

Getting Ready for Your Course

Mona Engvig, Ph.D.

Winner of the 2008 Stanley J. Drazek Teaching Excellence Award

Please note that some of the material in this presentation is from my book "Online Learning: All You Need to Know to Facilitate and Administer Online Courses" (Hampton Press, 2006). It is used with the publisher's permission.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to give you some food for thought as you prepare for your online courses. By sharing my own perspective, students' comments, a few underlying pedagogical principles and some practical advice, I hope to give you an added perspective on teaching online.

For as long as I can remember, I have loved to teach. I have, however, never enjoyed fighting icy roads in Norway, or rush-hour Los Angeles freeway gridlock. After a decade as a principal in Norway, and an extensive period obtaining two Masters' and one Ph.D. degree, I was uncertain what to do "when I grew up". By chance I found information about one of the early eLearning companies online. I have since then been fortunate to work in this exciting field in many different capabilities. I have negotiated with some of the top professors in the world about course production. I have written online courses, managed online programs, and taught professors how to teach online. My heart, however, is in the actual teaching, most of all in regard to what matters to our students. These students often have a somewhat untraditional background, but they bring so much to the classroom. Contrary to what many think, online classes are often more interactive than traditional classes. I therefore have the privilege of working with and learning from incredible students of all ages who have decided to get an education and make a positive change in their lives.

KEY ASPECTS OF ONLINE LEARNING

Various Types of Professors

During my many years in this field, I got close to so many of these students and realized that just as in traditional education, there were good, bad, and - unfortunately - "ugly" instructors. Having had the privilege to have taught in ten different online institutions, it became my area of interest to improve the quality of online education by focusing on training and supporting the faculty. Let us hear from a few online students from various universities as they describe professors they have met (Engvig, 2006):

The Pacifist

"One of my first courses was instructed by a professor that I would like to call the "Pacifist". She was extremely knowledgeable of her subject matter and she was well-organized, two critical tools for online success. Her synchronous classes were very structured consisting of a PowerPoint lesson, followed by a short question and answer period. She emailed all of the lessons to the students at the beginning of the course, which I found to be quite useful in preparation for the classes. Her downfall was that she was not very pro-active with students on course discussion pages and she would move on quickly through the synchronous classes, particularly if there were no questions from the group. Often, the PowerPoint lesson would consume the entire class and all one needed to do for synchronous classes credit was to turn up and listen...not very interactive. While this professor was extremely knowledgeable and well-prepared, I did not get the impression that she had a true feel for her student's progress. Answers

were given out too freely in class without challenging the students to determine if they had done the appropriate readings and were retaining the subject matter. In a traditional education model, a professor can readily assess student performance. In an online environment, a more effective mechanism is needed. Challenge should be present at all phases of training; otherwise it breeds mediocrity. I learned a great deal from this professor but came away knowing that the course could, and should, have been much more than what it was."

The Dictator

"In my third semester, I was exposed to a professor that can only be described as a "Dictator". This professor had an impressive resume in his field. This experience was both beneficial to the students and detrimental at the same time. The professor was new to instruction in his field, and was more familiar with other material. The professor re-wrote some of the objectives of the course, after the start date. These objectives more closely resembled the topics he was used to teaching. While very knowledgeable, he often structured synchronous classes to discuss a field of operations, which he was most familiar with, leaving many students with a fragmented and one-sided view of the course. The professor was not familiar with the technology of the synchronous classes and frequently started late or did not achieve connectivity with the group due to his inexperience in manipulating the system. He often complained about the myriad of emails he received and, as a result, his discussion groups were virtually non-existent. He did not generate any discussion among students and became very irritated when questioned on course content or structure. It soon became apparent that to survive this professor, a student needed to show up for all synchronous classes well-prepared, even if the professor was not. Students did not ask questions for fear of reprisal.

