A Resource Guide for Transitioning Your Class Online

SPECIAL REPORT

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Education Initiatives: A Mashup of Emergency Resources and Other Great Tips

Faculty Focus

In response to COVID-19, we've seen instructors and universities from around the world come together to compile numerous resources and lists. Although we've only skimmed the surface, we believe the following links provide insight on different perspectives that institutions and staff are currently going through. From transitioning to an online course to fostering a productive conversation with your students, these resources shed light on education initiatives we hope you find useful during this time of uncertainty.

1. Remote Teaching Strategies—Crowdsourced Public Resources

This crowdsourced (and growing) Facebook resource focuses on teaching remotely, compiled by Christian L. Frock.

2. Teaching Effectively During Times of Disruption, for SIS and PWR

From Stanford University, a guide to teaching effectively during times of disruption, by Jenae Cohn and Beth Seltzer.

3. Remote Teaching Resources

Remote teaching resources, an in-depth spreadsheet managed by Daniel Stanford with links to educational resources from all over the world.

4. Mandy Berry: A Facebook Post on Remote Teaching

A public Facebook post from Amanda Berry, an assistant professor of literature at American University.

5. Resources for Disruptions

A list of resources compiled by Ollie Dreon on his blog pertaining to transitioning to online teaching and coping with education initiatives during this time of disruption.

Tips for the Transition

Transitioning your face-to-face class to online takes time, but time isn't always on our side in case of emergencies. In response to many faculty transitioning their own classes during this time, we've compiled a few tips based on POD listserv discussions and with help from Jessie Male's students in her Disability Memoir course at NYU Gallatin.

• Keep your students informed on what's going on, what they can do, and what they should be doing. You can put an announce-

ment on your syllabus, post it, or email the students.

• Consider using Canvas. Even if your class is not published, your students may be using Canvas already for other classes.

• You can use Zoom to have synchronous, interactive sessions. Zoom requires you to set up a "meeting" outside of Canvas and provide a link to your class.

• Keep a schedule for when discussion prompts are posted/due. Most LMS have a discussion board, where you could potentially post one prompt per class to generate conversation.

• Or you can assign one discussion board post per student. So essentially, it's like having a discussion leader. That student is then responsible for facilitating discussion with their classmates (with instructor input, of course).

• Use Google Docs during each module or class, where students can add notes and pose questions.

• If you're creating videos, you can use Panopto to record your lectures. All classrooms on campus should have a mic, or you can record from your office/laptop. Select to "webcast" Panopto sessions, where you can interact with students remotely via text responses.

• Caption your videos. One tool for captioning videos is through YouTube. It's free and easy but does require some time.

• You can make a Facebook group for your class, where they can chat with one another through the messenger app. This could be a resource for basic questions and act as a quick engagement tool if access to a computer is limited.

• GroupMe is also an effective way to message students. It's flexible and less intrusive than some other platforms.

• Maintain a calendar for students with every deadline.

• Provide specific times for when you will be available for student meetings or will definitively be checking email. Consider using Google chat to meet with students.

• Check if college libraries will be open and what resources students will have access to while classes are moved online. See if there is a LibGuide for your subject. Even if libraries aren't open, a quick list of resources for research could be useful.

Ultimately, we know that this is not an easy time. We know that you are stressed and overwhelmed. But we also know the collaboration in terms of resources and community has been absolutely outstanding. You are not alone in this.

Use coupon code MOS97 to receive this online seminar for only $200.

In the face-to-face classroom, each faculty member typically designs and teaches their own course with minimal input from departmental colleagues. Reflective of this approach, many colleges and universities have adopted similar models for their online program. Simply put, development of a high-quality online course takes considerable time and advanced knowledge of online pedagogy. This online seminar highlights a model for department-wide, collaborative online course design that is particularly relevant for introductory or general studies courses.

Upon completion of this seminar, you'll be able to:
- Implement a process to collaborate with departmental colleagues
- Create a shared online course shell for high-demand courses
- Create departmental policies and procedures to support collaborative online course design
- Maximize faculty time and resources in the development of high-quality online courses

Here's what we'll cover:
- Online course design
- Collaborative course development (department-wide partnership)
- Course design to address content and introduction to department faculty/courses
- Timeline/strategies/process for collaboration among multiple faculty
- Modifiable online course "master" to be shared by multiple faculty teaching the course
- Administrative considerations of collaborative online course development

Who should attend?
- Faculty teaching online
- Department administrators of online programs
- Instructional designers

Purchase This Online Seminar

Eight Steps for a Smoother Transition to Online Teaching

J.A. Miller, PhD

As universities rush to get all their courses online quickly, there's a high probability of error but also a lot you can do to succeed. Problems may occur due to overtaxed technological infrastructure, your students' disorientation and fear, and your own learning curve. On the positive side, you learn for a living, so you are good at it! Being open to the current crisis-driven educational opportunity is a call to action. The reputation and integrity of your institution—and you!—depends upon your offering engaging online classes. (No pressure.) Below are a few tips to get you started.

1. Be a learner.

You're used to being an expert. But now you may be facing a situation where you aren't an expert. For most of your students, taking all their classes fully online will be a new experience. If it's new to you as well, don't be afraid to let your students know that you are learning with them. Keep a beginner's mindset. You don't have to have all the answers. Just know how to point your students in the right direction. There are many free resources online to help out. And as you would tell your students, there are no stupid questions. Ask away. Do a Google search, check in with IT, phone a friend, or ask your students. They will be happy to help if you make it clear that having a great online course is a group project.

2. Use technology as a means to an end.

Don't confuse technology with teaching. The goal is to use technology to facilitate engaging and effective teaching and learning. Know that technology's tools of engagement (like discussion boards, wikis, journals, blogs, etc.) are just that—tools, not the engagement itself. What is the secret sauce? You are! Along with the community of learners that includes your students, your fellow faculty members, and every teacher on the internet! An LMS or Zoom can't stand in for a trusted advisor, mentor, or experienced subject-matter expert like you. If you are new to online teaching, take it slow initially, but don't leave out engagement.

