The Student Perspective

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Hello! My name is Jennifer Smith, and I am the manager of Instructional Design Services for UFIT at the Center for Instructional Technology and Training. Prior to coming to CITT, I was tenured faculty in the College of Fine Arts. I developed my first online course in 2000.

In this presentation, I'll present some things for you to think about as you develop your online or hybrid course. Generally, it is helpful to consider your audience, the students.

- Consider students and their needs
- Identify common pitfalls with online learning
- Outline methods to ensure student success

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Think about the students in YOUR class. Are they the traditional college-age students? Are they freshman or seniors close to graduation? Are they working professionals? Do they fall within a particular demographic? Do they have specific goals? How motivated are they?

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Some students may find online courses particularly challenging. In particular, younger students (under 25) tend to have less success. Part of the reason for this is that they may not have developed time management skills yet. They may also be in a transition stage of their life. Also, they may lack emotional and social maturity.

Students that are older than 25 tend to have greater success in online courses.

Students who have taken an online course before, tend to be more successful when they enroll in another online course. This is because they are more familiar with the work required and the types of activities. However, this also means that they may be used to a different format and may have certain expectations.

Some students learn well on their own, others require very careful direction. Some students may prefer to learn through readings, other might prefer to learn through videos or social interaction. It's helpful to think about the styles of learning that might be most prevalent in your course. Most students at an undergraduate level learn with visual and kinesthetic learning styles

Challenges

- Time management skills
- Technology
- Motivation
- Sense of isolation

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Time management skills are very important online. When students can set their own schedule, many choose to put the work off until it is too late. Freshmen are particularly at risk of failure due to poor time management.

Students' comfort level with technology can play a large role in their success. Research shows that although undergraduates see themselves as comfortable with technology that their understanding of technology is largely superficial.

Throughout this workshop, you'll find a lot of focus on engagement and motivation. Student motivation is critical. If they are not logging into the course, then they are not doing the work.

Successful online courses address students' potential feelings of isolation. Students who feel connected to the other students and their instructor are more likely to login regularly and do the coursework.

Don’t forget that there are strengths that your students bring to the course. Not the least of which is enthusiasm. I have often heard faculty say that they don’t want to teach online because they don’t want to lose that enthusiasm and energy that students bring to the course. In such a case, you’ll want to consider ways that you can channel that energy in the online environment.

Strengths

- Enthusiasm
- Social media skills
- Prior knowledge
- Personal experience
- Creativity

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Many of the younger students of today are comfortable with with social media. With the popularity of social media such as facebook and YouTube students are now more than ever better prepared for the type of interactions common in online courses.

Adult learners and even juniors and seniors bring competencies and experiences from the field and their own lives into the course. Students at all levels can offer each other various types of support – both technological and academic – more easily in an online setting

We've talked about student strengths and weaknesses. How do we apply this information to an online course? Let's look at the things that students expect to get out of a course—whether it is face to face or online

The biggest thing that comes from the physical classroom is social interaction. The energy they can get from their peers and the attention from a professor are the big things that bring students to a classroom. Isolation is the biggest challenge with online learning. If students feel that no one is paying attention to them, they will stop logging in and ultimately do poorly or fail in the course.

They also want to know that what they are doing is correct. And if it's not correct, how can they improve what they are doing. If feedback is not frequent and timely students will not have enough time to re-learn what was not correct and they will not be able to improve. This can cause quite a bit of frustration.

Encouragement is very important. We all want to feel that what we are doing is important and someone notices what we are doing. It takes conscious effort in an online course to let students know that they are doing well. But it is just important online as it is face to face.

Students need a guide to help them learn the material in an organized fashion. Organization in an online course is as important if not more important than in a physical classroom. Students are used to websites that make things easy to locate, they are used to Googling anything that they are looking for. They expect instructions and requirements to be easy to find and easy to understand. They don't want to waste time looking for things or trying to guess what the instructor wants.

Students need to integrate what they are learning into what they already know. New learning becomes part of our tool set to view and respond to the challenges we face. Students who take ownership of their learning are going to be interested and engaged in the course and the course material.

So keeping in mind these things that students bring to your class along with their needs and challenges, how can we create a course online that can support students and provide quality learning? These are some of the practical things that you can do in your course to ensure student success. We'll be going into detail on these items as we move through the Faculty Institute.

Community
Fostering a sense of community within your course is critical. This helps overcome the tendency for students to feel isolated and supports their need for social interaction. Some ways of doing this are through discussion boards, peer evaluations and group projects.

Communication and Feedback
Perceived communication and contact with an instructor is one of the most common factors for success in online learning. Provide students with clear outlines for how they can contact an instructor. This can be through email, Skype, virtual, or telephone office hours

In regards to feedback on papers and assessments, you'll want to get a response to the student in less than 24 hours or at maximum between 24-48 hours. If this is not possible due to high course enrollment let students know when they can expect to hear from you.

Set up a discussion board for Frequently Asked Questions and use the "Announcements" feature of the course management system. Remember, you are no longer in a classroom setting where you can answer a question and all of the students hear the answer. In order to avoid having an overwhelming number of emails from students it's important to have clear expectations and guidelines from the beginning.

Expectations and Accountability
In an online course it is not enough to simply post a syllabus. A successful course will:

- Post a syllabus and reference deadlines throughout the course.
- Clearly outline expectations for all activities and assignments throughout the course.
- Keep expectations consistent and unchanged throughout the course.

