Lecture- 10

Preparation for CALL: Groundwork for CALL Foundation

<div align="right">**Module -26**</div>

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR ONLINE LEARNING

Topic No: 44

Technical Problems, Problems Related to Learning Style and Online Communication, Preparing Your Students, Readiness Programs, Orientation Programs, Preparing Your Own Orientation Program

Learning online can be as exasperating for the student as for the instructor, particularly for those taking an online course for the first time. Suddenly thrust into a world in which independent or collaborative learning is heavily stressed, students accustomed to traditional classroom procedures taking notes during a lecture, answering the occasional question, attending discussion sections must make unexpected and often jolting adjustments to their study habits.

In addition to these pedagogical concerns, students must contend with varying web site formats requiring special equipment or software. Indeed, it isn't unusual for students at the same university to encounter two or sometimes three different course management software systems during a single semester. With unsophisticated equipment and busy schedules, perhaps unsure whether they should communicate by email or by posting queries on discussion boards, students often feel frustrated, abandoned, or confused.

Students' problems fast become those of the instructor as well. Instead of teaching their course, posting information, and responding to legitimate queries on the discussion board, instructors often find themselves trying to troubleshoot technical queries for which they have minimal expertise. Tussling with why a student using a particular browser can't see part of a given web page or why another is unable to install a program on her home computer, instructors expend too much time and energy providing support and maintenance while struggling to keep up with the normal duties of teaching a course. Ideally, every institution should have 24/7 tech support to which every student can turn for help. But we realize that some readers do not teach under those conditions.

This lesson will address these and related issues concerning preparation of students for the online learning environment. The key is to identify and be forewarned about potential problems and to learn some effective methods for handling them. Problems That Students Typically Encounter

A student logging on to a course web site for the first time has a lot to contend with. To begin with, there's the terminology. Those neat rows of icons, either along the side or across the top or bottom of the screen, meant to guide students to the course material often bear names, captions, or titles

the users have never seen before. For example, a button might say "Course Notes," "My Course," "Course Information," or "Main Page," all of which generally mean the same thing. The icons under which such captions appear may look like an open notepad, an owl reading a book, or a blackboard.

Similarly, an area set aside for students to post information about themselves, including a small digital photograph, might say "Course Information," "Student Home Pages," or "Biographies." Most variable of all is the button or caption leading to the conferencing system. In some course management systems it is called the "Threaded Discussion," while elsewhere it might be called "Conference Board," "Discussion Area," or "Electronic Message Board." Tests are sometimes called quizzes, sometimes assessments, and the areas where students collaborate on projects may bear names like "Group Pages" and "Student Presentations."

Often these mysteries of nomenclature and icons are just the beginning of the puzzles a student must solve. There are also technical problems and communication difficulties.

Technical Problems

When they begin a course, students may find themselves unable to view the web pages properly, either because the browser they're using is too old (for one reason or another they haven't updated it), or because they haven't installed the necessary plug-ins. Another common experience is not being able to share word-processed documents. Even if students are using the same program, those with earlier releases may not be able to read documents created by classmates or instructors with more current versions without the help of a plug-in.

Problems Related to Learning Style and Online Communication

Far more significant, perhaps, is the variance in learning styles required of those learning online. Students used to instructor- directed learning may feel somewhat lost in an environment that relies heavily on individual initiative and independent learning or even more dismayed to hear that collaboration with peers is an expected element of the class.

Even though the requirements of the course are clearly out- lined in the syllabus and in the class announcements, the effect isn't the same as seeing an instructor glare severely at the class and announce that the essays are due the following week, without fail. Assignments are completed at home, often in solitude, and submitted through the click of a button, without that warm feeling students sometimes get when they pass in their exam papers or hand their essays over to their teacher in person. Indeed, without the discipline and structure imposed by the requirement of physically sitting in a classroom, students often feel cast adrift.

The complicated mechanisms of human expression—facial expressions, voice intonation, body language, eye contact—are also no longer available. In their place are the contextual and stylistic conventions of the written word, a mode of communication that favors verbal over visual or kinesthetic learners, thus leaving some students curiously unsatisfied. Learning how to modulate their own speech is also a concern for online students. Most of us rely on body language to deflect the impact of what we say; we convey our true intentions through gestures and vocal intonation. The absence of these conventions some- times causes students real distress.

The asynchronous nature of much online communication adds a further dimension to this problem. We are all used to instant feedback: Susan says something, and Steve responds. Online, Susan may still say something to which Steve responds—but the reply may come a day later. This spasmodic flow of communication takes some adjustment.

None of these problems is beyond the reach of a dedicated instructor. Now that there are so many ways to easily incorporate audio into classes, we encourage instructors to think about selecting opportunities to add these personalizing elements to the classroom, both in the form of their own short recordings as well as permitting students to do the same in their projects. Dealing with these problems effectively can save both the student and the instructor valuable time, reducing some of the tensions inherent in learning something new. The key is to understand the need to prepare students adequately for what they are about to encounter and to provide them with the necessary tools to get through the course. These efforts will complement the work you put into designing your course and syllabus.

Preparing Your Students

To address the kinds of problems we've been describing, the most successful online programs offer student orientations as well as continuing technical support and resources. They may also offer study-skills courses that include a strong focus on the issues particularly relevant to online learning. But instructors who are left mostly to their own devices can also find effective ways to meet their students' needs. In the following pages, we suggest approaches for both the individual instructor and the institution as a whole.

Readiness Programs

Many institutions have short online quizzes or lists that allow students to judge their readiness for online classes. Some of the areas they seek to gauge are:

■   Whether students are proactive, self-disciplined, and well- organized;

■   Whether students are comfortable communicating entirely online without face-to-face meetings (for fully online courses);

■   Whether students have access to adequate computer equipment and software, and if not, whether they are willing to update their equipment.

Two examples of different types of readiness quizzes online are:

■   Sierra College: http://lrc.sierracollege.edu/dl/survey/OL- student-assess.html;

■   Manchester Metropolitan University in the UK:

www.celt. mmu.ac.uk/studying_online/readiness/index.php.