3. Don't be "the man (or woman) behind the curtain."

High "instructor presence"—the feeling that an instructor is still present in an online educational experience—is more critical now than it has ever been. Log into your course every day. Yes, every day. You don't have to promise a 24-hour turnaround for responses. In fact, that will quickly exhaust you. A 48-hour turnaround response time is typical. But do respond to your students' posts if you have a discussion board. Set expectations of when you will and won't be available. Don't make Sunday night off-limits if you have an assignment due on Monday. That's not fair. Make use of group communications, like

the announcement function in your LMS, to touch base with your students every few days. Instructor presence is established when your students feel that you are there for them. It doesn't have to be 24/7, but your students will miss you! So, stay in touch.

4. Know the gotcha's.

Partner with IT to determine the top five to six technical issues that students are likely to encounter when accessing a course online. This may be a forgotten password, a pop-up blocker, or a browser issue. Educate yourself around what the issues could be because students will turn to you for technical support. To avoid spending more time troubleshooting technical problems than teaching your content, develop FAQs or links to websites or videos that provide solutions to the most common problems. You don't have to become a programmer to intervene effectively on technical matter. You just need to tell people where they can find good information. Encourage all students to help one another, as well. If you begin to feel bogged down or frustrated with tech support questions, remember that you want to help. It's part of the reason you chose this profession!

5. Promote engagement.

In a pinch, there may be an impulse to use the LMS as a content repository: upload all the relevant docs, schedule a lecture in Zoom, and voila you have an online course! But such a course will not promote lasting change—as you would expect your classroom course to do. As you construct your class—even if it's on the fly—ask yourself if your expected learning outcomes will be achieved. Avoid the trap of choosing "coverage" over engagement. Let students take turns week to week leading online discussions, either via Zoom or on the

discussion board. Add peer-to-peer support, try virtual group work, and provide frequent opportunities for feedback. You don't have to be technologically inclined to let your students know that you care about what they have to say.

6. Upskill, upskill, upskill.

Just as you shouldn't overemphasize the role of technology in this educational moment, you don't want to underplay it either. Everyone (faculty, administrators, and students) will need to upskill themselves in educational technology quickly. There are many free resources out there to get you started. Check out LinkedIn (which merged with Lynda.com) to find short videos on how to work in an LMS. If your university's IT department is overloaded, take matters into your own hands by using OERs (Open Educational Resources). OERs provide a wealth of information and resources (such as videos, articles, examples, case studies, rubrics) and other things useful for you and your students. Creative Commons is a good place to start, and YouTube has some very helpful videos, as well.

7. Survey often and early.

Survey your students about how it is going early into your tenure as an online instructor. Fear not. You can handle the truth! Quick surveys are a way to take the temperature of the room, a sense of the meeting. They provide an early warning system. The point is not to give yourself a grade but to find out which students are struggling and what they are struggling with. A simple 3-question questionnaire will do. Use a tool like Survey Monkey if you don't know how to set up a survey in your LMS. Ask simple open-ended questions like: "What is the best thing about this experience so far? What would you do differently? How

can I help?" An instructor may be unaware that half of the class can't access one of the assignments because of a pop-up blocker or some other easy-to-fix issue. Believe it or not, communicating with your students online may give you the opportunity to be more connected to them as individuals.

8. Keep it simple.

Think of your first online course as Version 1.0. Remember that the first time out of the gate won't be perfect. Long past the national health crisis, there's likely to be a version 2.0 and 3.0. Keep track of what you "wish you had known" as you go through the rest of the semester, and plan to use these nuggets of knowledge in future online courses. If you don't have time to make videos, post your PPTs. If you don't have PPTs, post your notes.

If you don't have notes, dictate your expertise into an audio recording application (such as VoiceThread) or just use your phone to create an audio (MP3) or video (MP4) file.

All of this being said, don't be too hard on yourself. You are, after all, making the plane while flying it! Allow yourself to make mistakes. Experiment. Have fun. You know this teaching-with-technology thing has been on your to-do list for a long time. So, let this be the opportunity you've been waiting for. You are not alone. The whole world—your students, their parents, your colleagues, and your family and friends—are pulling for you right now. Our higher education system depends not upon your technical expertise, but your pedagogical passion. Keep your love of teaching front and center while you learn this important 21st century skill!

Five Ways to Foster Creativity in Your Online Classroom

Oliver Dreon, PhD

When I talk to instructors who are new to teaching online, many complain about the sterile nature of their online courses. While they interact with their students and support their learning, they often miss some of the creativity that students bring to a face-to-face classroom. In face-to-face environments, they argue, students can more easily demonstrate their creativity by participating in role-playing, leading class discussions, or giving presentations, for example. But these instructors see the online classroom as a different space. Because most of the interactions in the online realm are text-based, the instructors don't always see the same creativity

on display. In their online classes, instructors will assign readings and have their students post to discussion boards. The instructors may also lead synchronous lessons to help students learn concepts. At the end of the module, the instructors will assess student learning by having students submit papers to the course dropbox or take an online exam. After completing one module, the instructor and students progress to the next module, where this cycle of instruction, interaction, and assessment is often repeated. Employing such a repetitious learning cycle, it's no wonder that my colleagues who are new to online teaching don't see the vibrancy of the online classroom.

The reality, however, is that the online classroom can be a space that supports and showcases student creativity. The learning management system can become a place where students expand their learning beyond traditional online means. With a host of free tools available on the Internet, online students have the ability to demonstrate their creative side as part of the class interactions and assessments. Wondering where to get started? Here are a few suggestions to help you be successful.

1. View your classroom as a commons area. Some online instructors see the content section of their course as the most valuable component of instruction. While it's important for students to have easy access to quality course materials and learning objects, the communication areas of an online course are where students will feel the most supported. In these sections, the instructor can interact with students and build a social presence that fosters learning. Threaded discussions are critical places for students to demonstrate their understanding of course content and to collectively make meaning of the subject matter. But online communication tools can do more than just foster discourse. Students can also use these spaces to share their creative works. For instance, as an introductory activity in my online class, I have students use an online tool such as Animoto to create short videos in order to introduce themselves to their classmates. The videos get shared in a discussion board and inevitably spark conversations. I also use the assignment as a pretest where I ask students to share what they know about the course. Used in this manner, the discussion board becomes a virtual gallery where students get to "see" their classmates and also get to showcase their creativity.

