

Introduction

We are very pleased to welcome you to the first edition of Teaching and Learning

Online: A Handbook for UMass Faculty. Whether you are totally inexperienced in online instruction or are relatively savvy about it, we think you will find the answers to many questions about how to create and manage a state-of-the-art online course. This guide was developed by a group of UMass faculty and staff who participated in a year-long Online Fellows program supported by a Professional Development Grant in Instructional Technology from the UMass President's Office. The participants, who represented all UMass campuses and various disciplines, were already currently teaching online courses. The Online Fellows Program was developed through the joint efforts of the Center for Teaching, the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment, the Center for Computer-Based Instructional Technology, and Continuing Education. Teaching and Learning Online is designed to guide you through the decisions that you will need to make if you teach online. It reflects the joint experience and wisdom of the Online Fellows, UMass faculty like yourself who up until a few years ago had no experience in teaching online. We have tried to make the guide straightforward and inviting, raising and answering the basic questions that novice online instructors would be contemplating.

Of course, no guide is able to cover every aspect of online teaching. There are several areas that we have not addressed, including specific technical issues (e.g., course management systems), legal issues involving intellectual property, and compensation issues.

What we hope we have accomplished, though, is to provide you with a guide to the major pedagogical and assessment issues associated with teaching an online course. All of the Online Fellows have found teaching online to be a rewarding and invigorating experience, and we hope this guide eases your transition into the world of online learning.

1. Advantages of Learning Online

Two approaches to online learning have emerged: synchronous and asynchronous learning. Synchronous learning is instruction and collaboration in "real time" via the Internet.

It typically involves tools, such as:

- live chat
- audio and video conferencing
- data and application sharing
- shared whiteboard
- virtual "hand raising"
- joint viewing of multimedia presentations and online slide shows

Asynchronous learning methods use the time-delayed capabilities of the Internet.

It typically involves tools, such as:

- e-mail
- threaded discussion
- newsgroups and bulletin boards
- file attachments

Asynchronous courses are still instructor-facilitated but are not conducted in real time, which means that students and teacher can engage in course-related activities at their convenience rather than during specifically coordinated class sessions. In asynchronous courses, learning does not need to be scheduled in the same way as synchronous learning, allowing students and instructors the benefits of anytime,

anywhere learning.

Course Software

Rather than creating your online course from scratch, a number of software programs are now available that make it easy to develop an online course. These programs include features such as threaded discussions and document sharing and pre-designed design layouts to make the course design process easier. Check with the campus technology specialists to learn more about the preferred software for online

learning in your department.

2. What is Online Learning

The term online learning (or, as it is sometimes called, distance learning) includes a number of computer-assisted instruction methods. For the purposes of this handbook:

Two parallel processes take place in an online environment:

1. Students become more active, reflective learners.
2. Students and teachers engage in learning through the use of technology and become more familiar with technology by using it.

Online learning is most effective when delivered by teachers experienced in their subject matter. The best way to maintain the connection between online education and the values of traditional education is through ensuring that online learning is “delivered” by teachers, fully qualified and interested in teaching online in a web-based

environment (Feenberg 1998).

Advantages of Learning Online

Online learning offers a variety of educational opportunities:

Student-centered learning

The variety of online tools draw on individual learning styles and help students become more versatile learners.

Collaborative learning

Online group work allows students to become more active participants in the learning process. Contributing input requires that students comprehend what is being discussed, organize their thinking coherently, and express that thinking with carefully constructed language.

Easy access to global resources

Students can easily access online databases and subject experts in the online classroom.

Experiential learning through multimedia presentations

New technologies can be used to engage and motivate students. Technology can also be used to support students in their learning activities.

Accessible for non-traditional students

Online delivery of programs and courses makes participation possible for students who experience geographic and time barriers in gaining access to higher education.

Draws on student interest in online learning

Many students are interested in online learning. In a recent survey conducted by the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment at UMass Amherst, more than 50% of students surveyed said that they were “very interested” or “somewhat interested” in taking an online course.

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