Engagement Strategies

By Andy K. Stanfield, Assistant Vice President for Institutional Compliance Director, Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence

Introduction
Engagement strategies are very important in the face-to-face classroom, but what about in an online environment? Some behaviors that are easy when you are in the same physical space can be more difficult when teaching online. These strategies include humor, movement, energy, gestures, voice, expressions and gaze.

Humor
Humor involves having a positive attitude or a sense of fun in the classroom. Humor is important in gaining students’ attention. However, if you are communicating through text or email, then be careful. Sometimes humor can be difficult in online situations because of the lack of context, body language and expressions. One way to get around this in an online environment is by using Collaborate.

Voice
Your voice is a powerful teaching tool. Tone, pitch, volume and speed of delivery aid in presenting information to students. If you have PowerPoint slides, then add narration. PowerPoint without a voice is like a presentation without a presenter. Collaborate is another great way to use your voice to engage students. You can vary your tone and pitch easily with this software. However, using your voice becomes more difficult if you are only using text. Ways to vary your textual expression include different fonts, point sizes, colors, bold, italics, underline, etc. Less is more when using these.

Gestures
In the face-to-face classroom, gesturing can be an effective way of making a point. This can be more difficult online. Don’t over-use gestures with arms and hands. Using Collaborate is a good way for students to see your physical gestures for emphasis. Gesturing while lecturing is important for course developers.

Movement
Movement in a face-to-face classroom involves moving about the room to illustrate points and answer questions. This is more difficult in an online classroom. One possible way of incorporating movement into your course is to use Collaborate in different locales and settings.

Expressions
Facial expressions are an important part of face-to-face lectures. Making varied, emotive facial expressions can add emphasis to a discussion. In an online class, expressions can be used as an engagement tool when using Collaborate. These expressions are also important if you are working as a course developer creating lectures.

Energy
Energy may be displayed by your activity in the course and by how frequently you interact with the students. Immediate personalized feedback is the biggest factor in student success in online learning. Display energy and vitality to your students through your passion and participation.

Gaze
Gaze is making eye-contact with your students. If you wish to engage students by making eye contact, then you will want to use Collaborate. Allowing students to use their webcams in Collaborate can add gaze to your online course.

Conclusion
Instructors have many tools in a face-to-face classroom to aid their lectures. Some of these behaviors are unconscious; however, they are extremely effective. Many of these can be adapted to online environments with a little thought and creativity. It is important for your online class to “come alive” and this usually involves the human element. Be aware of ways to humanize yourself to make your online classroom more inviting. Collaborate can be very helpful with many of these engagement strategies. If you haven’t yet used this tool, training is available. ◊
Group Study Area Offers Interesting Options: If You Have a Plan
By Andy Stanfield Assistant Vice President for Institutional Compliance
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Team projects are often a source of frustration and anxiety for students and faculty in the online classroom. The team experience is, however, a critical aspect of the online learning experience and necessary to demonstrate comparability to traditional curricula. Jim Reynolds, the program chair of the criminal justice program, who is a retired police executive and former chief executive of a regional police recruit training center, points out that team projects build critical skills and abilities that employers hold valuable in candidates. The challenge with online group projects is how to best create a learning structure that facilitates skill development in a fair manner that rewards the group and recognizes individual accomplishments.

The group study function in the ELP offers group email, group discussion boards, and a group chat and video feature with recorded sessions. While not specifically designed for team projects, the group feature is adequately robust to offer a very functional array of team communication and collaboration tools. Faculty can strategically design the team rooms and utilize techniques to minimize the need to repeat the same message or assignment repeatedly for multiple teams. Below are options that faculty can deploy to make the experience more efficient and minimize conflicts and issues with group projects in the online classroom—or at least detect them as soon as possible.

