

# REDUCING SOCIAL ISOLATION AND ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT BY FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

Science and maths educators of off campus students often struggle to find the most effective means to demonstrate complex concepts in the same scaffolded manner as achieved in face to face interactions. Our research indicates applying a 'monocle-like' focus on content, particularly in first year classes, may be a contributing factor to high attrition and high failure rates. Drawing upon a 5 year study of a large first year distance education class, and in-depth analysis of the literature, we identify the impact social isolation has on first year students and how it can affect engagement with content, peers and teaching staff. We also identify falsehoods in the assumption that today's students are 'net savvy' or technologically literate to the point of being able to identify and address their interaction needs at least as well within an education space as they may do in social networking spaces. More critically, for conference participants we will present several strategies developed over 5 years of practical reflection and process development that reduced students' perceived social isolation and will provide ample time for the sharing of strategies, practices and experiences to explore possible future research linkages.

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