

Foreword

Ray Schroeder

Learning in colleges and universities abruptly changed in the spring semester of 2020 when the rise of the highly-contagious Coronavirus prompted most of the 4,000 colleges and universities in the US to close their campuses to students. In many cases, this coincided with the scheduled spring break. While online learning had been a segment of the college experience at many colleges and universities over the prior two decades, suddenly every campus considered moving most or all of their classes online to protect learners from the pandemic. With just one week or less of notice, a limited pool of available faculty experienced with online learning, modest technology capacity, and scarce expert support, most institutions did not have the resources to ensure high quality methods of online delivery for every class.

Faced with moving thousands of classes to remote delivery for the first time, many campus administrations chose to simply move the on-campus syllabus to online delivery with synchronous class sessions meeting online in the same time slots with similar assignments and activities in hopes of accomplishing the learning outcomes designed for the campus-based classes. This was a great emergency solution to the pandemic crisis, but it was less than optimum for the long-term delivery of quality online learning.

From emergency remote teaching to creative and effective synchronous online learning

Over the intervening terms, technologies and strategies have emerged to enhance the engagement and overall quality of synchronous online learning. These creative and highly effective approaches are documented in this volume. They are the product of designers, developers, faculty and students working together to create effective learning environments using the Adobe Connect platform.

It has long been understood that a primary key to success in both online and on-campus learning is to engage learners and personalize the experience for students. It is important to adapt to the individual needs and interests of students in order to be most successful in helping them to achieve their learning expectations. You will find among the chapters to follow that responsiveness to the learner is a most highly valued component.

Most administrators and faculty recognize that the online platform offers a mix of options that include some of those that replicate the face-to-face experience as well as opportunities that are not normally available on campus. For example, bringing in “guest speakers” and engaging in inter-institutional exchanges are more feasible online. Finding the right methods, tools and techniques to provide an optimum learning experience for students in each class continues to be an important part of the design and development process. A wide array of these elements is detailed in the chapters that follow.

A key challenge in online classes is to build a deep trust relationship with learners at a distance. Teaching face-to-face enables non-verbal body language to fill in some of the response gaps in communication. Teaching online requires that we purposefully seek ways to fill those engagement gaps. Practices and strategies included in this book have been tested and proven to be effective in actual classes.

Engaging students with active learning and formative assessments

The many varied interactive methods of engagement detailed in the chapters of this volume are a treasure-trove of pathways to success in online synchronous learning. A wide assortment of active-learning approaches such as simulations, gamifications, role-playing, interactive polling and so many more are among the strategies that have been found to be successful in enhancing the online learning experience.

Formative assessments monitor the progress toward achieving desired learning outcomes so that adjustments can be made mid-course to improve outcomes. Creative ways to accomplish these while reinforcing learning are presented. Authentic assessments at the conclusion of the course are learning experiences in-and-of themselves. In the seamless progression of the course, these authentic assessments create the important linkage between the college and the workplace.

We now are on the cusp of yet more changes in the delivery of higher education. The Web is entering its third stage of development - Web 3.0 - which will offer support for a host of advanced technologies including Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, Extended Reality and even more immersive environments enabling greater interaction and engagement. The proliferation of online certificates and credentialing to meet workforce needs will add further impetus to the expansion of online learning. The principles, techniques and pedagogies described in this volume are foundational. They remain relevant to the new and emerging environment. They illuminate the pathway to engaging and effective learning.

Please use and share this ebook

I encourage you to keep this volume handy as you design and develop your upcoming courses. You will find the examples most helpful in creating an active synchronous learning environment online. Further, these examples will be a ready resource as you confront unanticipated challenges that inevitably pop up during the term.

Finally, I encourage you to share this widely with your colleagues. The editors and authors of this book have given freely of their time and expertise to share their experiences and best practices as an open resource for the benefit of you who are designing, developing and teaching synchronous online classes. To the contributors to this book, I give my heartfelt thanks on behalf of the many who benefit.

And, to you, the reader, I send my best wishes for an active, engaging and fruitful teaching and learning experience ahead.



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