2. Leave your assignments open-ended. While it's important to explicitly outline your expectations for students, consider leaving the actual mode of expression more open-ended. Is it important that students write a five-page paper to demonstrate they've learned a topic? Could they create a video outlining their understanding instead? Could they use the course content to animate an academic discussion on the topic? Providing students with options will increase their buy-in for an assignment and allow them to show more of their creative talents. It's also good pedagogically. The National Center on Universal Design for Learning (www.udlcenter.org) recommends giving students multiple means of expression and action in classroom environments. While UDL principles have been traditionally applied to face-to-face classrooms, the concepts are equally relevant to online spaces as well.

3. Think about creativity differently. While some people view creativity as an elusive construct that is hard to define, there's actually a body of research that helps bring clarity to the concept. J.P. Guilford (1977) identified four characteristics of creative thinking: fluency, flexibility, elaboration, and originality. Fluency describes a person's ability to generate a large number of ideas, solutions, or responses. Flexibility examines someone's ability to look at a situation from a different point of view. Elaboration encompasses a person's ability to modify or expand an existing idea. Originality, often seen as the essence of creativity, is the ability to generate a unique idea, product, or solution. While Guilford's framework helps describe the concept of creativity in much more operational terms, the model also offers opportunities for the online classroom. Instead of giving an online quiz on a topic, why not

have students see the content from a different point? A chemistry instructor could have students explain an oxidation reaction from the point of view of an electron, for instance. A history instructor could choose to focus on the elaboration aspects of creativity and have students outline a debate that argues both sides of a controversial topic. With an animation application such as [GoAnimate](#), the students could demonstrate their understanding of the course concepts and showcase their creativity as well.

4. View assessments more broadly. In the online classroom, instructors sometimes focus too heavily on objective assessments such as quizzes and exams. While these are relatively easy to design, schedule, and grade, these assessments offer few opportunities for students' creative expression. By expanding the assessments to include student-produced videos, presentations, animations, and artistic works, instructors can foster student creativity while they are evaluating student understanding.

5. Don't be distracted by the shiny. One challenge with using online creative tools for assessments and interaction in online classrooms is the influence student-produced media can have on instructors' evaluation of classroom learning. While a video created by a student may look appealing or technically challenging, the learning demonstrated through the work may be sparse. Don't let a highly polished project influence the assessment of student learning. In some cases, it may be beneficial to include a rubric that clearly identifies aspects of the assignment that will be assessed. This can help focus students on the specific content they need to demonstrate in their creative work.

While traditional use of the online classroom offers a variety of means of instruction, interaction, and assessment, seeing the space as an environment where students can display their creativity can help build student interest and engage them more in the learning process. It can also help the online classroom evolve into a more vibrant, creative space.

Simple Animation for Your Courses

John Orlando, PhD

Animation is an engaging format for delivering online content. We see it used in TED-Ed presentations, educational documentaries, and elsewhere. It is also much easier to make than many people think. Simple and free, or inexpensive, online systems allow anyone to make animated videos in a variety of formats. The creator chooses from a menu of characters, actions, and backgrounds; adds a narration audio track; and then chooses how the elements will move around a scene. These systems only take a few minutes to learn, and while they will not win you an Oscar, they are perfectly fine for online teaching.

One use of animation is to publicize a course on the faculty member's webpage. I made one

announcing a faculty development course that used two characters talking in a bar about challenges they face in teaching, with one announcing my course as a solution. Yes, it sounds hokey, but it's an attention grabber that sets the tone of my training as interesting and innovative. We do little to inform students about courses or try to interest them before they sign up. Normally, they just get a brief description in a course catalog or perhaps a syllabus. An animated video will capture students' attention and get them motivated to take the course. Animated videos can also be used in an online course to introduce a week's content, what students should do, and what students will get out of each activity. They can also be used to deliver content itself if the instructor prefers not to use other video formats. Take a look at this example of an animation used to deliver a lesson on animal ethics: https://youtu.be/3HAMk_ZYO7g.

Another option is to have students make animations as assessments. I have had students make animations that teach a topic. This is far more engaging to the student than a traditional paper, and students will respond with surprising amounts of creativity. Plus, the videos can be added to the course content itself to educate future students.

Here are some easy to use animation systems for making your own videos.

VideoScribe is one of my favorite tools for making RSA Animate-style videos. These videos display a hand that writes out, draws, or pulls in what you want to appear on the screen, making for a powerful effect that captivates your audience. As a creator, you are given a blank canvas and can add images from the system's own repository or those that you import. You then direct the hand to pull in

images as if they were being moved onto a whiteboard. You can also type text that the hand will draw out for you or load black-and-white images that the hand will draw out for you in the video.

To create this, or any other form of video, make sure to record your narration first and load it onto the site. Then pick the elements and set the action to match your narration as you move through the timeline. See a video introducing a faculty training site I designed as an example: https://youtu.be/id_AiIljB4Q.

PowToon is similar in layout and functionality to VideoScribe. There are just small differences in characters and functionality. I find it easy to use, and I like the free stick figures with different motions that you can include, such as happy, sad, angry, and so on. Take a look at an example I made that introduces our school to new faculty: http://bit.ly/2glqwkt. Also take a look at this tutorial on how to create a video in Powtoon: https://youtu.be/ypLODMIpGic.

Wideo is a cloud-based system that allows you to put different elements onto a canvas, like the former systems. It differs because it provides a much greater range of characters, backgrounds, and movements, as well as more detailed scenes and different effects. It also provides a wide range of templates from which to choose. The quality level is up to marketing level, which is its intended audience, though it works fine for educational content.

