

# *Best Practices in the Development and Facilitation of Online Courses*

PARK UNIVERSITY  
**CETL**  
CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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# A Little about Park University

- Founded in 1875 as a traditional, undergraduate, liberal arts school;
- Now diversified to include 42 Campus Centers across the country (our School for Extended Learning);
- Offers 7 undergraduate and 4 graduate programs online, with enrollments of approx. 10,000 per 8 week accelerated term;
- Common learning outcomes and a common “core assessment” ensure consistency across instructional modalities.



# Needs Assessment

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- What is your level of experience with online teaching and/or learning?
- What are your biggest fears or apprehensions about teaching online?
- What would you like to gain from this workshop?



# Online Learning Myths

- Students work primarily alone, at their individual paces, to complete all work by the end of the term/session
- The chief roles of the instructor are content developer and evaluator of students' work
- Online courses are largely text-based
- Students who choose to take online course have highly developed technical skills
- The majority of online learners are non-traditional learners
- Teaching and learning online require less time and are less rigorous than teaching face-to-face



# The Reality...

- Online courses are highly interactive, with students working together asynchronously and synchronously each week, as well as interacting with content from a variety of sources via the Web
- The instructor's chief role is a *facilitator*
- Online courses are uniquely able to incorporate a wide range of media in addition to text written by the content developer
- The choice to take courses online is often one of convenience and accessibility rather than of learning preference or technical skill\*
- Research suggests that teaching and learning online are more time-consuming and academically rigorous than their face-to-face counterparts\*



# Defining Our Terms

*what do we mean by “online course”*



Face-to-Face

Hybrid

Online





# Tour of Online Course Material

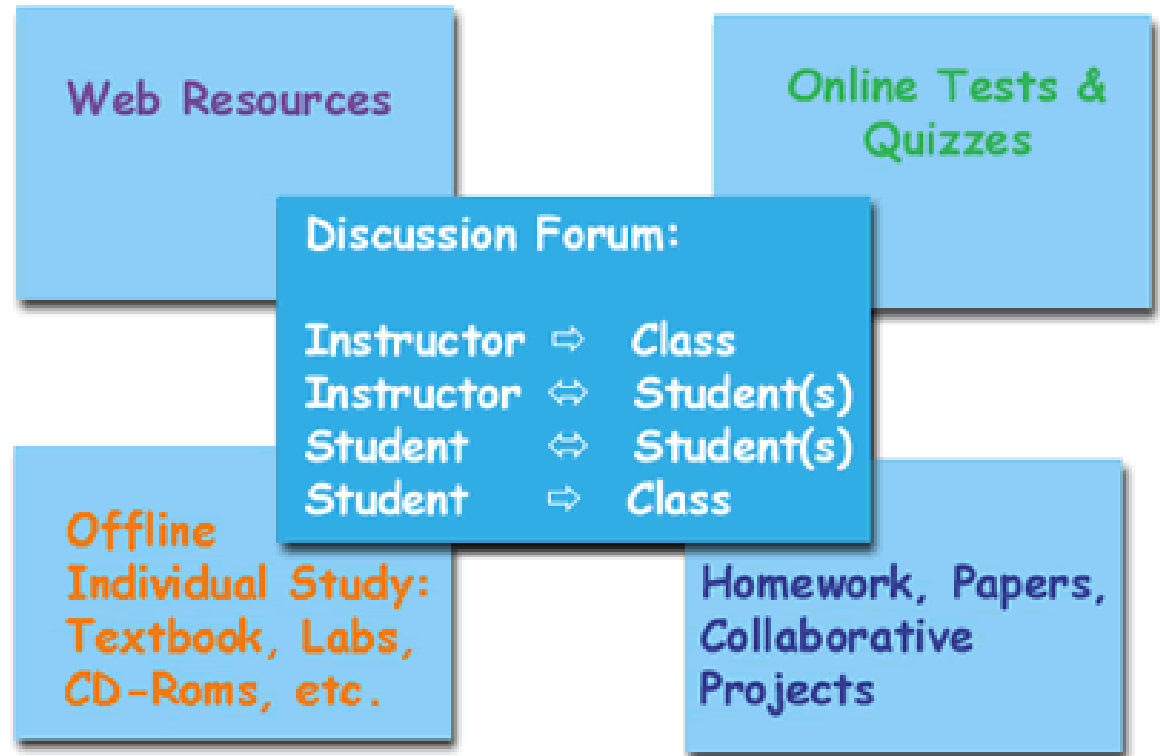
- Point your browser to <http://parkonline.org>
- Enter *student* as your Userid
- Enter *demo* as your Password
- Click *go to class*
- Click on the *Park University Demo Course*





