What are the Key Ingredients for an Effective and Engaging Online Course?

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Overview

• The Online Instruction Challenge
• A Quick Poll to Gauge our Online Experiences
• The Context & “Finding the Sweet Spot” Study
• The Key Ingredients
• Tips and Recommendations
• Lessons Learned Over Time
• Some Useful Resources
• Q&A Session

The Key Issues

• More and more business schools are offering more classes online (Ryle and Cumming 2007)
• Growing number of students motivated to take online courses (Dykman & Davis 2008)
• Instructors worry that traditional materials online are not very rich (Hannon & D’Netto 2007)
• Online teaching effectiveness goes way beyond just putting content online (Lindquist & Long 2011)
• Online students are also motivated extrinsically by interaction with peers and with instructor (Gatlin & Alexander 2010; Ryle and Cumming, 2008; McAllister, Metzler, & Wisneski 2012)
• Covid-19 has forced universities worldwide to switch from face-to-face to online teaching in mid-session

Student Online Course Advantages

• Can stay at home and keep working full time
• Reduced lodging and travel costs to and from school
• Can study wherever have access to computer and internet
• Asynchronous approach allows students to work at own pace
• Web apps like Zoom can make learning very accessible
• Use of computer and internet skills allows for transfer of skills to work life
Student Online Course Disadvantages

• One-way delivery of information may be perceived as stale and boring
• Students may feel isolated and may crave social interaction
• Unmotivated learners and those with less discipline or poor study habits may fall behind
• Lack of an intuitive structure and routine may cause extra work and frustration
• The online instructor may not be available or readily accessible, causing irritation

Let’s try a few quick Polls now

1. How long have you been teaching online?
2. How would you compare learning outcomes online with face-to-face?
3. How do you feel about the prospect of teaching online compared with face-to-face?
4. What is the most important ingredient for effective online teaching?

The Kelley Direct Program Overview

- Established: 1999, first online MBA offered in USA by an accredited (AACSB) business school
- Online Programs Ranking: #1 US News & WR, #3 Financial Times, #2 Poets & Quants
- Students Enrolled: 1,014
- Student Locations: 50 US States, 24 non-US countries
- Degrees offered: MBA, MS Degrees in: Business Analytics, Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Finance, Global Supply Chain Management, IT Management, Marketing, & Strategic Management
- Student Demographics: Average age 32, 9 years of professional experience, 11% military

Online MBA Student Focus Group Study

- Focus on “What makes a good online course?”
- Conducted by 2 faculty and 1 Instructional Support Specialist
- 3 student focus groups (2 face-to-face and 1 via web conference)
- Follow-up surveys with online students and faculty
- Results were used to guide a KD Program improvement effort
“What Makes a Good Online Course?” Themes:
Student Likes and Dislikes

1. Instructor Characteristics
   - Expertise and personal experience with the content
   - Passion for the topic and interest in the course
   - Able to connect the course relevance to the “real world”
   - Willing to form a relationship with the class and to work with each student individually
     - “take the content seriously but don’t take themselves too seriously”
   - Willingness to keep the course “fresh”
     - Updating texts, topics, readings, cases, lectures
     - Interested in learning and using technology and LMS features
     - Opposite of putting the course on “Autopilot” or “Set It and Forget It” approach
   In Short: An Instructor who is highly engaged with the Class

2. Peer Engagement and Interaction
   - Students want to be challenged and motivated to improve
   - Want to have meaningful, real-time interaction with the instructor and each other
   - Want to share what they are learning with each other and to receive feedback
   - Want to network with each other and with the instructor
   - Want group work and team deliverables as part of the assessment
   In Short: Students want the flexibility of online education but they crave the experience of “face-to-face” interaction

3. Course Organization
   - Course is well organized, complete from the start, and will not change
     - Syllabus, Reading Materials, Assignments, Deadlines
   - Week by week schedule and work expectations are apparent
   - Relevance and clarity in Assignments
     - Materials, requirements, directions, and deadlines should be clear
     - Assignments tie to learning objective and not busy work
   - Assignment deadlines are set and do not change
   In Short: Students want all course information from the start and do not want to get lost
4. Learning Management System Use

- Syllabus should be easy to find
- Modules and Assignments should be logically organized (week by week)
- LMS Calendar should be used for Assignments for easy deadline tracking
- Course E-mail, Announcements, Notifications should come via the LMS
- Lecture slides and required materials should be posted from the start of the course
- Superfluous LMS buttons and features should be hidden to avoid confusion and distraction
- Instructor should take time to learn and use the most practical LMS features

In short: LMS should make it easy to stay on track in the course

Recommendations

1. Instructor Characteristics

- Communicate interest in the course and in the topic
  - Record and post introductory videos
- Create a sense of community with class
  - Create and share a student demographics file
- Add teaching presence with a personal touch
  - Responsiveness, music, brain teasers, sports, travel pictures, etc.
- Incorporate current events and news within the course
- Provide more flexibility and show more interest than face-to-face
- Take time to gain competence with LMS features and technologies

