

# Best Practices in Online Teaching

## EXPECTATIONS

--The educational institution needs to establish what it expects from online instructors. We cannot assume that knowledge and experience in face to face teaching translates into successful online teaching. We need to eliminate the uncertainty of what is expected of the online instructor.

## KNOW YOUR ROLE IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

--Show up and teach: the role of the instructor in the online learning environment is probably more important than in the f2f setting.

## MANAGE/UNDERSTAND TIME CONSTRAINTS

--It's important to understand that there is a shift in the time and energy that it takes to set up an online course. In an online course, more time is usually spent prior to the beginning of the course.

## SET UP FAQ FORUM

--Good practice to set up a list of FAQ's and establish a forum for students to ask questions. Encourage students to use this Q & A forum, rather than emailing the instructor, as it will be beneficial to more students and will cut down on the time of the instructor. It's good practice to 'subscribe' to this Q & A forum, if the LMS provides this tool.

## TOOLS IN YOUR LMS

--Become familiar and competent in the LMS and take advantage of all the tools available that will make your life easier as an instructor.

## BE VISIBLE/BE PRO-ACTIVE

--Be visible and take a pro-active role in managing the students and managing the course. Be sure to regularly monitor assignments, discussions, post helpful and regular announcements to students.

## STRIVE TO IMPROVE

--Being able to monitor and manage the course and LMS will come with practice and experience. This will evolve as the course is delivered from semester to semester. Be open to making changes to the course, announcements, etc as the course is delivered from one semester to another.

## WHERE ARE THE TIME DRAINS?

--Take the time to reflect on the 'time drains' in each course, and make the necessary changes and adjustments to make the process flow more smoothly.

## USE COURSE ANNOUNCEMENTS REGULARLY

## CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION

--The key to success in any online course is regular and consistent communication.  
--Use the general course announcements tool frequently to remind students of assignments, etc

## EMPOWER YOUR LEARNERS

--As an online instructor it is our responsibility to manage the course, but ultimately, it is the goal to empower the online learner to take responsibility for managing their own learning. Most online courses follow a defined schedule.

INSTRUCTOR MANAGEMENT--Develop instructor management and course organization procedures. Create well defined documents, folders, etc. Try to reuse documents/announcements as often as possible to save time and manage your own time better in order to better work with students.

## PROVIDE TIPS FOR STUDENTS ABOUT TIME MANAGEMENT

--In all too many instances, online learning has been marketed and defined as flexible, anytime, anywhere learning... but students need to understand that there are clear start and end times, as well as due dates for assignments. Students need to be disciplined and establish time management strategies and routines. Depending upon the level of the learners, some guidance in this area may be necessary.

## CONSISTENT PATTERN OF ACTIVITIES

--Establish regular and consistent patterns of course activities. Post a course schedule that is easily downloadable for those students who feel the need to 'print'.

## ESTABLISH REASONABLE WORK PERIODS: HAVE A LIFE

--Time management is important for the instructor, as well. Establish reasonable work periods where students can expect responses and interaction from you. It's important to stress to the students that the instructor 'has a life' ... Provide an instructor 'work schedule', or at least general expectations.

## USE THE TOOLS IN THE LMS

--Save time by using a dynamic communication method that might be available in the LMS... like announcements, group email, etc. Use any features that will automatically inform students that a new announcement has been posted, etc. Encourage students to 'subscribe' to forums, if the LMS allows for it.

## HAVE A PLAN B

--Plan for the unexpected. As the instructor, always have a Plan B in case of emergencies.  
--Back up data files regularly.

## HAVE GOOD SOLID TECHNOLOGY

--Have the technology that is needed to get the job done based on your personal situation.

--At the minimum, broadband is needed. If you travel frequently, think about getting mobile broadband.

#### HANDLING PERSONAL EMERGENCIES

--Keep in mind that 'life happens' for both you and your students. Have a set of guidelines in place that will clearly outline how you will handle personal emergencies (for both you and your students.)

#### ADHERE/IMPLEMENT INSTITUTIONAL GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

--Institutions should probably set policies on how frequently instructors should be participating in the course (by answering emails, responding to Q & A's, and returning corrected assignments.)

--When instructors define their own guidelines, this usually leads to inconsistency and frustration on the part of the learners.

#### TIMELY FEEDBACK

--Timely instructor feedback is essential if students are to be successful in the online course. A delay in a response from the instructor could complicate and hinder the progress of the student. Guidelines and expectations should be presented and adhered to. Either the instructor or the institution should define a reasonable time frame that students can expect responses. Each instructor should develop strategies for timely responses/feedback to students.

#### RESPOND TO STUDENT INQUIRIES

--Monitor student inquiries frequently. If the same inquiries occur over a period of time in the same course, some adjustment to the course maybe needed. If that is not possible, some additional clarification should be made by means of an announcement.

#### THINK BEFORE YOU WRITE

--Think before you write! Feedback is important, but it must be clear and concise. When communicating only by text, verbal and visual cues that might be present in a f2f environment are missing, leading to the possibility of misinterpretation. Remove all opportunities of misinterpretation. Be careful of the punctuation that you use, as well.

#### DESIGN WELL CRAFTED MESSAGES AND RESPONSES

--An advantage of online instruction is the opportunity to take the time to reflect and design a well-crafted message/response. This can save time, as well, as it allows for the reuse of these same/similar messages from one course to the next. It is recommended that the instructor establish a database of responses that can be used as a starting point for student feedback.

#### USE CLEAR TERMINOLOGY

--Avoid the use of idioms and colloquialisms. The global nature of online learning exacerbates the communication difficulties. (Give the example of "lending itself to...")

#### SET THE TONE IN THE COURSE

--The instructor sets the tone of acceptable and unacceptable behavior in the discussions and other public forums in the course.

#### COMMUNICATION TOOLS

--All course related communication should be conducted through the LMS or institutional email systems. Refrain from responding to students in their personal email, if they have been given a school email address. It allows for tracking of messages and reduces the excuses of "I sent you an email about this... how come you didn't get it"? Clearly define these acceptable communication policies with your students and ENFORCE them.

-- For quick retrieval of responses when they are needed, cc yourself when responding to students and save all emails till the end of the semester.

#### MONITOR AND MENTOR

--Have a means in place to monitor the quality of the content of the course and the quality of the instructor interaction in the course. Set up a mentoring program

#### CHECK BEFORE YOUR LAUNCH

--Be sure everything 'works' in the course before it is open to students. All links, etc..

#### USE CURRENT TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

--Where possible, utilize the most current technology in the course to deliver content. Remember, it's easy to do things differently with technology but the real impact comes when you can do different things with technology in the online course. Students who take online courses expect a greater use of technological tools.

#### TECH SUPPORT IS CRITICAL

--Have dedicated tech support that has gone through the course with the trainers.

#### MANAGEABLE CLASS SIZE

--Class size... be consistent

#### ESTABLISH A SCHOOL/DEPT FOR ONLINE LEARNING

--School of Online Learning as opposed to each department running their online classes.