I once sent an email to request a four-day extension on an assignment due to being away on exercise with the military. I ended up sending the email twice with no response from the professor. I then sent a third email and cc'd the university administrative staff on my request. This generated a very curt response from the professor stating "I would be on time if I were you". I found this completely unprofessional and promptly said so, keeping the university informed. I was warned by other students not to make waves with this professor as they had had previous negative experiences with him. I was concerned that, by making a complaint, it would reflect negatively on both myself, and the group that I was participating with on a different assignment (guilty by association). What ensued was a four-day barrage of emails between the university, the professor, and myself trying to resolve this issue. The ego of the professor was such that he could neither admit nor apologize for not responding to my justifiable request. In the end, I worked until 4AM on three consecutive nights in order to get the assignment in on time. My family was not impressed, particularly since I had to shut them out after being away for so long. What should have been a simple request with a simple answer, erupted into a full-scale situation requiring university intervention to resolve. I was not impressed by either the university or the professor in the resolution process. Soon after, the university hired a professor to oversee all of the other professors. My grade on that particular paper fell by two grades and I am still awaiting an apology from the professor...co-incidence?"

The Collaborator

"I was fortunate enough to have a "Collaborator" as a professor during my first semester. She was knowledgeable, passionate about her subject and students, and actively generated interaction in discussion groups and synchronous classes alike. She was firm but fair and flexible

to meet each individual students needs. I needed to ask for extensions on two occasions due to work commitments and was pleased to receive permission on the same day of each request. The collaborator worked with each individual student and several commented that she was the most respected professor in the program. To assist her in monitoring her student's progress, she organized discussions on each module by posting knowledge probing questions and inviting comment. Her discussion pages thrived as a result and students freely shared their own personal experiences which greatly added to the depth of the course. Her synchronous classes consisted of a student presentation followed by discussion of the salient points of the most recent e-book modules. This pro-active approach proved highly beneficial to both students and professor alike. It is no surprise to me that I retain more information from her courses than any other at the university. The combination of personal and professional interaction makes for a pleasant learning experience. The personal examples that are shared by the student's own experiences solidify the academics in a way that a textbook cannot match."

Pedagogical Aspects

Take a minute to think about why you decided to teach online. Maybe you wanted to work from home, teach in your pajamas, or not have to endure a grueling commute. Maybe you need a flexible schedule due to other commitments. Maybe you believe that a more facilitative approach to teaching and learning is more effective. Maybe you prefer written communication to oral presentations. It is not unlikely that your online students are motivated by the same factors that you are.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that many of them are self-starters who are good at structuring their time. They are also often more busy than the traditional adult students. Online students need flexibility, and therefore choose to study via the Internet. Many of them are new immigrants, are first in their family to go to college, or reside in other parts of the country or other parts of the world from where the school is located.

Let us take a look at what "Online Learning" states about characteristics of adult learners (Engvig, 2006). The online students are usually adult learners with a lot of life experience to bring to the table, and the information presented here should therefore be helpful as you strive to create a good learning environment for this type of students.

In an attempt to formulate a comprehensive adult learning theory, Malcolm Knowles first published the book "The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species" in the early 1970s. Knowles asserted that adults require certain conditions to learn. He borrowed the term andragogy to define and explain these conditions. Andragogy, initially defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn," has taken on a broader meaning since Knowles' first edition. For many educators, the term defines an alternative to pedagogy and refers to learner-focused education for people of all ages.

The andragogic model asserts that various issues needing to be addressed, including: letting learners know why something is important to learn, assisting learners to direct themselves through information, and relating the topic to the learners' experiences. In addition, people will not learn until they are ready and motivated to learn. This often requires helping them overcome inhibitions, behaviors, and beliefs about learning.

There are surprisingly few studies that focus primarily on the online student's perception of their online learning experience. Most of the findings on students' views are reported in

studies that focus on many different aspects of online learning, and therefore go into very little detail on student perceptions.

In an exploratory study, Choi, McNickle and Clayton (2002) looked at online learner expectations and experiences in the vocational and training sector in Australia, focusing on student views of support in online learning. They found that students needed information on course requirements, and appreciated regular communication with their instructors. Rapid response time from staff, clear guidelines, roles and responsibilities for both students and instructors were found to be important to the students as well.

