HUMANIZING YOUR ONLINE CLASS

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN TO YOU?

Pedagogy Workshop
TEACHING ONLINE - WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE THAT ARE DIFFERENT FROM TEACHING FACE-TO-FACE?
CHALLENGES

- Communicating with students
- Student participation
- Interaction between student-and-student
- Student’s commitment to learning online
- Developing a learning environment that is inviting to student
Can you use the exact material and information for an online class as you do for your face to face class, and not add any other information to successful teach Distance Education students?
NO!!! You must add lectures, overviews, videos, discussion questions, and any other interaction strategies to be a successful instructor.

The goal is to create a new learning experience for your students.
Name interaction strategies not already mentioned that you can implement?

We learn from each other in an online environment.

We need to "humanize" our class.
The Third Place Theory (Ray Oldenburg’s theory) is that everyone has three places:

- Home, Work, and a Third Place...

- A Third Place is where people can interact with others as an equal using conversation as a primary method of interaction. Example: Students/People interact in church, at a pub, or gym, and so forth.
For our students of today, their third place is Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube. Can you name more places?

These “Third Places” are where students are very interactive; They willingly come to these places; They stay and they learn from each other at these places.

This can only happen when we “humanize” our online classes. Does this make sense?
Most of us basically use the syllabus as a contract....do this...do that...turn in this...meet this deadline....

How can you make your syllabus more inviting so the student enjoys reading it and does not feel as though he/she needs an attorney to help understand it?
Teaching in Today's World

- Has this changed in a face-to-face classroom? Probably. Think about when you went to college. Is it the same as it is today?
- Therefore, why wouldn't it be different in an online class?
- What about the introduction of technology?
Online curriculum is different from face-to-face curriculum. Online curriculum is organized into online sessions or units, with a combination of text-based material and multimedia content.

Online students are expected to read and explore activities on their own, and online instructors must be able to provide clear expectations for student participation, products and pacing.
Social Dynamics

- Social dynamic is different in an online class.
- The focal point of the online classroom is the online discussion, which provides an important opportunity for students’ reaction, demonstration of mastery, and interaction with other students and their instructor. The pace is slower online compared to discussions in an on-ground class, but this often enables deeper learning and full participation of all students.
Relationships

- Remember that relationships are formed between students and instructors online, just as they are developed in a face-to-face class.
- Don’t you, as an instructor, formulate a view of a student, just by reading what students write? You may feel as if you know the character and maybe even his/her personality just by what he/she writes.
Personality

To make your class friendly, you need to put yourself in your class. Your students need to “get to know you.”

This can start with your introduction, your replies to their introductions, the first week of class, and throughout the course with announcements, replies to discussions, and written encouragement.
Todd Conaway, an instructional designer of Yavapai College in Arizona said, “An instructor’s digital personality can influence student achievement, retention or completion, and satisfaction with courses.

We can inspire students online, but instructors must make an effort to get their personalities across. How can instructors achieve this goal?
We’ve already said that an online class is not designed exactly like a face-to-face class. So what do instructors need to do?

Instructors should design each instructional interaction with a focus on how students are going to learn as opposed to how instructors are going to teach.
Relevance is a key component in motivating students and designing an online class.

Include information that would interest your students. Include what’s happening in the world right now that relates to what the student is learning.

Remember, you are teaching online so information can be current, up-to-the-minute, and relevant.
You want students to be excited about checking into class daily, just as much as you want students to eagerly come to your face-to-face class.

You’ve heard the term, “Think outside of the box?” Well, “Think outside of the classroom.”
Part of online learning is not only the instructor making contributions, but the students as well. Have them submit videos, graphics, articles, photos, and other information to get them involved.

Get them actively involved in doing “fun” stuff that is relevant to the teaching of the course.
Trust, Praise and Personal Language

- Trust - Students must believe you know what you are talking about. They must trust to open up to you and be willing to discuss and give their ideas. Remember, they cannot trust you on-site by looking at your face, but they only have your written word and maybe a photo.

- Praise - Praise students by using encouraging language as often as you can. Give positive feedback as well as critical feedback.
Instructors have a tendency to write more formally in an online class than writing in a more natural style to make better (more “human”) contact with students.

When writing emails or responding to them in a discussion, for example, use their name.

Give your announcements, modules, and private messages a personal touch.
How about an announcement: Hi All, I hope your week has started well. I’m excited about the reading this week and I hope that you are too! The Harlem Renaissance is one of the most fascinating periods in African American literature and I wish we had more time to spend on it.” Read your announcements from a student’s point of view. Is it stiff or inviting?

Include current events, inspirational moments, congratulations to students for their work and anything else that would enhance the personal touch.
This trust can start off with the instructor’s introduction.

On the first day of a face-to-face class, you may spend time with class introductions. This helps you and the students to get to know one another. The same should be done in an online class.
Praise can be done in many ways. One example is with feedback.

For example, Tom, you have a good start here, now you need to write even more for full credit. Take more time, add examples and you will do great! Have a balance between praise and critical feedback.
Peer-to-Peer discussion involves students interacting with one another. They also need to trust each other and know that their ideas will not be put down.

Instructors should set the tone and pace of a discussion and set all the ground rules.

However, peer-to-peer discussion does not mean that the instructor is not involved. Students need to see the instructor involved in the conversation/discussion as well. For example, make comments about what one student said to another student. Be engaging!
Engaging

- Sell your content and ideas, share your passion, get them excited. Don’t just assume that your students share your passion for the subject. Get them excited about participating in your discussion.

- Not all discussions have to be focused on the specific topics of the course. Discussions can be used just to improve the learning climate of the class.

- Example: **Task communication** - focuses on the specific goal of the group. **Nontask** - focuses on the social aspects of the group allowing it to develop its own climate.
Don’t forget to use your Activity Meter to see who is participating and who is not. Send private messages to non-active students weekly and as often as possible to get them engaged.
Realize the usefulness of personal videos to “humanize” your online class.

Identify the tools needed to create your own videos including the camera, editing, and storage of them. Remember once you make them, you can use them again and again.

To be able to see and hear a professor, adds to the humanizing and personalizing of an online class.
Humanizing your online class takes a few extra steps compared to your face-to-face class. However, once the format is created, you can use it again and again. Take the time to enhance your online class as you would your on-ground class if your students seemed bored, uninterested, pre-occupied, or just stop coming to class.

Retention...retention...retention...We can all do it if we are all on the same page of keeping our online students engaged and excited to make a strong LASC Distance Education Program.