

Online Teaching Statement

DR. SABINE ALSHUTH

PURPOSE

In spite of rumors to the contrary, teaching and learning are based on evolving sciences - not just subjective art forms. We now live in a time of growing understanding (inadequate as it may be) of the neurological processes involved in "learning" and what we call "intelligence." As educators we are in a transition between subjective "Learning Style Theory" and an understanding of the various neurological mechanisms responsible for the creating of the learning process - and its ranges of variation between individual learners.

Modern digital technology has brought us the most stimulating and effective educational tools yet imagined by man - via the Internet. While printed texts are still valuable, they can now be transmitted electronically, enhanced, supported and updated with real time digital audio-visual rich information - in the forms of active links to research, news, animated graphics, videos of related content and relevant subject information. Consequently, if not ironically, the challenge of teaching in the last few decades has moved from insufficient learning content and materials - to the current exhaustive abundance and potentially overwhelming amount of materials and content.

Buckminster Fuller created the "Knowledge Doubling Curve"; he noted that until 1900 human knowledge doubled approximately every century. By the end of World War II knowledge was doubling every 25 years. While knowledge doubling curves can be calculated by technological categories, the expert consensus is that on average human knowledge is now doubling every 13 months. According to IBM, the build out of the "internet of things" will lead to the doubling of knowledge every 12 hours in the near future. Consequently, the challenge today for educators in both traditional classroom and online courses is the prioritization of critically necessary core concept content. Content appropriate to the course level and its students' learning path needs. In online courses the abundance of rich content resources can be overwhelming to the point of being ignored without judicious prioritization.

The purpose of my successful online marine science teaching course model is to be able to continually adapt and evolve with advancing online teaching resource technology. It was developed, evolved and tested over fifteen years as I taught online courses in Oceanography, Marine Biology, Marine Ecology and Tropical Marine Biology. My course development and teaching model necessarily focuses on: 1. Core information prioritization, 2. Core information organization, 3. Content clarification, 4. Content presentation inclusive in a wide variety of learning styles and mental processing, 5. Content feedback assessed by student participation, success rates, retention, completion, student satisfaction and enrollment.

ONLINE COURSE TEACHING GOALS, METHODS AND ASSETS:

GOALS

Being Present Onsite - My online teaching model includes having a continual presence on the Course Site - multiple times per day and of course during scheduled online office hours. My course site has announcements, discussion forums, announcements, that communicate to the students that I as the faculty member care for them as a student, about their questions, concerns, difficulties, and seeing their improvement and success. In doing this, my goal is to create a community of common learning goals and experience that develops intellectual and personal bonds equal to or better than traditional classrooms.

Creating An Online Learning Community - To create an online learning community, I use a balance of three different instructional dialogues: (1) Faculty to student. (2) Student to student, and (3) Student to digital content and supplemental online subject resources. As an online instructor I develop three types of community: social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive/content presence. To accomplish this:

- I start my classes with a personal introduction posting including references and descriptions to course assignments and resources. I include my instructor webpage about my background, current educational experiences - photos of past field trips, exemplar student research projects, and an invitation for students to get to know one another and their instructor. I continually encourage students to share their mastery of the subject with other students and for students who are having difficulties to let me know.
- I like to set up small groups (3-4 students per group) where students assume responsibility for mentoring of fellow students, reviewing content chapter reviews and practice questions under my oversight.
- I use additional social interaction through the assignment of content related project presentations (PowerPoint) using teams of students - to encourage additional social interaction. I track the progress of each group until the project is submitted for grading.

My synchronous and asynchronous online course design advantages - Working students often choose online courses to make use of the asynchronous nature of the online course - the "anytime, anywhere" aspects are the primary temporal advantages of online courses. To provide a balance to students with more synchronous needs,

the courses' online discussion groups and online presentation team meetings allow these learners to enjoy getting together from anywhere - at specific times to interact in real.

METHODS

Student Expectations - Expectations for my students are clearly described in the syllabus, assignment schedule and course calendar posted at the beginning of the semester. Depending on the course material - typical study time requirements are specified by the textbook and content providers.

My Expectations - I include a clear list of expectations that I have for my students - and that they can have of me. Expectations of me include (1) when (less than 24 hours) and how I will communicate with them, (2) how and where they should respond to me, and (3) references to syllabus and key assignment schedules on the course website. It also tells them that if they ask questions that are answered in the syllabus, or in assignments - that they will only get a referral to the respective link. Where possible I show responses that might be helpful to all on the discussion. My office hours and any necessary changes to that schedule are posted on the course site.

Discussion Posts - Discussion board posts are the online equivalent to class discussions in a face-to-face class - sometimes better. A key difference, of course, is that these discussions are asynchronous, providing time for thought and reflection and requiring written responses that become part of a course archive. Throughout the course I post and solicit discussion and comments on current news, research papers, related news and discovery announcements. I encourage critical thinking by asking students questions regarding the effects of new information impacts - technical, environmental, economic, local, and or personal of the related topic.

Hands-On Experience - My courses include not only online field trips to marine science (company and research institution) related websites, but have also included physical field trips (when supported by my institution and their insurance resources). I encourage Service Learning Projects by providing additional credit and contact resources for companies and institutions in related fields where students can volunteer their time for hands-on applied experience in the respective course field. This has been an extremely popular asset to my course model.

Online data sourcing, research, technology skill development - For some of my courses textbooks are not yet available in print or digital form. In these courses I assemble an online textbook from online materials. My syllabus provides the necessary links to websites, online encyclopedias, and or library sources. I provide additional credit for students who provide new and relevant content links for our course. I encourage my students to not only make the best of Internet resources, but as well learn how to critically distinguish and use them by looking for data and source bias.

Successfully ending our course - I remind my students throughout the course of what and when assignments (homework, tests, presentations, projects) are due. By mid-course projects and or presentations have been assigned and special projects and service-learning assignments begin to come due. At the end of the course we reinforce our prioritized core concepts in review of critical core content. I explain in detail how the final exam will be administered and answer any related questions.

ASSESSMENTS

Learning Assessments - The first level of teaching assessment will always be testing of student's knowledge. Teaching success is also measured by student enthusiasm and satisfaction - which can be assessed by enrollment numbers. I solicit the students' view of their newly acquired knowledge and how they will apply it in their future. I administer and ask for my instructor evaluation form (anonymous) to be completed before grades are given out. I encourage my students to exchange permanent addresses if they so desire which is the wrap of the courses' positive social and cognitive experiences.

Teaching Assessments - Course evaluations - "post mortem" evaluations allow future courses to be tweaked according to learning success rates, retention and completion. However, another big advantage in online courses is the flexibility to change the student-learning path with students' feedback and stated needs. I make student feedback surveys early on in the first two weeks regarding course instruction, and assignment clarity. Generally asking - "How easy is it to get started in my course?" I make homework and test results surveys after the first exam and after each exam until the end of the course. At the end of course and before grades are issued I ask student to do an anonymous exit review of my entire course.