GoAnimate lets users build videos using animated characters and preset scenes. You choose the character and scenes, and the action runs automatically. You can then either type text that the system will translate into a voice, which is admittedly a bit choppy, or add your own voice. Like most systems, it operates

on a freemium system that gives you limited functionality for free. You can start with the free system and, if you like it, pay for the premium version to do more. Take a look at this short example: http://bit.ly/2gzwrp7.

Plotagon uses characters that look more like real people than other systems while still being animations. It also provides a three-dimensional effect rather than the flat effect of other systems. Like GoAnimate, with Plotagon you choose a scene with characters and motion

and type in the dialogue. The movements are not perfectly smooth and the dialogue comes out a bit robotic, but it gets the message across in an interesting way. Here is the example I mentioned above about introducing a new faculty development course: https://youtu.be/87huqocuNzc.

Try one of these systems to capture your students' attention and add interest in your courses.

What Do Students Really Want from Online Instructors?

Brian Udermann, PhD

Over the past nine years, I've had the pleasure of seeing approximately 200 instructors at my institution develop and teach their first online course. I've witnessed instructors excited by the opportunity, but I've also observed many who were hesitant or even fearful of teaching online.

The instructors who were hesitant or fearful often would ask: "So, what's the secret to being a great online instructor?" I had the sense they were expecting an extensive or complex answer. Many times they were surprised by my response.

Much has been written about student satisfaction in online courses, and there certainly are a number of factors that can influence a student's experience as an online learner—institution, discipline, level of course, peers, home life, instructor, and so on. The ideas in this article have come from three sources: my 11 years of online teaching

experience, hundreds of discussions with instructors about what has and hasn't worked in their online courses, and the research literature.

1. Easy-to-follow course design and navigation

Something that can be incredibly frustrating for students is entering their online course for the first time and being confused or not knowing how to get started. Confusion can quickly lead to frustration and a disgruntled and unhappy learner—not a great way to start a class. Learner confusion almost always means more emails and questions for the instructor as well.

Many instructors include a "Welcome—get started here" message in the news or announcements area in the learning management system, making it the first thing students see when they log in to their course for the first time. Students can then be directed

to the syllabus, where they'll find additional information on the design and navigation of the course.

Easy navigation (presenting content and course activities in a consistent manner), whether by unit, week, chapter, or module, can foster a comfort level for students and help decrease confusion. Create hyperlinks from the syllabus, announcement page, or the content area within the course to minimize the number of clicks required to access content, to partic-ipate in discussion forums, to take quizzes, to upload papers and assignments, and so on.

2. Clear expectations and directions for activities and assessments

Providing explicit directions for course activities and assessments, as well as letting students know exactly (or as close as possible) what will be expected of them, is another way to reduce learners' confusion. This ultimately results in a better course experience for both student and instructor. Instead of spending time and energy worrying whether they are completing an assignment the way an instructor wants, students can focus that energy on the assignment itself. To help accomplish this, many online instructors provide their students with rubrics that students can use as a guide to help complete course assignments. The expectations an instructor shares with students could be related to netiquette, academic integrity, the quality of participation in online discussion forums, meeting deadlines, and so on.

I sometimes hear instructors comment about how they feel they shouldn't have to coddle their online learners or spell everything out for them. After all, online learners are supposed to take more responsibility for their learning—right?

Well, research shows that in addition to improving satisfaction levels, giving clear directions and expectations in online courses improves learning and helps keep online learners more engaged with an instructor and other students in the class. What instructor wouldn't want to be known for helping to facilitate that outcome?

3. Reasonably quick responses to students' questions

This point may seem incredibly basic, but I would say it rates high on the list of items that are important to online learners. In the nine years I've served as the director of online education at my institution, I've received more student complaints about this topic than any other: "I contacted my instructor with a question five days ago and haven't heard back yet."

We all like to receive timely responses when we ask a question, whether it's directed to a colleague, a supervisor, or the cable company. Students are no different!

I think there is a misconception that online learners expect 24/7 access to their instructors. It has been my experience, and the experience of a vast majority of instructors I talk to, that if an instructor sets clear response expectations (e.g., I will respond to emails within 24 hours if I receive them on a weekday), most students will respect that. An online instructor does not need to be available 24/7 to be successful—and should not be!

4. Instructors who make their presence known

One way instructors can make their presence known to students is by regularly communi-cating with them. This communication might start with an email a week or two prior to the start of the class to introduce themselves and give students information about the course. It could include a video introduction or course orientation. Subsequent emails could include regular course updates and announcements

summarizing how class members did on a particular assignment or activity. And most students greatly appreciate receiving reminders about due dates of upcoming assignments.

Students like to know their instructor's perspective on course content. This could be shared in the form of written lecture narratives, podcasts, voice-over PowerPoints, or videos. Online courses can be text heavy, and I've learned that many students enjoy both hearing and seeing their instructor—even in online courses. Students are pretty savvy, and many realize when instructors simply share publisher-created content rather than offering their own viewpoint on the concepts and principles covered in the class.

Other ways instructors can improve their presence in online courses is to provide prompt and meaningful feedback and to participate in online discussion forums (both could be stand-alone topics of future columns).

Presence is important. We survey our online students for feedback, and I have seen comments range from "I assume the instructor got paid for teaching this course, but it felt like I never interacted with him" to "I felt like I interacted more and got to know my professor better in this online course than in my face-to-face courses."

Conclusion

Many research articles and book chapters have been dedicated to student satisfaction in online courses. At a minimum, if instructors set clear expectations and provide detailed directions for activities and assessments, create courses that are well designed and easy to navigate, respond to student questions in a timely manner, and make their presence known, they will likely experience success and satisfaction in their online teaching. This should be reassuring to instructors who are hesitant about venturing into online teaching.

A Checklist for Moving Your Course Online

Angela Heath

A checklist is absolutely essential to moving a face-to-face course online. Not only does it help the instructor conceptualize their course in an online environment, it helps the instructional designer see what needs to be done. Here is a simple guide to preparing to move your courses online.

