Designing Your Online Class

Content

Content is the "stuff" of the course, everything from any lecture-type materials, to the expectations you lay out for the students, to your regular messages to them throughout the semester about the progress of the course (reminders of deadlines, etc.).

Lecture & Information Delivery

- Always create something, even if you don't "lecture"; your social presence is important; let students know you're a part of the course!
- Narrated PowerPoint is the most common vehicle:
  - **Suggestion 1: *VoiceThread ($0-CSU Stan license)***
  - **Suggestion 2: *Panopto ($0-CSU Stan license)***
  - **Suggestion 3: *Zoom ($0-CSU Stan license)***
  - Consider using a written-out script to focus your narration and to make captions easier.
- Record regular "talking head" videos, esp. if using textbook website materials (Pearson, etc.)
- Encourage multimedia contributions by students

Setting Expectations

- Communicate course-wide expectations at the start of the course (your email response times, login frequency expectations, etc.)
  - *Create a FAQ addressing common concerns.*
- Specify what constitutes quality writing in discussion board assignments (i.e., insist upon "educationally valuable talk").
- Provide regular updates on the progress of the course and address significant questions that arise.
- Survey the students at least once in the semester on how the mechanics of the course are going.

Interaction

The key to creating a real educational experience lies in fostering interaction and encouraging social presence among the participants. Any interaction will prevent your class from becoming merely a "correspondence course" and instead enables it to become a true university-level experience.

Discussions

- Discussion board assignments are often the primary way students will contribute to the course.
- Set up a forum for course questions and require all questions be posted to that forum, anonymously if desired (no individual emails to you). Give students occasional credit for helpful answers.
- Aim for open-ended topics (e.g., "Defend…", "Judge…", "Can you create…") that synthesize.
  - *Example: "How can the U.S. invasion of Grenada be considered a modern-day example of the Monroe Doctrine"?*
- Be specific about the length, tone, and deadline you expect from students.
- Provide a grading rubric with examples of "educationally valuable talk".

Groups

- Consider putting the students into groups at the start of the class (4-8 students per group)
- Assign a group project early on.
- Groups should have their own discussion boards where ALL of their interactions are documented, if not necessarily graded.
  - *Offline interactions should be documented after-the-fact.*
- Use groups as the primary environment for students' interaction, as a way to enable social presence.
- Do not allow students to request re-assignment to a different group except in very extreme situations.
- Have students use Zoom to meet and record their group interactions for your review later

Assessment

Compared to a face-to-face course, student assessment in an online course should come through a broader range of tools. The learning model in online courses requires more than the traditional midterm-final-term paper sequence.

Tests & Quizzes

- All "objective" tests are essentially open book in an online course. There is no foolproof technological way to prevent cheating.
- Where possible, objective tests should be used primarily for self-help and comprehension (they can be graded but should be low stakes).
- Bring back the Socratic method: Schedule a 5-minute Zoom video chat/quiz with each student to prevent one form of cheating and better gauge student understanding.

Assignments

- Consider using new tools like:
  - Journals, blogs, wikis, Twitter, VoiceThread, Flipgrid, etc.
- Other group projects and presentations:
  - Allow students to submit via video, web page, or regular papers
- Student tools include Office365 and VoiceThread (for creating narrated presentations)
- Using new technologies provides students with real-world skills useful for résumés and interviews!