Orientation Programs

Ideally, your institution should devise a student-orientation program that will take care of major issues such as these:

■   Equipment and browser requirements;

■   A general introduction to the software platform and its major features;

■   Instructions and links for downloading necessary software plug-ins;

■   Information about issues that arise in an online class—perhaps in the form of a checklist about what one can expect as an online student.

Lists of frequently asked questions (FAQs), referral email addresses, and toll-free numbers for reaching support staff are other useful features often included.

Many institutions or their hosting and delivery partners have created such orientation programs. Most are simply self-paced series of web pages, some interactive and some not. Many incorporate self-assessment surveys that seek to help students identify whether they are suited for online learning. Others test knowledge about computers, the institution's procedures, and so forth. At the University of Maryland University College students can actually try out the classroom environment and inter- act with others through enrollment in a demo course, UMUC 411 (see www.umuc.edu/spotlight/411.html).

Once students have enrolled, some orientation programs contain an element of human supervision and feedback, so that students must complete a few tasks in order to "pass" the orientation and be admitted to the classroom. These requirements are particularly effective in ensuring that students have the minimum skills, resources, and knowledge for an online course.

Having well-prepared students will mean that you as the instructor can concentrate on teaching rather than on resolving extraneous problems. There's enough for you to do once your online

course has begun without having to divert attention to these preparation issues. Effective student orientation is also beneficial to the institution, because it makes a significant difference in the retention rates in online programs. Students who start off with a good orientation are most likely to have a positive experience and to return for further courses.

Preparing Your Own Orientation Program

What if your institution hasn't yet made arrangements for an adequate student orientation? What should you do?

Two methods will resolve your dilemma. First, you can devise a simple orientation of your own, one that will satisfy at least the minimum requirements. Second, as noted in Chapter 5, you can give clear directions in your syllabus for dealing with documents, as well as explicit explanations of how and where you will handle material and activities in the classroom. If you are teaching a blended class, we suggest using the first class meeting as a chance to take the students step by step through an orientation to the software used in your class and to answer any questions students may have.

Before you begin creating your own orientation, you may want to take a look at some of the information and orientation pages that other institutions and institutional partners have set up. The following offer useful examples:

■   Portland   Community   College's   "Online   Learning   Orientation"   at www.pcc.edu/about/distance/orientation;

■   UCF Learning Online: http://learn.ucf.edu/index.html.

Some orientation programs address the issue of basic computer skills and suggest how to find assistance. Others try to give students insight into the classroom environment. For example, Arkansas State University, Fort Smith

(see www. uafortsmith.edu/Online/OrientationInfoForWebBasedClasses) provides a series of videos (with text transcripts) to orient their online and blended course students to their course management software, Blackboard. It includes study tips, manages expectations, and also addresses software-specific issues.

Module -27

ELEMENTS OF AN ORIENTATION

<u>**Topic No: 45**</u>

General introduction, including our expectations for online students, Requirements for computer equipment and software, Computer skills needed, Introduction to the course management software or other programs you will use to teach the class, A first assignment that requires students to demonstrate some familiarity with the software being used, Introductory Techniques

If you create your own student orientation, there are several elements you should consider, as outlined below.

1.   **General introduction, including our expectations for online students**

A general introduction can be made available to students even before they enroll in your course. Michele Pacansky-Brock created such an introduction for her students at Sierra College, combining a short video, "Preparing for Your Online Class," with a text introduction, all linked from the distance learning web page at her institution so that students could view this as early as when they were shopping for classes. She also provided a transcription and subtitles for her video, using a program called dotSUB (http://dotsub.com). She tells students in the video,

I created this website in an effort to increase the success of your learning by providing you with some very important information about my classes before the semester begins. . . .

This page is important for all my online students but especially for those of you who are about to embark upon your very first online learning experience You're going to find, as you embark upon your journey with me that I really love teaching online and I work very, very hard to make your experience exciting and relevant.

Pacansky-Brock discussed the attributes of successful online students and referred students to her institutions' online student-readiness quiz and a video of a Student Success work- shop she had created, "Are You Ready for an Online Class?"

In the video, she explained how communications worked in her class,

This may sound a bit odd to hear from your instructor but communication is the foundation for any successful relation- ship . . . yep, that's right. I expect you to fully communicate with me throughout your semester learning experience. You'll have plenty of opportunities to interact with me in our discussions and activities but if you, at any point, need further help to successfully meet a specific learning objective in our class, it is your responsibility to reach out to me and let me know.

She comments on this, "I try to explain what my class consists of ahead of time so I can be more assuring of having pre- pared students enrolled on day one. I know there are students who do NOT want such a technologically enriched learning environment, and they have the right to be informed about the components of my class before they enroll so that they can find another class that suits their preferences."

2.   Requirements for computer equipment and software (other than the platform being used)

State these as simply as possible. Realize that many people don't actually know the "numbers" for their computers, such as how large the hard drive is. However, they can easily identify their modem speed and the version of their software and browser, so be specific about these—for instance, "Must have Internet Explorer 8 or Firefox 10 or higher" or "Should have a high-speed Internet connection." You can also devise your own "tests" of certain requirements. For example, if students need to be able to access audio in your course, give them a sample to test—either on your own site or elsewhere on the Web.

Many institutions can make a common word-processing program available to your students, or they have site licenses for other software. But if your students don't have access to a common program supplied by your institution—and this is often the case for continuing-education students—you will need to stipulate how documents will be shared. You might ask students to save all documents in a particular format or to use software freely accessed through a browser like Google Docs. Or you might want students to paste their documents into text boxes provided in your course management software.

Gather information about the software possibilities ahead of time, and let students know whom they can contact for technical support or to obtain software. Include links on the Web where students can download any free programs, such as Adobe Acrobat Reader, that you intend to use in the classroom. In regard to technical resources, don't overload new online students with many different references; instead, choose a few carefully evaluated resource links that will meet the students' needs.