In 2002, Michigan Community College Association sponsored a study focusing on attitudes and opinions of online students toward community college online learning. The opinion survey of 399 randomly chosen students concluded that most of them took online courses to satisfy requirements for a degree program, and indicated that it was very important that the online units were transferable to other colleges and universities. 34% of the students indicated that flexible hours was the primary reason for taking online courses, and 91% felt that interaction with the instructor was adequate.

Prince and Stern (2002) studied characteristics of and satisfaction among online technical and community college students. They found that the top two reasons students enroll in online courses are preparation for four-year college and work. Students who only took online classes were generally older, and many had family obligations. Students in this group generally reported high rates of satisfaction with their instructors.

Regan and Tuchman (1990) found that face-to-face students, to a much larger degree, actively sought interaction with faculty, whereas online students tended to see their instructors more as a source of information. Both in the online and the traditional courses, students generally

saw the others as competitors rather than learning partners, and one of the recommendations is to facilitate the development of peer and teacher relationships in distance education.

Additionally, several other studies exist that do not look specifically at student satisfaction, however present findings that to some degree pertain to this topic. MacGregor (2002) focused on personality differences between online and face-to-face students and found that online students generally rated themselves as more introverted, serious, shy, less independent, and more tough minded. She suggests that personality characteristics may be a factor in predicting attrition from online learning courses. Although this study does not say much about the students' satisfaction, it is reasonable to argue that attrition is linked to student satisfaction.

In a study comparing the learning styles of online and traditional community college students, Halsne (2002) concluded that a majority of online students have a visual learning style preference. Again, this is not directly applicable to the focus of the study, but at least it indicates that one should take visual learners' needs into consideration when designing online content.

Cathleen Kennedy's literature review from 2000 focuses on identifying which factors influences student learning in an online course. Several of the studies included indicate that students who take online courses generally are older and more self-directed than traditional students. A more surprising finding is that students generally attribute their success in the online environment to their study habits, not their instructors.

Changed Role

Roles change quite drastically when moving from a traditional teaching setting to teaching courses online. Most importantly, if you have relied on lectures in the past, you will

find that you need to make the transition from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side," which means that you become a facilitator instead of a lecturer. Your job in the Forums is to structure it well to begin with, create a rich and supportive peer learning environment, trust that your students have a lot to bring to the table. Those of you who have used more facilitative teaching techniques in your regular classroom (problem-based learning, group case studies, etc.) will likely find this transition easy. For others who have used a more traditional lecture method, this will be a major, but very meaningful adjustment.

If I had to choose which of these common student expectations it is most important to adhere to, it would be timely communication and feedback. In a regular class setting, the students at least know that when they go to class, the professor is there (I hope). Not so online. Since a majority of the interaction is asynchronous, it is crucial that you do not let it go too long before you respond to an email, call the student back, or give feedback on assignments. Many students carry with them an unnecessary respect for professors, and may not resend that important email if they do not hear from you. If you cannot respond right away, at least send a quick "I got it" email so your students do not think their email was lost in Cyberspace.

In the last section of this monograph, I will look at the student perspective in more detail, and share some specific advice regarding preparing for your online course.

WHAT WORKS IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

The Student Perspective

Some time ago, I conducted a study of online students' perception of their learning environment (Engvig, 2006). The ultimate goal with this exploratory study was to capture detailed information about what works and does not work within the online learning environment, based on the students' own experiences. At times specific trends were apparent throughout the survey, while for other questions there were vast differences in the answers resulting from differing experiences, probably education level, personalities, etc. Perhaps the most poignant finding from the survey responses was the perceived need and impact of the instructor on the students' online learning experience and overall success in this environment.