Topics to consider

Course Length/Timeframe

Most courses run the length of a semester,

but this does not always translate directly to an online format. For instance, you may have 30 minutes of instruction in a course session followed by class activity and homework. Students are then given activities and readings to do outside of class that support the lecture. By contrast, in an online course, the "lecture" need not be the center of instruction, but more of a means to guide students to the concepts they will learn through other material. In my online business courses, I like to first provide

students with relevant practical materials to dive in and see the concepts in action. I then use my lecture as a way to wrap-up and highlight what was learned in the module.

Course Objectives

In many cases, there are fewer course objectives for online courses, in that material is chunked to keep students from becoming overwhelmed. Review current course objectives and make a note of which topics contain the most and the least number of objectives. Also, make a note of which topics/modules/sessions contain objectives that are often difficult for your students.

Learning Activities

Some of the biggest misconceptions are made when considering learning activities. For instance, many faculty believe that the online course equivalent involves just uploading PowerPoint slides to substitute for in-class lectures. In face-to-face classes, learning activities often consist of lecture, discussions, practice problems, video discussion, group work, etc. Of course, this can greatly depend on the subject being taught, the size of the class, comfort level of the teacher, available technology in the room, and many other things.

Assessments

Does your course have a midterm and a final? How about weekly quizzes, homework, lab assignments, and practice problem sets? How do these translate into an online environment? There are many ways to handle assessments, but you need to be clear on whether the assessment is a formative or a summative one. A formative assessment gauges how students are doing along the way. The purpose of a formative assessment is to provide feedback and inform students of their progress and what they need to improve upon. On the other hand, summative assessments are more final and should be used to evaluate students on their level of learning, skills development, and overall achievement in the course. So, the type of assessment will help determine the appropriate online strategy to access your students.

Course development checklist for faculty

Now that you've thought about your course in both formats—face-to-face and the new online format—you will need to succinctly summarize this for your instructional designer. Having a checklist that summarizes the major aspects of your face-to-face course is helpful before sitting down with your instructional designer. This ensures that you both are on the same page about the course structure, learning activities, assessments, and so on.

Here are the questions to answer when filling out your checklist:

Overall Course Features:

• What are the top three features that you MOST like about your course? In other words, which course features (i.e., lectures, exams, assignments, etc.) do you feel work, and would you keep the same?

• What are the top three features that you LEAST like about your course? In other words, what are some features (i.e., lectures, exams, assignments, etc.) that you would change if you could?

• Which two course features (i.e., lectures, exams, assignments, etc.) do you feel work, and would you keep the same?

Learning activities

• What are the three MOST popular learning activities in your course (e.g., the wiki on green

computing)?

• What are two challenges or struggles have you experienced in teaching this course? For instance, "Lecture two is dry, and students do not pick up the material well."

• What are the muddiest points per module/lecture that students experience in learning from your course?

• What are three technology features that you would add to your course to enhance its learning activities?

Assessments

• Do you use any formative assessment tools such as quizzes, homework, practice sets, etc.?

If yes, what are students required to do to successfully complete them?

• Do you have grading rubrics for your assessments?

Interactivity

• What are the three or four primary ways that students interact (with you, with each other) in your course?

• What are three or four interactions that you would like to see in an online course?

The answers to these questions will guide your course development. Feel free to download a course development checklist at https://bit.ly/2IeRn2K.

How Teaching Online Can Improve Your Face-to-Face Classes

Lolita Paff, PhD

When teachers are tasked with developing an online course, their thinking often follows along these lines: This is what I do in class. How can that be translated online?

What if we reversed our thinking? Instead of assuming what's done on ground is ideal, what if we looked at teaching online as a means of improving our face-to-face teaching skills? The process of developing an online course, starting with a clean slate instead of converting resident instruction via technology, leads to an examination of our classroom-based course design, assumptions about learning, and ultimately improves instructional practice in both settings along several dimensions: teaching persona, power distance, instruc-

tional clarity, student interaction, and learning assessment.
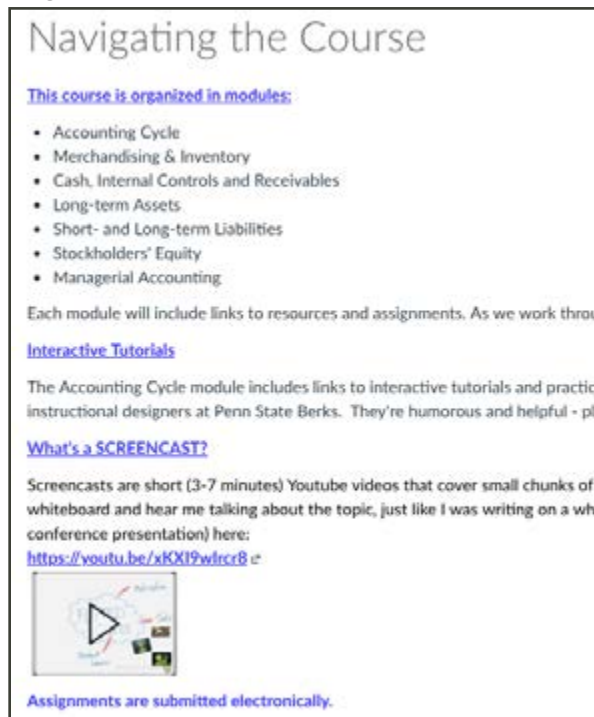
Presence and Distance

From the minute we enter the classroom, students are sizing us up. Our appearance, demeanor, voice, word choice, and mannerisms project an image. Similarly, the teacher may notice a variety of student characteristics: clothing, tone of voice, behavior, and level of attention. All this happens automatically when we share a physical space with our students.

Online first impressions begin with the learning management interface, course organization, and whatever materials and

resources the teacher has chosen to share when the course opens. While teaching online means we may not have to worry about physical appearance, it does mean we have to spend time thinking about how to create and maintain a presence online. Who am I? How can or should I communicate my identity to students?

I didn't invest a lot of time thinking about this before I started teaching online. Thus, I missed opportunities to make learning personal. Online teaching forces us to think more carefully about persona, values, and priorities than the face-to-face context. For example, the welcome module in the online section begins with a segment called Navigating the Course. I hadn't thought about creating a resource like this for resident students. But after I developed a page of short descriptions and examples for the online environment, it was clear that all of my students would find this information helpful.

