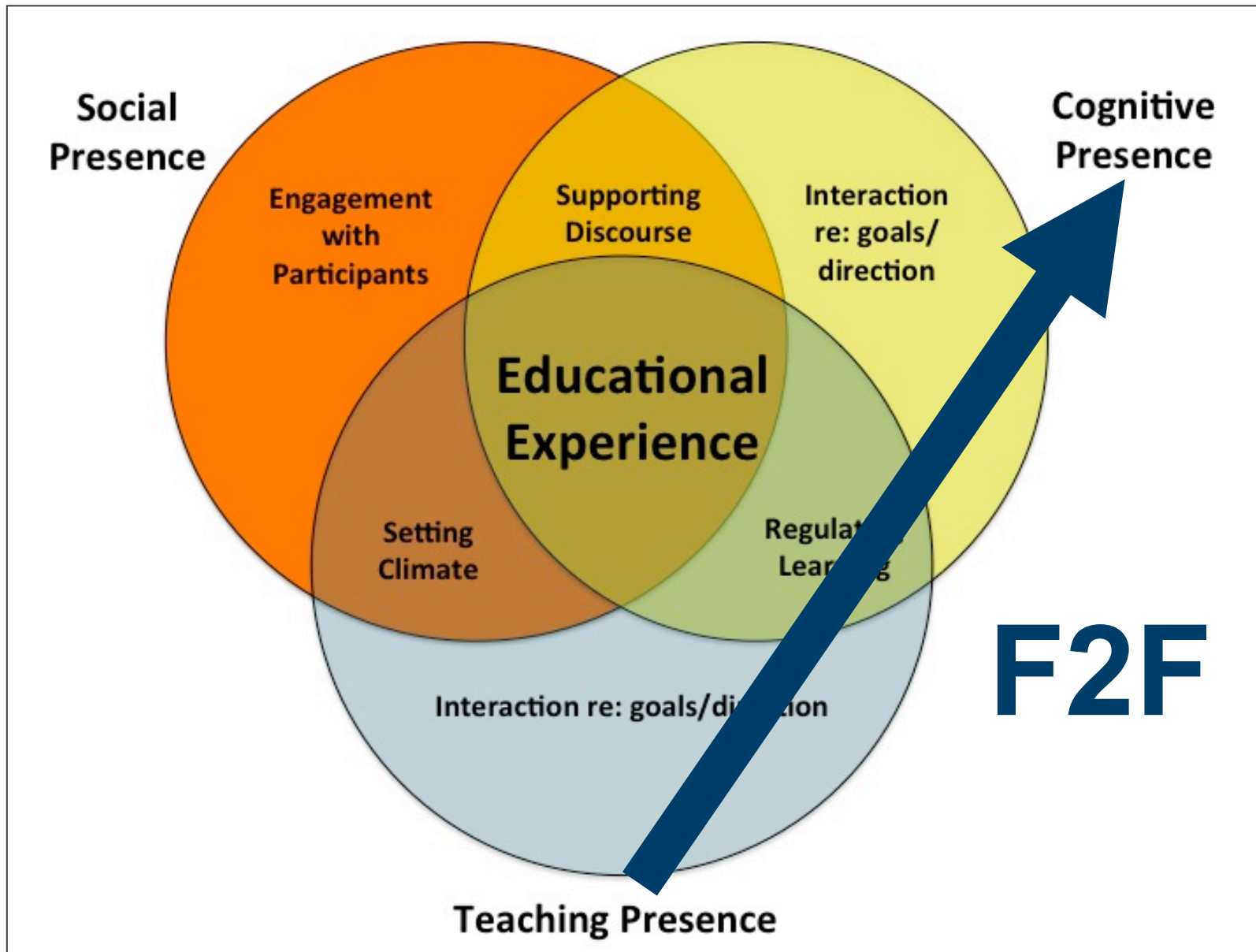
What is social presence? A little learning theory

“Social presence involves a level of **connectedness among instructors and students that determines how motivated participants are** to take an active role in their own and their peers' meaning-making processes....

