Welcome to the “What is Motivation? Diagnosing Motivation Problems” presentation.

This presentation contains audio, so please make sure your speakers are turned up on your computer. Click the forward button below to proceed to the next slide.
Convincing students we understand them through active listening helps motivate them to do a better job at their courses and be more open to advice from you as their instructor. But what is motivation? Why does active listening by an instructor help students to feel more motivated? How can we identify when students have a motivation problem and how do we provide motivational support?

In the remainder of this workshop, we’ll attempt to answer all of these questions. Specifically, in this unit you will learn how to define and diagnose the motivational problems experienced by your students. We begin with a model of the human motivation process. Then, after describing what we know about the behaviors that define motivation, you’ll have an opportunity to practice with authentic materials from online courses.
All motivation is "caused" by our beliefs about what makes us successful or effective. Psychologists call them "control beliefs" since engaging in tasks or pursuing goals that make us feel effective also make us feel more in control. Control beliefs result from our past experiences and we are not always consciously aware of our beliefs or their origins.

When students are not motivated to complete academic assignments, it is because they do not believe that the completed assignment will make them feel as effective as other activities that compete for their time. Evidence from motivation research (for example, Schunk, Pintrich and Meese, 2008) indicates that we can influence student’s beliefs about academic tasks through four different routes:

- The **value** they place on academic tasks;
- Their **self-efficacy** or confidence that they can succeed at the tasks;
- Their **attributions** or explanations about the reasons they may not have done well on similar tasks in the past; and
- The **emotions** they experience when anticipating or performing the tasks.

Control beliefs, expressed through our values, self efficacy, attributions and emotions influence the three defining components of motivation;

- **Starting** to learn (rather than merely intending to start and instead to delay and/or procrastinate)
- **Persisting** at learning (even in the face of distractions) and
- Investing **adequate mental effort** to achieve learning objectives
If students are achieving passing grades, then we know that they most likely started, persisted and did the mental work necessary to pass. With greater persistence and mental effort they might learn more and achieve higher grades.

Adequate motivation, however, does not mean that a student started exactly when we wanted them to start and/or that they did not pause or get distracted by problems and more desirable pursuits from time to time or they always worked at their peak mental capacity.

The next two lessons will explore each of these motivational factors in detail and describe ways to diagnose and remedy student motivation problems.
Let’s assume that there are at least three kinds of reasons why students experience an academic problem such as a failure to complete a project on time, not posting when expected or receiving a below average or failing grade on a paper or project. Students can experience all three of the problems as shown on this slide at the same time.

Yet, it is important to determine the cause of their problems since instructors can’t help students solve problems until we determine the approximate cause of the problems.

**First**, students can experience “difficult to control problems” such as a computer failure, not having access to study materials required and/or they may have had a health problem. In these situations let’s assume that they knew how to succeed academically and were motivated to do so but were prevented by difficulties with equipment, materials or their health problem.

**Second**, they may have lacked the knowledge necessary to succeed. They had the materials and technology they needed and their health and motivation was adequate but they did not know what or how to study so that they could succeed.

**Or third**, they may not have been motivated. In this case, they knew how (or could have learned how) and they were not prevented by health, equipment or materials problems.
How to decide that students have a motivation problem:

**IF** as you listen to students with academic performance problems and you: Get the impression that their academic problems are not caused by health or technology problems, and that the student knew how to do what they did not do well, and that they either had not started, or were not persisting (did not spend enough time working) and/or that they were simply not spending enough mental effort to get the work finished **THEN** assume that they have a motivation problem and identify whether their problem was starting and/or persisting and/or investing adequate mental effort.

**IF** they also have uncontrollable problems and/or knowledge problems address those issues separately.
Many students seem to misjudge the amount of persistence (time) and effort required to succeed. Some of this problem may be due to “wishful thinking”. Yet, regardless of the cause, it is important that you accurately determine whether their problem is due to motivation and if so, what kind of motivation problem they are experiencing so that you can help them push through it and succeed.

Some students may be avoiding the need to get started reading or tackling an assignment. They may also have misjudged how long they have to study or how high a priority they must give their academic work and so they allow themselves to get distracted away from studying. They sometimes also try to solve new problems with old and familiar knowledge rather than invest the mental effort to learn the new strategies you are trying to teach them.
Thank you for taking the time to complete this presentation.

References