Instructors’ Perceptions of the Best and Worst Practices in Online Classes

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Abstract

Instructors have difficulty designing online courses that are effective and help students learn the necessary course material. To assist instructors to better develop online courses, this research project has the purpose of identifying instructors’ perceptions of the most beneficial practices in designing and teaching online courses.

Review of Literature

Research shows that keeping students engaged and actively participating in an online class will help develop critical thinking skills (Zappala, 2012). Students express that active participation makes for a “good” university course, while lecture-only formats are considered “poor” university courses (Harrinton, 2012). How can online classes promote critical thinking and student’s participation? In addition, it is important to establish good instructor-student relationships in an online course. Instructors should communicate with students often and be prepared to alleviate student fears and solve problems (Sull, 2009).

Results

Results of the survey show that instructors believe assigning individual projects/assignments are the most effective teaching strategy for online classes. However, 65% of instructors only assign an individual project/assignment every other week.

Sample Questions

In your online classes, how effective are the following teaching strategies in assisting students to develop communication skills (written/verbal)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Strategies</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving oral and written communication skills</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing participation and engagement</td>
<td>60.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing teamwork skills</td>
<td>42.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing critical thinking skills</td>
<td>58.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ind. Projects/Assign.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Forums</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Projects/Assign.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Methods</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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References

Harrington, S. J. (2012). Enhancing Engagement and the Value of the Course to the Student through Course Organization and Active Learning. Faculty Focus, 15-16.


Introduction

Online learning has become increasingly more popular over the last few years, so universities are offering more online courses to meet student needs. According to the Babson Survey Research Group, in 2013, over 2,800 universities were offering online courses and 7.1 million higher education students were enrolled in at least one online course, which is a 6.1% growth from previous years (Sloan Consortium, 2013). This growth is occurring because online classes offer a wide range of advantages: convenience and flexibility, increased student enrichment, and cost-effective choices (World Wide Learn, 2013).

Methods

- Quantitative Research
- Primary data collected through a survey (Survey Monkey)
- Surveys were sent to 199 instructors (full time and adjunct faculty) at Indiana University-Purdue University Columbus