

Promoting Interaction and Communication in an Online Course

One way to promote interaction and communication in an online course is through the use of an ice-breaker activity. For example, an early course assignment might require students to submit biographical data consisting of their name, hot-linked email address, hometown, recreational interests, and primary professional interests. Students would also be given the option to attach a file containing their photo. The biographical information would then be shared with the students on a separate page in their online course.

In a paper by LeBaron & Miler (2003), students were required to review posted biographies and begin a dialogue with one of their classmates based on professional or recreational interests; their immediate thoughts in reviewing the professional or recreational interests, followed by posing questions and responses using a threaded discussion forum within the course. The students were given two weeks to complete the ice-breaker assignment which would represent 20% of their overall course grade.

Some students who waited late to complete the assignment found it difficult to find a peer with whom they wanted to engage in communication. As a result, instructors in the subsequent semester decided that further refinement to the ice breaker assignment needed to be implemented. To have more evenly distributed student communication, a team approach was initiated by the instructors who established private team work areas populated with three students each using the original ice breaker guidelines. At the end of the exercise students were to introduce their peers to the class using a threaded discussion board.

A majority of the students who participated in the refined ice breaker exercise indicated that it was a good way to begin the course by offering a method to meet classmates which in turn encouraged continuing interaction and communication during the semester. Each student averaged 56 postings for the 14 week semester indicating a high level of activity (LeBaron & Miller, 2003).

Standards, Benchmarks, and Guidelines for Online Courses

In the June 16th issue of this newsletter we provided a list of recommended standards, guidelines, and benchmarks for your reference in developing online or web-enhanced courses. That list focused on the organization and design areas of an online course. In this issue, we provide you with recommended standards, guidelines, and benchmarks related to "instructional design and delivery."

Promote Interaction and Communication

- Students introduce themselves
- Students are encouraged to respond to classmate introductions
- "Ice-breaker" activity to get acquainted
- Instructor introduces himself/herself to model interaction

- Tasks and activities are designated as synchronous or asynchronous; sequential or may be completed in any order (clarified)
- Instructional material may be reviewed repeatedly (built-in redundancy)
- Summary provided frequently, particularly at the end of topics, to reinforce learning

Activities to Enhance Student Learning (addressing multiple learning styles)

- Video clips of interviews, movements
- Historical audio clips of famous speeches
- Screen animations for instructional exercises using software
- Personal interview reports
- Crossword or word search puzzles
- Matching and concept change activities

- model interaction
- Netiquette described and enforced
- Student participation is tracked and ‘wallflowers’ drawn into the discussions
- Students are prompted by facilitator to expand on relevant points
- Reading and writing requirements are consistent with student abilities and course unit load

Goals and Alignment to Learning Objectives/Outcomes

- Pace of delivery of course is managed
- Course content is “chunked” for more manageable learning
- Instructional design is made clear (e.g., is it self-paced, or group-paced)
- Expectations for synchronous vs. asynchronous activities are clearly spelled out

Learning Objectives and Activities are Integrated

- Reading assignments match learning objectives
- Activities lead to learning desired concepts

- Crossword or word search puzzles
- Matching and game-show-style trivia games
- Online scavenger hunt/WebQuest
- Annotated bibliography
- PowerPoint presentations as assignments

Activities to Develop Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

- Discussions center on questions without a single correct answer
- Compare and contrast exercises
- Case studies
- Critique classmates’ assignments
- Collaborative exercises
- Portfolios (building one activity upon another) to share/peer review

LeBaron, J., & Miller, D. (2003). The Teacher as “Agent Provocateur”: Strategies to Promote Community in Online Course Settings. Retrieved June 25, 2008, from http://gse.uml.edu/lebaron/Oulu-TAPfinal_030922.pdf

Seok, S. (2007). Standards, accreditation, benchmarks, and guidelines in distance education. In M. Simonson, & C. Schlosser (Eds.) *Quarterly Review of Distance Education: Research that guides practice*, 8(4), pp.387-398.

Tiered Storage of Online Courses

Starting June 18, 2008 eCollege began an adjustment to the way online course content is managed and stored. The implementation of this tiered storage will take place over the next few weeks.

This tiered storage will benefit faculty as well as those who oversee the eCollege program on our campus. A tiered storage policy will be implemented for courses in terms that have been closed for longer than 18 months. This will not impact courses in active terms.

All course content moved to tiered storage will continue to be **available and accessible**. The **key benefits** to you of the tiered storage structure are:

Improved Performance – moving older content to tiered storage will enable faster page load performance for all active courses

Ease of Use – based on research, 99% of the time users access old courses accidentally. The new structure and messaging will help to eliminate these unintended clicks, saving time and frustration.

There are a few **procedural points** associated with the tiered storage structure listed below:

All course content moved to tiered storage will continue to be available and accessible through the existing course link on the personal homepage.

Instructors will receive a pop-up message upon course entry informing them that the

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MBA Courses

- [MBX03-1-FIN Finance](#) (Admin Access) - eCourse AU
- [MBX03-1-MKT Marketing](#) (Admin Access) - eCourse AU
- [MBX03-1-ORG Organizational Behaviour](#) (Admin Access) - eCourse AU
- [MBX03-1-PM Project Management](#) (Admin Access) - eCourse AU
- [MBX03-1-REC Betriebliches Rechnungswesen](#) (Admin Access) - eCourse AU (Tiered)
- [MBX03-1-REC Betriebliches RechnungswesenCopy2](#) (Admin Access) - eCourse AU
- [MBX03-1-WEC World Economy](#) (Admin Access) - eCourse AU
- [MBX03-3-ASM Advanced Strategic Management](#) (Admin Access) - eCourse AU



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 Inventory Term

course they are entering is on tiered storage. All courses and content will continue to be accessible by instructors, however when navigating through courses on tiered storage page load times may be slightly longer.

Formative Surveys (Online Courses)

Students in online courses (01W, 02W...) are required to complete a formative survey approximately two weeks after the beginning of the term. These surveys serve to inform the instructors as to the experience of students regarding the start-up of the course(s). Survey administration dates and delivery of the survey results to faculty and

| Term | Dates Surveys are Administered to Students | Results to Faculty/ Department Heads |
|----------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Summer II 2008 | July 17 - 21 | July 23 - August 18 |
| Fall 2008 | September 9 - 13 | September 16 - December 12 |

Summative Surveys (Online Courses)

Students in online courses (01W, 02W...) are also required to complete a summative survey approximately two weeks prior to the close of the term. These surveys inform the faculty assigned to the course and the department head of how the students evaluated the course. Survey administration dates and delivery of the survey results to faculty and department heads is provided in table below:

| Term | Dates Surveys are Administered to Students | Results to Faculty/ Department Heads |
|------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Summer II 2008 | July 25 - July 30 | August 18 - November 18 |
| August Mini 2008 | August 15 - August 18 | August 29 - December 12 |

Announcements

Fall 2008 Populated

Fall 2008 courses are scheduled to be populated with students on August 13th.

Ready to Develop or Modify Your Fall 2008 Course(s)?

Request that your Fall 2008 course shell be created by completing the online course copy request form found at www.tamu-commerce.edu/itde/copyrequest.asp.

**** A PDF version of this newsletter is available at www.tamu-commerce.edu/itde/newslettersArchive.asp.

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