Pacansky-Brock addressed the issue of technical requirements humorously in a section of her introductory materials called, "Your Transportation to Class":

"What?! Why do I need transportation for an online class?!" Well, you wouldn't enroll in an on-campus class if you didn't have a reliable way to get there, right? So, you shouldn't enroll in an online class unless you have regular and reliable access to the internet. This class requires high speed internet access (DSL, cable or satellite) due to the large, multimedia files you'll regularly be accessing. Reliable "transportation" is paramount to your success in this online class.

### 3.	Computer skills needed

Depending on your student audience, you may want to suggest a computer skill set necessary for taking your course. In most cases, this is fairly simple: "Students should know how to cut and paste, how to email and send attachments, how to use a browser, and how to download from the Web." Refer students to web sites for Internet neophytes which can help those who are unsure about their basic skills. Urge them to check their skills before entering your classroom. In some cases, you may be able to refer students to on-campus workshops as well. In an online language or speech class, you will need to discuss any software that you will be using to facilitate audio communication.

### 4.	Introduction to the course management software or other programs you will use to teach the class

Some course management software companies have already put together a general introduction, student manual, or class- room demo for their software. Whenever possible, refer students to such pre-made resources. You may also be able to find examples of software introductions at the sites of other institutions that use the same software your institution does.

Michelle Pacansky-Brock added information about the technology and programs students could expect to use in the class and how she planned to use that technology in a section entitled, "How Much Technology Does This Class Require?"

As you may have heard from other students, my online classes employ many forms of emerging technologies as learning tools. This is a topic I'm passionate about, folks, and I assure you I have carefully evaluated each technological tool before integrating it into my class and requiring you to use it.

She continues,

Podcasts (Art 10 and Art 1E)—Both of my online classes offer options to my students. Lectures are offered in printed PDF form and in podcast form so you can select between reading or listening, based upon your own reading preferences. Interestingly, nearly 40% of my students have shared that they read and listen to my lectures because it enforces their learning. The other wonderful option that podcasts provide is mobile learning! If you have an iPod, you are welcome to export the podcasts onto your mobile device and learn on the go! Podcast lectures are accessed through Sierra College's iTunes site and requires students to have iTunes software installed on their computer. You will be required to down- load this software in the first week of class.

VoiceThread (Art 10 and Art 1E) If you enroll in either of my online classes, you will also be engaging in weekly discussions and activities using an online tool called VoiceThread. Voice-Thread allows you to leave your comments in text or voice, it enhances our class community and enforces visual learning through image-based, interactive discussions . . . If you're interested in using the voice commenting feature of VoiceThread, you are encouraged to consider purchasing a USB microphone for your computer or you have the option to purchase one hour of phone commenting through VoiceThread for $10. The phone commenting option allows you to leave comments through your telephone, just like leaving a voicemail (pretty cool!). Voice comments are encouraged but not required . . .

5.   A first assignment that requires students to demonstrate some familiarity with the software being used

This might be combined with one of the icebreaking activities. Typical of such assignments (depending on the software features available) would be these:

■   Write a short self-introduction and post it in the discussion forum.

■   Take an orientation quiz using online testing.

■   Fill in the template of a basic web page or blog with some biographical data and an optional photo of yourself. Add a video clip or audio recording if you like.

Providing FAQs

Take a good, hard look at your syllabus and ask yourself if any- thing you're requiring your students to do will require special additional skills or equipment. For example, if you've devised an exercise that entails uploading or downloading software, using a plug-in or accessing a useful but difficult to navigate site, go through the steps yourself and jot down any parts of the exercise

that may not be obvious. You may think that all of the operations involved are commonly known, but you'll be surprised to discover how many students don't understand them. If you don't provide some way for students to readily find out, you may spend an inordinate amount of class time filling in the blanks.

One approach is to gather all these possible sticking points into one FAQ file. You can compose it using a word-processing program, or create it as a web page. In this FAQ you should list each procedure your students may encounter and provide a short explanation of what they need to know to complete it. The web convention for composing such FAQ pages is to list all the possible questions at the top of the page and then create a link to each one with a bookmark (in Word) or an anchor (in HTML), thus permitting your students to find the question they want answered without having to search the entire document.

Introductory Techniques

Your initial postings in the discussion forum, your first messages sent to all by email, or the greeting you post on your course home page will do much to set the tone and expectations for your course. These "first words" can also provide models of appropriate online communication for your students.

Your introductory remarks should reinforce what is contained in your syllabus, your orientation, and other documents students will encounter as they commence their online class. Note some of the examples we have already given of instructor remarks that set a tone and reinforce expectations.

The last thing we would like you to remember is that you must establish a presence and rapport in your classroom that are evident to students as soon as they walk through the online class- room door. Even though this would seem to be a matter of instructor preparation, it is also an important part of what you can do to foster your students' readiness to begin the learning process.

Here are a few tips for establishing your presence:

■ **Convey a sense of enthusiasm about teaching the class.** For example, you might say:

Welcome to our course! I look at teaching Intro to Biology as a chance to share my enthusiasm about this subject with all of you, whether you are taking this class to fulfill a general requirement, have a personal interest in biology, or because you are exploring whether or not to major in this area. If you are one of those who feel some trepidation about science classes in general, I hope that you will soon realize that biology is all about the life around us and I look forward to helping you dis- cover the underlying principles of this subject.

■ Personalize and provide some touchstones about yourself and encourage students to do the same.

A biology instructor might share the following information about himself:

I first became interested in biology as an undergraduate, changing my major from business. My particular interest is in the biology of marine animals and I have spent many summers at a research center in California. Here's a photo of me chatting up the sea lions . . .

■   Indicate your availability for questions and communications, the protocol to follow, and that students are not stranded on their own when it comes to online learning.

For example, you might say:

If at any time you have a question, please post it in the Q&A discussion area after checking the class FAQ. If it is some- thing relevant only to yourself, please send me an email. I log in each day and should respond to you within 24 hours. Sometimes your classmates will come to your assistance, but please don't wait to contact me if you are encountering a serious issue. If you have a technical problem, contact the 24/7 help desk as soon as you can rather than endure frustration and delay trying to figure out the problem on your own.

A well-organized course, with signs that you have anticipated the students' problems, plus a welcoming attitude apparent in your first communication, conveys your appreciation of student concerns. Your initial efforts set the tone, and when these are followed by a responsiveness to students throughout the course, they will go a long way toward instilling student confidence in the online learning process.