Many students acknowledged that it was intrinsic motivation - their desire to excel, thirst for knowledge, self-improvement, career advancements, etc., - that often motivated them individually, and within an online learning environment. Other motivating factors included content and material which was relevant and well organized. Far more discussed, however, was the importance of professor involvement relating to responsiveness to student needs, questions and grading, as well as encouraging interaction with and amongst participants within a safe learning environment. Another important aspect mentioned was the facilitator's required competency, approachability and overall attitude towards the students; focusing on the need to be a mentor instead of the traditional "sage on the stage". Professor preparation, commitment, inclusiveness, and passion were also mentioned as important factors.

Of the 73 full survey responses received, 68 felt that professor participation in online interactions was important or extremely important. Over 98% of these students further indicated that it was important or extremely important that instructors provide constructive feedback to improve skills and knowledge, showing a preference to individual commentary rather than simply a grade or generic feedback. Other areas that stood out were the over 93% that felt the need for instructors to provide real-life examples and situations for students to study and analyze throughout their studies.

Many students touted peer interaction as a valuable method of learning through the sharing of information and experiences related to topics studied. A few examples of sharing include but are not limited to: sharing transpired through group work, asynchronous message boards, online chat rooms and classrooms. Many indicated that peer interaction was a valuable method of learning; 78% of those surveyed felt that ongoing interaction with other students was important or extremely important.

Group work was another area discussed and where opinions varied. Some found group work challenging due to issues such as varying peer work ethics and levels of commitment. Many students spoke of the need for professor guidance and intervention when students are requested to work in groups. Additionally, they discussed the need for posting group work expectations prior to the commencement of projects, which can assist in counteracting some of the possible negative outcomes.

Several areas that students felt most compelled to discuss in length included questions that requested information on how to improve the online learning experience and advice for those involved in this mode of learning - both students and instructors. Advice for instructors echoed some of the above sentiments along with:

- Taking an interest in each student;
- Understanding their diverse backgrounds, needs and challenges;
- Explaining all expectations early and in depth;
- Staying in touch frequently via message boards, email, etc.; and
- Being a beacon of encouragement, offering positive reinforcement and constructive feedback for improvement.

To make the online classes more productive students felt that it was important that all accessible technology be examined and/or used with varied multi media used for instruction. For example, a mixture of instruction using lecture, Whiteboard (an online version of the blackboard), message boards (asynchronous interaction), presentations, outside materials, email, etc., was viewed as being more satisfying than classes using only some of these tools. In addition, students indicated that they wished to be challenged and respected as individuals, and while wanting a level of familiarity with the professor they also looked for professionalism and etiquette. Students also suggested that it would be beneficial for online instructors take an online course themselves in a discipline totally unrelated to their area of expertise to better understand the experience of students, and thus better understand their needs. One respondent perceptively advised the professor, “Teach what you enjoy, enjoy as you teach...”

It would be too easy to simply say that the opposite of all the above are what students find demotivating and ineffective within the online learning environment; however, many responses indicated just that. Additionally, many students indicated that the lack of support or indifference on a professor’s part significantly impacts their experience regardless of the outcome of their studies. The perceived indifference could be related directly or indirectly to instructor’s actions or inactions, such as not responding promptly or at all to messages and

submissions, showing lack of empathy, and appearing very informed but not sharing their knowledge. Some students felt that some professors were going to the extreme of seeing each student as a percentage of the income received from an institution and allocating their time based on the impact to monies earned. Whatever the perception the outcome is the same - dissatisfaction. For future online students, the advice offered from the respondents included:

- Research the courses and the institution carefully;
- Seek out an orientation at the beginning of a program to understand the technology, tools used, requirements, etc.;
- Dedicate a specific time daily for study;
- Have an appropriate study area with the necessary elements, both technical and environmental;
- Ask questions as needed; and
- Do not get behind or give up.

Organization and time management were deemed as skills required of all, considering most students have more on their plates than simply studying alone. Many recognized that due to work and family obligations, as well as time, resource, and geographical challenges, they would not be able to further their studies immediately or within the foreseeable future if it were not for online education. Therefore, they were motivated to make this means of convenient study work despite the obstacles and challenges that arose.

