
BEST PRACTICES FOR ONLINE COURSES

PLANNING

- Different content, different levels, different populations demand different Instructional Design parameters.
- Provide a statement of course structure and organization or a map of course content to facilitate navigation of course material.
 - Should include discussion of which Blackboard tools are enabled and how they are to be used in the course (e.g. Calendar, Tasks, My Grades, Mail, etc.)
- Establish policy for degree of instructor feedback and participation in online component of class.
 - May include discussion board participation and use of grade book or other features of the course
 - May include type and frequency of instructor emails or messages and preferred method of communication from students (e.g. email or internal Mail)
 - May include virtual office hours, copies of syllabi and assignments posted in Blackboard, discussion folders for general questions and comments, prompt posting of scores in grade book, digital receipts for assignments, etc.
- Keep it simple. Simple is always beats complex
- Test Drive your plan

BUILDING

- Provide a statement in the syllabus explaining student expectations in relationship to use of Blackboard.
 - Should include instructions for accessing Blackboard and minimum requirements for use of Blackboard.
- Build content in proper format: HTML for online viewing, PDF for downloading and printing, Rich Text for editable documents
- Keep future duplication in mind when building and adding content
- Don't bury content. Keep things on the top level
- Don't modify the course menu unless you have to
- Triple check all links and settings by using "Student View"
- Use Course Links to help students navigate

COMMUNICATING

- Belt AND suspenders: email, discussion board, announcements
- Use either email or internal mail tool, but never both
- Actively manage discussion area. Close bloated or old forums, move relevant forums up
- Establish clear participation expectations
- Use Groups to "shrink" the class
- Use a clearly written policy for dealing with inevitable interruptions students may have with their access to the Internet and Blackboard.
 - May include grace periods, pools for resetting quizzes, repeatable quizzes, alternative means of submitting assignments, etc.

ASSESSMENT

- Beware the lure of objective assessments...
- Use assignment manager whenever possible to streamline and enable comments
- Should students see the grade book?
 - Students value the feedback on progress
 - Students may demand instant grade updates
- Retain flexibility in grading: resist the urge to sharply quantify everything
- Take the time to build extensive test pools

ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES

- Open your classroom to your peers
- Don't use tools you can't teach your students to use
- Email the Instructional Designers for advice
- Ask students about your course