Establishing Teams
It helps to have a strategy in forming teams. It is critical that the course begin with a welcome email. A good strategy is to tell everyone that you use their biographies in forming teams and ask them to provide a thorough biography. Ask students to confirm with an email that they have updated their biographies. That demonstrates that they are reading and responsive and to what level. Look at their experience and future goals. Try and match teams on common experiences and goals when possible. A few days later follow up with an email and ask for input on students they each prefer to work with or not be partnered with. You can also ask for time zones and schedule issues so you can try to strategically assign members more likely to have compatible schedules for chat sessions.

Set Clear Expectations
Clear expectations are important for any class environment. This is especially true to online team projects. Establish a strong code of conduct and how to communicate regarding problems or issues. It helps to have each team designate one point of contact (POC) for questions and deliverables. I find it very helpful with group projects to use a “Group Q&A” board on the main class discussion board. It is very effective and an easy communication channel for faculty and students. Having students post questions or issues there and check the board frequently makes it easy to spot a new post by the instructor and allows fair and consistent communication to the entire class in one location. Teams using the group email feature and groups discussion board often generate a volume of communication that can be unmanageable for the faculty to read daily. A central spot for questions related to the group project makes communication more timely and manageable while creating an easy repository for students.

Evaluation and Grading
A basic issue with any group project in any format is distribution of work and member contribution and competency. While this is not an issue limited to class teams, student evaluations are often critical when some members perceive they do more than other members or “carry” the team. There is little doubt that some will do more than others, but the question becomes how to fairly and accurately assess and grade team projects.

One solution has been team member evaluations which carry a grade consequence. While end-of-project evaluations are good for one-week projects, they really do not allow the instructor to monitor and intervene on longer projects. A weekly peer evaluation with behaviorally anchored scales and an area for comments is currently being piloted in an online course and has promise. It offers students a weekly opportunity to evaluate their peers and a grade is assigned each week for participation. The overall group deliverable is still a team grade, but with an appropriate amount of points awarded for weekly participation it has been effective in accounting for weekly member contributions. Students see the average score of their peer evaluations and can use that feedback to make adjustments on their team contribution and activity. The comments also help the faculty evaluate issues and intervene when necessary. This requires daily monitoring as the chance for conflict among members is greater than without weekly peer evaluations, but it is a much better option than some students doing the majority of the work while others do little and receive the same grade.

Other Promising Practices
A few other practices hold promise on monitoring individual activity and help make the group projects fair and equitable. Manually tracking student login activity weekly can be very helpful. The ELP currently has a running total but having a sheet of paper to write down the logins at the end of each week is not that difficult. This gives you a mechanism to monitor weekly login activity and help
Interview—Dr. Maria Lavooy

Dr. Maria Lavooy is the focus of our faculty spotlight this issue. She teaches psychology for Florida Tech Online. In fact, she developed the courses she teaches. These include Physiological Psychology, Multicultural Psychology, Psychology of Women, Applied Psychology, and Personality Theories.

Lavooy has been teaching online for 13 years. In 1999, she began training in online teaching methods at the University of Central Florida. This was a required semester-long course. After completing this training program, she began teaching online in 2000.

Her greatest joy in teaching is when the students "get it." This is true for her, whether she is teaching online or face-to-face. Conversely, her biggest struggles online are related to the Internet’s perceived anonymity.

For those considering teaching online, Dr. Lavooy wants them to know it is not less work. Teaching online is an everyday job.

Her motto to keeping students engaged is the "2 I's" of interactivity and immediacy.

Dr. Lavooy recommends that instructors create and maintain an online presence, which includes sharing your personality and providing constructive criticism.

There are three things that have helped her become a successful online instructor. First, she talked to people who were already teaching online, in order to find out what did and didn’t work. Second, she received training to get good ideas for her classes. Third, she listens to students, so she can better accommodate their needs.

Many thanks to Dr. Maria Lavooy, this issue’s faculty spotlight.

