Top Ten Online Instructional Strategies Preferred by Students

Firm Faith Watson, Murray State University

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Top Ten Online Instructional Strategies Preferred by Students

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Firm Faith Watson Ph.D.
Marianne Castano Bishop Ph.D.
Debra Ferdinand James Ph.D.
Description of Session

Presenters will describe the top ten instructional strategies that emerged from the qualitative responses from over 600 master’s students who answered a dissertation survey question: What specific things would you like your online instructors do to help you learn successfully? The presentation will relate these strategies to the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education and the Quality Matters Rubric. Examples of student feedback will be provided, highlighting students’ voices in their preferences.

What specific things would you like your online instructors do to help you learn successfully? The top ten instructional strategies that emerged from the qualitative responses of over 600 master’s students who answered this dissertation survey question will be discussed. Their responses will be related to two established frameworks that have been widely used in higher education: 1) the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, and 2) the Quality Matters Rubric.

The master’s students in the study were enrolled in a system-wide state university in the Midwest and had taken at least one online course. For this presentation, examples of direct quotes from the students’ qualitative responses will be provided for each of the top 10 instructional strategies.

Based on a literature review for the article from which this presentation is derived which was published in a special issue in TechTrends, a publication of AECT, the presenters found that research findings on effective instructional strategies have oftentimes focused on undergraduate students. While there is paucity in research studies that focus on instructional strategies for master’s students taking online classes, this situation is compounded by the lack of research findings on instructional strategies from the students’ perspectives, capturing students’ voices. This presentation seeks to bridge that gap and to invite researchers to explore this topic with other master’s students.

Intended as guidelines by Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson in 1987, the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education have since been adopted widely in diverse educational fields by faculty, students and administrators to improve teaching and student learning, including master’s students. In 1996, Chickering and Ehrmann discussed “technology as lever” in implementing the Seven Principles. More recently, researchers (e.g., Crews, Wilkerson & Neill, 2015; Johnson, 2014) have applied the Seven Principles to online education. In this presentation, each of the Seven Principles will be applied to the appropriate top 10 instructional strategies preferred by online students.

The Quality Matters (QM) Rubric, with its eight general standards and 43 specific review standards (Quality Matters, 2014), was designed to help online practitioners design hybrid and online courses. The QM Rubric underscores the importance of alignment which ensures that the following critical course components work together: Learning Objectives, Assessment and Measurement, Instructional Materials, Course Activities and Learner Interaction, and Course Technology. The presenters will highlight how the top 10 instructional strategies apply to certain QM standards.

For example, students’ responses that related to the top 3 instructional strategy – “Provide prompt feedback” included the following quotes:
“One across the board thing I feel is missing is timely feedback about assignments. It is much harder to ask questions and understand what a professor is looking for through an online platform. If the instructor is not responsive this is frustrating.”

“I want more feedback. In forum discussions, comment and let me know if I'm on the right track in my thinking.”

“Give feedback either during or at the end of the group discussions…”

The aforementioned responses point to the need for providing constructive feedback in a timely manner that assists students in accomplishing their coursework. This instructional strategy is also related to the fourth of the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education – “Gives prompt feedback” and QM Standard 5 – “Course Activities and Learner Interaction.” In addition, one of the specific review standards for QM Standard 5 is “The instructor's plan for classroom response time and feedback on assignments is clearly stated.” While faculty may provide a plan for classroom response time to their students through their syllabi, online announcements via their course management systems, and other venues; providing timely feedback as a consistent practice is necessary.

To engage the audience, the presenters will ask them to predict a few strategies that could be among the top ten strategies that online students prefer to help their learning. They will also be asked to identify their current roles as they state their predictions. It is possible that the responses from their diverse roles resonate with the top ten instructional strategies preferred by online master’s students whether they are instructional designers, faculty teaching online, and other relevant roles. Attendees could find a commonality in what instructional strategies were found in the dissertation study that students preferred and what the attendees perceive to be students’ preferences. Thus, the audience responses to this interactive exercise could lend credence to many of the top ten instructional strategies. Discussions on these strategies could continue to engage the audience.

Online practitioners who could benefit from this presentation include staff who provide faculty development training, instructional designers, course developers, faculty who are developing and teaching blended and online courses, supplemental instructors or tutors, administrators of online education, and those who provide academic support for online students.
References