Below is my own example (click picture for larger view):

The lack of social cues is a common reason faculty give for resisting online teaching. But let's be honest. How many of your students do you really get to know? It's easy to assume physical presence automatically leads to relationship building, among students and between the teacher and students. Before I started teaching online, most of the connections I made with students happened during office hours.

While I strive to learn everyone's name and circulate around the room regularly each period, I can't say I've really gotten to know each student, particularly in large sections. Yet facilitating relationships across the geographically dispersed and asynchronous online classroom requires a more intentional approach. As I developed online strategies for students to get to know each other and me, I realized how haphazardly I fostered a sense of community in resident instruction.

I've adapted the online "getting to know you" tactics for my face-to-face courses. I've also provided an online space for frequently asked questions (FAQ Forum) in resident classes. Sometimes referred to as The Water Cooler, the forum is a place for students to answer each other's questions or connect about non-course related topics. Before I taught online, I hadn't thought about setting up a virtual space for students to interact informally. After all, they see each other in class. But student feedback suggests students, resident and online, appreciate being able to connect outside of formal course discussions. Below is a screenshot from a resident section of an honors microeconomics course.

Use of the forum varies each term, depending on the composition of students and how diligently I promote its use. Overall, the availability of a virtual student space increases the sense of community in the course.

Thirsting for Info: Questions, Current Events & Open Dialogues

Have questions?
Want to discuss a topic?
Post it here!
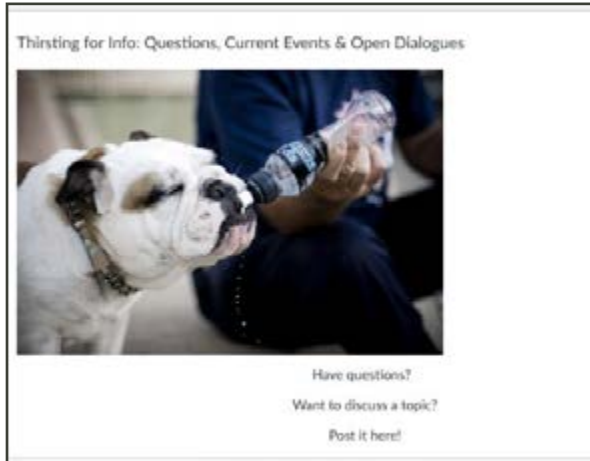
Clarity and Unproductive Cognitive Load

The importance of structure, sequence, and clarity cannot be overstated in the online environment. Cognitive load should be focused on learning content, not trying to figure out what the teacher wants, searching for resources, or solving learning management system mysteries. Of course, teachers want instructions to be clear for resident students too, but the opportunity for face-to-face questioning before, during, and after class means the stakes aren't nearly as high as they are online.

Thus, a critical aspect of developing an online course is predicting and avoiding points of confusion. This applies to how the materials are organized, instructions for assessments, and clarity in content delivery—often across a range of media. Online students' frustration stemming from unproductive cognitive load leads to late drops, missed or incomplete assignments, and poor course evaluations. When instructions, layout, and sequencing work well online, it is virtually assured they will

be clearly understood by resident students too. Thus, materials and planning for online instruction saves time and stress for teachers and students, in both settings.

Student Interaction

Many teachers want to promote and encourage discussion and interaction, for a variety of learning and instructional reasons. In technical disciplines, promoting discussion can be particularly challenging. Many teachers in technical fields, and I count myself in this group, face additional hurdles by the nature of the content. Neither accounting nor economics is known for discussion pedagogy in resident instruction. Indeed, a survey of 275 economics faculty report "leading class discussions" represents only 20 percent of instructional time (Goffe & Kauper, 2014). Based on my research, I suspect the percentage is even lower in accounting.

Yet online economics and accounting courses routinely integrate interaction through online discussions in formative and summative assessments. Effective online interactions focus on interesting (from the students' perspectives) topics, real-world issues that allow for open-ended prompts, and activities with multiple outcomes and explanations. They can serve as a hook for content or a means of evaluating students' understanding.

After seeing the depth of application and understanding my online accounting students achieved through online case study discussions, I integrated online discussion in my face-to-face sections. The online format allows more introverted students to share their insights in a setting that works to their advantage. Online discussion provides a record of the exchange that students can revisit when they prepare for exams. The opportunity to discuss current events, apply concepts, and

wrestle with ethical issues outside of class time means students engage with the content more frequently and in a deeper way than time allows in the classroom. And student feedback by online and resident students has been very positive.

An unexpected benefit of preparing for online discussion: my classroom discussion facilitation skills improved. I've learned to wait and let discussions unfold instead of jumping in at the first pause. I've also become more adept at letting new avenues, particularly ones I hadn't anticipated, be explored.

Rethinking Assessments

Starting online course design as a blank slate means formative and summative assessment options are wide open. Exams and papers are a common default selection for resident instruction, not necessarily optimal whether online or on ground.

Identifying and developing assessments for the online environment frequently leads to different types of learning activities, particularly ones leveraging more collaboration and creativity than in on ground versions of the course. Typical examples of deliverables online include demonstrations of learning by creating websites, curating online content, and making videos. Here are a few examples of free resources by project type:
- Presentations: Prezi, PechaKucha
- Video: YouTube, Animaker
- Curated Content/Infographic: Pinterest, Piktochart, Canva, Venngage
- Interactive Resources: ThingLink, Kahoot
- Websites: Wix, Weebly

Based on the success of these activities online in accounting, I expanded the assessment options in my resident economics courses. This increased student engagement, particularly at the end of the term when energy and focus wane. Instead of another final exam, my students now engage in projects utilizing a range of media and formats. What's particularly striking here is that the process of reconsidering course design, delivery, and learning online leads to teaching and learning insights across disciplines and instructional settings. I expected to improve as an online teacher with time and experience. I didn't expect it to enhance my teaching in the face-to-face classroom.