Module -28

TEACHING WEB-ENHANCED AND BLENDED CLASSES

Topic No: 46

Tips for Teaching Web-Enhanced Courses, Posting Lectures Online, A Revised Approach to Lecturing, How to Post Your Lectures Online, Using a Discussion Board, Enlisting Technology in Your Favor, Using Online Quiz making Tools, Providing Advice and Support, Counseling Students Online, Establishing Virtual Office Hours, Assigning Group Projects, Using the Web as a Student Presentation Medium, Team Teaching, Tips for Teaching Blended Courses, Preparing for the Blended Course, Teaching the Blended Course

This lesson focuses specifically on them as well as those in which online elements play a merely supplemental role to the face-to-face class. You may find that material that was discussed in the context of the chapters in which it occurred is here summarized or treated in greater depth.

Today, the use of the Web by instructors is broad and varied. Some universities maintain their own "channels" on YouTube to stream video versions of their best instructors' on-campus lectures to the Web while others schedule just a few online discussions throughout the semester and post their lecture notes, while still others teach classes that regularly meet online one week and on campus the next. How can you best integrate the online and face-to-face elements of a class? What factors should you think about? Are there any pitfalls to avoid? To answer such questions, we'll try to offer helpful tips for blended classes as well as for integrating online tools for a primarily face-to-face class.

Let's look for a moment at those instructors who make minimal use of the Web. Perhaps they teach a traditional on- campus course but maintain a web site for the course. Typically, such web sites contain a course syllabus, a schedule of required readings and assignments, a listing of the course office hours, and some hyperlinks to relevant web sites in the instructor's particular subject area. They may also include a link to a discussion board which may be entirely an optional area, with students deciding whether to use or not use the site. In these cases in which students seldom look at the web site, the situation suggests that the instructor isn't using the web site to maximum advantage. If asked to provide a reason why their web sites are so lightly utilized, instructors might cite their students' lack of reliable access to the Web from off campus (a typical complaint for developing countries), or even a lack of interest on the part of students who are having their

instructional and social needs met on campus. Instructors may also say that because of their own workloads, they don't want to spend more time creating material for the web site. They may even express the fear that if they use the Web more extensively, their students will no longer have a reason to come to class. In other words, instructors are asking why they should work more for the same pay, doing something that perhaps threatens their livelihood. The ultimate answers to this question are beyond the purview of this book. Academic senates and other faculty organizations, institutional administrators, and union representatives must work them out. But we don't believe that using the Web effectively requires you to labor twice as long for the same pay. We do think that it can improve the way you teach your traditional course. To that end, this chapter will also provide some practical suggestions for this skeptical audience.

The Sloan Consortium definitions of Web Facilitated (what we call "enhanced" here), Blended/Hybrid, and Online are based on the amount of content delivered online. They term "Web Facilitated" as those courses with 1–29 percent of content delivered online; "Blended" courses as those in which 30–79 percent of the content is delivered online but still require some face-to-face meetings; and true "Online" as containing 80 percent or more online content with few or no face-to-face meetings. But another way to approach this is to look at the types of instructional activities carried out online and whether or not they are required or the degree to which they replace face-to-face time. (Still persistently termed "seat time" by many, consider the following definitions:

■   Web-enhanced: A broad category of courses with associated web sites or course management system classrooms that contain materials relevant to the course (perhaps a syllabus, a list of web-based resources, a course calendar, a reading list, lecture notes or video lectures, discussion board, and/or real-time online meeting functions and chat). Actual online activities may be required or optional.

■   Blended: Courses in which both online and face-to-face instructional elements are required and complementary. A sizeable percentage of content is delivered online, there are required online student activities, and a significant portion of the student's grade is based on online activity.

Tips for Teaching Web-Enhanced Courses

While we want to focus first on those teaching web-enhanced courses, readers who are mainly interested in true blended courses may find that many of the following tips are also relevant to their needs.

Posting Lectures Online

The matter of online lectures is probably the biggest bugaboo teachers face when considering whether to use the Web. Why should students bother to come to class if they can simply read (or view video versions of) the lectures online?

Most lectures consist of a body of core material, factual or introductory in nature, followed by a discussion of more complex issues, proofs, or processes. The core material constitutes the main dish of the lecture. It's usually this material that students are expected to know. The other material serves as side dishes, which help differentiate the A students from the B and C students. If the core material were posted online, enriched by graphics and charts (perhaps with a few links to other relevant material available online), students would be relieved of the chore of reproducing this material word for word in their notes. That would allow them to concentrate on the finer points of the lecture. In other words, posting the lectures online frees the students to concentrate on what is being said.

Yet that argument still raises the question: Why should most students bother to come to class?

The answer may have something to do with learning styles. Some students learn better by listening and taking notes. Others do better by reading rather than by listening to lectures, and a third group seems to benefit by doing specific assignments based on the material covered. In that sense, posting lecture notes online helps some, but not all, students.

But the answer goes deeper still. It involves the basic approach to lecturing. Perhaps you need to rethink how you use your face-to-face time with students.

A Revised Approach to Lecturing

Admittedly, an instructor who posts lecture notes and reads them aloud in class may be in danger of putting students to sleep. But if the lecturer alters what he or she does in class, relying on the fact that the material is freely available online, then the experience of attending class may have a different meaning.

Say that the assignment for the week is to read the core notes posted online, along with whatever textual material supports it. In that case, instead of spending the first twenty minutes or so reviewing the core or introductory material, the instructor can concentrate on a particularly knotty issue or complex concept, examining it, elucidating it, debating it in class. Those students who have read the material beforehand will gain a deeper insight into the concept. (Of course, those who have not read the material will have considerable difficulty following what's going on. One hopes they will get the message and come to the next session better prepared.)

Online lectures offer other advantages as well. For the instructor, posting lectures can be an aid in re-evaluating older and possibly out-of-date course materials, improving organization, coherence,

and comprehension. For the students, having the core portion of the lecture online provides an opportunity to review the material in its original form (rather than using their scribbled notes) or to catch up on material they may have missed because of illness or absence.