Although there are ultimately an unlimited amount of factors that may contribute and affect an individual's experience in any arena, there are some clear conclusions to be made from my online learning study. Online students look for frequent and open communication with their peers and instructors. They require both summative and formative feedback from their

instructors. Communications include positive and constructive feedback to aid in their development, as well as understanding, support and guidance. The experience that a student has will be greatly impacted by the role instructor chooses to play.

There are similarities and differences between the literature on online students and my study. Choi, McNickle and Clayton (2002) indicate that clear information and rapid responses are of importance to the students. This is in line with my findings. MacGregor (2002) found that students taking online classes often are more introvert than traditional students, a finding that is supported - at least indirectly - by my findings. It is, however, important to note that anecdotal evidence indicates that introvert students often report being more open in the online classroom than in a traditional setting. Kennedy (2000) showed that the online students she surveyed generally were older and more self-directed than traditional students. Kennedy's findings are compatible with my observations, as is her comment about students attributing their success to good study habits.

Halsne's (2002) findings indicate that a majority of online students have a visual learning style preference. The students in my study did generally not comment a lot on content, and if they did, they focused on the need for it to be relevant and well-organized. Flashy presentations were not mentioned as an important feature of online content.

The Michigan study and the Prince and Stern article both conclude that a majority of students indicate that they are satisfied with the level of interaction with their instructor. My study does not support their conclusion. One reason might be that these studies looked at courses taught several years ago, when students were less used to online interaction in online courses, and therefore had lower expectations. It is interesting to note that Regan and Tuchman (1990) found that distance learning students saw their instructors as purveyors of information rather than

role models. My findings indicate that many of the students that were surveyed indicated that a close, more mentor-mentee relationship with their instructor was a key satisfaction factor. One reason for this disparity might be that the Reagan and Tuchman study is fairly old, and that they likely surveyed students enrolled in more traditional distance learning classes where one-way communication from the professor to the student was a norm. Modern online classes with ongoing online communication require a more facilitative teaching style, which again probably leads to a more multi-faceted relationship between the students and their instructor.

In conclusion, it is also important to note that many of the studies discussed in the literature review were conducted at the community college level. The students participating in my study attended four-year colleges, or were getting their Master's or PhDs. It is not unlikely that community college instructors tend to focus on their teaching, while professors who teach in Master's and Ph.D. programs might be more focused on their research, and therefore spend less time developing a close relationship with their online students.

Now, let's look at how some of these findings can be incorporated in how you set up your classroom:

Key Aspects of Forum Interaction

The Importance of Structure

The key to a successful online classroom is to have a good overall structure so it is clear to the students what the expectations are and where they are supposed to post their messages and assignments. In the online setting, we lose a lot of contextual information that is taken for

granted in a regular classroom. The students can no longer rely on body language, tone of voice and other clues available to us in fact-to-face interaction to understand what the expectations are.

The main way to compensate for this lack of contextual information is to set up the online classroom in an extremely structured manner. In most academic courses, the students move through as a cohort. This means that as an overall structure, it will work well with one Forum for each week or each unit of the course. In addition, you might want to consider starting a thread where the students can interact informally about things not directly related to the course content.

Some online professors prefer to also have a Forum named Questions for the Professor, but many like to have specific assignment-related questions sent via email so they can get back to the student immediately. If the question applies to many students, you can post a general message to the Forum in addition to sending a more personal response to the student via email.

The Welcome Message

Since you usually teach content that others have written, you want to personalize the classroom with a welcome message. It is important that this is a personal and warm greeting, not a copy of your CV! This is different from your profile, in that the welcome message also includes a quick overview of your expectations and more general advice. I suggest that you urge students to post their bios, if possible with a picture.

Students will likely not meet you in person. It is therefore crucial that you greet them in a friendly and positive manner in the online classroom. You want them to feel that they "know" you well enough to get in touch if they have any challenges, but also be very clear about what your expectations are. These important functions are served with a well-composed welcome message.

