Incorporate Technologies to Improve Class Communication and Participation

UDL CHECKPOINT 8.3: Foster collaboration, interdependence, and collective learning — Making sure to utilize various technologies within a course can help learners remain engaged in the material, which can create a sense of confidence and comfort in the course as well as increased understanding of the content.

What is it?

One of the most essential components of education is engagement, and for a classroom this means participating in the course, whether it be hands-on participation or clear focus and attention on the material. As technologies evolve, instructors are able to increase their own communication with learners (including the use of discussion boards, comment sections in Canvas, breakout rooms in Zoom, etc.). These technological advancements within education can help learners become more engaged in the material, which creates a more active learning environment. This is especially true in online courses (both synchronous and asynchronous).

Why do it?

So many learners take a passive approach to their education, where they simply listen to a lecture or video or read assigned pages. However, this can create a barrier of boredom and a lack of truly understanding the material. Creating a more active learning environment through technology (for on-ground and/or online classes) can help learners internalize concepts while also remaining engaged in the course. Technologies also improve communication, where instructors can offer more personalized feedback on assignments/assessments (directly on submissions, in comments in Canvas, in discussion board posts, and through email and Canvas messages). Additionally, learners can feel more comfortable reaching out to instructors about questions they may have. Lastly, technologies, such as discussion boards in Canvas and sharable documents can help learners within a class better communicate with each other, which can foster a collaborative learning environment. All these benefits can improve learners' retention of the material and success in the course.

How can I apply it?

Here are some ways that you can better improve communication and participation through technology.

- **Be active on Canvas.** Whether it be with discussion boards or grading assignments, make sure to engage every learner and give thorough, individualized, and constructive feedback. Doing so can help learners to feel part of a community within the course;

additionally, instructors are able to clearly communicate expectations and other essential information.

- **Respond to emails in a timely manner.** Try to respond to emails from learners within 24 hours, at the latest. Often, emails from learners are asking for clarification with an assignment, and by giving them an answer early on, instructors can help learners feel more confident about their work and learning.
- **Create assignments that require collaboration through technology.** Whether it be an on-ground or online class, assigning projects that require learners to collaborate through OneDrive, Zoom, email, or any of the many other collaborative technologies can help learners feel an active part of the course and their education.
- **Make discussion boards a place to share ideas.** Discussion board assignments are often seen as drudgery by learners and instructors alike. However, promoting the importance and collaborative nature of discussion boards within a class (highlighting the ways in which they can bounce ideas off each other and share their own perceptions in a "safe space") can help learners become and remain engaged within the course. One way to do this is to require back-and-forth replies on initial posts and have the posting due dates staggered over the week (as opposed to all parts due on Sunday).

Summary

Technology offers instructors a way to easily improve learner engagement throughout a semester, regardless of the course subject or type. Utilizing communication tools can help learners feel part of the bigger class while understanding expectations and class requirements. Additionally, technologies can help learners work together in ways that promote engagement and collaboration. In the end, incorporating technology within the classroom can help keep learners motivated throughout the semester, which can lead to short- and long-term academic success.