A Checklist for Facilitating Online Courses
By Mary Bart

There are two common assumptions about teaching online that can sink even the most well-meaning neophyte. One is that “teaching is teaching” regardless of whether it’s face-to-face or online and there’s no reason to deviate from the proven principles that work so well in the traditional classroom. The second assumption is that teaching online is all about the technology, and if you design your course properly, it pretty much runs itself.

Of course both assumptions are false, but where does that leave online instructors looking for guidance on the right way to teach an online course? A new research-based tool developed at Humboldt State University can help. Assessing Online Facilitation (AOF) can serve as a valuable guide to best practices in online teaching. It lists the four main roles of an online facilitator – pedagogical, managerial, social, and technical – and the associated tasks of each role. These tasks also are broken down according to when they should be done – before the course begins, during the first week of class, throughout the course, and during the last week of class.

Do you let your students get limited access to your course before it officially begins? Do you use ice breakers in your class? Do you invite peer review? Do you use rubrics? Hopefully you’ve answered ‘yes’ to most, if not all, of these questions because that’s what’s recommended. Learn more about online teaching best practices with a copy of Beyond Course Design: Planning for Successful Facilitation. Order a copy of this seminar now »

In the recent online seminar Beyond Course Design: Planning for Successful Facilitation, two of the AOF’s developers, Joan Van Duzer, an instructional technologist at Humboldt State University, and Carole Robinson, instructional media producer for Pasadena City College, discussed many of the tasks outlined in the AOF. Some of the items in the checklist include:

Before the Course Begins:

- **Pedagogical** – Review past course evaluations to determine if enhancements for instructional strategies are required.
- **Managerial** – Send informational message including how to login, what materials are needed and how to get them, and who to contact for technical assistance.
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**Before the Course Begins:**
- Pedagogical – Review past course evaluations to determine if enhancements for instructional strategies are required.
- Managerial – Send informational message including how to login, what materials are needed and how to get them, and who to contact for technical assistance.
- Technical – Update hyperlinks to remove dead or broken links.

**During the First Week of Class:**
- Pedagogical – Create an ice breaker activity related to a course key objective or concept.
- Managerial – Contact missing students to encourage their participation.
- Technical – Assist students with login/access difficulties.
- Social – Provide a personal and welcoming introduction to develop a personal presence.

**Throughout the Course:**
- Pedagogical – Summarize discussions.
- Managerial – Update the online grade book promptly after assignment due dates.
- Technical – Model competency with course management system delivery tools.
- Social – Organize collaborative projects to achieve strong social interaction.

**During the Final Week of Class:**
- Pedagogical – Provide feedback on final project.
- Managerial – Provide general information concerning the nature and format of the final assessment(s).
- Social – Send an email with a closing personal message to students.

The AOF is available for download from here. The Facilitation Activity Record, an optional companion document to the AOF, which provides spaces for facilitators to make notes of what worked and what didn’t work when facilitating a course, and to flag issues that should be addressed before the course is offered again, can be downloaded here.