Tips for Instructor Presence in Online Courses

Prior to the First Day of Class:

- **Include in Syllabus or Overview area**:
  - Contact information
  - Office hours (and/or virtual hours)
  - **Pro tip:** Set and share communication expectations. When should students expect an email response from you (choose a timeframe that you will be able to manage over the semester that won't make you feel pressured to check email every hour; 24-48 hours during the business week is reasonable)
- **Create an introduction video.**
  - This is your first in-course interaction with students, it's a great way to show your personality.
    - **Pro tip:** Share how this course will be useful to students, your philosophy on teaching the course, expectations for students (will work with peers be an integral part of the course, why?)
  - Plan on 2-5 minutes; some options are:
    - "Talking head"
      - Consider: What are some things that students will be able to infer about you based on what they can see in the frame? Is there anything you'd like to show them about yourself?
    - Slide show (with option of picture in picture) with photographs and/or screenshots
  - **Pro tip:** Script your video before shooting it. It'll help you remember everything you want to say, and then you can use the script as a video transcript and it will be useful in captioning the video.
- **Create an orientation video (focused on Sakai)**.
  - How will students navigate your course, and what should they expect from week to week?
  - **Pro tip:** Discuss grading and feedback. When should students expect their submissions to be graded? How will you provide feedback?
- **Welcome email.**
  - A few days before the course starts, send a welcome email explaining when and how the course will start, orientation requirements, how to log in, any special tools or materials needed, etc.
  - **Pro tip:** Provide a hyperlink to the [Sakai for Students Video Series](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpwpa82O9h3qlvn_Gdu70uV3A6N36EUn-) URL:https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpwpa82O9h3qlvn_Gdu70uV3A6N36EUn-

Ideas for Presence in Course Activities

- **Post a weekly summary of discussion forum (written, audio, or video)**.
  - What new and relevant points did students make that moved the discussion forward or what deepened it? Feel free to mention students by name. This is an opportunity to share any thoughts you might have about their discussion and to let them know what to expect during the next week's discussion.
  - **Pro tip:** If choosing to mention students by name, keep a roster/checklist handy to help track which students you've already mentioned.
- **Inject your personality in your content! (written, audio, video, images)**
  - Incorporate real-life examples whenever possible.
  - Incorporate your environment or an environment that will be familiar to most students (i.e., grocery store, post office, etc.) as backdrop for examples, weekly summary, etc.
  - **Pro tip:** Scaffold; reference and build upon concepts you mentioned earlier. Be specific (e.g., in which week did they learn about that something you're mentioning?)

On the First Day of Class

- Publish your course site, and post a welcome announcement telling students what to do to begin.
- **Pro tip:** Encourage student introductions (forum, FlipGrid, PPT/Google slideshow, narrated video, etc.). Depending on course content and your expectations for peer interaction, students can model your introduction or you can provide them with a prompt. Other ideas include student interviews, scavenger hunts, or a spreadsheet of student information (a spreadsheet is useful later in the semester when students look for peers with similar interests or backgrounds). Have students take a survey if you're interested in learning additional specifics about their motivations, skills, and prior knowledge.

"E" Date Awareness

- As "E" date arrives, contact any student that has not yet submitted or completed the "E" activity. Ask if the student is able to access course.

Ongoing Communication

- Connect with each student at least once during semester.
  - **Pro tip:** Send an article, quote, or reflection/thoughts on something student said in forum. Encourage student; what has student been doing well? If wishing to use student work as model, this can be an opportunity to seek permission.
- Provide timely feedback on student submissions as per your feedback statement.
- Have students "check in" to demonstrate understanding (Sakai question, journal on Student Page, word cloud, ePoll)
- Create announcement or video to address multiples of any question (common errors or issues) you may be receiving from students.

Ideas for Peer-to-Peer Interactions

- 2-4 students per group. Provide a content-related (or relevant) article, case study, or scenario for students to analyze and discuss. What conclusions can they draw as individuals and as a group?
- As an alternative to written discussion forum, use FlipGrid with some existing posts
- Have students review peer's work to create:
  - a "poster" to invite others to view a particular piece of work/response
  - Once or twice in a semester: Ask students to review peer's work and create a slideshow or document with images/screenshots from that peer's work (In Notes area of slideshow or near images in document, have students reflect on how peer's work helps their own understanding of content)
- Other resources for peer-to-peer interactions:
  - [University of Illinois Online Instructional Activities Index](https://www.uis.edu/ion/resources/instructional-activities-index/)
    URL: https://www.uis.edu/ion/resources/instructional-activities-index/

If peer-to-peer interactions are new for you or your class, it will be helpful to model your expectations for the first one or two activities. Questions to consider: Will the class need to learn "active listening" techniques? How will you qualify "meaningful" discussion? In what way will you follow-up or close the activity?