

Reflecting Upon Your Online Course: From A Student's Perspective

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Organization. In looking at the assignments/quizzes/instruction/discussion that you created for a given topic... will it be clear to your students what needs to be done, how to accomplish it, and in what order? In a classroom, this would be considered flow and transition from one activity to another. In an online course, it comes up as organization. Also, is it clear when the topic (or the individual components of the topic - quiz, lecture, assignments, etc) are due?

Instruction. Does your method of instruction support multiple approaches to learning the material? Sometimes, students just need to see it presented in more than one way before they "get it." Do the instructional materials cover the important points of the topic? Is it engaging? We do more than just talk-n-chalk or show powerpoints in the classroom, and likewise online it can be helpful for there to be more than just a posted powerpoint and/or assigned text book pages. In the classroom, you might include a brief video to get students' attention or illustrate a point. Online this could be with a link to a relevant and interesting video segment (e.g., a video on youtube) or to a website; telling students why the link to the video/site is there. Some instructors create a narrated lecturette (half a page to a page; that is written down to read) that introduces students to a topic (which could be posted, e-mailed, or in an announcement).

Regular and Effective Contact. How are you maintaining regular and effective contact with your students? There are a variety of ways to support interaction between the instructor and the students, including class discussions, by giving feedback on assignments, via e-mail, synchronous meetings (e.g., using Elluminate), announcements, and/or a more generic 'Ask A Question' area where students can post questions when they need help.

Student Interaction. Think of classroom discussions, small group interactions, or where students are called upon to share their response with the class... In an online course, student interaction can occur whenever students' see and/or hear what their classmates have to say... and have the option to add in their own thoughts. Are students engaged in critical thinking? Are they applying what they are learning? Are they discovering other perspectives on a topic? A single class activity does not need to accomplish any of the above goals... but what is it accomplishing? When reflecting upon your course's online discussion, you may want to consider the amount and depth of thinking demonstrated by the students in their posting. Did the discussion accomplish its purpose?

Assessments. Similar to an onsite course, an online class may primarily include written assignments; though the assessments can just as easily involve students creating an audio podcast, a short video, narration tied to images (e.g., VoiceThread), a blog, etc. Online students might also be asked to work with partner(s) on an assignment; with the instructor providing the groups with a group discussion board (or the students may opt to use other means: text messaging, instant messaging, twittering, phone, Elluminate, etc). Student projects can be created using a Wiki, Google docs (shared access to documents, excel spreadsheets, powerpoint files), etc. Note that assessments do not have to be graded - there can be self-evaluation quizzes, that help students to assess their level of understanding, and provide feedback (written, web links,

embedded video) on topics that they missed. Additionally, online assessments typically include quizzes and tests that can be timed, drawn from randomized question pools, using several formats (essay, short-answer, fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, etc), proctored or not proctored. In several cases, it is possible for students to receive immediate feedback on their work (on objective questions). How do your assessments contribute to the students' learning and critically thinking about the course material? What type of feedback do you provide your students on their work?

Syllabus. The syllabus may be a single document, or it may be integrated into the online course itself. In addition to the MiraCosta required sections for a syllabus, you may want to also include a policy regarding appropriate conduct in the online class (e.g., in discussions, etc.).

Final comment is that it can take a considerable amount of time to build an online course. Often it is an iterative process, where you lay down the foundation, and then come back each semester and improve on it to 'take it to the next level.' As your own technical skills, the technology, and especially your knowledge of pedagogy continue to improve, both you and your students will benefit.

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