[L]earning is the social negotiation of meaning that involves **reification** (making meaning from abstract information) and **participation** (active involvement in the social process).”

-[Educause](#)

**Social presence maximizes reification
and participation**

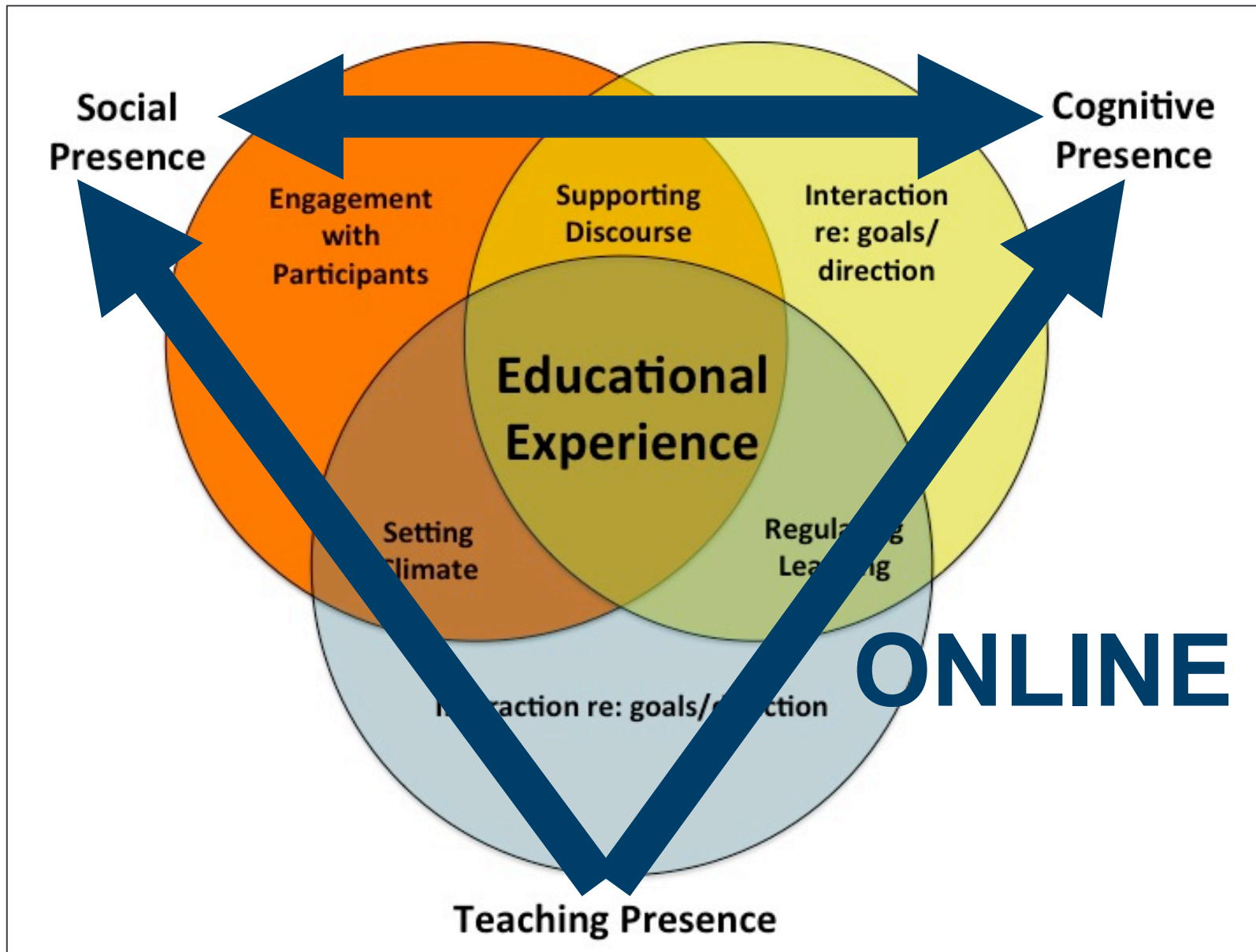


A gestalt shift for most faculty

- Physical and social presence experienced as a simultaneous (for most)
- Social presence assumed to be a byproduct of embodied presence

