3 Simple Steps to Building Online Learning Communities

“Laundry List” of Tips and Tricks

**Design Content for Collaboration**

**F-2-F to online-** Think redesign, not curriculum conversion.
Use backwards design- Design course based on what students should be able to DO after finishing your course.

**No more busy work-** Align objectives to assessments and instructional strategies for meaningful learning experiences.

**Activities & assessments-** Design around problems, interests, and experiences.

**Use a variety of materials-** Books, journal articles, chunked video lectures, just-in-time videos, virtual field trips, OER, YouTube, websites, interviews, guest speakers, etc.

**Chunk course materials-** Small digestible pieces of content enhance the learner’s capability to grasp and remember.

**Build in opportunities for self-assessment-** Journaling, practice quizzes, homework, checklists, rubrics, discussion boards, etc.

**Create activities that foster communication and collaboration-** Open-ended discussion boards, group discussion boards, group projects, Wikis/Google Docs, joint resource collections.

**Include group activities/assessments-** Group charters, group guidelines, clear expectations, check in points, mediation guidelines, peer feedback forms, etc.

**Build in CATs-** Classroom Assessment Techniques allow the students to share what is/is not working and solicit ideas/information from students.

**Deliver Content Clearly & Concisely**

**Use syllabus as a guidebook-** Think of your syllabus as the ultimate guidebook/map that allows students to navigate your course efficiently to get from Point A to Point B.

**Topic/weekly outline-** Include a course outline that students can use as a checklist for content completion.

**Communication Policy-** Email, office hours, virtual platforms, feedback, telephone, netiquette, etc.

**Student/Instructor responsibilities-** Clearly define all responsibilities to include course participation, activities, assessments, plagiarism, etc.

**Grading/Feedback policy-** Include information in grading turnaround times, types of feedback and frequency. Most students prefer quick turnaround time with minimal feedback!

**Start here folder in LMS-** The start here folder contains your syllabus, instructor info, welcome announcement/video, Blackboard help links, short video/document on accessing content, Course link to introduction discussion board, etc.

**LMS content organized and consistent-** Weekly/module folders contain all the content, course links on one page for easy navigation. Content is consistently placed in the same order in the folders. Less time spent navigating the LMS allows students more time for learning and collaborating.

**Include a social space-** Build a “Coffee House” discussion board that encourages students to discuss life outside of the course content.

**“Spring” cleaning-** Freshen up your course space by updating broken links, changing dates to reflect current semester, and deleting old content.

**Be PRESENT!**

**Communication-** Model attention and presence by communicating with students via announcements, email and discussion board (DB). Read and reread correspondence and DB postings before responding.

**Welcome students-** Send a course welcome announcement/video along with welcoming each student to the current week/module.

**Use names-** Address students by name and sign your name when using email and discussion boards.

**Email or call-** If students are failing behind or not present in the course, you can email or call to see if there are any issues. Sometimes all a student needs is to know someone cares.

**Feedback-** Give student’s timely feedback on assignments, activities, etc. Use a rubric, build a common feedback list, peer evaluation feedback, ask students if they want to receive feedback and what kind, etc.

**Just-in-Time Video-** If there is something the majority of the class is not grasping, prepare a just-in-time video or additional content.

**Block time-** Every week block out a few hours in your calendar to grade, write feedback, read & respond to DB posts, correspond with students, etc.

**Discussion board-** Select a few posts each week to respond to and keep track of whom you responded to by building a checklist. Be clear about your purpose before responding to students. Be brief and reply with a 1-2 sentence/question or ask for more information. Reply the day after the original posts are due so all students will see your post.

**Virtual community-** Host virtual office hours, book clubs, weekly live discussions, community hang outs using Skype, Zoom, MS Teams, Adobe Connect, etc.