

Online Instructional Strategies

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Visit http://bit.ly/learn_ois for the most up-to-date version of this handout as well as complete resources and links.

Fundamentals

Course Home

Having a home website is essential in an online course. Students need to have one central location where they can go to get or link to all course related material, which will improve communication. The home website needs to include a complete course syllabus, schedule of assignments/projects/tests, rubrics, content modules, discussion boards, resource materials, essential hyperlinks, and grade book.

Learning Management System– If your institution subscribes to a specific learning management system, such as WebCT/Blackboard, use that as your course home. Students are typically most familiar with the navigation of institutional learning management systems.

Website - If your institution does not have a learning management system, creating your own website will be the best next option. Websites may not have all the educational functionality of a learning management system. You will need to link tools and resources to your website.

Free Resources

- wix.com
- weebly.com
- sitey.com
- webstarttoday.com
- webstarts.com
- moonfruit.com

Well-Organized Course Syllabus

A well-organized course syllabus is essential to effectively communicating expectations to students. It is essential that the course syllabus contain clear sections on grading policies, grading weights, late work policy, office hours (online/in-person), contact information, and best communication methods.

Recommendation/Strategy

- Include a detailed course schedule as part of your syllabus

Detailed Course Schedule

Clear communication of student expectations is essential in all online courses. An essential part of clearly communicating expectation is to have a detailed course schedule with all assignments, projects, and exams detailed for the entire semester.

Recommendations/Strategies

- All due dates and points should be clearly set on the schedule from the start of the semester
- Include assignment locations on schedule
- Include important academic calendar dates (drop, withdrawal, etc.)
- Use a table or bulleted list to organize schedule
- Use module format to organize content and assignments

Module Format

Organize course materials in weekly modules to ensure clear communication of student expectations. Setting up weekly modules clearly communicates to students the course content they are responsible for (reading, activities, etc.), assignments due, assessments, and interaction requirements for the week.

Recommendations/Strategies

- Breakdown course into clear weekly modules
- A unit or chapter can span more than a week, but breakdown content and deliverables into weeks
- Create one page or location for each weekly module
- Create navigation that allows students to easily move between modules
- Use a module feature in your learning management system or organize pages within a website.

Communication and Feedback

Regular communication and timely and meaningful feedback are essential for online courses. Rubrics are a great tool to provide feedback to online students. Communication and feedback can be through a variety of tools (email, discussion postings, comments, rubrics, and grade book)

Recommendations/Strategies

- Post and provide all rubrics to students at the start of the semester
- Answer email questions within 24 hours
- Provide students with individual rubrics/feedback on each assignment/test within 3 days after due date
- Post regular course announcements on learning management system or email (at least once a week)

Interaction

Student-student and instructor-student interaction is an essential part of a high quality online learning experience. Additionally, instructor-student and student-student interaction is a requirement by accrediting bodies for online courses. Interaction builds community among students, exposes students to a variety of learning resources, and creates active learners. Discussion boards are the most common method used for student-student interaction.

Discussion Boards – Discussion boards are the most common way to facilitate student-student interaction.

Recommendations/Strategies

- Offer for credit – Students will not participate if it is not required
- Set a number of words as a requirement for postings and responses
- Discussion questions should be open-ended with no one correct answer
- Use debating questions to facilitate discussion
- Use self-reflective learning questions
- Use questions that address students' understanding of content
- Sharing of online resources
- Test/assignment strategies
- Implications of content to real world situations
- Encourage students to post content related questions
- Encourage students to answer other students' questions
- As an instructor, participate in discussions

Advanced

Variety of Interaction

Discussion boards are the most common method to create student-student interaction, but including a variety of interactions (Asynchronous, Synchronous, small group interactions, class interactions)

Recommendations/Strategies

- Set online office hours via chat, Skype, Blackboard Collaborate
- Use live chats for synchronous interactions
- Use Blackboard collaborate for synchronous online meeting with students
- Allow students to use Blackboard collaborate for small group meetings
- Divide online discussion boards into smaller groups to facilitate more interaction

Create Your Own Course Learning Materials

Creating and customizing your own learning materials takes your online course to the next level. In addition to textbook and publisher resources, develop customized screen capture tutorials and/or videos. These videos include images of your computer screen with a voiceover that explains to students complex topics. Students can view these videos as many times as necessary and always refer back to them for review.

