

# **Summary of Research to Inform my Design Concepts**

IXXN211 Design Psychology

Assignment 1

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I will be researching aspects of focus to try to unpack where online learning falls short and how we could design to improve online learning environments. Online learning environments could be the physical space the student learns in, the mental scape of an isolated student or the digital spaces the online student uses to interact with their university communities.

### **Procrastination, Emotion Regulation, and Well-Being**

Pychyl and Sirois (2016) suggest that people use procrastination as a form of maladaptive emotional-regulation strategy. People use task avoidance as a form of coping and attempt to improve their mood by picking more enjoyable alternatives but it actually leaves them feeling worse off because of increased time pressure, diminished sense of self and critical views of self. The decision to try to repair the mood by avoiding things that leave the person in a bad mood and picking more enjoyable alternatives may be a decision that occurs at the nonconscious level to undermine one's self-control, this shows how the cycle of negative views of self and rumination can fuel itself. [UX Design could encourage adaptive coping strategies, we could help intercept the nonconscious level of task selection by encouraging productive tasks or productive alternatives like exercise or exploration to not leave someone in a spiral of distress.](#)

Successful procrastination intervention uses cognitive psychology approaches to adapt the way people appraise a situation. These strategies can be seen through acceptance-based or mindfulness-based meditation, teaching this can allow people to go through a non-judgemental process of responding to emotions. This meditation can foster neuroplastic changes or new paths of thinking which are responsible for responding to bad or stressful situations in a more productive manner. [We can design UX to deal with the fear that deems](#)

these online learning tasks emotionally bad, can we make secure, communicative, structured environments that enable people to feel balanced and encouraged in their studies.

### **Emotional Presence, Learning, and the Online Learning Environment**

Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) report on the prevalence of emotional states during online learning. They highlight the importance of awareness of the power of emotion for learning and focus and how it's easier to recognise and implement strategies in person but not impossible in the online space. They explain students have distracting negative emotional feelings towards organisational issues, learning materials and social issues like communication, time management and struggles with technology. They also showed how students felt strong emotions concerning social alienation, and the need for connectedness and communication with classmates (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012).

All of these aspects could be improved through the design of clear and satisfying systems from a collective or institutional level (Harris & Hari, 2022). We need to find ways of coping with social isolation within online learning as the emotions evoked from this can serve as a distraction. It's key when establishing the design of online systems that we acknowledge that emotional tenor is lost without face-to-face interaction with the subtle body and facial expression cues (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012), these things are not obvious yet very influential. When thinking about most current designs for online students I spot a lack of emotional consideration when there is a barrage of readings, documents and multi-choice quizzes. While group assignments are geographically difficult for online students I would love to design to facilitate discussion during tutorial time by adjusting tools that already exist to add security and self-confidence and for the fearful, pressured and awkward emotional states to be lowered.

## **The Concept of Flow**

Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2014) describe the concept of flow as a dynamic state where a person's whole self is absorbed, invested and intensely concentrated on the current exchange between their consciousness and their interactions with the environment. This state can only be achieved through devout attention caused by curiosity, interest and persistence in engaging challenges at a level that is appropriate to one's capacity. Anxiety, obligation, boredom and wishing you were somewhere else than where you are is not flow. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2014) also explain how levels of flow are higher in class work that is active rather than passive.

Flow is absorption in what one does that is intrinsically motivated, this is key to designing to encourage flow states. Both the institution and the individual will have to find a middle ground to achieve a flow state. Both the digital and physical environment can be designed to induce flow states, by having online tasks that flow seamlessly from one to the next and space without distraction or a sense of passing time would be beneficial. Attitudes or goals could be established from the student's perspective and intrinsic motivations for completing university tasks could be threaded throughout online programming. We can design an enjoyable routine that establishes the beginning of study time, the alignment of attention and the commence of focus. This way we could be more in tune with our goals and motivations as opposed to time pressures, deadlines and anxieties. We can design with an active physical/online interaction rather than shows visible progression rather than a passively designed environment that doesn't require engagement except for extrinsic pressures.

## **Overcoming Isolation in Distance Learning: Building a Learning Community through Time and Space**

While it's clear to see the multitude of benefits online learning poses, as it is a fresh field there is work to be done to improve the student learning experience. Croft et al. (2010) studied the online student experience and found that while students' desire for flexibility and autonomy were being met, their richness of community and their ability to engage with other students were lacking. They explain how isolation can come in many forms such as geographical isolation, social isolation, intellect/experience isolation, sensory isolation and subject isolation. These can be addressed through online designs that reform online connection, regaining the sense of human interaction through profiles or maps and having the ability to connect with online classmates easily and comfortably. Students need to be able to gain new perspectives and learn from others' experiences which is hard through online learning. Motivation, self-discipline and time management were key to students' success online. A key finding was students' need for 'reassurance that they're heading in the right direction which can be achieved through careful online dialogue between tutors and students. The study looks at ways students could begin to network online in a way that was helpful and didn't take away from their learning. Students said they were curious to find others in similar geographical locations or with similar interests (Croft et al., 2010). I think it would be so valuable to design a fun way of reframing the online environment where students can find each other when working on similar tasks, collaborate in their own time or be held somewhat accountable by peers. All of this report suggests to me the need for specific information, both quantitative and qualitative data about how Victoria University online students feel in terms of motivation, isolation, autonomy, connection and competence. This data could be used to design systems specific to our students and their needs.

## References

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