Improving Presence and Engagement in the Online Learning Environment

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Program Objectives

• Assess tools that can help facilitate effective techniques of establishing an online presence.
• Explore tried and true “lessons learned” /“best practices” in the virtual classroom.
• Develop and evaluate Flip grid assessment for use in courses.
State of Higher Education and Online Learning

• 6 million students took at least one online course in 2015, representing more than a quarter (29.7 %) of all higher education enrollments that year.

• The number of undergraduates who took online courses in 2015 totaled nearly 5 million and the count of graduate students who did the same was just over 1 million.

(Allen & Seaman, 2017)
Among the "exclusively distance" students, 55% live in the same state as the school from which they're taking courses, while 42% live out of state. (The rest are "other" or "unknown.")

Result is great demand for instructors that have the necessary skills to teach fully or partially online

(Allen & Seaman, 2017)
Where are we today?

- Online education has developed as an essential mode of delivery and is transforming the educational landscape.
- This transformation has resulted in many instructional and institutional challenges.
- Although many of these challenges occur in face-to-face courses, there are many new challenges unique to online education.
“Education Marketplace”

- Smaller colleges and universities are entering the online learning market to increase their student base
- The “digital divide” is shrinking – the ability to train and support online students and faculty is increasing
- Advent of open source course management systems, mobile technology and use of public blogs and wikis
- MOOCs (massively open online courses) that are non-credit courses, free to students, capable of enrolling thousands of students in one course
Who Are Our Students??

- **Non-Traditional**
  - Older
  - Working full-time
  - Need flexibility due to multiple life roles
  - Typically are self-motivated and self-disciplined
  - May need more assistance with technology
  - Place-bound

- **Traditional**
  - Younger
  - Technology oriented
  - Taking online classes as part of on-campus program
  - Want flexibility to have the time to engage in other activities – sports, social, etc.
Instructor as Facilitator

• When online students discover that the most profound learning in the online course comes through interaction with other students rather than the instructor, they may become confused and sometimes feel “cheated” by the process.
• We need to inform our students that in the online environment the instructor acts as a facilitator, or guide, enabling students to learn collaboratively.
Key Concepts of Online Learning

• PRESENCE
  – Social
  – Cognitive/Affective
  – Teacher
• ENGAGEMENT
• INTERACTION / SENSE OF COMMUNITY
• MOTIVATION
PRESENCE
Strategies to Promote Instructor Presence

• Start with the Syllabus
• Welcome Announcement /Video
• Discussion Board
• Examples of own Experiences
• Tell Stories
Syllabus

• The syllabus serves to facilitate learning, communicate and to provide a positive and exciting first impression to the course!

  – Always important but imperative in online learning. The syllabus must provide clear and explicit information regarding the course objectives, goals, schedule, due dates, expectations, participation, grading, rubrics, technology assistance and faculty contact information......at a minimum
  – Important for faculty to review syllabus for accuracy prior to course starting
Post a Welcoming Response to all Student Introductions

• Be the first to welcome students
• Connect with each student – find a common interest
• Instructor should post their introduction and bio...........share something about yourself.
  — These are first steps in creating a warm and inviting atmosphere and the start of creating a learning community

(Beck et al., 2017; Cunningham, 2015)
Pitfalls of Managing Instructor Presence

- Hyper Responsiveness to Students
- Missing in Action
- Robot-like Interactions
- Sharing of “too much information”
Faculty Bill of Rights

- Set guidelines for expectations and stick to them!
- If a student is consistently late, there should be consequence
- Praise students for helping each other out
- Ask the instructor tab – open area for anyone to answer!
- Post times available (office hours)
- Share your typical routine
- Post times that you may not be available (i.e. a travel day)
- Treat learners with respect and courtesy and require the same from them
- Do not let your frustrations become transparent
ENGAGEMENT
Strategies for Engaging Students in Asynchronous Discussions

• Determine role of instructor and communicate to student – in particular the involvement of the instructor
• Address students personally and have students address each other the same way
• Narrow down topic to encourage participation
• Monitor “appropriateness” and “staying on course” even if you are not actively participating
• Rotate the students you address, ask questions of students if appropriate
• Summarize themes, key concepts, clarify any inaccuracies and “share” your wisdom on the topic
• Provide responses that stimulate higher level thinking
• Be prepared to intervene on controversial discussions – course “netiquette”
• ***** While the instructor needs to be seen as engaged and needs to monitor the discussion board, responding to every post to a class of twenty can be extremely time consuming not allowing for efficient time management and may damper the student to student discussion.

(Beck et al., 2017; Craig Sull, 2014)
Timely Communication

• Technical questions – respond within 24 hours
• Student course questions – respond within 48 hours
• Written course assignments – graded and returned with feedback – no more than 7 calendar days
  – Timely communication is a critical part of engagement and community. Students need clear guidelines regarding deadlines – instructors need to model adherence to deadlines by being timely themselves

  (Beck et al., 2017)
Feedback

• Salutation – always use student’s name

• What worked well?? - “Your introduction to the paper set the tone very well”, “Your objectives were very concise and easy to understand”, “You provided some excellent personal examples in your paper”

• What needs additional work based on rubric, learning objectives, etc.?? “The paper could have been improved by adding…..Elements that detracted from the project include…”

• Closing - “The final grade of your paper is a 92”, “Your paper reflected your comprehension of the topic”, “Please refer to the rubric for an explanation of points deducted”
Sense of Community

- Must contain three facets:
  - 1. Social Presence – personal characteristics of all members
  - 3. Affective Presence – attitude, value, feelings
  - 4. Teacher Presence – facilitation

