

## Facilitating and Teaching in an Online Classroom

1. **Use your announcements to proactively prepare students for assignments and model the level of engagement you expect of your students.** Many of our students have fallen into a pattern where they access the course only on Thursday and Sunday nights. It's no surprise that this is tied to our discussion board deadlines. What this means is that students are not checking assignment requirements or planning ahead of time for the amount of work they need to complete for the week. You may want to think about a couple of strategies here:

- Dedicate an announcement or two to “walk” students through the assignment requirements for major milestones. Predict where students may struggle and identify the potential pitfalls. Model how students can use the rubric as a checklist to evaluate their own work prior to submitting.
- Provide a suggested time management plan for the module week. If students need to conduct research in order to (successfully or effectively) complete their discussion forum posts, provide them with a recommended schedule to ensure they have what they need prior to the deadline.
- Ensure that you are posting regular announcements in the course shell. Consider also sending these out as emails to reinforce their importance and encourage students to read what you have written (because the information you provide students is important and facilitates their comprehension of the materials and success in the course).
- Maintain an awareness of how current events are relevant to the module and course. Encourage your students to discuss current events as they transpire.
- Teach the course. Don't let the module resources, class texts, or chapter or module overviews stand on their own. If there are theories or terms that are critical for students to reference in their projects or particularly difficult concepts in the module, use your announcement similarly to how you would run a (short) face-to-face lecture.
- Provide additional resources that students may find useful, just as you would in a face-to-face classroom.

2. **Provide EARLY and PROACTIVE support and outreach to students.** While students are responsible for participating in class, completing the assignments, and being committed to their learning process, instructors will want to reach out to students who miss major assignments or go “missing in action.” Show students that you care about them “beyond the keyboard.”

- Identify those students who could benefit most from your dedicated support. Wherever possible, offer up opportunities to check in with these students on their progress **prior** to assignment deadlines.

- Where possible and feasible, schedule phone calls with students to check in on their progress and/or maintain open office hours through Skype or other open-source chat tools.
- Keep the lines of communication open to students as much as possible. You are the **primary** influence on a student's likelihood of success. You know what tools students need to be successful – try not to involve them in a guessing game to figure out if they're meeting your expectations.
- Log into your classroom at least 5 days a week, and respond to students' queries within 24-48 hours. Your level of engagement will serve as a model to the level of (high) engagement you expect of your students.
- Return graded work in a timely manner. Your students will rely on your feedback to prepare for future assignments.

### 3. **Emphasize sustained engagement in the course through discussion forums.**

Discussion forums are spaces in the virtual classroom for collaborative learning and community building. Your presence and engagement in this space can set the tone for the class, and performance expectations, and greatly influence your students' learning experiences.

- Highlight the *affective* aspects of discussion. What are the personal investments students have in a topic of the course? How do students' experiences relate to the readings and what is being discussed? What are the points of agreement or disagreement in the discussion?
- Treat the discussion forum in similar ways to how you would manage an open discussion in a face-to-face classroom. Keep an eye out for areas where you can connect students' contributions. Participate as an active member of the discussion – add to the conversation and challenge students to think more critically about a given topic. An online setting gives students opportunities to provide thoughtful and intentional responses, so take advantage of opportunities to facilitate higher order levels of thinking and engagement.
- Encourage early posts and reward quality contributions. As the forums are open to all students, highlight particularly effective contributions by students as a model for their peers.
- Create optional discussion forums to provide students with a space for collaboration or open conversation. This is a great tool to use for discussing relevant newsworthy events.
- Summarize or “overview” the discussions each week to help facilitate learning and connections for students (between classmates' posts, your posts, your instructional announcements, and assignments for the week).