The Forums

In the Forums there are usually two different kinds of postings that factor into the student's course participation grade:

1. Responses to discussion questions taken from the pre-designed course content

Almost always, you will teach online content that others have created. Most designed courses already contain discussion questions. Here is one example:

Lesson 12 Discussion Question 2:

According to Goleman, emotional intelligence (EI) is an important factor in regard to a leader's success or failure. How important do you believe EI is compared to traits in leaders? Please justify your responses.

Post your answer (about 3-4 paragraphs) to the applicable thread in the forum.

It is important to note that all students should answer all these pre-designed questions, unless there are more than four of them per lesson. In that case, I suggest that you ask them to choose at least four of the questions and respond to them with a few short paragraphs. Since all students will respond to these questions, it is important that they are open-ended. Few online activities are less meaningful than reading twenty variations of the same answer to a question.

2. Questions and comments that you or the students post during the course (e.g. current events, own experiences)

These postings are usually more applied and less formal in nature. In order to make these generate discussion among the students, it is a good idea to end them with a question, if at all possible.

Hi, all!

As I read the second topic this week, I found that the suggestions for how to lay off people were helpful. I am just getting ready to let somebody go, and wonder if you guys have any additional advice for how to soften the blow?

Pat

Usually, students do not need to answer all the informal questions. It is best to indicate that they will need to for example post two informal questions or answers per week. In order to do so, it is best to include a Various thread for each week the course is in session.

It is of key importance to note that these two types of forum interaction are not usually individually graded. They factor into the overall participation grade, often about 20% of the final grade. In order to make assessment of participation doable for yourself, you may want to make your expectations very clear, send out a reminder to students behind in their posting around the middle of the course, post a participation reminder when 80% of the course is over, and then just assess with a score and a few quick comments when the course is over.

Since online students appreciate flexibility, you may include the following in your participation instructions: "I strongly prefer that you post to the lesson forums as each lesson is covered. You may, however, contribute to any Forum at any time."

It is recommended that you set up your Forums before the course starts. Many start off with a forum section pertaining to ALL lessons in the course, containing a welcome message, a Coffee Lounge or similar forum for informal interaction, and a Course Various thread where the students can post anything related to the course that does not fit under any of the other main threads. You then open up Forums for each main lesson in your course, as well as a Lesson Various thread.

As you can see from this overview, almost all of the forums are course-related. According to Palloff and Pratt's (1999). *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace (1999)* and many other sources, however, it is very important to build an online community of peer learners where the students also have some kind of personal relationship. That is why it is so important to include the Coffee Lounge forum, and make it clear to the students that this is the place to discuss non-course related matters. You might for example start the discussion by posting the following message:

Dear all,

Welcome to class! I look forward to working with all of you. This Coffee Lounge posting is meant to be a place where you can informally interact about non-course related issues (for example the challenges with your teenager or the price of text books :)

Let's start off with the following "getting to know you" question:

Why did you choose to take your courses online?

Thanks,

(your name)

Assignments

It is strongly recommended to post a reminder or a general overview of the graded assignments to the Forum. Especially new students often suffer from information overload, and these Forum messages make it more likely that all assignments will come in on time. Please note that it is a lot better to have the students upload their assignment, rather than sending it to you via email. You then have a safe record of when it was received. Email programs crash, and you do not want the only copy of Peter's thesis to crash with it. Here is an example of such a posting:

Assignment 3:

The following assignment is due by the end of the course: Please develop a 12-page business plan (Times, 12pt, double-spaced) for a new business related to a hobby (fitness, scrapbooking, etc.). The plan needs to have a financial section as well as a short marketing plan. You need to post your assignment to the Assignment folder in rtf format.

There are two main general types of assignments used in online courses:

- The offline assignment could be a reading or an activity that is either emailed or transmitted differently to you, for example by fax or email. I have already indicated that this type of delivery mode for an assignment can easily cause confusion and frustration for both you and the students. "Lost in space" is a term that comes to mind when assignments mysteriously get lost on the way from the students' email outbox to your inbox. Sometimes, however, you might want to give students untraditional projects which require material to be mailed. If so, make sure you provide detailed information about delivery and deadlines in the summary of the assignment.
- The uploadable assignment requires the student to directly upload their assignments to the assignment folder. This could, for example, be a paper or a problem set. You will easily be able to retrieve the assignment and post a grade and/or response. This is by far the preferred mode and a lot safer for all parties involved. Detailed instructions are of course also needed for this type of assignments.

