

MODULE ONE: During this module, we will provide a general introduction to online teaching and learning.

TERMINOLOGY:

- *Goals/Objectives* – main points or intentions of a course
- *Learning management system software* (LMS) – sometimes called course management tool or web-based course content management systems/tools – software programs that allow for the content of online learning to be created by an instructor, uploaded to a space on the Internet, then presented to students (for our course we're using Blackboard)
- *Online Learning* – a method of course delivery – referred to as Distance Learning (DL), Mobile Learning (mLearning), electronic learning (eLearning), Virtual Instructor (VI)

ADDITIONAL READINGS (LOOKING AHEAD):

1. How to encourage online students to participate and communicate
<http://www.thejournal.com/articles/14054>
2. *Be VOCAL: Characteristics of Successful Online Instructors*
<http://www.ncolr.org/jiol/issues/PDF/4.2.6.pdf>
3. A Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning: Implications for Design Principles
<http://www.unm.edu/~moreno/PDFS/chi.pdf>

COMMENTARY/LECTURE:

A. LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM SOFTWARE

Various LMS include: Moodle, WebCt, TopClass, Virtual-U, Lotus LearningSpace, Web Mentor, Symposium, TopClass, Convene, Embanet, Real Education, eCollege.com, E-Web, Internet Classroom Assistant, Softarc's FirstClass, Serf, Virtual-U, Blackboard, and Eduprise.com. Usually all that is needed is a login, password, and the ability to navigate the Web, open, and close windows, save files, and send email and email attachments. Differences between management tool software programs include options such as spell check and editing capabilities.

B. ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROS AND CONS - Is online teaching easier or more difficult than face-to-face?

Online teaching presents little opportunity for an instructor...

- to read body language to determine if students are 'getting it'
- to make a joke and see students laugh and then visibly relax
- to use intuition
- to call on a student with hand raised to make a suggestion, add to the topic, or ask for clarification

But, online teaching offers an instructor:

- flexibility and little time constraints
- the ability to hear from all students equally, instead of just one or two with raised hands
- the opportunity to guide, support, and assist students almost 24/7
- multiple methods to collaborate and communicate
- opportunities to explore learning and teaching styles
- opportunities to 'hear' shy students

C. ONLINE TEACHING REQUIRES DIFFERENT TEACHING BEHAVIORS - The online teacher needs:

- to be available to assure students of instructor presence and to use strategies to eliminate isolation
- establish clear expectations at the beginning of the course for both student and instructor
- to respond to emails within 24 hours, and to assignments within a specified number of days
- to think ahead and anticipate, i.e. if a winter storm is approaching, expect loss of power or Internet access and notify all students of the situation prior to the storm

Personal Experiences:

- The instructor did not logon for almost four weeks, and the instructor failed to give personal or contact information. Students carried on with the course, but not with course content because most discussions and emails pertained to 'what are we supposed to be doing' and 'did anyone hear from our instructor yet.' (The professor lived in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, but by not sharing personal information, the students had no idea.)
- Graduate students in a summer Midwest course were presented with a 'welcome to the class letter' from their instructor who mentioned a snowstorm. Instructors should never recycle documents without reading content first.

D. ONLINE TEACHING REQUIRES CAREFUL CONSIDERATIONS – Course/Content a Good Fit?

Instructors must determine if a course is suited for online delivery; and students must determine if taking a course online is a good fit for them and their lifestyle. Instructors should also be aware if an online student lacks the skills necessary to successfully complete an online class.

An instructor may have an entire course written and published, for example, and then discover at the end of week one that several students lack basic technology skills and are unable to attach a file. The instructor should revise the course documents and add content to accommodate those students and basically dual-teach the same course, at the same time, to students with varying degrees of expertise.

To ensure that everyone is on the same page, suggest students take a survey. There are a variety of surveys available online, free of charge (more on creating a survey later). Another idea might be to simply ask the students to list their skill level in a particular area. As educators we are all familiar with teaching a class of students at varying levels of knowledge or expertise. It happens in online classes too, but in an online course, instructors are unable to read body language or see raised hands; **online teaching simply means being more creative and intuitive when writing content.**

Student Abilities: Of course the best route is to know student abilities prior to the start of class, but that isn't always possible. But being aware of special accommodations during week 1 is better than not knowing at all. Below are a few online surveys.

- Is the course suited for online? <http://www.fgcu.edu/onlinedesign/designdev.html>
- Is the student's technology skill at the level needed to successfully complete an online course? Take the survey on distance learning needs (no need to enter a course number – leave that box blank) <http://www.fgcu.edu/support/techskills.html>

An online self-assessment

- http://www.improvelearning.com/text/prof_dev/self_assess/self_assess_mod_css.html

Learning Style: It is suggested that the way an instructor learns, is the way the instructor will teach. For example, if an instructor learns best by listening (auditory learner), then the course content will most likely be designed as auditory, **which means that students who are not auditory learners might become lost or confused.**

To determine your learning style, take this short survey (click on questionnaire at the left). <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=questionnaire>

Interventions and Facilitations: Other issues for an online instructor are knowing when and how often to intervene and facilitate, how to increase online student communication, and how to create activities and projects that increase critical thinking skills and encourage collaborative learning. We'll be exploring these issues as the class progresses.

Considerations, Hints, Suggestions: As a classroom teacher, we are able to explain ourselves immediately if we make a student-assumed erroneous statement. In an online class if a student takes something the wrong way, the instructor is not given a chance to explain the intended meaning. A student will very rarely email to ask for an intended meaning, and instead assume that what an instructor states in writing is usually how the instructor feels or believes.

When writing course content, examine words and phrases that might have a double meaning, and use parentheses for further explanations or definitions.

Teaching to an all-male creative writing class (in great debate about woman presidents), a teacher wrote on the board “Mother Earth, charge of the world, powerful position.” The intent was to show the boys the literature connection between woman and powerful positions. One student raised his hand and announced that it was really God, not mother earth, in charge of the world. The innocent teacher quickly erased the words from the whiteboard and explained her point. Luckily the class wasn’t online and the innocent phrase could be easily erased and further explained. But if this incident took place online – how many would have assumed that the teacher felt that Mother Earth ranked above God.

Often online content can be misconstrued, so invite and encourage questions through the discussion board.

E. ARE STUDENTS READING THE MATERIAL? - Making sure that online students read the course documents is, of course, difficult to control. Often the welcome document or intro to the course document goes unread; unfortunate because that document usually contains important information (grading scale, contact information, i.e.).

Idea: To ensure that students will read the information within course documents and not move directly to the 'assignment due' area, include a short assignment worth a few points directly within the first document, i.e. 'please send me an email, worth 3 points to...' and here you can get creative, maybe ask them to send you the email to assure that the email function within the course page is working, or maybe ask students to give you an alternate means of contacting them just in case the course site goes down, maybe ask for their level of experience in a certain area, or ask students a question relative to the course topic.

Thank you. This concludes our first module. Remember to call or email if you need help or clarification at anytime.