Introducing Danielle Maltese

As a new member of the Online Learning team, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Danielle Maltese, your Online Student Success Specialist. I am a Florida Tech alumna for both undergraduate and graduate studies. I will be focusing on online student success and working to improve and ensure retention of Florida Tech Online students. I will be helping to maintain, analyze and implement proactive systems for student retention and persistence. I will be your “go to” person for any help needed with Florida Tech’s new student orientation, Panther Pass. Currently, I am working on creating an Online Open House where online students can come and participate before their very first term here at Florida Tech. My goal is to prepare students as well as answer any questions they have to make sure they are ready to begin their first term. I look forward to participating in the Online Student Newsletter, where students can read tips on how to succeed in the online learning environment. I will be working closely to help students who need accommodations receive the support they need to be successful.

If you are an instructor for ASC 1006 Mastering eLearning course, I will be your contact person for any questions, recommendations or concerns. You can reach me at 674-8207 or by email dmaltese@fit.edu. I look forward to meeting and working with you all.

Group Study Area continued from page 2

in determining potential problems or validating evaluations from team members.

Some teams find platforms and methods outside the ELP to communicate. These have included conference calls and video-based meeting options like Skype that can bring added value to the team experience. Requiring minutes or copied logs to be posted in the group area allows the faculty to monitor activity while documenting activity for the team and providing the information for any member that misses the session.

Communication skills are critical to the education experience and many assessment requirements expect a demonstration of these skills. Microsoft PowerPoint with recorded audio is an excellent format for teams, or individual projects, to demonstrate communication skills and is a format that is archivable for future reference.

Technology is evolving; virtual teams and groups are becoming more commonplace in education and the workplace. Online programs should be preparing students to excel in these formats and offer some advantage in skills and abilities upon graduation. It is important that we, as faculty and course developers, not get frustrated with the challenges and forge ahead to find a better learning system for these critical components of online learning.

“Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me, and I may not remember. Involve me, and I’ll understand.”—Native American Saying
Dr. Andy DiPaolo, senior associate dean of the Engineering School at Stanford University visited Florida Tech on Feb. 20, 2013, to discuss critical challenges and lessons learned in the evolution of online education. Faculty, staff and students attended the event in the Olin Engineering Complex, which included a Q&A session afterward.

DiPaolo took the audience through feedback he has received from adult online learners. He said, “Convenience and flexibility with a range of course and delivery options and multiple avenues for learning are requested by students.” Providing an option to test out of courses was also on the list. He characterized it as adult learners want “self-directed, demand-driven learning with control of the sequence and pace of learning.”

Group learning and being part of a learning community were also mentioned by students. DiPaolo reported he sees this as a “shift from ‘connectivity’ to ‘collectivity.’” Related to this connection is the desire to have a personal approach to all services provided to the student by the institution. The focus should be on “student as a customer.” What this means according to DiPaolo is that “elimination of delays and inefficient procedures (must be) regarded as essential” by universities.

Students also seek an opportunity to preview courses, rating of content and assignments, and review of course evaluations—all before registering for courses. In addition, students are seeking competitive and variable pricing.

Not surprisingly, students seek “timely, prompt, detailed and meaningful forms of assessment and feedback,” he said. “Students are looking for an ongoing education renewal over an entire career with commitment from their institution to support learning for a lifetime.”

The popular development of MOOCs, or massive open online courses, can teach us about deficiencies in our own offerings. DiPaolo explained how venture capitalists (VCs), who are funding the development of MOOC companies, view education. He characterized the VCs view of education as a commodity, in need of more resources to bring that commodity to an interested market.

Learning from MOOCs may include capitalizing on technology and increasing the speed to market of new programs and offerings. Time will tell if the MOOC model can be sustainable, but we can learn from its growth and even mistakes when evaluating our own programs. He noted that one area where MOOCs are expanding is in the matching service for prospective employers.

DiPaolo’s talk raises some interesting questions to think about. Should we consider MOOCs for Florida Tech? DiPaolo offered several guidelines when considering the MOOC model for universities:

- Is it consistent with our mission and values?
- Do we have a clear strategic plan?
- Is there a financial model to support the growth?

His advice was to start small and not to feel we have to do it all ourselves. He encouraged us to use open source materials and collaborate and to focus on a service interaction—be fast, flexible and attentive to student needs.