F2F





A gestalt shift for most faculty

- Social presence is not a given in online learning
- Building and maintaining social presence will not come naturally to many faculty



The imperative of social engagement

- Without social engagement, “learners typically experience isolation and alienation in online learning environments.”

-Wei, Chen and Kinshuk



<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/out-the-ooze/201611/the-perils-social-isolation>

The imperative of social engagement

- Without social engagement, “learners typically experience isolation and alienation in online learning environments.”
- Effective online learning requires intentional facilitation of “perceived social presence.”

-Wei, Chen and Kinshuk

- “Engagement is not a set of activities; it’s a state of mind.”

-Anna Seferian



<https://innovagility.com/2018/10/10/remote-teams-and-virtual-facilitation/>

Building digital presence and engagement



CAUTION

- Don't try this at home all at once
- Different tips, tricks and techniques for various contexts
- Start small
- Be authentic

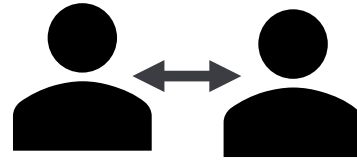
Design with Assessment in Mind

“If social connectedness is a goal in any learning experience, that goal must be connected with course outcomes, activities, and assessments.”

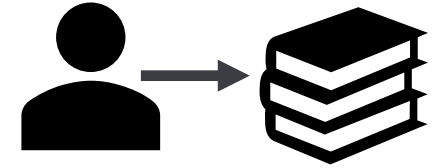
“The Power of Social
Presence for Learning”

- Start with backwards design
- Scaffold learning – breaking down learning into manageable steps
- Provide formative feedback as students progress toward summative assessments
- Give students the opportunity authentically demonstrate what they know and can do

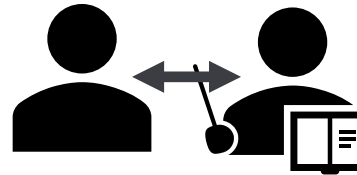
Design with four types of interaction in mind



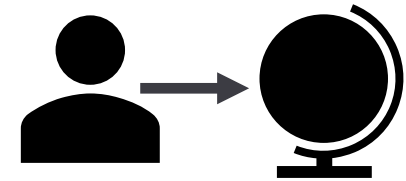
**Student to
Student**



**Student to
content**



**Student to
instructor/
Instructor to
Student**



**Student to
world**

Design with learning science in mind

Provide multiple means of **Engagement** →

Affective Networks
The "WHY" of learning



- Tap into students' interests/feedback
- Survey students and incorporate responses into class
- Have students work together to set expectations or create self-evaluations

Provide multiple means of **Representation** →

Recognition Networks
The "WHAT" of learning



- Provide multiple ways of acquiring information and knowledge on the same topic
- Readings, videos, audio, screencasts, narrated decks
- Provide support choice for students (pick 3 of 5)

Provide multiple means of **Action & Expression** →

Strategic Networks
The "HOW" of learning



- Provide students with multiple ways to demonstrate learning
- Faculty, students co-construct deliverables and process of completion

Tactical tips, tricks and techniques

Don't forget the basics

Provide a space for introductions and replies, from students and faculty at the start of the course - consider multimedia options (voice, video, discussion threads) ... use PADLET-style bulletin boards for intros. See [here](#) for more ideas.

