

# IDEAS

## IDEAS FOR INFORMATION

- Don't fall victim to "shovelware"---i.e., dumping paper documents online. Online syllabi and notes are good, but they're not enough. Create a variety of interactive experiences.
- Whenever possible, post documents in HTML format. Students may not have the necessary software to open other types of files.
- If you use PowerPoint presentations, learn to "send" the *Outline* view to Microsoft Word and save it as HTML. These files are more compact and much easier to print.

## IDEAS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY

- Take pictures of each student and post the pictures on your web site. If you name the pictures after the students, each student's name will be displayed when a user's mouse "hovers" over the person's picture.
- Solicit unusual facts about students and use student pictures to create a weekly "guess who?" web feature.
- Bring a digital still or movie camera to document class activities and events, then post the results on the class web site.
- Personalize your site by adding student biographies or profiles. Then email each student with a personal note about something the student said.
- Require students to use homepages for other assignments. For example, ask students to share personal experiences related to a class topic.
- Give short surveys via the web site, then exhibit results in class and post on the web.
- Enlist students' aid in deciding on virtual guest speakers or pen pals.
- Host "events" rather than assignments (e.g., a poster session rather than a term paper).
- Use database searches and modified boilerplate to send emails about class standing.

Incorporate warmth into written text:

- Give occasional personal details.
- Use gentle jokes, even corny ones.
- Describe the setting from which you are writing (e.g., the weather, the music to which you're listening).

## IDEAS FOR INCREASING WEB SITE PARTICIPATION

- *If you require it, they will come.* Make web assignments mandatory (especially participation in *communication* activities) a significant part of assessment and clearly communicate this policy to students.
- Make students build parts of the web site: e.g., student homepages, picture gallery, and event reports.
- "Where's Waldo?"-type activities reward web site participation. Similarly, sneak actual exam questions into practice tests and hide them elsewhere on the web site.
- Make "value added" materials (e.g., study guides, practice tests) available *only* via the web site.
- Early in the semester, give surprise awards to frequent users of the web site.
- Make it *fun* (e.g., doctored pictures, top ten lists, music).

## IDEAS FOR COMMUNICATION

### General

#### *Understand Differences Between Online vs. Face-to-Face Communication*

- \* individuals in computer-mediated groups are relatively more uninhibited.
- \* compared to face-to-face communication, text-based communication is contextually impoverished unless writers are expert.
- \* status differences play less of a role in the online environment.
- \* interaction in online groups tends to be more evenly distributed among group members.
- \* online consensus decision making takes significantly longer than when group members interact face-to-face.

- Many folks sum up the difference between traditional vs. web-augmented classes in a pithy saying: "Not the *sage on the stage*, but the *guide on the side*".
- Consider how the online environment empowers those who may not speak out in a traditional classroom. You'll find that shy students and non-native speakers participate more when rapid writing or talking isn't mandatory.

### Announcements

- Make the homepage of your course an announcements page and change the greeting and messages regularly.
- Include valuable time-dependent information (e.g., "Exam 3 grades have just been posted")
- Include "teasers" for upcoming class sessions (e.g., "In Wednesday's class, I'll show you how you can save \$1500 on every new car you buy").
- Include some personal touches like holiday greetings, comments about class sessions, and occasional praise. Consider sharing responsibility for a "joke of the week" (stress keeping it clean!).

### Email

- Consider establishing a separate email account for class emails.
- Always send sensitive information via private email.
- You can use email to approximate a *listserv* by using mass emails to send reminders to students about deadlines and events.
- When sending mass emails, be sure to use the BCC (blind carbon copy) rather than the CC (carbon copy) field. That way, people can't see each other's email addresses and potentially stigmatizing information isn't made public.
- Search the grade spreadsheet for high and low grades, then send boilerplate + personal emails to high/low scorers and those with dramatic changes in scores.
- Search the web site statistics for most frequent visitors/posters, then surprise them in class with small gifts.
- Consider Electronic Pen Pals: messages are exchanged with peers in another school, state, or country. Consider cross-cultural or cross-age pairings or groups. May be done at individual or group levels.
- Consider Peer-to-Peer Tutoring (aka electronic mentoring): email links students with others who provide one-on-one content or technical assistance and guidance.

### Student Homepages

#### Possible Uses:

- Student Biographies
- Webquests

- Book reports
- Movie reviews
- Web site reviews
- Best of the Web/Web Pages that Suck

### **Group Work**

- Help forge a group identity by asking group members to come up with the group's name.
- Create gentle group competition (e.g., be the first group to complete a scavenger hunt). Don't make the prizes all-or-none--just give the winning group slightly better prizes.