Important! The point here is that using the Web to post lectures is neither a panacea nor a threat. It depends entirely on how effectively the web-based material is integrated into the class.

How to Post Your Lectures Online

Posting your lecture notes online does add to your initial workload, particularly if you've never prepared them this way before. But once you've done it, you'll find it comparatively easy to update your notes the next time you teach the course. There are more and more choices available to accomplish this, which were discussed in Chapters 6 and 9 in some detail. You may post your lectures by uploading PowerPoint, by creating a PDF version of your word-processed documents, write directly into your course management system content area, or use one of the free sites mentioned in earlier chapters to create course web pages. You may also use one of the many Web 2.0 programs already mentioned in this book to create narrated slides or an audio or video lecture. You may want to experiment with these diverse ways of offering lectures before deciding on one that is easiest for you to create and for your students to access.

Using a Discussion Board

Most classes, particularly smaller, seminar-style classes, involve discussions of some sort. Ordinarily, students prepare for the discussions through readings. In some graduate classes, stu-dents prepare "position" papers, which are then circulated to other students for their consideration before coming to class. Using the Web in conjunction with the work done in class can enhance any of these techniques. Take the case of the seminar. In order to present the topic properly, the instructor will generally introduce it with either a short lecture or an impromptu talk. The students will then offer initial reactions to the discussion topic, setting the stage for the eventual discussion. A half hour or so may have elapsed before the discussion is really joined.

An alternative approach is to have the students post their initial reactions to a discussion topic online and read the postings on each topic before coming to class. Although this would require more work from the students, it would not increase the instructor's workload except insofar as he or she had to read the work posted to the web site. What it would require of the stu- dents is perhaps a more carefully considered appreciation of the discussion topic and a greater awareness of where they stand in relation to other students in the seminar. Presumably this would make for a livelier and more informed discussion, and it would elicit remarks from all the members of the class rather than merely the most vocal.

A discussion board can be of use in large, lecture-style classes as well. For most students, "attending" such a class means finding a seat somewhere in an auditorium, staring at the back of someone's head, and listening to the instructor intone the lecture from a stage. Discussion in such a setting is usually fairly haphazard. The instructor pauses to solicit input from the assembled students. The more intrepid dare to raise their hands, while the rest sit quietly.

The Web can humanize such a class and permit students far more interaction with their colleagues and instructors than might otherwise be possible. An instructor can divide up the class into groups of twenty or so, depending on the number of TAs or assistants available. The instructor with a large class and no assistance might even devise a system of rotating student moderators who take turns facilitating their groups. Students using the discussion board will thus have a work group com- posed of class members whom they might not ordinarily get to know, a considerable advantage in schools where a majority of students don't live on campus, or in large universities where most students know only their dorm-mates.

Instructors and students can use these virtual study groups for a number of purposes. Students can post and discuss questions related to the material covered in class. Or, having delivered a lecture in class, an instructor might post a follow-up question, requiring the students to formulate an appropriate response as part of their grade. These responses might then become the basis of a future class discussion or lecture. They might also serve as an archived resource for students reviewing the material.

An instructor can monitor the comments posted in the discussion groups and use them as the basis of a frequently asked questions (FAQ) page containing general answers to the students' more noteworthy queries and concerns. This will save the instructor the extra time of having to respond to the same question over and over again, either by email or in one-to-one advising sessions. Finally, if the instructor creates some relevant and focused initial discussion prompts, the discussion group postings can provide the instructor with valuable insight into how effectively the material in lectures has been conveyed.

Enlisting Technology in Your Favor

Much has been made of the ubiquity of laptops, netbooks (small, scaled-down laptops), and smart phones and the dis- traction these pose to students in the on-campus classroom, taking attention away from the lecture or other activity that the instructor has so carefully prepared. Rather than fight it, try to enlist technology in your favor. This goes beyond the "clicker" personal response systems many universities have introduced on campuses whereby instructors can poll students or ask them to contribute questions. Why not make something on the Web the object of your attention (for example, a photograph representing a current event or a video) and ask students to log in and take five minutes to post their quick responses in a chat. Then display the chat and its results and
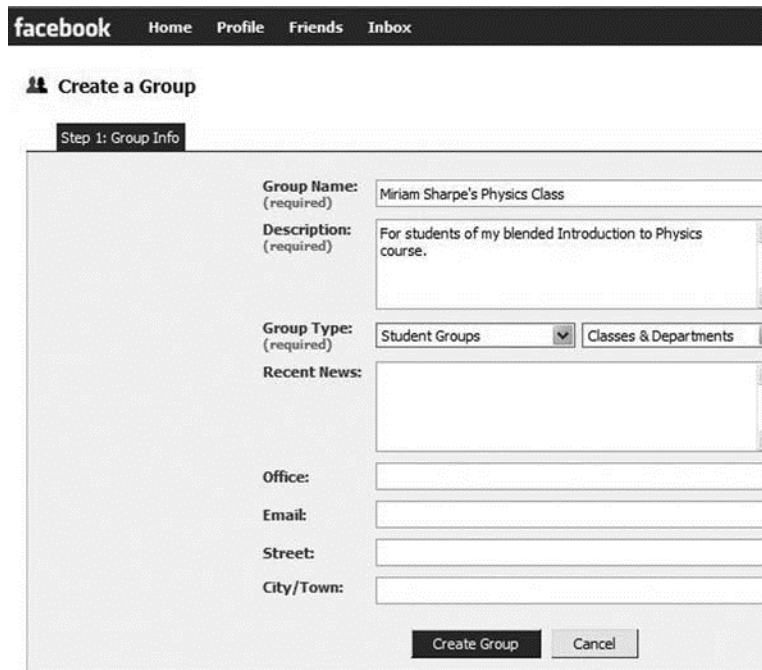
discuss the issues. (For those students who may not bring an electronic device to class, you might provide the option of logging on after class to an asynchronous forum you have established to add their responses to those of their classmates.)

