Article: Establishing an Online Teaching Presence

1. Planning and Preparing the Online Course

The first place where students get a sense of your teaching presence is in the design of your online materials. Online teaching shares some of the same course design elements as found in designing a face to face course. Dee Fink (2005) says that instructors make three key decisions in designing a course:

A. What do I want students to learn? (Learning Goals)
B. How will students (and the teacher) know if these goals are being accomplished? (Feedback and Assessment)
C. What will the teacher and the students need to do in order for students to achieve the learning goals? (Teaching / Learning Activities)

For an online learning environment, the emphasis shifts from preparing class sessions to preparing learning modules with specific learning goals, reading assignments, brief instructional materials, learning activities, discussion board posting requirements, assessment procedures, etc. While you design the modules for your course, you should regularly ask:

A. What do I want students to learn in this module?
B. How will students demonstrate their learning of the materials in this module?
C. What assignments or learning activities will support the learning for this module?

By asking yourself these questions while designing modules, you will support student learning and will establish your teaching presence in the design of the course.

2. Facilitating Online Discourse

The second place where students encounter your teaching presence is through your facilitation of online discourse. "Skillful facilitation allows students to interact with one another and the instructor at a high level" (Palloff and Prat, 2011). At the beginning of the course, faculty members can help facilitate discourse through ice breakers that ask students to introduce themselves and find commonalities with other students. You should participate in the ice breaker by introducing yourself and modeling what you are asking students to do. Establishing a netiquette policy at the beginning of the course can also help to establish your teaching presence while helping students to understand your expectations for online discourse.

Facilitation throughout the course is important. "Facilitating discourse during the course is critical to maintaining interest, motivation and engagement of students in active learning" (Anderson, et al, 2001). The following table shows some ways that faculty can facilitate discourse throughout the course (Adapted from Anderson, et al, 2010).

Examples of Facilitating Online Discourse During the Course	
Types of Facilitation	Examples
• Identifying areas of agreement / disagreement	"Joe, Mary has provided a compelling counter-example to your hypothesis. Would you care to respond?"
• Seeking to reach consensus / understanding	"I think Joe and Mary are saying essentially the same thing."
• Encouraging, acknowledging, or reinforcing student contributions	"Thank you for your insightful comments."
• Setting climate for learning	"Don't feel self-conscious about 'thinking out loud' on the forum. This is a place to try out new ideas after all."
• Drawing in participants, prompting discussion	"Any thoughts on this issue?" "Anyone care to comment?"
• Assessing the efficacy of the process	"I think we're getting a little off track here."

Summarizing an online discussion is also a good way to facilitate discourse and show your teaching presence. Peterson and colleagues (2001) suggest, "Summarize the discussion periodically to demonstrate the relation of the discussion to the course content and to point out missing information."

3. Providing Direct Instruction

Finally, students perceive your teaching presence through your direct instruction. Direct instruction is when you allow students to see your disciplinary expertise through your online interaction with them. Indicators of direct instruction "include presenting content and questions, focusing the discussion on specific issues, summarizing discussion, confirming understanding, disposing misperceptions, injecting knowledge from diverse sources and responding to technical concerns" (Shea, et al, 2006). Garrison and Vaughan (2008) describe direct instruction as follows:

"Direct instruction is about academic and pedagogic leadership; that is, educational leadership that provides disciplinary focus and structure or scaffolding but also offers choice and opportunity for students to assume responsibility for their learning. This instruction is more than a 'guide on the side' but less than a 'sage on the stage.' It is an approach whereby learning is socially shared. This is the path to a meaningful, systematic, and worthwhile educational experience" (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

Through the design of your online course, facilitation of discourse, and direct instruction, you establish your online teaching presence. A strong online teaching presence makes for a strong online learning experience and a sense of community for your students.

Entire article can be found at following link:

http://www.duq.edu/about/centers-and-institutes/center-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-and-learning/establishing-an-online-teaching-presence