# Online Courses Are...

- Time, Distance, and Device Independent
- Interactive
- Multi-medial
- Learner-directed



*Graphic courtesy of the Illinois Online Network*



# An Overview of Online Learning Scholarship and Research





# Implementing the 7 Principles:

## *Technology as Lever* ([Chickering and Ehrmann, 1996](#))

1. Frequent faculty-student contact
2. Reciprocity and cooperation among students
3. Active learning techniques
4. Prompt feedback
5. Emphasize time on task
6. Communicate high expectations
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning



# WCET's Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degrees

1. Institutional Context and Commitment
2. Curriculum and Instruction
3. Faculty Support
4. Student Support
5. Evaluation and Assessment

# Learning Styles in the Online Classroom

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# Beyond the Bells and Whistles

- Instruction



# Best Practices for Online Content Development

Before we get started, what would you *most* like to learn about putting your content online?





# Best Practices for Online Content Development

- Bloom's taxonomy as guide
- Other principles
  - Readability
  - Chunking
  - Interactivity
  - Assessment
  - Outsourcing multimedia



# Understanding Bloom's Taxonomy as Guide



- As teachers we tend to ask questions in the "knowledge" category 80% to 90% of the time.

Try to utilize higher order level of questions. These questions require much more "brain power" and a more extensive and elaborate answer.



# Utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy

- **Evaluation:** appraise, assess, choose, compare, estimate, evaluate, judge, measure, rate, revise, score, select, value.
- **Synthesis:** arrange, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, formulate, manage, organize, plan, prepare, propose, set up.
- **Analysis:** analyze, appraise, calculate, categorize, compare, contract, criticize, debate, diagram, differentiate, distinguish, examine, experiment, inspect, inventory, question, relate, solve, test.
- **Application:** apply, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, shop, sketch, use



# Utilizing Bloom's Taxonomy

- **Comprehension:** describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, locate, recognize, report, restate, review, tell, translate.
- **Knowledge:** define, list, name, recall, record, relate, repast, underline.



# Interactivity: Building Community

<http://coe.sdsu.edu/eet/Articles/k4levels/index.htm>

1. Use an informal communication style (this allows your personality into the conversation)
2. Don't immediately jump into course content. Allot time for students to explore the course content and meet their classmates
3. Design the first few exercises to force conversation between small groups of students
4. Have the students introduce themselves and tell something about their interests



# Interactivity: Building Community

<http://coe.sdsu.edu/eet/Articles/k4levels/index.htm>

5. Have students post their work in portfolios where peer feedback will be provided
6. Don't discourage social interactions in the class area, (or if the social interactions get too prolific, provide a space for social interaction)
7. Require participation in discussions
8. Design group projects to provide students with opportunities to engage in extensive Web-based interaction and communication with their peers ([Bonk, et al, 2000](#)), ([Lynch, 2001](#))"



# Assessment

- In assessing student learning online, we begin with the assumption that: "Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom" ([AAHE](#), 1996).
- In turn, we believe that ideally, one best evaluates student learning over time, with a variety of methods, by examining a variety of behaviors, to obtain as comprehensive picture as possible of what has been acquired, integrated, applied, and likely to be effectively applied in the future.
- The following chart identifies two types of assessment: Formative Assessment and Summative Assessment.