- Provide step-by-step instructions for academic assignments AND how to use the technologies of the course.
- Instructor and TAs take accountability for the course and frequently “check in.”

Engineering Economy EIN4354, Summer 2012 Due Dates

Assignment/Quiz	Description/Notes	Date Due	Points	Gradebook title	Done
All assignments are due at 10:00 p.m. on the due date.					
Discussion: 1st post	Your initial discussion board post is due each Wednesday at 10:00 p.m.				
Discussion: 2 responses	Your two discussion board responses are due Friday at 10:00 p.m.				
Quizzes	Your quizzes for all of the modules covered each week are due Friday at 10:00 p.m.				
Activity or Project	Your weekly activities or projects are due Sunday at 10:00 p.m.				
Midterm and Final Exams	The dates/times for your proctored midterm and final exams will be posted as soon as they are available				
Week 1	**May 14 - 20**				
Module 1 Discussion Post: Hello!	Introduce yourself to the class with a post.	5/18	5	1-DB-Hello	
Webtour Quiz	You cannot view introduction module until you have passed the Webtour quiz (5 points out of 5)	5/18	5	WebTourQz	
Handbook Quiz	You cannot view the course material until you have passed the handbook quiz (8 points out of 10)	5/18	10	HB Qz	
Contract Quiz	Agree to these statements to show that you clearly understand your responsibilities and the commitment necessary to succeed in this course.	5/18	5	Con Quiz	
Module 1 Quiz	Quiz covering Chapter 1 material.	5/18	20	1-qz	
Module 2 Problem Set	Chapter 2: Drill Problems 1 (a,d,f,j) and Application Problems 1 (a,b) and 2.	--	--		
Module 2 Quiz	Quiz covering Sections 2.1 and 2.2 material.	5/18	20	2-qz	
Module 1 Discussion Post: Article	Post an article (Web URL) concerning an engineering investment, classify it, and justify your classification. NOTE: YOU WILL NOT BE GIVEN CREDIT IF YOUR ARTICLE HAS ALREADY BEEN POSTED!	5/20	10	1-DB-Article	
Module 2 Activity	Build a GoogleDocs spreadsheet for the cash flows of the investment that you identify in the Module 1 Discussion Post. Merely estimate any data you require to fill in the necessary data.	5/20	10	2-ACT	
Week 2	**May 21 - 27**				
Module 3 Problem Set	Chapter 2: Drill Problems 3, 4, 6, 9, 14, 15 and Application Problems 4, 5.	--	--		
Module 3 Quiz	Quiz covering Sections 2.3 through 2.6 material.	5/25	20	3-qz	
Module 5 Problem Set	Chapter 2: Drill Problems 21, 22, 23, 25, 26 and Application Problem 8.	--	--		
Module 5 Quiz	Quiz covering Sections 2.7 and 2.8 material.	5/25	20	5-qz	
Module 4 Activity	Post a Bureau of Labor Statistics Index (or other index of choice) and estimate inflation rates	5/27	10	4-ACT	

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Frequent and Consistent Deadlines

Without the framework provided by regular classroom meetings, students taking online classes tend to put off doing the work. Provide the student with a framework of regular deadlines.

- Require students to complete weekly activities such as quizzes, discussions, and projects that require them to login frequently.
- Keep deadlines on the same day of the week and at the same time. Students have a lot of different deadlines and keeping them consistent will help them to remember yours.
- Students tend to prefer having things due at midnight, although this can be problematic in the event that they have any difficulties with technology as the Help Desk is closed at that time.

Student Engagement

One of the advantages of an online course is the ability to present materials in a variety of ways to engage the student.

There is a direct correlation to the amount of times a student logs into the course and the success in the course. Some examples of student engagement are:

- Discussion Boards
- Short lectures in segments of 15 minutes or less
- Variety in the presentation of materials (current events, youtube videos, articles, readings, lecture, humor, webquests, etcetera)
- Collaboration and other interaction with their peers
- Projects
- Weekly assessments

Availability of Assistance

Students are very busy and can get frustrated quickly when technology doesn't work or assignment instructions are unclear. Be sure to provide students with specific information on how to get help. Point them to the Help Desk for technical assistance, give them a course questions discussion board to provide answers to assignment questions. When students feel comfortable that they can get their problems solved quickly, they'll be able to focus on the course material.

Most face to face undergraduate courses – especially of the freshman and sophomore levels, follow a lecture and assessment model. Usually the students attend a lecture and are given 2-3 major exams throughout the semester.

Converting this model to an online setting by replacing the lectures with video and putting the exams into the course management system does not tend to support student success.

Generally, watching a lecture—whether it is live or recorded is a fairly passive activity. A successful course tends to focus on "active learning." This means that students spend their time doing something with the course material. The following modules within the Faculty Institute will provide ideas and strategies that will help you incorporate active learning into your online or hybrid course.

Since we have just been talking about the importance of "Active Learning" in an online course, it's time to put that concept into practice. Write down the strengths and challenges that the students taking your course a likely to have. Also consider specific needs that your students are likely to have.

You can use the worksheet form that is provided, or simply jot your thoughts on a piece of paper. As we go through the workshop, you'll refer to these items to determine the best way to create your course.

End

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