A recent Google search for "faculty resistance to teaching online" produced 12.4 million hits. Most articles discuss the barriers and risks, or incentives to get more faculty teaching online. My experience suggests framing the issue as a professional development opportunity may lead more teachers to consider developing online materials and eventually teaching online. For those not ready to plunge into full-blown course development, choosing one segment and developing it for the online setting is an excellent exercise in instructional improvement. Question your assumptions about how students best learn your content, explore alternative forms of assessment, talk with colleagues who've had success teaching online or blended courses.

Most of us teach because we care about students and want them to learn. I didn't start teaching online to enhance my classroom instruction. But's that's exactly what happened. Preparing to teach online made me a better, more empathetic teacher, face-to-face and online. It may do the same for you.

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Seven Ways to Facilitate Effective Online Discussions

Mary Bart

Unlike a lot of faculty teaching today, Brian Udermann learned about the potential of online discussion boards almost by accident. It all happened about 15 years ago when he noticed the online discussion forum feature in his institution's new learning management system and decided to set one up for his face-to-face class in health and nutrition.

"I had no idea what I was doing," said Udermann, now director of online education at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. "There were no grades affiliated with it. I didn't even create a prompt, or a question, or an activity, nothing. I just told students, 'Hey, this is available in our class, this discussion forum thing, and if you ever want to go out there and interact with each other, you certainly can.'"

Nothing happened for about a week or so, but then one day a student posted a comment about something he found interesting from the day's lecture. Then another student chimed in, then another. And for the rest of the semester a small group of students would drift in and out of the discussion forum, chatting about the

most recent class and the things that piqued their interest.

Fast forward to 2018 and Udermann is teaching others how to facilitate effective online discussions. He knows firsthand the challenges of engaging online students and hears from faculty about the frustrations of trying to find the right balance with their online presence as well as the age-old challenge of cultivating meaningful dialogue among students.

He offers the following seven strategies for creating robust discussion board activities that students will find interesting along with helpful tips for managing instructor workload related to reading and grading posts.

1. Identify your optimal number of discussion forums.

Oftentimes, an online instructor will determine the number of required forums based on the weeks in the semester. So, by default, a 15-week course has 15 forums. That can be too much, especially during weeks where students have midterms, papers, or other large projects due.

In surveys of online students at UW-La Crosse, Udermann says they started noticing a theme about five years ago whereby students said the discussion boards sometimes feel like busywork. It's that kind of feedback that can help faculty reconsider the structure of their discussion board requirements and reflect on what they're really hoping to achieve.

"We always have this conversation with new instructors before they teach their first online course," said Udermann. "Why are you using discussion forums in your class? Is it just because it's an online class, and you think that that's what you're supposed to be doing? What's the purpose? What's the meaning? What are the students going to learn? What do you want them to achieve based upon their partic-

ipation in these forums? Are your discussion forum activities tied into the student learning outcomes for the class?"

Once you have the answers to those questions and a clear purpose to each assignment, share it with your students. The reason we're having this discussion forum this week is because _____.

2. Determine how much you will participate.

One of the biggest challenges for online faculty, especially new instructors, is finding that sweet spot between having such an overbearing presence where you feel the need to comment on every post, log in at all hours of the day, seven days a week, and dominate the discussion to the point that students don't feel compelled to participate and setting a course on auto-pilot where you check in sporadically and have very little interaction with students other than dispensing grades.

"If an instructor is participating too much, students might start to back off because they know the instructor will jump in," said Udermann. "But if the instructor is not doing all that much, then students wonder where they are. Why are they getting paid to teach when they are never around?"

With experience, instructors often get a feel for the optimal level of presence needed in an online discussion forum to remain visible, offer encouragement, answer questions, share perspectives, and help guide discussion. And it will often vary from course to course, depending on how active students are in the discussion or whether they need some additional prodding.

Instead of making lots of brief comments, some instructors will write up a summary at the end of a week or a unit of a module, identifying four or five themes that may have emerged and highlighting particularly

noteworthy comments students had made.

3. Create more interesting and engaging prompts.

To illustrate the importance of good online discussion prompts, Udermann likes to share a story about an experienced online professor he met at a conference. The man shared openly about the challenges he had been having getting students to engage fully in the online discussion. Like many faculty, those teaching online as well as face-to-face, he was frustrated by the listless participation. It wasn't until this professor looked inward that he had an epiphany. Maybe the problem wasn't the students, but him.

After examining his discussion prompts through a more critical lens, he could see that they were, in a word, boring. No wonder students didn't seem interested. After retooling his questions and prompts, the difference in student engagement was like night and day.

In addition to spending some extra time formulating effective questions, Udermann recommends getting students to step away from the keyboard and do something that will bring personal relevance to the course content.

For example, years ago he taught an online health and wellness course and one of the discussion forum questions asked, Why is it important to pay attention to the serving size on a food label? Not surprisingly, the students correctly stated that a nutrition label tells how many calories, grams of fat, and so on that you're consuming with each serving. Everyone's comment said pretty much the same and the discussion quickly devolved into boring repetition.

"I decided to change the prompt—I got rid of the question and had the students do an activity instead," Udemann said. "I asked students to go to their cupboards and refrigerators and pull out five or six things they ate or drank on a consistent basis, look at the nutrition label, and report back on what they found."

The discussion forum lit up with comments from students who were shocked to learn that a serving of ice cream is only half a cup, a fraction of the giant bowl they would normally eat. Or that a serving of potato chips in only about 10 chips, not half the bag. They quickly discovered how many extra calories they were consuming without even knowing it.

"I think students found that somewhat interesting because they were actually engaging in some activity, and then following that up with some discussions with other students in the discussion forum," he said. "Anytime you can pull in a real-life component, it helps keep students interested because they see the benefit for what they're learning."

4. Deal with concerns immediately.

The know-it-all. The bully. The jester. The over-participator. The seemingly anonymous nature of online discussion forums can lead some students to write things they would never say in a face-to-face class. In some cases, things get misinterpreted without the benefit of seeing the person's face or hearing the tone of their voice. Courses that deal with controversial issues are especially prone to difficult conversations and require a solid framework for creating a safe, open, and productive discussion.