Teaching Presence rather than Teacher Pressure
Student to Student Interaction

- Student to student interaction builds a learning community, encourages team building and promotes a higher level of critical thinkers
Encouraging Student to Student Interaction

• Clear expectations regarding student participation in course
• Instructor presence needs to be more visible beginning of course to model
• Clear netiquette expectations
• Assignments that include student-to-student interaction
• Include a self reflective component in course (participation)
• Gentle nudging of students not participating
• Personalized positive feedback
Humor in the Online Classroom

• An increasing body of literature supports that emotional communication in the online classroom helps build a sense of community
  – Teaching online doesn’t have to be flat medium and all serious business
  – Humor adds personal warmth to the online classroom (just as in a face to face classroom)
  – Students need to see the instructor as a real human being
  – Students need to feel comfortable expressing who they are without fear that it may not be relevant to the course.

(Scarborough, 2014)
Strategies for Motivation/Persistence in Online Learning

• Consistency of course – regularity, routine, flow, clear expectations

• Variety – mix of content, learning formats and varied engaging activities

• Relevance – content is pertinent and relevant to personal and professional lives, use of examples

• Content Prioritization – sequencing, organization, deadlines and milestones of content and materials.

(Lehman & Conceicao, 2014)
Feedback – Strategy for Persistence

• **FEEDBACK** – regular, consistent, timely and relevant
• Strong motivator for students = persistence
• Provide feedback to students before they ask for help
• Individual and group feedback
• Make feedback personal and specific
• Students would rather have a lower grade with meaningful feedback than all A’s with none!

(Cole et al., 2017)
Use of the Phone/Skype

There are some situations where making contact with a student on the phone or via Skype is not only appropriate but sometimes necessary:

- Personal matter or issue
- Complex tutoring
- Complicated matter that requires extended interaction
- Sensitive topic where expression, tone are important
Changing Course – Working Flexibility into the Online Classroom

- Maintain some level of flexibility in assignments / activities as long as learning objectives are not being altered.
- Authenticity and relevance to learners
- Adapting to technical glitches; errors in course
- Unforeseeable circumstances – severe weather affecting connections
- Quick decision making – weigh the effect the decision will have on the entire class
Lessons Learned

- All online courses are not the same – wide variations in quality – same as traditional classroom
- Instructors should not fear or resist online learning
- Course development needs to focus on interactivity and not only content
- Focus of delivery needs to be “student centered” to develop sense of community and engagement
- Teaching and learning online does not “just happen”. Both faculty and students need training
- Faculty who teach online need to feel supported just as students do
- Students want to feel secure in the online classroom and want to be in the “know” at all times
Lessons Learned

- We are no longer teaching to the “typical” online student – great diversity among online students
- Online learning has many of the same challenges as face-to-face classroom
- Presence, engagement and a sense of community are key components to successful online learning
- ONLINE LEARNING AND TEACHING CAN BE VERY EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT, REWARDING AND SATISFYING WHEN BEST PRACTICES ARE UTILIZED.
Applications/Activities

- Narrated lectures
  - Powerpoints
  - Echo 360
- Video Discussion Board (Flip Grid)
- Webex for synchronous lectures
- Group presentations - with student lead DB
- Peer review activities
- Wordle
Wordle

• Post a question
• Use “Polleverywhere” to allow students to answer
• Responses make a picture
• Word is bigger depending on number of times word is chosen
• http://www.wordle.net/
Wordle - Example

• What characteristics are important for an online educator to possess?
Wordle
Flip Grid in the Online Classroom

- www.flipgrid.com
- Benefits
- Development of the assignment
- Feedback
- Grading
Benefits

- Free for students
- Apps for phones
- Encourages own ideas
- Develops presentation skills
- Immediate direct feedback
- Students feel connected to instructor, classmates and the university
Development of the Assignment

• Frequency
  – Routinely or for one time use
• Objective
• Topics/Themes
  – Introduction
  – Discussion
  – Case studies
  – Q and A

• Prompts
  – Instructor
  – Videos
  – Combination
• Settings
  – Time limits
  – Email feedback
  – Approve posts
Feedback

• Instant feedback to student via email
• Standard rating scale or customizable
• Use of emojis
# Grading Rubrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Guidelines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial response with minimum one reference</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Response is posted on time and relevant to the prompt. Demonstrates engagement by offering insight, providing originality, analyzing, and synthesizing the topic. Includes a minimum of one scholarly reference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer reply #1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Post is on time and encourages ongoing discussion. Acknowledges others’ questions and responses. Demonstrates engagement by providing appropriate examples, thought-provoking ideas or inquiries, offering opposing views or, pursues clarification of responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer reply #2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Post is on time and encourages ongoing discussion. Acknowledges others’ questions and responses. Demonstrates engagement by providing appropriate examples, thought-provoking ideas or inquiries, offering opposing views or, pursues clarification of responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APA, Grammar, Spelling, Organization</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Follows APA format per 6th ed. Language and tone are professional. Content is organized in a logical manner with smooth transition of ideas. References (if required) are included in the DB section of the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let's make a Flip

1. Sign up for a free account
2. Design your dashboard
3. Design and record your topic
4. Share your flip code with the group

Sharing
Resources

Office of Digital Learning
• https://www.sacredheart.edu/officeservices/digitallearning/facultyworkshops/integrateavideoresponsesysteminyourteaching/

Flip Grid Resources
• https://resources.flipgrid.com/
References


References

