Building Community in Online, Blended, and Face-to-Face Environments

A fantastic way to enrich the classroom experience.... but what, why, who, and how?

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About our course
Title: World Regions (Geography 1014)
Students: 2750
(of diverse origins, academic levels, and knowledge levels)
Live Lecture: Monday 7pm-9:45pm
International Film nights on Tuesday/Wednesday at 7pm

Q: With SO many students, don’t individuals just get lost in the crowd? How can we prevent that?
A: Build a learning community!

But WHAT the heck is that?
A learning community is a group of people who share common emotions, values or beliefs, are actively engaged in learning together from each other, and by habituation.

Factors that define a sense of community:
1) membership/sense of belonging
2) influence on each other
3) fulfillment of individuals needs
4) shared events and emotional connections.

So, the participants of learning community must feel some sense of loyalty and belonging to the group that drive their desire to keep working and helping others, in an active (not just a reactive) way...which fulfills many of the needs of the participants as they exchange information, express personal opinions, and create shared experiences, some with powerful emotional attachments.
Sounds kind of sappy to me....

...I mean, they are coming to class to see me, the expert, not other students.

So why bother building a community?
- Helps keep students engaged, interested, and active before/during/after class
  A college course is a holistic learning experience for an entire semester, not just during the live class session... and you cannot be there personally all the other hours of the week.

- Students who feel they are a part of a community help each other and inform each other much more.

- Perhaps cliche, but collaborative learning and working prepares students much more for ‘the real world’.

Basically, because a community can increase student learning, learning opportunities, and may even make your job way easier than dealing with 3000 individual students.
But there is just one catch....

You can’t actually “make” a community.
But now there are amazing (and free!) new communication tools to that bring people together...most of which your students are already using!

Tools that help students interact with other students
Tools that help connect the professor to the students

Professor Facebook/Twitter - class notices, quick polling, & casual interaction

Scott C @YoScott
What I learned in #wrvt: Explore the world. Its differences are beautiful and yours for the taking. (also: employ ninjas in case of attack.)

Atef Aziz @atef23
@plaidavenger i learned what ASEAN is in #wrvt. In Singapore I learned not to piddle around and go straight for the hawker centers.

Ty Hodges @STH_Hokie
@PlaidAvenger Genocide is sovereignty stopper #WRVT

Krishna Patel @thatskraykay
everything is shifting to the east! east east east! #wrvt #shouldvelearnedchinese
Tools that help connect the professor to the students

Ustream - Online office hours

Creating a powerful PERCEPTION of availability
Tools that help give students a voice during class, building a sense of active involvement.

Twitter - Class hashtag streamed live on-screen.

What news story should Prof. Boyer cover today?

- Russia & China VETO Moves on Syria: 30%
- Assad Regime Bombards Homs: 5%
- Turkey and Gulf States Squeeze Syria: 44%
- Blasts Rock Central Nigeria: 6%
- Volatile Week in the Philippines: 15%

Text a KEYWORD to 37607, Tweet @poll and a KEYWORD, or Submit a KEYWORD to http://PollEv.com.

Total Results: 124
Heck, even music tools that help create a vibrant collective environment...
Not sold yet? Then let’s make it more real:
A COMMUNITY can answer each other’s questions
...3000 individuals will ask you the same question 3000 times

@travisaacs It’s tomorrow. #wrvt
14 hours ago

Was the movie for the week tonight? #wrvt
16 hours ago

And a community can take care of problems as well... like our Facebook SCANDAL
More important than the mundane: a COMMUNITY of learners can often form a more logical climbing team to knowledge than you can...
A COMMUNITY knows what everyone else is up to ...3000 INDIVIDUALS working solo do not

Peer review, group projects, and peer to peer networking can really raise the standards of student work.