

Preserving What Works in Traditional Classrooms



By the end of the Fall 2020 semester, most university faculty have had some time to reflect on how they teach, why they teach, and what they teach. Most professors made improvements in courses as they seek new ways to engage future students. Some even may question the relevancy of a course's content—how will the syllabus facilitate their students'

long-term goals? How will the curricular units prepare learners for professional practice in their chosen fields?

These questions feel increasingly urgent in an era of accelerated technological and social change, and they converge with the pressure created by the rise of online learning. For some faculty, the burden of creating online versions of their courses casts a shadow over the verdant summer months. Before jumping on the digital bandwagon, these veteran professors need reassurance that the quality of their online classes will match that of their face-to-face courses. They may also wonder whether the online environment will promote the kind of vibrant professor-student relationships that energize face-to-face instruction.

Educational research routinely underscores the importance of faculty connections in online instruction, but the painstaking work of creating relationships with each student requires a faculty member's most valued resource—time. Proponents of online education point out that students' completion rates rise in courses when the instructor invests time in getting to know each student. Numerous studies conclude that online classrooms offer faculty a wider range of communication vehicles—discussion boards, video conferencing, email, comment boxes—than traditional classrooms. While studies often affirm the promise of online education, recent research also examines the challenges of these diverse communication channels. Clearly, faculty preparing to enter the realm of online education need support and resources to help them establish productive relationships with their online students.

Beginning with Best Practices in Online Course Design

Four years ago, veteran professor and instructional designer Dr. Sara Tarr created ClearAlignment, a software solution focused on providing technical support to university faculty venturing into online education. After hearing many faculty express concerns about the numerous demands on their time, Dr. Tarr developed a streamlined process for faculty seeking to take their traditional courses online. Starting with a professor's syllabus, ClearAlignment places a course's learning objectives at the center of the re-design process. Using ClearAlignment faculty simply copy/paste, from their syllabus, their course description, assignments, assessments, and reading assignments into the website. Then, an experienced instructional designer analyzes this information and produces a detailed map for the online version of the class. This course map aligns lectures, assignments, instructional activities, and assessments with



the learning objectives on the professor's syllabus. This approach to course design places students' learning outcomes front and center. Meeting online students on their own terms helps build trust between the professor and student who may never meet in person. By providing an efficient approach to online course design, ClearAlignment helps faculty bridge the gap between their students' worlds and their own instructional goals—a solution that unleashes the power of what works best in both traditional classroom and online education.

References

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