Best Practices in Online Teaching - During Teaching - Promote Active Learning*

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Abstract

This module provides strategies that faculty can use to promote active student learning in an online environment. This module is part of the Best Practices in Online Teaching Course created by Penn State University World Campus as a guide for faculty who are new to teaching in an online environment.

*Version 1.2: Aug 24, 2007 3:24 pm -0500
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1 What to Do?

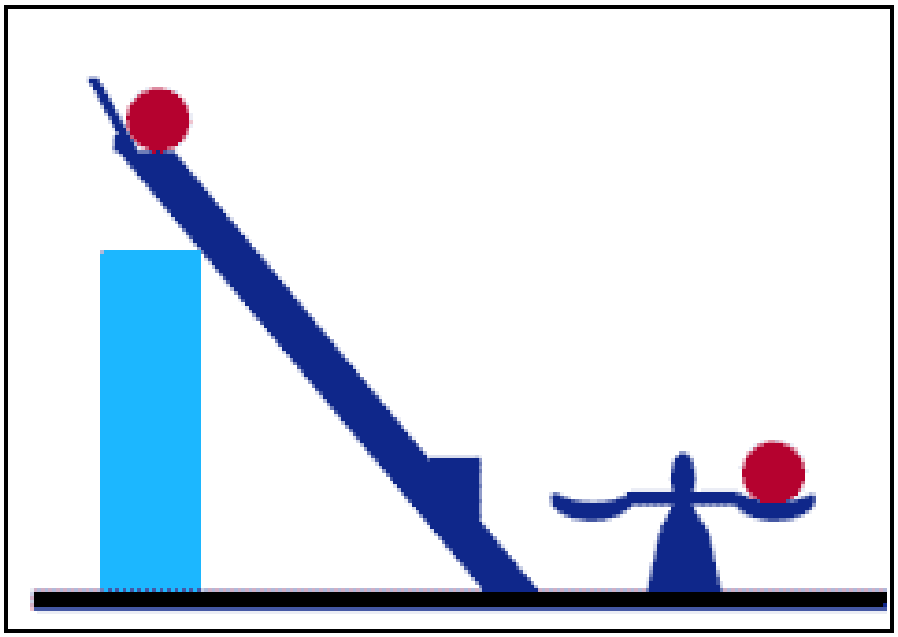

Figure 1: Perpetual Motion Machine, Created by Karl Leitzel, Penn State World Campus

Effective online instructors challenge their students' thinking and foster active, constructive participation in learning.

2 How to Do It?

- Emphasize the importance of learning by playing an active role in the learning process, not from direct instruction or lecture as in a traditional classroom.
- Provide opportunities for the students to critically critique and/or reflect upon certain course topics.
- Encourage your students to use the Internet for researching on course topics; however, remind them to be critical about the information they will share with peers. (For more information, see Intellectual Property Guidelines module[1])
- Encourage your students to be proactive in their learning by doing the following:
  - Regularly logging into course site
  - Submitting assignments on time
  - Completing quizzes within required timeframe
  - Reading messages posted and replying within required timeframe
  - Cooperating with teammates, etc.
- Provide opportunities for your students to be actively involved in information seeking and problem solving.
- Provide opportunities for your students to interact, to collaborate, or to review a peer's work.

[1] "Best Practices in Online Teaching - Pulling It All Together - Follow Intellectual Property Guidelines" <http://cnx.org/content/m14976/latest/>

- Encourage your students to participate in online discussions actively by:
  - Designing thought-provoking discussion questions: see Crafting Questions for Online Discussions[2] from ITS
  - Encouraging students to respond to questions at a deeper level
  - Using discussion forums effectively by posting "messages that weave several strands of conversation into a summarization that may prompt people to pursue the topic further" (Berge, 1995)
  - Pointing out "opposing perspectives, different directions, or conflicting opinions" (Berge, 1995)
- Use different discussion formats listed below to cultivate students' critical thinking (MacKnight 2000, p40.):
  - Small group discussions
  - Buzz group: two people discussing for a short period of time
  - Case discussions using real-world problems for analysis and suggested solutions
  - Debating teams wherein students present ideas, defend positions, and argue against opposition's reasoning
  - Jigsaw groups where subgroups discuss various parts of a topic and report to the others
  - Role play mocking real settings
- For more information about facilitating online discussions, please see Ten Tips for Generating Engaged Online Discussions[3] by Donna Reiss.
- For more information about self-regulated learning components, please go to Encourage Students to Regulate Their Own Learning Module[4]

3 Why Do It?

"It is critical to understand the pedagogical potential of online learning for providing active and dynamic learning opportunities for learners. Faculty can employ strategies and activities that will engage students in 'producing learning' (Barr & Tagg, 1995) for active learning" (Vonderwell & Turner, 2005, p.66).

"Learning occurs in a social context through collaborating, negotiating, debating, peer reviewing, and mentoring; Collaboration requires a level of reflection that promotes knowledge construction and a deep understanding of the subject matter" (Grabinger & Dunlap, 2000).

4 References

Berge, Z.L. (1995). Facilitating Computer Conferencing: Recommendations From the Field. **Educational Technology, 35(1)**, 22-30.

Grabinger, R.S. & Dunlap, J.C. (2000). Rich environments for active learning: A definition. In Squires, D., Conole, G. & Jacobs, G. (Eds.). **The changing face of learning technology (pp.8-38)**. Cardiff, Wales, UK, University of Wales.

MacKnight, C.B. (2000). Teaching critical thinking through online discussions. **EduCause Quarterly, 4**, 38-41

Vonderwell, S. & Turner, S. (2005). Active learning and preservice teachers' experiences in an online course: A case study**. Journal of Technology and Teacher Education, 13(1)**, 65-84

[2] http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/online_questions/

[3] http://www.wordsworth2.net/activelearning/ecacdiscustips.htm

[4] "Best Practices in Online Teaching - During Teaching - Encourage Students to Regulate Their Own Learning" <http://cnx.org/content/m14970/latest/>