To some extent, online learning changes the power structure in the relationship between the professor and the students. In many aspects of the online course, the instructor gives up some of the power found in the in-person classroom. Evaluation is one of the few areas where you have the same power as you do in any classroom. The rules of the game are similar to those in the traditional classroom. You say "jump", and hopefully the students do!

You also need to let them know "how to jump"! Assignment instructions need to be extremely detailed. Here are some things to keep in mind for papers:

- Number of pages, line spacing - and will you accept longer assignments?
- Do you want them to include a title page and appendices? If so, are they included in the recommended number of pages?
- Do you want them to include an executive summary?
- What about margins and font?
- Do you want them to include figures and other visuals?
- Do you want them to use APA or other style for their citations?
- Is this supposed to be an academic paper, a case study, or a personal account?
- Etc., etc., etc.

The more detailed you are, the fewer questions you will have to respond to!

An important aspect of assignments is implemented before the course starts. If you have stated your expectations clearly and structured your online classroom well, the students will know what needs to be done, and get the assignments to you on time. Your setup should include not only due date and time, but time zone as well.

If possible, share an example of a good assignment with them. When students submit good papers, you can ask for their permission to share their work with other students. Removing the student's name is not enough if you want the author to remain anonymous; the name of the original author often remain in fields in the document property information. It is therefore a good idea to copy the paper onto a new document, and remove the student's name. When you post these sample assignments, you should ask the students to discuss why this is a good paper, and if there is anything they would like to change.

As already noted, few things are more important than giving students timely feedback. You need to have all assignments corrected and grades/feedback posted within one week, but if at all possible, try to do it faster. Few things are more frustrating to an online student than getting feedback on the first assignment too late to incorporate your comments as they do the second assignment!

CLOSING THOUGHTS

This monograph has shared various perspectives pertaining to teaching online. Most important, however, is your enthusiasm. Let us close with a powerful comment from an online professor:

"I will never forget when I found out that the highest achieving student in one of my online classes was a recent immigrant who had Thalomide syndrome. She typed her almost hundred weekly messages with three fingers on each hand, and had to sit with her face about three inches from the screen since her arms were very short.

Teaching online will give you a lot more than a paycheck."

REFERENCES

Attitudes and opinions of online students toward community college online learning: An opinion survey of community college online students. (2002). Lansing, Michigan, Michigan Community College Association, School Public Relations Consultant Services.

Choy, S., McNickle, C., & Clayton, B. (2002). *Learner expectations and experiences: An examination of student views of support in online learning.* Melbourne, Australia: Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED466766).

Engvig, M. (2006). *Online learning: All you need to know to facilitate and administer online courses.* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Halsne, A. M. (2002). *Online versus traditionally-delivered instruction: A descriptive study of learner characteristics in a community college setting.* Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Loyola University, Chicago.

Kennedy, C. A. (2001). *Using a model of learner readiness to study the effects of course design on classroom and online college student performance.* [Summary] Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved January 2, 2005, from http://www.smccd.net/kennedyc/rsch/diss_sum.htm

Knowles, M. (2000). *The Adult Learner* (5th ed.). Houston, TX: Gulf Professional Publishing Company.

MacGregor, C. J. (2002, Fall). Personality differences between online and face-to-face students. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 50(3), 4-23.

Palloff, R., & Pratt, K. (1999). *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Prince, D., & Stern, P. (n.d.). *Online learning students: Characteristics, satisfaction, and implications for future planning. A summary of findings from two system development projects.* Olympia, Washington: Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Regan, K., & Tuchman, S. (1990, March). *The importance of authority and peer relations on the educational process of onsite and online Students: An exploratory investigation.* Paper presented at the International Conference on Technology and Education, Brussels, Belgium. California: Information & Technology.