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# IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR ONLINE TEACHING: Examples

Best Practices in Online Learning: WebCt and Blackboard From the Trenches.  
October 27, 2011. Nova Southeastern University

# Some Effective Practices

# Encourage contacts between students and teacher

1. Be Present: weekly announcements to the class, send individual emails at least once a week, email reminders, instructions, provide office hours, participate in discussions, provide personal introduction and welcome your students.
2. Set up asynchronous communication spaces to accommodate different learner needs (Sorensen & Baylen, 2009).
  1. Questions and answers space
  2. Content discussion space: graded discussions
  3. Social space: encourages informal interactions
  4. Team space
  5. Contact hours

# Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students

Use a variety of large group, small group, and individual work experiences (Boettcher, 2011)

**Examples:**

- Peer reviews
- Discussions
- Team assignments

# Active learning

- Application of concepts to practice
- Hands-on activities
- Summaries on content and personal reflections
- Portfolios
- Moderation of discussions
- Case studies
- **Prepare Discussion Posts that Invite Questions, Discussions, Reflections and Responses (Boettcher, 2011)**

# Prompt feedback

- Provide guidelines for contact (e.g., office hours)
- Provide guidelines for response time and when to expect instructor feedback
- Provide information feedback and acknowledgement feedback

# Time on task

- Track student participation
- Encourage students to regulate their own learning:
  - Send and post reminders of weekly activities, upcoming activities, and deadlines
  - Provide a calendar
  - Set time limits and deadlines
- Arrange the course in discrete units to help students focus
- Share a set of very clear expectations for your students and for yourself as to (1) how you will communicate and (2) how much time students should be working on the course each week (Boettcher, 2011).

# High expectations

- Communicate high expectations
- Set appropriate goals and objectives
- Provide detailed assignment information and rubrics for assessment
- Provide links to additional resources
- Provide grading criteria
- Set clear communication expectations
- Provide expectations for online etiquette

# Diverse ways of learning

- Develop assignments that require application of concepts
- Present content in different media types (video, text, images, audio)
- Provide different ways to access same content
- Accommodate for and be aware of cultural differences
- Provide synchronous and asynchronous activities
- Allow students to choose project topics

# Use media and technology as appropriate for the content included

- Plan for effective use of media and technology.
- Understand the content (learning outcomes and discipline)
- Know how different media and technologies promote specific learning outcomes and target different learning styles
- Consider your own experience with technology, amount of time for planning and teaching, and your role.
- Think about the students: exposure and access to technology and preferred learning styles
- Analyze technology according to its function and relevance

# Aspects of instruction, technology and management (Simonson et al., 2012)

- Structuring the instruction
- Instructional methods
- Course management systems

# Aspects to consider when Structuring the instruction (Simonson et al., 2012)

- Organizing the instruction
- Developing the syllabus to ensure communication
- Creating the learning community
- Facilitating active learning practices
- Using instructional materials to assist learning
- Addressing assessment

# Organizing the structure

- “Help students quickly and easily become involved in learning rather than puzzle through how the course is delivered”
- Do you begin with an activity that requires students to interact with each other?
- Should you begin a class with a brief overview of the content?
- At the end of a class, should you close with student questions?

# Organizing the structure

- How to begin each section or module? Will it be text-based lecture or a short streamed video for resending the content?
- Should you post prompts or questions prior to the actual beginning time for discussion? Or should students be expected to post questions prior?
- How and when to respond to each student's postings? Interject comments along the way to individual comments? Or summarize at the end?

# Organizing the structure

- “Students are more comfortable ... when instructors adhere to predetermined course schedules”
- Synchronous settings: maintain class schedule congruous with transmission schedule
- Asynchronous settings: post information and assignments timely
- If necessary to adjust the schedule: involve students in the process

# Organizing the structure

- “Students need a clear understanding of their own responsibilities”
- Let students know what is expected of them in terms of preparation for class and participation in class activities
- Incorporate interactive activities related to readings to reinforce the need for students to prepare in advance

# Developing the syllabus to ensure communication

- “Single-most-important document an instructor can prepare. This is the primary communication with students at a distance.”
- Provide enough information that allows students to understand the structure of the course, expectations and assignments, and the assessment process.
- Provide contact information and framework for contacting the instructor.
- Let students know in advance any changes in the established protocol (e.g., going away).
- Provide alternatives and information on what to do when technical difficulties

# Creating the learning community

- Provide communication protocols and expectations, and responsibilities to be courteous and well-mannered.
- Conduct icebreakers: students get to know each other, helps build sense of trust, and humanizes the experience.

# Facilitating active learning

“The ‘kiss of death’ for any distance course in the lack of student participation.... The key to active learning is to keep the learners involved in their own learning, not just keeping them busy”

- Strategies range from giving students opportunities to think about a topic and respond to actual hand-on manipulation of objects
- Examples: Case study analysis, structured discussions or debates, or virtual field trips

# Facilitating active learning

- Essential: Clearly articulated goals, timelines, essential questions, and authentic assessment practices
- Work with students to establish goals that meet standards or requirements
- Be flexible: Plan in advance but be ready to negotiate with students timeliness of assignments
- Be open to adopt strategies that form a dynamic learning community

# Using instructional materials

“The key to using quality instructional materials is that the appropriate media is selected”

- You can design your own material or rely on existing being cautious of Copyright rules
- It may be wise to consider distributing materials over the life of the course, rather than at the beginning
- KISS (Keep it Short and Simple): Divide information into short packages

# Addressing assessment

“Students need to know how their participation in class discussions is measured”

- Provide shy students with nonthreatening means for participating
- Assume responsibility to meet the needs of students who might be reluctant learners
- Inform student’s success and provide private communication to students who are not performing accordingly
- Communicate with students as quickly as possible how well they are doing
- Provide formative feedback in addition to grades

# Instructional Methods

“Teaching methods should be chosen based on the characteristics of the instructor, students, content, and delivery system”

- Methods must match the outcomes defined by the objectives and the assessments to be implemented
- There is no unique way, but a key to selection is the way in which the strategy can be used to encourage student interaction and active learning
- Technology used should be considered a tool to deliver instruction, not as a method
- Include fundamental elements of planning

# Instructional Methods

“The type of instructional setting will dictate the appropriate choices for instructional methods”

- Synchronous environment
  - Short duration lessons
  - Group activities
  - Students need to remain active
- Asynchronous
  - Provide learners with enough interaction to keep them on task while exploring their learning experience
  - Problem-based learning, collaboration, student-led discussions

# Course Management Systems

Don't have to use all resources. Use those that help students be engaged in their learning rather than frustrated:

- Discussion forums
- Tests
- Assignment drop box
- Calendar
- Course Content
- Messages
- Announcements
- Grade book

# Managing Distance Learning Courses

- Guide students at the beginning: expectations, use of the tools, and location of resources.
- Provide examples or exercises that model what will be expected in terms of performance
- Communicate regularly. Remind students of upcoming due dates and activities.
- Regularly post announcements of things happening within the next few weeks.
- Provide meaningful feedback in grading
- Provide rubrics for grading that help facilitate the communication process and outline expectations
- Enforce plagiarism policies and be prepared to deal with it
- To avoid plagiarism: provide enough time to complete paper, and make requirements unique.

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