PowerPoint Video with Voice Over - Microsoft PowerPoint includes features to record a voiceover for a PowerPoint show and save it as a video.

Camtasia – Screen recording and video editing software. Great for creating screen recordings, but requires that you have your own place to host the video. Other free screen recording software is available; however, they have limitations unless you purchase the software.

Other free screen capture software: [Jing](#), [Screencast-o-matic](#), [Screenr](#)

Printed Screenshots with MS Word or PowerPoint – Use your screenshot feature (PC: Print Screen button: Mac: Ctrl + Shift + 4), to take screenshots and paste them into a MS Word document or PowerPoint Presentation. Use autoshapecs, block arrows, and/or textboxes to add written instruction on the screenshot. These tutorials can be saved in PDF format and made available for students to view, download, and/or print.

Authentic Project-Based Learning Projects

Create projects that address a real-life situation or attempts to solve a problem. Incorporating course material into real life situations can increase student engagement and promote higher-level critical thinking skills. These projects do not have a right or wrong answer and requires students to create something tangible. Developing these projects in an online course can be challenging.

Recommendations/Strategies

- Break up components of the project into well-defined parts
- Create rubrics of each part of the project (Regular feedback)
- Create clear instructions in written and/or video format

Innovative

Group Projects

Implementing group projects can be challenging in an online course, but teach your students how to collaborate in groups in online situations. It is increasingly common that online collaboration occurs between teams/groups in the workplace. It is important we prepare our students to be successful in these types of work situations.

Recommendations/Strategies

- Set clear expectations, grading criteria, and deadline
- Provide students access to resources that can support their group collaboration (i.e. Google Docs, Blackboard Collaborate, Chat, etc.)
- Provide tutorials on how to use collaboration resources (YouTube has a wealth of already created video tutorials)
- Create a group evaluation where members get to evaluate everyone's contribution to the group (I found Google forms to be an easy way to collect this information)
- Make completing the group evaluation a graded requirement
- Optional: Randomly assign roles to group members for each portion of a project. Rotate roles with each part (i.e. Leader, time keeper, recorder, etc.)

Generating Student Content via Blogs

Instead of requiring a paper to be submitted via email, have students write their papers in blog format. Blogs allow students to integrate links to their resources, teaches them to captivate their audience, and can be shared on social media. Students take more pride in their work if they think more than just the teacher will read it.

Recommendations/Strategies

- Teach blog writing skills
- Be sure students include links to resources sites
- Include pictures when possible
- Have students write on a controversial topic/issue
- Have students review a website or another blog post
- Use link shorteners to hare links to blogs

Social Media Integration

Social media integration can increase student engagement in online courses. Social media can be used to share student work, share resources, and generate content that contributes to the global conversation.

Facebook Group – Creating a Facebook group creates a home for your students. By setting the group as a “closed” group, students feel free to share their content and comments because they will only be shared with students in the class and not all of their friends.

Recommendations/Strategies

- Use the “wall” of the group as a discussion board. Have students post content and provide comments to other students. Students can link posts from their blog.
- Have students create intriguing taglines to entice readers to click on their links
- Posts extra credit assignments to the group to encourage engagement

Linkedin group – Have students join Linkedin groups that center on the course content. This will bring relevant perspectives on course content into the discussion.

Recommendations/Strategies

- Have students write reviews of interesting Linkedin discussion postings
- Have students write blog on course topics to share on Linkedin. This allows students to contribute to real world online conversations
- Share links to interesting posts on Facebook group

Other Resources and Tools

- [Bitly.com](https://bitly.com)– Link shortener that allows customization
- [Glogster.com](https://glogster.com) – Create interactive multimedia canvases
- [WeVideo](https://wevideo.com) – Free online video editor
- [Freemake Video Converter](https://www.freemake.com/video-converter/) – Convert media file formats (PC version only)
- [Remind](https://remind.com) – Text broadcast system for education
- [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) – Create a YouTube channel to host videos for your course.
- [VoiceThread.com](https://voicethread.com) – Cloud-based software to host content and have students comment via voice, video, or text