

Alternative Organizational and Instructional Approaches

Current Research

There is considerable evidence that *active learning approaches with technology enhancements* improve student learning and outcomes (Kitchens, et. al., 2018; Patton, 2015; Prince, 2004).

Active learning provides students with opportunities to develop critical thinking skills (i.e., to reflect, evaluate, analyze, synthesize, apply, and/or communicate on or about information), so that they experience the fundamental work of a sociologist (Fink, 2013).

The foundational concept supporting a *flipped (and/or blended) delivery format* “is that “time students have with the instructor is too valuable to use for only didactic delivery of materials and should be spent with the instructor guiding and directing students in what was traditionally considered homework” (Kitchens, et al., 2018, 60).

This meta-analysis concluded that *blended learning and technological interaction* enhance student achievement (Bernard, Borokhovski, Schmid, Tamin, & Abrami, 2014).

Online components, enabled through blended learning, encourage self-regulated learning. Use of Learning Management Systems increases student achievement and course retention. (Quarless & Nieto, 2013).

Organizing with the Catcourse Shell

Creating a clear and consistent organizational structure for your catcourse improves your student’s learning experience. A well-structured course provides students with *a consistent navigation scheme* and increased findability of content materials, assignments and assessments.

First, you might want to consider breaking your syllabus into manageable pieces within its own module (Course Logistics). For example,

- Course Syllabus
- Grade Policy
- Course Schedule (including Assignment Due Dates)
- Citations and Referencing
- Navigating Through the Modules

Second, it is important to think through the **general structure of your course**. Coverage of course content can be broken down and grouped by subject, theme, etc. into **individual modules**.

Essentially, you want to categorize your course into discrete units, whether you have one learning unit per week or themed units (“modules”) that are devoted to a particular topic or idea.

- If you organize your course by weeks, you will have one Learning Unit for each week.
- If you organize your course by thematic modules, each Learning Unit may span one week or several.
- Each Learning Unit will become an independent folder in the LMS and, therefore, should have some type of identifying label or title. The label could be as simple as “Week 1: Natural Selection” or it could be “Module 1: Natural Selection”.

- Begin thinking in terms of what students must learn first in order to sequentially move to further understandings and application later in the course.
 - Learning Unit Week Number:
 - Learning Unit Name or Title:
 - Number of Weeks to Complete:
 - Learning Unit Introduction:

Next, identify the following for each unit/module

- What unit *learning outcome(s)* are addressed in this module? What are the associated course learning outcomes?
- What *learning materials* will students need to interact with, and in what order? (e.g., content delivery materials such as multimedia, readings, lectures/mini-lectures, power points, etc.)
- What *learning activities and/or assessments* will students complete, and in what order? Establish due dates and publish these.

Finally, set up the grade book and associate scoring rubrics so that all student assignments and assessments are turned in and returned with feedback via the course shell. This alone is an excellent way to avoid any violations of FERPA.

Home Page and Announcements: This area on the catcourse shell is an excellent place to post any changes to the course content, schedule, or due dates. Students should be primed to check this page daily.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do you currently utilize the catcourse shell to support student learning?
2. What might you do to improve or strengthen the use of this online course shell to support student learning and your teaching?
3. Do you have any reservations, questions, or suggestions regarding the use of catcourses?
4. Have you considered (or experimented with) the flipped classroom approach? Can you think of a lesson that would be enriched by active learning strategies if only students came to class prepared with exposure to the content (e. g., listening to a set of mini-lectures and/or multimedia presentations)?

References

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