

10x10 =100: Best Practices and Lessons Learned From a Decade of Teaching Online Courses

Human - Centered
~~Human-Computer Interaction~~
Computing

Sara Hook

Indiana University School of Informatics and Computing

Drawn from the literature and the Quality Matters rubric as well as the presenter's own experiences of 10 years of teaching online and in developing 10 courses on a wide variety of subjects, this presentation will offer a generous number of practical approaches and strategies that can be taken to enhance instructor-to-student and student-to-student interaction, encourage active learning and accountability, incorporate peer review and self-reflection, assess student learning outcomes, and utilize technology most effectively.

Outcomes:

Identify practical ways to increase instructor-to-student and student-to-student interaction in their online courses.

Incorporate peer review into online courses.

Provide meaningful opportunities for self-reflection in online courses.

Increase active learning and student accountability in online courses.

Illustrate how to match student learning outcomes with evidence-based assessment in online courses.

Highlight how technology can assist faculty in making online courses as effective as possible.

Explain how Quality Matters rubric is used as a framework for online courses.

List 10 strategies or techniques that instructors can include in their online courses.

Category: Integration

Indicate the broad area of teaching and learning in higher education that you are integrating. Describe how your paper integrates the research of others in this area.

Ever since she became aware that something like this was possible, the presenter has been in love with designing and teaching online courses. A novice at first, she took several online courses herself as well as participated in both a special training program on her campus to convert two of her existing face-to-face courses to online format and a Sloan-C online workshop on the Quality Matters rubric (Varonis, 2014). As her portfolio of courses grew to 10

and with 10 years of experience teaching online courses exclusively, the presenter has a wealth of practical knowledge to share with conference participants in a way that multiplies her expertise to 100. To complement the lessons learned from her experiences, the presenter has conducted a comprehensive review of the literature about online teaching so that her presentation will incorporate best practices as reported from a wide variety of sources. Although there were initial concerns about the quality and rigor of online courses, this format is now well-established. Numerous articles outline pedagogical and technological strategies for how to deliver an effective learning experience, even for those who may be skeptical or anxious about teaching online (Brewer & Brewer, 2015; Barber, Taylor, & Buchanan, 2014; Neequaye, 2013; Tatum, 2013; Barr & Miller, 2013). Fortunately, studies have been conducted that illuminate the best ways to help instructors transition to online teaching and to identify the characteristics and strategies of exemplary online teachers (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2013). Online courses also present an overarching challenge to higher education in terms of how to most effectively integrate technology so that it supports pedagogical best practices and enhances student success (Marcy, 2014; Keengwe, 2013). The presenter continues to take online courses, giving her an interesting prospective as a student as well as a teacher.

Compare and contrast the theories, innovations, and applications in this area.

One of the underlying principles behind online courses is that student success and student satisfaction are greatly influenced by instructor-to-student and student-to-student interaction (Varner, 2013; Cuthbertson & Falcone, 2014). One of the significant features of the presenter's courses is the approaches she takes to connect with her students on an individual and personalized level, what a peer reviewer referred to as a "low-tech, high-touch approach" because it does not require specialized or fancy technology tools.

The ability to create such a "persona" online is reflected in techniques that she and other successful instructors use to organize and plan their courses, communicate with students, incorporate collaborative work, encourage self-direction, and develop learning relationships between and among students (Casey & Kroth, 2013). For example, one study resulted in a comprehensive set of essential instructional strategies for tools, processes, and content development through a trajectory with the goal of creating a virtual community of engaged learners (Niess & Gillow-Wiles, 2013). There are also particular issues with how to prepare and provide guidance for online learners, especially if it is their first experience with this course modality (Vaill, 2013). On the other hand, such an extensive load of teaching online can result in stress and burn-out, so the presenter will share the various strategies and resources that she uses to make her course development and delivery as streamlined and well-organized as possible (Portugal, 2013). The presenter has tried other techniques to better engage students, keep them motivated and organized, and encourage them to strive for excellence, some as a result of a student focus group. One of the hallmarks of her courses is a highly interactive weekly discussion forum where students review and provide feedback to each other (Dalelio, 2013; Tran, 2011; Salter & Conneely, 2015; Ekahitanond, 2013; Krull, 2013).

Critique results in selected items in this area.

Among the strategies that the presenter has incorporated into her courses are opportunities for rigorous self-reflection and regular peer review, so that students receive feedback from each other as well as the presenter and her teaching assistant. Another aspect of the presenter's courses which she identifies as being essential is increasing student motivation so that students take responsibility for their own learning. She addresses this issue by building accountability into her courses. Her students not only critically examine their own performance but also self-identify the ways that they can improve. Students experience accountability through both support from peers and peer pressure from giving and receiving feedback throughout the semester. Another feature of the presenter's courses is real-world assignments, such as case studies and scenarios, so that students clearly see the connection between what they are learning and their future careers (Casotti, Beneski, & Knabb, 2013). This approach not only promotes course content and critical thinking, but also the value of "soft skills" like interpersonal communication, time management, and teamwork (Myers, Blackman, Andersen, Hay, Lee, & Gray, 2014). Data collected from the presenter's school show that her courses receive uniformly high evaluation ratings and excellent comments from students while maintaining the necessary rigor of course content, incorporating appropriate assessment so that the stated student learning outcomes can be substantiated and with no evidence of grade inflation. Early indications suggest increased engagement of students over the past few semesters and an upward trend in final course grades (KunhiMohamed, 2011).

Provide a context and description for future exploration.

The presenter has been designing and teaching online courses for more than 10 years. She has developed 9 online courses for her own school, which cover law, business, technology and ethics. She also created an online course on music and decorative arts for the American Studies program. Several of her courses are required core courses for undergraduate programs and certificates, while others are popular electives. Her university's students are a mixture of traditional-age and returning/adult students and are diverse in terms of gender, race and nationality. The campus is part of a large and vibrant urban setting. The presenter continues to refine her approaches as she transitions to a new learning management system, investigates potential new technologies to facilitate the delivery of her courses as part of a larger state-wide online degree initiative, and evaluates her courses on the basis of the Quality Matters rubric (QM, 2014).

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The presenter attended:

May 30-June 15, 2007: Using the Quality Matters rubric to improve your online course.

Sloan-C Online Workshop.

December 12, 2014: Applying the QM rubric. Indianapolis, Indiana.

Organization:

This interactive session will begin with an introduction to the various problems and issues that the presenter has faced in the more than 10 years that she has been developing and teaching online courses. For each of these problems/issues, the presenter will provide a list of practical solutions that she has used or that have been reported as successful interventions in the literature. She will also highlight the attributes and best practices of instructors who have made a successful transition to online teaching. The presentation will include examples of assignments, templates and technology tools, which will be available to conference participants on the conference website along with the presenter's PowerPoint slides. A question and answer session will give participants an opportunity to reflect on what makes an online course successful and to contribute suggestions for strategies and approaches that they have tried in their own courses or that they would like to try. The session should be especially encouraging for participants who have not yet experimented with teaching online.

Keywords:

Academic Success

Assessment, Student Learning

Online Teaching and Learning

Quality Matters

Student Accountability