Example to Help Create Sense of Community

- Required Student Bio-Sheet
- PPT or PDF Results File Shared

Helps participants know each other and understand constraints
2. Peer Engagement and Interaction

• Take time to learn student backgrounds and understand their goals
• Encourage students to share their experience and perspective
• Assign team deliverables
• Invite guest speakers but allow student Q&A sessions
• Add synchronous sessions for active discussion (Zoom)
• Send preparation topics and questions in advance synchronous sessions
• Provide the feeling of the face-to-face experience as much as possible

3. Course Organization

• Finalize syllabus and course materials before start of the class
• Insert week by week schedule and due dates to syllabus
• Do not change syllabus without a good reason and without sufficient notice
• Choose relevant and interesting materials
• Freshen up cases and assignments
• Provide opportunities to work ahead to avoid conflicts
• Provide a consistent and repeating structure for assignments
  • Types of questions, length, rubrics, due dates, etc.

4. Learning Management System Use

• Post syllabus, materials, and assignments 1-2 weeks in advance of start
• Eliminate any buttons and features not in use
• Place Syllabus at the top and easy to find
• Create an inviting Home Page with contact and navigation tips
• Create logical, clear Module and Assignment structure
• Use Calendar tool to post Assignment due dates
• Provide lecture notes and materials in a logical place
• Take time to explore and use advanced LMS features
  • Grading Rubrics, Grade Comments, Page Links, External Apps, etc.
• Test, Test, Test
Example to Reduce Unnecessary LMS Buttons

Default (34) Eliminated Final Result (12)

Reduces confusion on where to find course materials

Create an Inviting Home Page with Navigation Help

Reduces chance of getting lost or overwhelmed from the start

Web Conferencing Tips

Zoom Tool Highlights

- Video and voice web conferencing tool
- Flexible delivery of course content
  - PowerPoint, videos, PDFs, and other types of files
  - Including Screen Views for demonstrations
- Conducting real-time meetings
- Allowing participants to present and share their work
- Conducting case discussions
- Voting on a specific course of action
- Stimulating peer-to-peer interaction
- Guest lectures from anywhere
- Open Q & A sessions and Virtual Office Hours
- Recording entire meetings for posting
- Outcome: Powerful for creating a sense of connection and community
Zoom Techniques and Features I Use

- Choreograph session and send out preparation topics/questions
- Add “check-in” and “check-out” process (to warmup and recap)
- Require everyone to use their video and to use first and last name
- Manage interaction and process throughout (establish Presence)
  - Post smooth chatting tips
  - Direct the flow of interaction
  - Call on individual students to participate and to respond to outlying behaviors
- Use Chat pod and involve everyone in the interaction, limit one-way lecture
- Use Poll feature to create debates, elaboration, sharing, etc.
- Introduce difficult cases and make students be decision-makers
- Take class temperature throughout
- Hold students accountable for quantity and quality or participation
  - Download Zoom Chat Transcript

Examples of Zoom Content Sessions

- Check-In Process (4:30)
- One-Way Lecture 1 (13:20)
- Video for Class (7:02)
- GlobeSmart Demo (28:30)
- Voting Poll (5:30)
- Case Discussion (IKEA) (17:02)
- Guest Lecture 1 (11:42)
- Guest Lecture 2 (1:18:00)

Example of Accountability for Zoom Participation:
(Assessing Quantity and Quality)

- Run Zoom Participation via Chat Pod
- Chat Transcript Output as .txt file
- Insert .txt into Excel for Sorting & Grading
- Convert .txt to Word or PDF for Posting
- Allows students to understand their session grade and compare their input with their peers

What I Have Learned Over Time

- Teaching online is not less work than face-to-face courses – just different
- Tools, assignments, resources and activities must be planned, choreographed, and made available much earlier
- There is a real cost in time and effort to keep up with changing technologies
- It is wise to take a gradual approach to innovation – test, make small changes, test, then test again
- Students also have to adjust to the online environment and some may not be well suited or may need more help
- One may discover different teaching strengths and may welcome the change from face-to-face teaching
The Good News

- Covid-19 forced faculty and students to experience online instruction all at once
- Zoom use increased, vulnerabilities were identified, improvements were prioritized, the tool is now better
- We have seen an explosion of teaching resources and lighting fast sharing of teaching techniques
  - Keep Teaching Tools, IT Support, Department Level Workshops, LMS Templates
- This crisis was not wasted!
- Let’s keep trying online teaching and sharing for the benefit of our students

Some Useful Resources

- Canvas Instructor Guide
  [https://community.canvaslms.com/groups/instructors/pages/home](https://community.canvaslms.com/groups/instructors/pages/home)
- Zoom Help Center
  [https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/categories/200101697-Getting-Started](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/categories/200101697-Getting-Started)
- Online Course Templates
  [https://canvas.pasadena.edu/courses/982220](https://canvas.pasadena.edu/courses/982220)
- Keep Teaching Sites
  [https://keepteaching.iu.edu/get-started/index.html](https://keepteaching.iu.edu/get-started/index.html)
- Curt Bonk’s Open Learning World

Additional Q&A