Establishing & Maintaining Instructor Presence in the Online Classroom

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Continuing Studies instructors: Murray Cornish, Colleen Kawalilak, Mary Kennedy, Tracy Kirkham, Candace Matelic, Karen Lee, Laurie Phipps, Anna Marie White, and Julie Williams who shared their thoughts with us on this topic.

Some material presented in this resource has been adapted from:


Resources consulted:


Defining Instructor Presence

... a sense of presence is “being there” and “being together” with online learners throughout the learning experience. It looks and feels as if … the instructor is accessible to the learners and that the learners are accessible to the instructor and each other, and that the technology is transparent to the learning process.


... in terms of establishing my presence, that’s one of my priorities. I don’t refer to it as a one-off event. It’s very much of an ongoing process.

Colleen Kawalilak, instructor, Adult and Continuing Education Certificate

The following suggestions for creating and maintaining your online classroom presence have been drawn from discussions with our Continuing Studies instructors and from other resources. See the Acknowledgements for details on sources.

Suggestions for establishing your presence

...I think the first two weeks in particular are critical to an instructor developing that rapport with their students. ...it’s drawing students into the course, learning a bit about them. It also helps me understand what examples and what illustrations, what material I might want to bring into the course to help keep them engaged.

Anna-Marie White, instructor, Public Relations Diploma
• Develop a bio that can be included on your course site.
  Providing some personal information helps to give your students a sense of who you are and
  what your background is. Your personal information can include a picture, a bio, and even
  an audio/video clip so that students can put a voice and image to the name.

• Compose a welcome message.
  Posting a message that greets students on the first day of the course can help set your
  communication tone for the course and even ease anxiety for your students.
  (see The Continuing Studies Instructor’s Welcome Message PDF for details)

• Articulate when and how your students can expect to hear from you during the course.
  Part of establishing your presence is being clear with your students how frequently you will
  be responding to their questions and contributions, where on the course site they should
  regularly check for messages from you, and your availability during the week for “office
  hours”.

• Acknowledge your students’ posts and contributions to the course community.
  Whether you are responding to individual posts or providing summary responses to the
  class as a whole, it’s important to recognize your students’ input and contributions and
  provide assurance that you are reading their messages.

• Follow up with students you haven’t heard from recently.
  Contact students privately who have not been active in the course to determine if they are
  having problems or technical difficulties which are preventing them from participating.
  Remind them to contact the Onlinehelp Desk for assistance if necessary.

• Provide timely feedback on course assignments.
  In addition to your regular responses to student questions and contributions, it’s important
  to provide your students with feedback on each assignment before the next one is due. In
  addition to providing individual feedback, you might also consider posting your overall
  observations on the assignment to the whole class.
  (also see PDF Managing Your Time in the Online Classroom)

Additional suggestions for maintaining your presence

... I developed this strategy which I call “moving on messages” because I decided I needed to
personalize the course schedule on the home page. The moving on messages do two things:
they summarize what the students have been doing for the past week and emphasize the key
things they should have gotten out of the unit, and they get a description of what we will be
doing in the coming week, what kinds of content they will be dealing with and so on ... one of
the high points for students when they are completing course evaluations is those moving on
messages.

Mary Kennedy, instructor, Adult and Continuing Education Certificate

• add your voice to individual units by recording an introduction that elaborates on aspects of
  the unit or set up PowerPoint or slideshow presentations

• start each week with a check-in post reminding learners about what needs to be done that
  week
• always address your students by name when you send them personal email and feedback
• encourage interaction and collaboration between and among your students
• hold virtual office hours by phone and/or by real-time chat

For more ideas, see

Video resources
• Establishing Your Online Presence (approx. 5:10)
• Creating an Audio Welcome Message for Continuing Studies Courses (approx. 4:06)
• Maintaining Your Online Presence (approx. 6:16)
• Enhancing Your Instructional Presence with Audio (approx. 5:50)
• Providing Meaningful Feedback (approx. 12:01)

PDF resources
• The Continuing Studies Instructor’s Welcome Message
• Enhancing Instructor Presence – Tips from Continuing Studies Instructors
• How to Record an Audio Welcome Message for Your Continuing Studies Online Course
• How to Record Audio Commentaries for Your Continuing Studies Online Course