

Teaching in a Digital Age Webinar Series

The fourth webinar in this series was held on Tuesday, January 12, 2016, on the topic of Ensuring Quality – How to Design and Deliver Quality Courses in a Supportive Learning Environment with Contact North | Contact Nord Research Associate Dr. Tony Bates.

There were five questions Dr. Bates was unable to respond to due to time considerations. All other questions posed during the webinar were responded to by Dr. Bates and are included within the recording of the webinar. Click [here](#) to access the recording.

We are pleased to share the questions and Dr. Bates' responses below.

Q1: When "assessing" on-campus courses, behavioural aspects of the instructor are often considered. Should we do the same in online learning, not just looking at content and delivery/platform?

Yes, absolutely. We should in particular be looking at the quantity, quality and speed of response of instructors to students. We should be looking at the quality of feedback on assessments as well as instructors' reliability in assessing students. This is particularly important if adjunct instructors or teaching assistants are used to handle extra sections of classes. There should always be a full-time faculty member responsible for a course (even if they don't teach it themselves) and they should be responsible for this kind of monitoring (which is much easier online than face-to-face).

It's also important to train faculty and instructors on these issues before they start teaching online. At the University of Central Florida, for instance, you are not allowed to teach a blended or online course unless you have taken their course for teaching online.

Q2: But we can then say that online allows us to do a better job of achieving the SAME outcomes. Certainly, a student can't hide in an online course as he might do in a 1000 seat lecture hall! We are going to capture his input and engage him better online.

Yes, I agree, there is certainly plenty of well-founded research that clearly indicates that online learning is usually just as effective as classroom-based teaching. Hence my law of equal substitution: the same topic can be taught just as well online or face-to-face in most cases. I think though that is not the right question. We should be identifying in specific subject areas (as the answer will vary from subject to subject) what is done best online and what is done best in class. In other words, focus on the exception and not the rule.

Q3: Not a question - but would love some additional resources on a) how to engage international learners in an online environment (you mentioned that they don't want to challenge content) AND tips for faculty on creating a teaching "presence" (online personality).

This is a big question (actually two questions). On the first, I would refer you to:

Insung Jung and Charlotte Lanawardena (2014) Culture and Online Learning Stirling VA: Stylus Publishing

Incidentally, I didn't say that all international students don't want to challenge content - only some, who come from a different culture of deference (that was the word I was seeking in the webinar) to a university professor, and that inhibits them from challenging the professor's standpoint. This did not seem to be a problem though with most of my Mexican students. Again, though, these are generalisations. The best approach is to assume that all students will have some difficulties, and these difficulties will differ from student to student, and try to identify or anticipate those difficulties as best as possible.

On the second, there's a lot of literature on online presence and how to create it, including references at the end of Section 11.10 in Teaching in a Digital Age. You will find more literature under 'Communities of Inquiry'. See also the chapter in Teaching in a Digital Age on online collaborative learning, especially Section 4.4.5.

Q4: Do you have any suggestions how to combine quality assessment and faculty professional development?

Another really big issue. Far too often faculty development focuses on faculty and what they should be doing without measuring whether this has any effect on learning outcomes or student performance. A focus on getting faculty to evaluate their own teaching would be a start, using some quality standards as criteria for evaluation as well as end-of-course grades and completion rates. For instance, what characterized students who got As from those that got Bs? Could you teach that difference in the next iteration of the course?

Again, qualitative analysis of student assessments is often a good way to look back at the teaching but it is often difficult to directly link student assessment to a particular teaching approach or action, except in a very broad sense. What QA can do for faculty new to online teaching is to check that they haven't missed anything important when designing and delivering their courses, or to make them think more carefully about what they are trying to achieve and how to assess this. See also my answer to Q1.

However, often the real challenge is to move faculty from mere competence in online learning (do as well as in face-to-face teaching) to expertise (do better). To do this in online learning will require faculty to be innovative, and then I think we need to move beyond QA processes to brainstorming, demonstrations of alternative approaches to teaching online, etc.

Q5: WOW. Could I use that quote from Dr. Bates...."Most important thing to look for in an Instructional Designer is empathy..." I would LOVE to be able to use that!

Be my guest!

Click [here](#) to read Teaching in a Digital.