

Encouraging Communication in Online Classes

Illinois Virtual Campus

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Interaction is important in the learning process

“The weight of evidence from the research reviewed was that increased student involvement by immediate interaction resulted in increased learning as reflected by test performance, grades, and student satisfaction” (Zirkin and Sumler, 1995)



Interaction is important in the learning process

“Learning is best accomplished when the learner is actively engaged in the process” (Klemm, 1998)



Interaction is important in the learning process

The research is consistent that one of the most critical factors in online student success (when measured in terms of learning outcomes, retention and satisfaction) is a high level of interaction.

- Increases learning
- Increases retention
- Increases satisfaction



How do students interact in a traditional course?

Let's make a list.....




How do students interact in an
online course?

Let's make another list....

What do instructors need to know to improve interaction?

■ Avoid Discouraging Communication

- Responding too rapidly
- Responding to every post
- Acceptance of an answer or response without additional probing and questioning
- Steering students toward the expected answer
- “Does everyone see how I got this answer...?”
- “Since I have explained this already, you should all know by now...”



What do instructors need to know to improve interaction?

■ Facilitate Discussion

- Help get the discussion started
- Provide feedback
- Weave contributions of different individuals together
- Get the discussion un-stuck when necessary
- Deal with disruptive or off-track students
- Request feedback from group about how the discussion is progressing

How to foster community in an online course

■ Use Ice Breakers

- Easier to discuss academic topics if students have already communicated about other issues

EXAMPLES:

- Bio Activity
- “3 Truths and a Lie”



How to effectively design discussion boards

- Create separate conferences for each module or topic
- Create an off-topic conference – Pub, Coffee Bar or other

How to assess student participation

- Use a rubric that clearly explains expectations

Example:

“Assignments -> Activity C” from Interactive Distance Learning

http://courses.cl.uh.edu:8900/SCRIPT/INST6437/scripts/serve_home

How to implement constructivist theories in online courses

■ Foster Reflection/Self Awareness

- How have you seen this kind of problem before?
- Describe how your philosophy varies from this one
- How might an expert handle this situation?



How to implement constructivist theories in online courses

- Make Activities Interesting

- Directly related to course or the curriculum
- Appeal to life experiences
- Allow students to choose some topics

References

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