Similarly, there are ways to take advantage of the popularity of social networking sites like Facebook. However, be careful to allow students to preserve the boundaries between social inter-action and "official" class participation. You can create a special Facebook group to communicate with students, or ask students to create a limited class profile with appropriate privacy settings for participating in your class. There are an increasing number of applications designed for Facebook that might enhance your face-to-face class, including the application previously mentioned, Blackboard Sync, for institutional customers that provides some integration with a Blackboard classroom. However, start by deliberating what you would like to accomplish and then try out these applications of interest to you within Facebook to judge for yourself whether it would be easier to use a course management system or one of the many collaborative sites like Ning rather than Facebook for your purposes. It may be that you decide to use Facebook primarily for community-building activities for the class or as a way to update students on the class activities.

Using Online Quiz making Tools

If your course is enhanced or blended, you presumably can conduct your high-stakes testing in a proctored on-campus environment. But online quizmaking tools can provide valuable

Figure 9.1 Miriam Sharpe prepares to create a group page on Facebook (www.facebook.com) in order to build community in her blended physics class. Reproduced by permission from Facebook.

assistance by permitting you to construct self-grading quizzes online. Most course management systems contain this feature. They permit you to construct a quiz consisting of true/false statements, multiple-choice questions, one-word answers, multiple answers, matching answers, ordered answers, or short or long essay questions. Even if your institution offers no access to course management systems, you can make use of the numerous free quizmaker tools available online.

Students taking these tests can receive immediate feedback. This feedback can consist of a simple "correct" or "incorrect" message, or a statement explaining in detail why the student got the answer right or wrong. Questions can include embedded graphics. Depending on the software, they can even include sound or video files you've made, or links to such files that you found elsewhere on the Web. Another use of such online quizzes is to provide sample practice exams for student to use to prepare for midterm or final exams. Using one of the quiz generators, the instructor can provide answers as well as focused feedback, so that those taking the practice exams can learn from their mistakes. As with the preparation of lecture notes, creating quizzes can be time-consuming at first and then save you a great deal of trouble the second time around. One caveat, however: be sure to save the questions and answers in a word-processing file of your own. Sometimes institutions change their course management systems, and it isn't always possible to import a set of questions in one software system into another.

Providing Advice and Support

Providing counseling, advice, mentoring, and support is part of the job of teaching. Instructors list their office hours in their syllabi and, once or twice a week, sit dutifully behind their desks waiting for someone to knock on their door. All too often, nobody comes, leaving the instructor to wonder about the utility of sitting in an office for two hours a week. For some, the meager trickle of students is an opportunity to catch up on paperwork. Some may see it as a testament to their pedagogical skills—a sign that students aren't having any difficulties. To others, however, the lack of office visitors is a warning signal that something may be wrong—either the allotted time isn't convenient or the students don't feel they are getting what they want from the course. Using two of the online tools readily available to most instructors—email and chat—can improve the flow of communication markedly.

Counseling Students Online

With email, text messaging, instant messaging and chat, instructors can respond to student inquiries at a time and place of their choosing, leaving them freer to structure their activities during the day. Students can submit their inquiries as the need arises—for example, in their dorm room late at night when they're studying.

But shifting the counseling load to the Web has its obvious downside as well: it can significantly increase the instructor's workload if it isn't kept in check. To control your workload, we suggest the following guidelines, some of which we've recommended in earlier chapters as part of establishing a protocol for communications.

■   Set strict parameters for responding to emails and other online messages and make these clear to your students in both your syllabus and your class. For instance, make sure your students understand that although you will accept emails from them, you will not necessarily respond to each one immediately and that you may provide responses to a question in the classroom if you see it is one that has been repeatedly posed.

■   Specify which kinds of problems you will respond to: for example, personal problems, requests, or issues; or difficulties comprehending the subject matter. Steer clear altogether of administrative issues, such as dates for upcoming tests or questions about homework. Such information is either avail- able in the syllabus or more properly discussed in an online or on-the-ground discussion session.

■   Insist that you will not respond to any emails whose chief issue isn't clearly identified in the subject line of the communication.

This will save you the trouble of having to read through the entire email to discover the problem at hand. It will also allow you to forward a student email to a TA or assistant when appropriate.

■   Respond to a problem you perceive as being potentially a question for all by sending one email to your entire class, or by posting an announcement in the online classroom or by compiling a FAQ page with your answers and post it on your web site.

Establishing Virtual Office Hours

Online chat software can be used to conduct virtual office hours. It can, for instance, lighten your advisory load, or at least make it less onerous, if you use it in a focused way. Say, for example, that you tell your students that you will be available for consultations for an hour or two on certain days. If you're in your office, or even your home, you can open a chat session, leaving the chat window visible on your screen. As you wait for students to check in, you can do other work, glancing at the screen now and then to see if anyone has arrived.

Once a student has arrived, your conversation (depending on the chat software you're using) can usually be logged; that is, a record of your conversation is automatically saved to a text file. This permits you to edit the text file at some later date, extracting material for your FAQ page.

Some chat software tools now include a whiteboard function. The whiteboard, as you may recall, is a communal area where an instructor can draw or type. The students in the chat session can then discuss the instructor's display or present material of their own as part of the online give and take. Such software tools permit you to display in the whiteboard area any document on your hard disk (such as a PowerPoint presentation or an Excel spreadsheet) or any web page you have bookmarked; you can do this simultaneously while chatting with your students. More impressive still, the students can do the same thing. Thus you and your students can see the same documents, web pages, or applications at the same time that you are discussing them.

Many of the foregoing capabilities are now augmented by browser-based videoconferencing tools that permit one-to-one or even group video and audio communication without the need to even download software. (Some of these tools were described in earlier portions of this book, especially Chapter 9.) But as the pipelines carrying the information have improved, this form of communication has become more accessible and common. Today's instructor now has a broad array of communication tools with which to conduct advisory or small-seminar sessions with a class whether or not their institution provides such tools.

Assigning Group Projects

One feature commonly available in most course management software is the ability to divide large classes into small student groups, affording them a private area online in which to collaborate on the production and publication of group projects.

In these private areas the students have access to the full panoply of online tools—message boards, chat rooms, and whiteboards. They can create information, format it, and share these newly created items with each other, unseen by the rest of the class. This gives them a virtual workspace, permitting them to work together on a schedule convenient to them—a particular advantage to students with busy schedules or difficult commutes. It also permits you as the instructor to assign group collaborative projects with the assurance that they won't overwhelm the students' time or capabilities. Many institutions and course management systems also provide wiki software for such group collaboration purposes.

In a small private school, using a discussion board or other tools to promote online group work may seem superfluous. But in a large urban school, where students commute long distances, have jobs, or are raising families, the opportunity to work online overcomes a number of logistical obstacles while at the same time affording a level of intercommunication that wouldn't otherwise be possible. It also helps students learn how to collaborate with one another, a communication skill highly valued in the workplace.

Access to online group collaboration tools may permit you to assign more complex research projects than you might have before. By dividing the workload, students can tackle problems of much greater complexity than might have been possible if the assignment were for one student alone. With adequate preparation and planning, students from different institutions, cities, and even countries can connect via the Internet and may be able to work together collaboratively using the same set of group tools. Finally, the group projects can be released for viewing to the whole class and form the basis of a vigorous face-to-face or online discussion. To explore this subject further, see Chapters 6 and 7 for discussion of some of the specific options available for group activities.

Using the Web as a Student Presentation Medium

The Web is a powerful presentation medium, and it can be used in both web-enhanced and blended classes to display work created by students as course projects, either individually or in groups. Some instructors understandably prefer the more traditional means of expression, such as the research paper or the PowerPoint slide show delivered in front of the class. Frequently, however, an inordinate amount of classroom time is required to present such projects to the class. How much more efficient it can be to have students present their work online instead.

Using the Web to present such reports permits students to use a wider range of media to make their points. Students can create videos, narrated slides, blogs, and web pages replete with graphics, sounds, animations, and links. Even without such multimedia embellishments, web-based reports can be read and evaluated by all the students before or after they come to class, leaving more face-to-face class time for discussion, analyses, and critiques.

Assembling such projects should no longer be considered a hardship for students. In most cases, it is a skill they can master easily, and one they ought to learn. Using simple, menu-based Web 2.0 type tools described in earlier chapters, they should be able to assemble relatively sophisticated presentations with ease.

Web-Based Exercises

The Web is so rich in potential learning materials that traditional instructors would be depriving their students of valuable educational resources if they ignored it altogether. No matter what subject you teach, be it molecular biology or cultural anthropology, a multitude of sites can provide you and your students with information, simulations, or resources to consider, critique, analyze, or discuss.

Aside from visiting informational web sites, students can participate in global science experiments, perform experiments in online labs, collaborate and communicate with students from another school, state, or nation, analyze and critique articles published online and post reactions to them in a discussion board, and meet and discuss relevant issues with a "guest host" in a discussion board or chat room.

Here are some pointers for incorporating Web resources into your face-to-face on-site class:

■   Identify each site you want your students to visit by its URL, both on your web site and in the syllabus. Revisit the site just before you begin teaching the class to make sure it's still alive (sometimes sites are moved to different URLs or simply no longer work).

■   Be very clear when defining what you want your students to see or do when visiting a site. Be respectful of the time they must spend online to accomplish the assigned task. Gener- ally, you'll want to avoid the treasure-hunt approach—that is, having your students hunt for information before they can critique it.

■   Avoid wasting time displaying web sites in the on-site class unless it is for the purpose of discussing a specific assignment focused around that web page or it otherwise requires some explanation that can't be duplicated online. If your Internet connection in the classroom is not stable, you may want to prepare screen shots of a web site being used for this purpose.

Team Teaching

Just as students can collaborate easily online, so can teachers. Team teaching a large, lecture-style course requires a great deal of advance planning and preparation. Traditionally, this is done in face-to-face meetings, but using the collaborative tools available on the Web can ameliorate the process, speeding up the production of course materials and easing the task of approving them once they are done.

Once a course is under way, using the Web has its advantages as well. Instructors can spell each other at certain tasks, with one instructor handling lectures in the classroom while the other publishes backup materials on the Web and replies to student inquiries on discussion boards.

In less common cases, instructors may be situated too far apart to commute easily to the physical class. Using the Web is an obvious alternative, permitting the use of "experts" to prepare online lectures, but leaving the discussions to the instructor in the on-site class.

A Final Thought on Web Enhancement

In this discussion of ways the Internet can be integrated in an on-the-ground class, one key thought underlies our comments. Important! Making the use of the Internet optional rather than incorporating it into the curriculum dooms it to failure.

When you make the Web an integral part of the course work, you automatically make it more relevant and valuable to your students and yourself alike. Treating the web site merely as a repository for chance comments or random postings reduces it to the level of a technological appendage and squanders its considerable potential to enrich what you are doing on the ground.

Tips for Teaching Blended Courses

While many institutions new to online education have surmised that the road to online teaching is made easier by first exposing instructors to blended teaching, there is little or no research that bears this out. In fact, many people who are experienced online teachers might tell you that blended courses can actually be more difficult to teach than fully online ones. Why is this? It is chiefly due to the challenge of integrating the two modalities of teaching in a way that makes both equally meaningful and effective.

Two of the biggest errors made by those attempting blended courses are:

■   Overloading students with a great deal more work than they would have in either a completely face-to-face or fully online course;

■   Not giving clear directions about what will be accomplished in each mode and how to coordinate the two.

The first issue has been termed the "course and one-half syndrome." The second is best handled along the same lines as fully online courses—with a comprehensive syllabus and schedule that clarifies how the class will operate.

The tips offered here in some cases reiterate principles already stated in this book and previously illustrated by examples, while in other cases, tips supply some additional information specially tailored for the blended format.

Preparing for the Blended Course

■   Take advantage of any training or training resource materials offered on campus (or off- or online) if you are new to online teaching and blended learning. Look for training that not only focuses on how to use online software from the technical point of view, but also offers some insights into approaches to teaching and learning and design for a blended course.

■   Review the face-to-face version of the course if that's what you have been teaching. Consider what is best reserved for face-to-face delivery and be able to explain your rationale. Find the weakest points in the teaching experience as you see them and consider how these may be changed with the addition of online activities and resources.

