FUNDAMENTALS OF EFFECTIVE ONLINE TEACHING PRACTICE

Effective online teaching is an extension of good teaching practice, just in a different learning space. This guide presents a series of principles about how people can best interact online to create an effective and inclusive learning environment.

COMMUNICATE

1 **Communicate** – students want to know that you are present and engaged. Use a welcoming, inclusive tone in discussions, announcements, emails and course materials. These should sound like you, not like a formal missive. Plan to send a global cohort announcement at least once a week, and check and respond to email and discussion boards frequently throughout the week.

2 **Check in with students personally**, this helps to build relationships with them and helps them stay focused through frequent feedback, contact, and monitoring engagement in the Blackboard dashboard. Pick up individually with any students who you notice are not participating – they may need further support.

MANAGE TIME

3 **Set expectations** about communication and engagement such as preferred methods, typical time to respond, where to ask questions / share ideas, and boundaries for interaction that are reasonable for both students and instructors (none of you have to be available 24/7).

4 **Office hours are a critical support for online students**. Set aside time for responding to questions and offer time(s) to be available synchronously. If you will be unable to respond for a few days, identify someone else within the course team to be the contact point during that time and make sure that this is explained to students as early as possible.

STRUCTURE THE LEARNING JOURNEY

5 **Use a learning design process** – start with your learning outcomes, design assessment to evaluate them, then the supporting learning activities and content.

6 **Map out the content of the course** – map learning activities, live sessions, reading, research, videos, assignments, etc. to the learning outcomes. You can use a table, concept map, or visual syllabus to do this and share this with students to help them see the course at a high level. Make the purpose of class activities and assessments explicit.

7 **Make the course navigation clear** - use the HW VLE structure to give your course site a simple and consistent structure. Within your course site keep a consistent and simple layout e.g. one folder per week containing all the content for the week and an explanation for what to do with it, assessment all in one folder, provide links to the library for readings and other resources (check first that they are available electronically).

ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY

8 **Consider principles of accessibility and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** in all your pedagogical decisions. (UDL means designing so that the course is accessible to everyone from the start, rather than having to adapt it later in response to individual requirements). This will improve your course for all students, particularly any students with disabilities. Make sure you have checked what support your students require and that they have access to this. One of the main advantages of the online environment is that students can learn in their own way, at their own pace.

9 **Consider what technology your students will have access to**. Many will be trying to work on a phone or tablet, may be sharing a device, and may have poor or limited internet access. Before using high bandwidth tools and practices, consider whether there is a low cost and low-tech alternative.

PROMOTE ACTIVE LEARNING

10 **Structure learning activities** to actively engage students in the learning process. Clearly explain to them what they should be doing throughout the week and how this supports their learning. Continue to work within the context of the learning hours for your course but think differently about what those hours would be used for. Emphasise time on task over 'contact hours'. Design opportunities to engage deeply with learning in authentic contexts, rather than surface approaches.

11 **Plan for a mix of synchronous** (e.g. live virtual classroom, chat) and **asynchronous activities** (e.g. text, discussion boards, announcements, emails, problems, research, readings etc.).

12 **Limit synchronous interactions** to things that pedagogically require it e.g. live demonstration, dialogue about difficult topics, collaborative problem-solving. Always have backup plans (yes more than one) in case of technical difficulties.

13 **Use asynchronous learning** where possible to limit demands on internet bandwidth and provide flexibility for students working in different timezones or managing other responsibilities or issues as well as their studies. Asynchronous resources such as pre-recorded mini-lectures (shorter chunks covering discrete concepts are more useful and accessible than long recordings), notes, learning guides, and other downloadable content, can be useful, especially when scaffolded as part of a wider activity to encourage active learning.

14 **Recording live sessions** provides a useful learning resource for students and enables accessibility. Remember to get consent from participants before recording. If it's not appropriate to record all of a session, you can record parts of it e.g. hang out at the end of a live session after the recording's finished, think of this as the space in which students might approach you after class if you were teaching on campus.

15 **Encourage metacognition** by embedding questions and activities that help students to reflect on their learning – e.g. small formative quizzes, problems, reflection prompts.

16 **Outline key learning activities each week** - write or record (video, audio) these to help student stay on task and manage their time. It will also help students to feel that you are engaged and in turn will engage them. A short reflection on the previous week's work can help students to link concepts and activities together across the course.

FOSTER A LEARNING COMMUNITY

17 **Take time to develop the learning community** - students need time to make connections, more so online than face-to-face. Building community is especially important online, where people may feel isolated or disconnected. Providing space and support for them to develop as a community will pay dividends in their confidence to collaborate, share ideas and develop their learning from each other.

18 **Make introductions** - Post a short introductory video about the course and yourself. Create a space for students to introduce themselves too e.g. an introductory live session and / or a discussion thread. Encourage them to connect with each other but remind them they only need to share what they are comfortable with. You may wish to provide some warm-up activities to facilitate community building.

19 **Be visible, available and responsive to your students through multiple modes** – live sessions, email, discussion forums, virtual classroom, MS Teams, work phone (if you're on campus) etc. Make sure you are clear on boundaries and expectations.

20 **Encourage students to communicate, collaborate and share** what they are learning with each other. Use smaller group activities where appropriate to build community and connection between students. Encourage and support students to make use of tools available to do this e.g. to create and respond to threads on discussion boards, to use group virtual classrooms for synchronous informal discussions.

Providing space and support for them to develop as a community will pay dividends in their confidence to collaborate, share ideas and develop their learning from each other.

21 **Create space for students to connect informally / socially.** Providing a virtual classroom or discussion board space for informal and social connections will contribute to students building connections and developing as a learning community. Create a space for student representation discussion too – this is an important way for students to connect and participate with the wider university community.

22 **Curate a diverse range of resources/content to support learning** – consider going beyond a textbook to include other relevant and/or up-to-date readings, Open Educational Resources (OERs), websites, news reports, online videos, instructor-created content, simulations, virtual labs, cases. Your school liaison librarian can help find resources and address copyright questions about content you want to use online. Encourage students to reflect on and share the resources they have found useful.

FOCUS ON ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK FOR LEARNING

23 **Plan your assessment to support learning.** Wherever possible, consider more authentic assessments that allow students to demonstrate performance in an applied context. Review what assessments are needed and how they will be delivered. There are unlikely to be face-to-face exams so plan what alternative assessment could be used. Provide a low-stakes opportunity to practice assessment.

24 **Start by trusting your students' academic integrity.** There is no magic answer to resolve all concerns about academic integrity – it requires a multi-strategy approach including building a culture of integrity, pedagogical approaches, assessment approaches, technology, and education on academic responsibilities.

25 **Provide prompt and meaningful feedback on assessment.** Provide feedback which supports students to further their learning. There are various digital tools which can help you provide feedback, so make use of them where appropriate e.g. audio, video feedback, Blackboard Grade centre or Turnitin Feedback Studio.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Chickering, A. and Ehrmann, E. (1996), Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever [Online] Available at **http://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/teachingLibrary/Technology/seven_ principles.pdf**

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education model. The Internet and Higher Education, 2(2-3), 87-105.

Lee, K. (2020) Five ways online university learning can be better than face-to-face teaching [Online] Available at **https://theconversation.com/ five-ways-online-university-learning-can-be-better-than-face-to-face-teaching-139127**

Rosell-Aguilar, F. (2020) Videos on how to teach online using live tutorial software [Online] Available at **https://twitter.com/FRosellAguilar/ status/1240673255549292545**

NOTES

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