

Online vs. In-Person Activities

A brief for Marlboro College Graduate School Faculty

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Activity Recommendations

In-Person Activities

1. Presentations (rich media projectors on the Web with discussion)
2. New skills and new tools. Demonstrate a new technique or skill, followed by student discussion and questions. Then do an instructor lead lab to help students get started on their own laptops using the new tools or techniques.
3. Physical activities such as field trips, group photography outings, site visits, tours, etc.
4. Guest speakers with time to socialize in person after and plenty of QA.
5. New in-person skills: Partner up and attempt a new skill that requires a subject in-person to try it on. Example, usability testing.
6. Round robin work shopping of student work by entire class on the big screen, with constructive critique.
7. Whiteboard brainstorming.
8. Practicing presentation skills with critique.
9. And yes, even sage on the stage lectures!

Online

Moodle (Private learning management system)

1. Reading with structured instructor discussions.
2. Individual time on assignments that require construction and creation over time.
3. Small team projects that can benefit from several days of online collaboration. Example: Research a subject; add links to a group wiki.
4. Upload draft papers for instructor feedback.

E-Portfolios (Public finished work space)

1. Upload finished papers with web abstract as PDFs for public consumption.
2. Finished, polished projects as screen shots, slide shows, videos, screencasts, or audio files with short descriptive text blurbs.
3. Polished resumes and personal bios.
4. Outstanding class discussion posts checked for typos.
5. Polished resource lists and links

Synchronous Web Tools and the Phone.

1. "Webinar" conferencing and presentations of class materials like lectures using software such as DimDim or Adobe Connect. Should have a "record" function so it can be viewed later.
2. "Flash Meetings" for humanizing, networking, and group discussion using software such as Tnychat.com and Skype.com
3. Instructor initiated class support groups using Skype/AIM/Yahoos IM software. All students in class to see all other students when online and are encouraged to help each other and bond as a group.
4. Office hour time slots using telephone or Skype/AIM/Yahoo where students are required to check in every few weeks and talk to instructor.

Research Says...

1. Online learning's effectiveness can be as good, or better, than in-person only.
2. Blended learning (Online with several in-person meetings) is often better than either online or in-person.
3. The variables are the instructor's engagement, skill, and support from the organization enabling instructors with the right tools and training.
4. Start small, keep it simple, and keep it clear. If you're new to online, or blended learning, start building your course early, ask for help, and get feedback as you go.
5. Integrate as many classroom activities with online work as you can.
6. Instructors need to "Plant and farm" rich and vibrant online communities of students. The instructor in the beginning models reciprocity and cooperation until students take over.
7. The first 1-2 weeks are more crucial than in-person classes. Clear expectations, syllabi, grading and due dates need to be very, very clearly established, student-by-student.
8. During the entire class it is recommended to check in often with each student individually to prevent isolation, disengagement, and detachment of students. This also reduces any stress from confusion and miscommunication. Weekly online, audio/video/phone office hours with each student are recommended, even if for only 5 minutes.

Specific Activity Examples

(From Marlboro Graduate School's Collective Experience)

Reading and commenting

- In person: A reading assignment is given, online or with physical copies. Specific criteria for commenting are presented and discussed by faculty, e.g. "Comment on your overall impression, the effectiveness of the author's persuasive powers, their research, and the graph on page 7. I'll be logging your comments in the grading by Monday at midnight."
- Online: Students fulfill assignment in Moodle with faculty observing

Affinity Diagram

- In Person: Show the concept of an "Affinity Diagram" in action via in person example or video, etc. Have the entire class participate in an "Affinity Diagram" sticky note exercise. Discuss efficient ways of students can lead the exercise for their own needs and record the results.
- Online: Discuss the situations where an Affinity Diagram would be the right tool to use for the student's project. Have students do the exercise with their friends or family and post 200-500 words about their experience.

Basic Photography

- In person: Show the principles of photography, e.g. composition, lighting, and focus on the projector. Go outside and practice all three principles rotating through the group taking photos of each other. Come back into classroom and help students download, and import into standard editing software they all have secured beforehand. Have small groups help each other limit submissions to one photo per example. Instructor takes students through signing up for and using an online photos service such as Flickr, and assigns homework.
- Online: Student posts 3 photos to Flickr and links are posted in a Moodle forum with written defenses for each photo. Photos are embedded in the student's e-portfolio as a slide show and the e-portfolio page is sent to the instructor as the assignment's conclusion.

(From the authors of the book *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles, and Guidelines* (Wiley, 2008), D. Randy Garrison and Norman D. Vaughan.)

Small group wiki work

- A series of online discussion forums are created in a learning management system, such as Blackboard. These forums are directly related to the key modules/topics for the course.
- Groups of students (2 to 3) choose a module based on course readings, previous experience and/or interest in the topic.
- Each student group is responsible for moderating and summarizing their selected online discussion for a specified time period.
- The groups then use a wiki application (i.e., <http://pbwiki.com>) to make draft notes and a final summary of the online discussion based on guidelines co-created by the students and the course instructor.

Weblogs

Weblogs can be used to facilitate student self-reflection and peer review of course assignments. For example:

- Students can create their own course weblogs using Google's Blogger application.
- After completing each course assignment, and reviewing the instructor's assessment feedback, the students post responses to the following reflective questions on their weblogs: (a) What did you learn in the process of completing this assignment? (b) How will you apply what you learned from this assignment to the next class assignment, other courses and/or your career?
- In terms of peer review, students paste or attach drafts of specific course assignments to their blogs. Other students in the class then review these documents and post responses to the author's weblog. Guiding questions for the peer review process can include: (a) What did you learn from reviewing this document? (b) What were the strengths (e.g. content, writing style, format and structure) of the document? (c) What constructive advice and/or recommendations could you provide for improving the quality of this document?

Sources and Further reading

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