Designing for connection

Practice examples

- A teacher creates presence and personalizes her online site by adding her photo, a bio and an informal welcome audio, telling her students the best way to contact her and when they can expect her to respond to their communications. She also has a Virtual Office which is a Moodle chat room where she makes herself available during her designated Weekly Office Hours.

- A teacher provides a simple 'Where to go for HELP!' page in her Moodle site. In it she lists different issues her students might encounter, highlights which support area of the university is relevant for each type of problem and provides contact information for the different support areas. Another teacher maintains an FAQ page which he builds on each semester. Another teacher sets up a forum called 'PLEASE ASK: There's no such thing as a dumb question!' Another teacher sets up an Orientation Quiz which checks students' knowledge of key contact information, due dates for assessment, required referencing style for assignments, etc. The final question asks students to say what they are looking forward to in the course and to voice any concerns they might have regarding their online study.

- A teacher runs an introductory activity called 'My Place' during the first two weeks of semester where her students post an image of the place where they study with a one sentence description/reflection. The images and words are then turned into a slide show which is uploaded to the Moodle site.

- A teacher reorganizes his online course from four modules into a week by week structure, to give his online students a better sense of progression. He develops 'Purpose' statements for each activity, describing how each activity fits with required assessment, and provides a weekly audio called Five Minutes on Monday, where he briefly discusses the week's content, what's important, what's interesting, etc.

- A teacher puts her students into groups of two so that everyone has a designated 'study buddy'. Her main purpose is to facilitate peer support, but she also uses the 'study buddy' structure in one of the assessment tasks later in the semester. In this task each student researches and develops a client needs profile, then 'swaps' clients with their study buddy. The task is then to develop a response to the needs of the client presented by your buddy, seeking further information/clarification about the client from your buddy if/when required.

- Another teacher manages the reading requirements in her online course via a Book Club structure. Students work in groups and one student in each group leads the weekly discussion of the course readings. Students can also choose to work as partners to lead a discussion.

- The teachers in another course set up an Assessments forum where students can ask questions about upcoming assessment tasks. The teachers then put together an informal interview style presentation in which they discuss the forum questions, as well as addressing other details they think are important. In another course, after surveying her students about suitable times, the teacher then schedules several virtual classroom sessions (one evening and one weekend) to provide opportunity for her students to discuss any concerns and queries about the major assessment task.

- The beginning activity in a Rural Social Work unit requires students to find an image of life in rural Australia that resonates with them. They post the image online and describe why it is meaningful to them, also describing how their choice links to the themes in the week's key reading. They are also required to respond to others' postings. Completing this task unlocks the next week's activities. It is also the first step in the course's first assignment, which is to develop a poster about service provision in rural/remote communities.

- Teachers with a large and widely dispersed cohort of online students set up a 'Find a Friend' forum to enable students to find others in their area and set up their own local face to face study groups.

- A teacher (in a smaller course!) makes a point of emailing each of her students individually during the semester to touch base and check how they are going with their studies.

Federation
UNIVERSITY • AUSTRALIA