*Consider using more than one type of group:*

- Base: support, encouragement, assistance (2-5 persons)
- Formal: project-based (2-4 persons)
- Informal: focuses on selected material to be learned (2-4 persons)
- Consider using both ad hoc and permanent groups.

*Consider giving each group member a role:*

- Technical support person: responds to technical questions.
- Recorder: writes minutes.
- Facilitator: checks that all members are contributing.
- Checker: assures all work is completed on time.
- Consider Round-Robin Publishing: a group starts a story with one paragraph and emails it to another group. Students add a new paragraph to the story, and the story variations rotate to the next group.
- Rotate responsibility for an "observer report" from each group.
- At some point in the semester, meet with each group member individually (even if it's via chat rooms).
- In WebCT and Blackboard, groups can have their own bulletin boards, chat rooms, ways to email group members, and share files.

### **Discussion Boards**

*In an initial posting:*

- Clearly state the purposes of the discussions--e.g., How will discussion help each student to achieve the learning outcomes? What are the benefits of discussion to students?
- Clearly state the minimal number of postings expected, per student, per discussion.
- Provide examples of good vs. poor discussion messages.
- Post rules, hints about writing style, and conventions regarding use of the discussion boards.
- Advise students of the extent to which you will participate in or monitor the discussions.
- Enforce guidelines for respect and responsibility in discussion postings. Guide individual students privately (via email) if their contributions do not follow the agreed conventions.
- At least in the beginning, use qualifiers (e.g., "it appears...", "don't you think that...") to reduce defensiveness. Also, use "I-messages"("I believe...") in place of "You-messages" ("You are...") whenever possible.
- Use private email messages to encourage participation in, and reinforce contributions to, the discussion boards.
- Clarify misunderstandings or inaccuracies in postings.
- Refer students to comments made by others in the class.
- Occasionally summarize discussions in progress.

- Consider *bomb throwing*--- getting a discussion started by asking controversial questions.
- Consider an anonymous bulletin board for sensitive topics (like instructor feedback!).
- Require students to reply not only to your initial message, but to the replies of other students as well.
- Consider peer review of writing via the discussion boards (it eases the logistical burden, plus no more stacks of notebooks to lug home!)
- If you use group work, consider creating separate discussion boards for each group in addition to the class discussion boards.
- Consider modeling how to facilitate virtual discussions, then requiring student-led discussion. For example, using a seminar format, students (individually or in small groups) can be given opportunities to identify critical issues in the lectures and readings and lead discussions related to those topics.
- Solicit topics for discussion both publicly (via the discussion boards) and privately (via email).
- Discussions should occur during a specified time frame. For example, students may have two weeks to participate in ongoing discussions, starting with the date of their first posting. The conversations are then closed.
- Once a discussion is closed, provide feedback that 1) summarizes the discussion and conclusions, 2) refers students to enrichment opportunities, and 3) evaluates the quality of the students' overall contributions. This responsibility could be delegated to students or groups.
- At the end of the semester, use searches to collate each student's contributions to the discussion boards (overall quality is easier to assess if all the messages are grouped together). Make the resulting file part of the student's electronic portfolio.

### **Chat Rooms**

- Require groups to hold online meetings in logged chat rooms. If you have more groups than chat rooms, stagger the meeting times.
- Hold virtual office hours. This is more effective at certain times than others (e.g., the night before an exam or project deadline).
- Invite virtual guest speakers.
- Post chat logs (edited, if necessary).
- Hold a class session online instead of on campus.
- Use a chat room for "virtual tours" of web sites.

### **Audio & Video**

- Blackboard and WebCT support sound and video files as attachments; however, to be useful, web audio and video should be in *streaming* formats (i.e., Windows Media, RealAudio/RealVideo, or QuickTime). Streaming can be tricky, so attend one of the FDC's free workshops.
- The software supplied with some \$20-50 desktop video cameras can save files in streaming formats. If not, then free converter programs can take the video output and convert it to streaming format.
- Some software programs (e.g., Sonic Foundry's *SoundForge XP*, \$40) let you record "streaming" audio or video from your desktop and attach it to emails or discussion board messages.
- Easy-to-use video editing programs (which used to cost hundreds or thousands of dollars) can now be obtained for less than \$50 (or even for *free*).

- When possible, always buy "academic" versions of software (they're cheaper).
- Blackboard and WebCT support email and discussion board attachments of many types.
- WebCT can "call" large audio and video files from CD-ROMs.
- The FDC offers training in the *Tegrity WebLearner*, a mobile cart that creates streaming media files. You can link to these files from your Blackboard or WebCT course.