Multidimensional presence

Communicate with students across multiple channels (discussions, announcements, rubrics, voice comments, videos, narrated presentations), engage students as a whole, in groups, individually, and not just on an exception basis

Be available

Have 1:1 conversations with each student or small groups of students in first week; host multiple zoom office hours for open-house style assistance, conversation, community building etc. – rotate floating availability

Tactical tips, tricks and techniques

Unsucking discussions Pt. 1

Make discussions about application, not regurgitation: orient prompts around Bloom's Higher Ordered Thinking Skills (HOTS) – analyze, evaluate, synthesize

Unsucking discussions Pt. 2

Develop and share a process for responding to students in discussions – i.e. PQP: **Praise** something you liked, **Question** (professionally) something about others' ideas, suggest (politely) ways for others to **Polish** ideas

Students hate groupwork

Wait till week 2-3 to set up groups so that you have time to learn more about learning habits and behaviors and can optimize group composition

["Strategies and Principles to Development Cognitive Presence in Online Discussions"](https://coi.athabasca.ca/publications/cognitive-presence/)

<https://coi.athabasca.ca/publications/cognitive-presence/>

Tactical tips, tricks and techniques

Class Café ...

Create a classroom space for faculty to share real-world, real-time articles, events, news related to course content, solidifying theory-to-practice continuum ... Or post a socially engaging survey/quiz (outside LMS) each week:

<https://quizizz.com/>

Be mindful of screen time

Watching long, recorded lectures, repeatedly reading long documents, participating in extended video-enabled sessions is straining – cognitively, psychologically, emotionally; provide chance for high- and low-tech activities (i.e. pen and paper reflection)

A note on vulnerability

Many of the things often considered out of scope for academic settings are now inextricably bound to teaching – cats will bomb the screen, sickness and death are with us, people need to know that faculty are human too ...

Managing professional personae online

A crash course



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS

The basics of social media presence

- Know your institution's policies
- LinkedIn and Twitter are most common professional platforms
- Create a manageable social media presence
- Decide who you want to be (expert, commentator, aggregator, etc.)
- Remember TAP: thesis, audience, purpose, even in tweets
 - What is your point, who do you want to speak to, and why are you doing this?
 - LinkedIn = other professionals, Twitter = the world, Instagram/TikTok = students
 - Expertise may drive choice of platform (YouTube, Instagram, etc.)
- Additional ideas to consider

Public engagement and writing

- Topicality and timeliness are the coin of the realm
- Subscribe and read daily newsletters
 - IHE, Chron, Politico education report, NYT learning network, Dive, AAC&U, etc.
- Identify preferred genre
 - Letter to the editor (usually ~150 words, can be longer online)
 - Op-ed (usually ~500 words, written for educated non-specialist)
 - Comments posts (resist the undertow of snark and crankiness)
 - Blogs and magazines (usually associated with professional organizations)
 - LinkedIn Publishing (reach other professionals quickly)
 - Twitter (it's not as easy as it looks)

Students and public engagement

- Consider ways to make public audiences more than theoretical for students
 - Consider how genres from previous slide work as learning activities
- Co-present and co-author with students as appropriate
 - Know institutional policies and procedures
- Identify student work that can become learning resources
- Encourage students to engage in professional orgs, society's platforms
- Nota Bene: Policies and rules for student engagement apply on social media

Managing social-media conflict

- Learn how to manage accounts (blocks, hides, mutes, etc.)
- When something you say generates conflict/controversy
 - If you've screwed up, apologize
 - Clarify honestly asap (but breath first)
 - Be authentic and transparent
 - Encourage direct interaction
 - Don't jump platforms
 - Address, don't delete, comments
 - Know when to hold or fold 'em
- Distinguish between trolls and readers with legit points that sting'
 - And be the latter not the former when responding to others' posts
- Know what to do when conflicts cross the line
 - Resources and recommendations [here](#) and [here](#)

It's a crowdsourced, hive-minded world

Special thanks to ...

- Nancy O'Neill
- Chad Whistle
- Rand Hansen
- Rebecca Foss
- Anna Seferian

Discussion

douglas.harrison@umgc.edu | [LinkedIn](#)



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS