Online Teaching
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What is online teaching?

This is teaching using internet based technologies which at Griffith is the Blackboard system. Generally students who use online teaching as a sole source of their education are either, international students, distance students or students who cannot get to the University campus for lectures for some other reason. However, at Griffith all courses have some form of online presence and thus these courses may include students who are online occasionally rather than at all times. All these students must be taken into account when teaching “online”.

Effective teaching includes imparting information and expertise to the students we are teaching. However we all know that students want and need and indeed should have a relationship with teachers and other students in the class and that these relationships are vital for good teaching and learning outcomes. Teaching online is in effect no different in that students should be able to access the same information, expertise and relationships that “on campus” students have access to. The difference is of course that the technology and time or distance or both intervenes in between the students and the teachers as well as the other students in the cohort.

It is essential then to find mechanisms to replicate the information that would be shared on campus and the relationships that would be developed on campus.

Access to information online

When developing the material online it is essential that just using “lecture capture” is not the only source of the information that students have access to. However using lecture capture as an adjunct to the online information is highly valuable and online students certainly express their appreciation for lecture capture.

It is important to provide very clear information and objectives for students to achieve. Provide either written information or links to web sites and reading material as well as reference to the specific pages referred to in any lecture that is delivered.

In fact it is best to be able to use all of the above mechanisms to communicate the material to the students. Students enjoy “you tube” videos if available, they will use information from web sites and from readings, reference materials and the text book that is recommended.

Online relationships

It is important that online students get to know teaching staff and therefore it is essential that staff provide as much information that they can about their professional expertise so that students are confident that the teacher is someone they can trust and respect. Teachers might also wish to provide some personal information that assists students to empathise with them and develop an online relationship with the teacher. Clearly personal information needs to be appropriate and only that information that teachers would share with on campus students would be included.

There are several mechanisms within the Blackboard system to develop relationships with the teaching staff and other students. For example The Discussion Board is a very useful tool for Asynchronous discussions, which can include working in groups to enhance relationship development and discussions that might be otherwise undertaken in a classroom. This is an excellent tool and for people new to online teaching it should be the first tool that is used.
Caring for students and ensuring they are involved

If the class is small then it is useful to email individual students to ascertain that they are happy and coping and that they are engaged. If the class is large this is not going to be possible. A mechanism to deal with this to an extent is to view the course statistics within the control panel. Determine students who appear to be not engaged through their lack of usage and contact them directly to investigate if there is anything that the teacher can do to re-engage the student.

Critique

While it is important that students receive appropriate critique of their work. It is just as important that students are not exposed to public criticism. So when providing critical evaluation of work this should be done privately and not on public forums. Email students individually with any criticism of their work. If student work is on the “discussion board” or other public forums online then it may be important to provide some general criticism in a very gentle and understanding manner so that other students know that the public information is not correct, however detailed criticism needs to be done privately as discussed above.

Summary of Guidelines for Online Teaching

1. Provide information using all the tools available that are appropriate for the class, this can include lecture capture, you tube videos, written notes, other web sites, readings and reference and text books. For each weeks work be clear about what is expected to be completed each week.
2. Use the various online tools that you are comfortable with to develop relationships with and between students. Your profile should include all professional information you can provide and as much appropriate personal information as you are comfortable to share.
3. Show that you are interested and care for students by emailing students you feel are at risk by using the course statistics to see which students are active and which are not.
4. When providing detailed critique to students this should be done using private means rather than public forums.

Resources and further information


Conrad, D. (2004). 'University instructors' reflections on their first online teaching experiences', jln, 8: 2, 31-44.