■   Review the schedule for your blended class. Are the face-to- face meeting dates already determined or can you determine the pattern yourself? The first class should ideally meet face-to-face so that students can be fully prepared for the blended format. On many campuses, students are accustomed to thinking about the first class day as provisional, a waste of time, or not a "real" class meeting. For this reason, it is a good idea to email your students ahead of time to stress the importance of not missing this first class date. If this would seem to be a losing battle on your campus, strongly consider making both the first and second class meetings face-to-face.

■   Generally speaking, in putting together your syllabus schedule, it's a good idea to plan discussions of the most complex materials for a face-to-face meeting. This doesn't mean that complex issues cannot be handled just as well in a fully online class, only that you may find that it will be relatively quicker for you to clear up misunderstandings if you have the opportunity for a face-to-face session. Many instructors have found that scheduling the first small-group meeting for a face-to-face meeting week greatly facilitates the rate at which groups form and establish cooperation. Some instructors also recommend that groups be scheduled to meet face to face at

other critical moments in a group project. Again, this doesn't mean that the same objective cannot be reached purely online, but if you have the opportunity to convene groups face to face, you may find that it simply accelerates the process of forming groups or reaching consensus on key aspects of the project.

■   Be prepared to offer an orientation to students on your course management system or other software if this is not supplied to students elsewhere.

■   Define how your blended class operates in the introductory area of your syllabus and what expectations are for students in regard to participation in online and face-to-face activities. Explain how the weeks will work in tandem as a fully integrated course. Make sure your syllabus schedule clearly delineates in a graphic manner (through use of bold font or other means) those weeks in which the class meets face-to-face and what online activities, if any, are expected for those same weeks.

Design Issues for the Blended Course

■   Pay careful attention to the transition between face-to-face and online activities. Ideally these two modes are not completely separate—therefore, always have some online activity, no matter how minor or brief, within the week in which the class meets face to face. For example, you might ask students to go online to the discussion board within forty-eight hours after a face-to-face meeting to continue to reflect on the topics broached at that meeting. This gives students who may be reticent about speaking in the on-campus class a chance to weigh in and it also provides an interval for all students to reflect on the preceding face-to-face discussion. It also signals to the students that what happens in these two modalities is not disconnected, but interrelated. The online work following directly upon the face-to-face meeting helps bridge the topics and activities of the two successive weeks, and can serve as preparation for the entirely online week. The opposite is also true—a carefully planned activity in the online-only week may be designed to provide essential back- ground for the upcoming face-to-face meeting.

■   Consider the pacing and time needed to complete each week's activities, both online and face to face—calculate the total time expected for students to be on task—whether that means reading, researching, discussing, or completing other "homework." The total time should be comparable to that expected for a purely face-to-face class. This avoids the problem of "a class and one-half."

■   In devising a participation grade, be sure to define what participation means in the context of a face-to-face class meeting and an online discussion. Keep in mind that there generally isn't time for every student to participate in a 1–3- hour face-to-face classroom meeting. You may want to give students an opportunity within a face-to-face meeting week for participating in either format. In other words, if you give ten points for participation, you can stipulate that the ten points can be distributed over both the face-to-face and online meetings or confined to just the online. Or

you can set up separate criteria or a rubric for each modality. Perhaps there are a certain number of points for participating in three of the fifteen face-to-face discussions with another total number of points for online participation in a face-to-face meeting week and yet another collection of points for those weeks in which the class is only online.

■   Carefully incorporate Web resources into your course content and instructional activities to provide more diverse pathways to learning and supply guidelines to help students devise a more critical approach to reviewing information.

■   Avoid scheduling all your face-to-face meeting time for lecturing! The on-campus meeting affords valuable time to explore ideas and gauge understanding by engaging students in active discussion and debate, case studies, or other active learning strategies.

Teaching the Blended Course

■   Post your syllabus online but depending on your student audience and expectations for the on-campus meeting, you may want to bring hard-copy printouts to the first class meeting (if that is indeed face-to-face) as well. At some campuses, students can be emailed in advance and instructed to read and bring the syllabus to the first class (on their laptops or in hard copy).

■   At the first and perhaps second class meeting, you will want to review the syllabus for the course. Additionally, here is when you may need to lead that orientation to the course management software for students. At the very least, you will want to clarify how and when and where to carry out online activities, as well as to point to your syllabus schedule to emphasize the face-to-face meeting dates and the required online activities.

■   Provide weekly announcements in the online classroom every week to highlight the week's activities ahead and guide the "handoff" from the face-to-face meeting week to the purely online ones and vice versa.

■   Send weekly emails to students to remind students of continuing online activities during weeks in which the class does not meet face-to-face. Sometimes students in a blended class tend to think of the weeks in which they do not meet on campus as "weeks off."

■   Send a personal email to provide a friendly reminder to students who at any time are not participating in the online portion of the class or the opposite—to encourage students to come to face-to-face meetings.

■   Use an online gradebook to allow students to follow their progress in the class. By grading students on their online activities on a weekly or biweekly basis, it is easier for you to keep track of student learning and for the students them- selves to be reminded of an ongoing class in which they may seldom meet face-to-face.

■ Strive to interact with students online every week in some manner. This may range from active facilitation of online discussion to announcements or posted commentary that help illuminate the readings and assignments underway. Let students know that you will be monitoring their online activity.

■ In addition to any student course evaluations your institution may administer at the end of a course, consider asking students some of your own questions tailored to the blended course design you devised. For example, you may ask students questions such as, "Which assignments provided the best learning experience for you this term and why?" "Was it clear to you what needed to be done in weeks in which the class did not meet face-to-face?" or "Rate the following Web-based activities from our class . . ."

Finally, after teaching your first blended class, carefully review it and don't be shy about enlisting the extra pair of eyes that a trusted colleague can provide. It's difficult to get the blended course "recipe" exactly right the very first time, but your effectiveness will improve with feedback from students and colleagues along with reflection and practice.

Reference Source:

1. **'Teaching Online: A Practical Guide' by Susan Ko. & Steve Rossen**
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