“If I go into a class not knowing anybody, and then throughout the whole year I never learn anyone’s names, I don’t feel as welcomed or at home within that class environment. Getting to know people helps boost my confidence and has the class feel more like I belong.” - Abby Russman, Sophomore in Communication Studies

According to 2019 NSSE data, 44% of first-year UNO students who responded gave high ratings to interactions with their peers, but UNO performs slightly below peer institutions in this area. How can faculty connect students to other students?

**Explicitly Connect Students**
- Create study groups and suggest ways students can learn together in and out of the classroom.
- Set up teams of students who will work on projects throughout the year.
- Give students time in class to ask each other questions and get to know each other.

**Consider Group Work vs Problem-Posing Collaboration**
- Integrate focused conversation that require everyone’s participation with no room for “free-riders.”
- Let students interpret problems in their own way and have everyone share their idea.
- Change the narrative from “group work” which emphasizes product only to “collaborative learning” that emphasizes the process and product.

**Involve Students**
- Generate buy-in by involving students in planning, instruction, co-created assignments, and rubrics.
- After completing reading assignments, use relevant case studies to facilitate conversation and ask “more” to further critical thinking and discussion among students. Can students “stump the professor” on content in the readings?
- Reenforce the classroom as a “community” where everyone is accountable for learning instead of every person for themselves.

**Use Canvas to Your Advantage**
- Utilize student-only discussion boards and create Canvas student groups.
- Show students how to contact other students within Canvas.

**Utilize Outside-of-Classroom Resources**
- Slack, Zoom, scavenger hunts, book clubs, and meditation are great resources to incorporate so students can get to know each other, not just the course material.
- Reserve a room for students to meet for a study group prior to a test.

**References**
DeAngelo, L. (2014). Programs and practices that retain students from the first to second year: Results from a national study. *New Directions for Institutional Research* 2013 (160) 53–75. doi: 10.1002/ir.20061