

English and Modern Languages

Faculty on Pedagogy

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How To Have a Successful Web Course

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How to Have a Successful Web Course

Rule #1	Build community. The #1 reason that students fail DLP is the feeling they are totally alone. No one seems to care if they stop contributing. No one seems there to help them with questions or problems. No one makes them do the work. So what you need to do is to build community. Spend the first week of a class getting students to introduce themselves through the discussion board and/or through homepages. Post info about yourself and maybe a picture of you, your family, or your dog. Let the students know that you are a real human being who's in this thing with them. Set up a café or coffeeshop in discussions for them to chat with each other. Be very visible especially through announcements. Go after drifters as if you were the very hound of heaven. Encourage through email. Interact on the discussion board; don't be just a grader. Send them electronic cards during holidays. Do whatever you can to make them feel connected to other people.
Rule #2	Help them navigate the course. After some time, the course will become very familiar to you, but it will always be a jungle to them. Help them find the information they need in the way that you would like to be helped.
Rule #3	If you ever get the chance, take an online course yourself. Things do look very different when you're a student facing the screen.
Rule #4:	You will be responding to email and discussions ad nauseum, but make an effort to not be abrupt in your messages because of haste. Put in the extra keystrokes to be personable, kind, accessible, and helpful. Think how Jesus would have handled a keyboard, if He had had one (and now He does through you!).
Rule #5	Help prevent cheating and plagiarism . Hopefully, a considerable percentile of students' grades will come from discussion posts. Usually if they have to do so much work on the board, they are more inclined to do and be able to do their own work on papers and exams because, after all, they did most of the legwork on the board (and probably cannot get anyone else to do so much work in their stead). Require all papers to be submitted through Turnitin and let students know why. The threat of discovery is a proven deterrent. Give essay exams with 3 or 4 questions from a pool of maybe 20-30. Let the computer select a set for each student, so that it's very unlikely the same student will get the same set. Use the timer on the exam, and allow students only a one-time access to exams.
Rule #6	Don't forget that we are a Christian university. Don't get lost in all of the work required in teaching DLP. Look for opportunities to make the assignments, discussions, and communication apply biblical knowledge. Here at LU, there's more to a DLP course than just the material being studied, and the Lord wants you to help Him teach them eternal lessons.
Rule #7	Turn them on to online writing centers and electronic tutorials that can help those who need help with their grammar.
Rule #8	For their own sakes, make sure they are reading the online material in the modules. Believe it or not, some students will not even be aware that they are supposed to read the lecture notes, etc. Many of them suppose they're expected to figure out stuff all by themselves.
Rule #9	Learn as much as you can about technology so that you can help students when they are having trouble. Yes, there is a Help Desk, but these folks can't always help students with specific BlackBoard questions. Go to training sessions and conferences.
Rule #10	Do not let DLP be simply a correspondence course in which students get assignments, return assignments, and get grades, without the likelihood that learning is going on. Use the technology to facilitate your teaching, but do not abnegate your teaching responsibilities.