DiPaolo emphasized that online education is not about technology—it is about innovation. He believes that universities with strong online programs will need to think daringly and execute steadily. We here at Florida Tech University Online have embraced these ideas since the online programs were launched.
Happy National Library Week

By Rose Petralia, MLIS, Instruction Librarian

When I'm not teaching students about the wonders of library research or researching the habits of highly successful students myself, I'm usually at home cooking. My favorite cookbook these days is this one:


What I like about it is that each recipe is tested, as you may have guessed, and the science behind every recipe is included. It's food research!

You might think there's no place for cookbooks in Evans Library, but actually, we have over 200 resources cataloged as “Cooking,” 134 of which can be accessed online. Take a look for yourself: Evans Library catalog results for “Cooking” as a subject term.

Don't skip the GovDocs, 'cause then you would miss out on Fishing for compliments? Try sea fare from NOAA, and Selected abstracts on mutagens and carcinogens in cooked, smoked and charred foods.

Bon appétit and happy research!

If you missed the library's Easy Instruction session on Formatting Citations, don't fret! You can access the archive on the library's website: http://lib.fit.edu/instruction/easy-instruction-archive.php.

View all of our slideshares here: http://www.slideshare.net/evanslibrary.

The Evans Library recently subscribed to Cabell's Directories of Publishing Opportunities, specifically the directories for Accounting, Economics & Finance, Management and Marketing. Cabell's Directories are designed to help scholars match their manuscripts to the academic journals most likely to publish their work based on factors such as journal aim and scope, acceptance rates, readership, etc. Learn more about this unique opportunity from the library blog.

Distance learning instructors, feel free to embed or link to the slides from your courses! ☺

Finding the Best Articles for Your Research

By Rose Petralia, MLIS, Instruction Librarian

Are you finding the best articles for your research? Do you wonder about the efficiency and effectiveness of your searches? Do you have 30 minutes?

Our 30-minute Easy Instruction sessions do not require registration and are held each month on the first floor of Evans Library.

Check the Evans Library website for more information about our Easy Instruction Series, and as always, if you need help, Ask a Librarian! ☺

Status of MOOCs

We are all being inundated with information about MOOCs. As someone with a keen interest in changes in higher education that will impact demand for academic support, I need to stay current as the “tsunami” makes its approach. These recent articles are among the best and so I wanted to share them.

Three easy-to-read articles on the status of MOOCs in March 2013:

• Who are the key actors in the MOOC movement? A Graphic Presentation
• What have the results been to date? Is <10% the right number
• Are there role models for strategic partnerships? CSU-SJ and Udacity

Clearly, if the delivery of academic content is shifting, the methodology for delivering academic support will have to adjust. AskOnline is working with a major MOOC provider in designing their tutoring service. I am eager to learn about your plans and hope we can provide support. Let's Schedule a Custom Webinar to help assess your institution’s plans and define the best next steps. Or just give me a call today at (617) 642-8055.

For a quick overview of our online tutoring platform, watch our 5-minute video.

These are exciting times. Let us help.

Sincerely,
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“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”
—John F. Kennedy
Online Accolades

“Online education was growing in popularity when I started my graduate school search in 2008. An online program was the right fit for me as I needed maximum flexibility with my full-time job as operations manager at Verizon Telecom. Foremost, I wanted my MBA degree from a university I could be proud of. I chose FIT because of its scholarly classroom reputation, the quality of professors, and finally because I read on the university website that the online MBA at FIT was the same degree as a traditional classroom MBA candidate received.

My MBA classes were challenging and competitive. The caliber of students I worked with on assignments and in discussion boards was extraordinary. My professors challenged me to think outside my comfort zone and always welcomed my business experiences as value added to the course content. During my two and a half years of study, I felt like I was a member of the Florida Tech family!

With my MBA proudly displayed on the wall in my home office, I am confidently pursuing my next career choice in collegiate academia, as an administrator or adjunct helping people get the outcome they expect from their education.”

—Deborah Bennett, ’11 MBA, Laurel, Md.