For all these reasons and more, it's important to share with students your expectations for online discussions starting on the very first day of class. Post netiquette guidelines to the LMS and refer to them as needed. Some instructors solicit input from students to help draft the guidelines, which helps to gain their buy-in. And if a problem does arise, deal with it immediately.

5. Grade to your expectations early on.

Beginning instructors sometimes go easy on students during the first few weeks, awarding more points than an answer deserves because they figure students are still trying to figure things out in the course. Unfortunately, it's hard to tighten up the requirements once you've been lenient.

That's why it's better to communicate your expectations right from the start, which is where rubrics become indispensable. It also helps to share samples of past students' work—from exemplary to poor. Just get permission or remove any identifiable information.

"Share your rubric with students so they know what to expect and how they will be graded," said Udermann. "And if you do give a student a two out of five or a one out of five, be specific in your feedback. 'Here's the reason you got the score that you did.' It's kind of an eye-opener for them and usually gets their attention."

6. Utilize guest experts.

Inviting guest experts is a fairly common technique for infusing fresh ideas and real-world relevance into face-to-face courses, but it's used less frequently in the online classroom. Why is that? Advances in communication technology provides numerous ways to tap into the expertise of guest speakers. [Skype](), [Zoom](), and [BlueJeans]() are just a few of the platforms available for video conferencing and collaboration. Conduct the session synchronously and record it for those who can't attend the live discussion. Or just have the guest speaker available for questions via the chat.

"In one of the health classes I used to teach, I had a lecture on cardiovascular health and used to pull someone in who had quadruple bypass surgery to share their experience with students," said Udermann. "So, it doesn't necessarily have to be an academic expert on the topic but someone who has experience with what you're talking about in class."

7. Model what you expect.

Because online students don't get the benefit of sitting in the same physical space as you and seeing your energy and enthusiasm for the course and how you interact with students, it's important to be deliberate in modeling how you expect your students to behave in the course. How do you interact with students? Are you friendly, calling them by name and noting their positive contributions? Or are you terse, dashing off a few repetitive comments just to prove you logged in?

"Students will pick up on these things very quickly," Udermann noted.

And don't be afraid to have some fun, starting with the first-day-of-class icebreaker. A lot of classes start with a prompt that asks students to share their name, year in school, major, and why they're interested in taking this class. While that's fine, why not create some intrigue with something like "two truths and a lie." Everyone has to share three things about them, only two of which are true, and people need to guess the lie.

"There is always that fear, but the vast majority of time when I interact with faculty after they taught online for the first time, they had a good experience. Probably 85% to 90% of our online instructors continue to teach online," he said. "And most say that they're impressed by the students, by their participation, by the depth of the conversations that they have in their online discussion forums."

Online Discussions: Would Changing the Environment Help?

Maryellen Weimer, PhD

Online discussions aren't a new thing anymore; they regularly occur in online courses and courses with online components. What we've learned for sure: they're a mixed bag. On the plus side, they make participation safer. Students can make a post, walk away, and not worry about nonverbal, face-to-face feedback. Comments are written, which means there's more time to craft a thoughtful response and more opportunities to work on writing skills. The discussion has permanence. Student comments stay put for the duration of the exchange. The whole interaction can be reviewed and analyzed in great depth. When students are assigned to respond to comments, that ups the chances of peers learning from each other. And the discussion can occur asynchronously.

The downsides of online discussion balance its impressive benefits. It lacks spontaneity, the energy that flows from a dynamic exchange of ideas. Students usually participate in response to prescribed protocols. They must make a comment and respond to two other posts. The linear nature of these exchanges makes it hard to follow a discussion thread and see the connections between comments. Threads read like disjointed monologues. Moreover, online discussions tend to be short. They don't build

toward a conclusion. Students do what they're required to do but with little enthusiasm and one wonders how much learning.

The effectiveness of online discussion has been limited by the imposition of face-to-face protocols in an environment where they don't particularly fit. We've tried to structure them as traditional discussions: an exchange of comments, often required, and posted during a designated time period. The technology works against this kind of structure. We need to start thinking of online exchanges as a different form of interaction.

A participant in one of my recent workshops described what he called the "online discussion environment," an idea he said he got from an article by Gao (2011). The problem, he said, was that you can't see where the discussion is going or has been when online exchanges occur linearly. The posts appear one after another, and before long, any given comment is lost in the sea of comments surrounding it. But in the online environment, it's possible to position what's being exchanged differently. The posts can be arranged visually, and that's how Gao handled them, using the idea of concept maps.

Concept maps are all about visually presenting relationships. Gao developed a

discussion map using a [collaborative concept map website](). It puts the discussion prompt at the center of the map, with posts radiating out from it in bubbles and responses to posts appearing as sub-bubbles. Discussion participants also used lines to connect posts across and within bubbles. Comparing the number of connections students made in a conventional online discussion with those made using the discussion map, Gao found that on the map, they made significantly more connections and there was greater development of threads within the discussion. Even though the study was small, Gao's students responded to the discussion map positively, reporting that it was easier to extend and build on ideas.

Some of the problems that regularly occur in face-to-face discussions have migrated into online discussions. Most students aren't eager to participate in either kind of discussion. Many have yet to discover that they can learn from other students' ideas and insights, and most don't like to be required to participate in what they consider boring discussions. Aloni and Harrington (2019), in an excellent article on improving online discussions, recommend devoting time to explaining the purpose of discussion and using discussion starters, whether provocative thinking questions, scenarios, role plays, or other creative alternatives; they also encourage teachers to work on developing effective facilitation skills.

Designing learning experiences for an online environment gives us the opportunity to think about different structures. Unfortunately, it's easy to forget that design details are malleable. They can be changed. Online discussions make it possible to learn from interactions in a different way. That learning is more likely to occur if we are responsive to the features of the online environment.

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The Faculty Focus newsletter is a free resource that publishes articles on effective teaching strategies for both the college classroom and online course.