### IDEAS FOR ASSESSMENT

- Make sure all assessments are *criterion-referenced*: i.e., consistent with your learning objectives/outcomes.
- Use frequent small assessments rather than infrequent large assessments.
- Use an "assessment portfolio", where each different type of assessment plays a different role, rather than one or two types of assessments.

Here are some examples that go beyond exams and term papers:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discussions</li> <li>• WebQuests</li> <li>• projects</li> <li>• interviews</li> <li>• research</li> <li>• critiques</li> <li>• peer review/reactions</li> <li>• peer teaching</li> <li>• video review/reactions</li> <li>• summaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• web production</li> <li>• music</li> <li>• storytelling</li> <li>• poems</li> <li>• news articles</li> <li>• analogies</li> <li>• service learning</li> <li>• design or art production (pictures, diagrams, ads, photos, videos)</li> </ul>
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- Attach short quizzes or surveys to individual pages of notes.
- Consider using the online environment to have students construct electronic portfolios that are downloadable when the class is over.
- Ensure individual accountability by including some individual assessments like quizzes, papers, reports, presentations, and self assessments.
- "Ramp up" assignments in their degree of technical sophistication.
- List criteria for, and examples of, what you think constitutes quality, OK, below average, and failing work.

### Flexibility

- Offer opportunities to exercise creativity.
- Give students some choice over when and how they complete assignments.
- Give students some degree of freedom to pace themselves to go a bit faster or slower than others taking the course.
- Allow students to choose, through links, whether or not to explore topics in more depth (i.e., enrichment).
- Provide optional remediation for students who are falling behind.
- Provide assessments that students can take more than once to improve their score.
- Open closed discussions for a short period of time near the end of class, but with more stringent requirements for posting.

### IDEAS FOR ADMINISTRATION

#### How can Blackboard or WebCT aid course administration?

- Access 24/7 from any web-connected computer.
- Central repository for class interaction.

- Compact archiving.
- Multiple backups decrease the chance of data loss.
- Reduced clutter.
- Students can check grades from anywhere (and view only their own grades).
- Downloadable files.
- Searchable course and files.
- Automatic grade computation (WebCT)
- Automatic grading and gradebook entry of quizzes.
- File sharing.
- Homework submission.

### **Accessibility**

Blackboard and WebCT take pains to be accessible to persons with disabilities. However, you can help, too:

- Create <ALT> tags for all images.
- Provide text Descriptions of images.
- Make link and file titles informative.
- Make sure screen color combinations are legible.

### **Automation**

To accomplish some of the things I've suggested, you'll have to become efficiency-minded and automate wherever it does no harm.

*Examples of automation:*

- \* Spreadsheets for grading
- \* Student databases
- \* Rubrics
- \* Boilerplate + personal comments
- \* Student grading (spot check to keep 'em honest)
- \* Pass/fail grading
- \* "Found" data (e.g., Blackboard & WebCT's tracking statistics)

*Other software can help, too:*

- \* Software forms & EPSSs (e.g., Bob's *IDEA* at <http://instructtech1.fullerton.edu/newidea/>)
- \* Plagiarism-detection (e.g., [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com))

### **Tech Support**

- Technology *will* eventually fail. Have a backup plan.
- Teach students how to use the software program---via a face-to-face orientation session in a computer lab, when possible.
- Provide printed materials (clear instructions, computer requirements, FAQ, etc.). To make these more effective, learn to use a screen capture program (e.g., *SnagIt* from [www.techsmith.com](http://www.techsmith.com))
- Provide technical help online within the course.
- Instruct students how to minimize loss of files (redundancy, hard copy backup, transferring email and discussion messages from a word processor).
- Make use of the expertise of other members in the course by asking for technologically adept students to serve as resources.

### **Miscellaneous Hints**

- Before you make a substantial online investment, clarify ownership of your intellectual property (content, platform, etc.).
- Similarly, honor others' intellectual property. Become acquainted with applicable laws. When in doubt, *link*.

- When you first log on, and before performing any tasks, scan relevant areas of the course to get an idea of your workload that day. Extinguish the "fires" first before working your way down to less pressing matters.
- Always have that week's assignments uploaded the first day prior to the classroom week.
- Deal quickly with excessively negative students before they "drag down" the entire class.
- You'll be doing a lot of work, so you might as well get publications out of it. Before the semester, identify the two or three biggest changes you'll be making to your teaching as a result of going online---then formulate a plan for data collection.