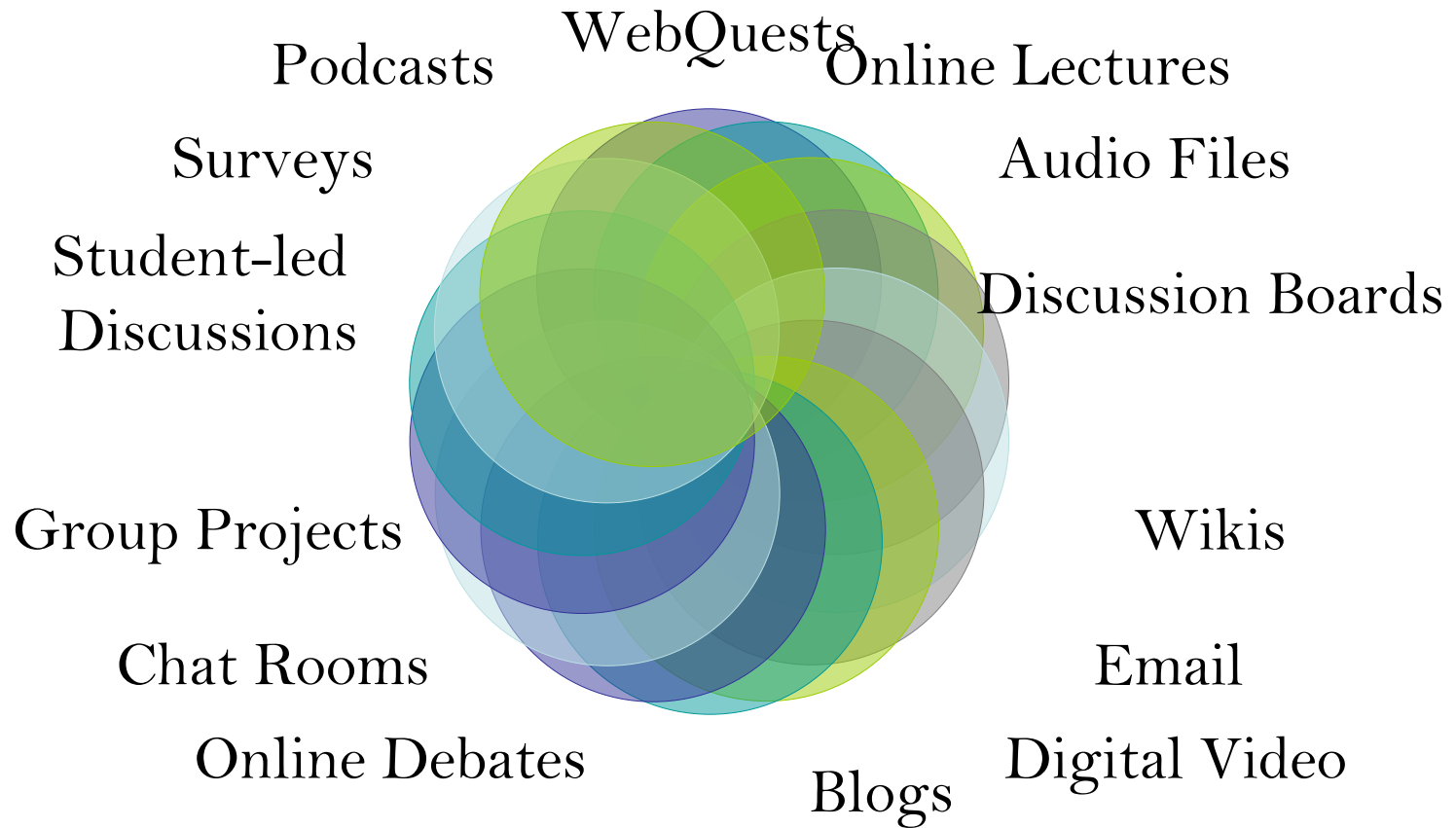


# Assessment

Formative	Summative
<p>Ongoing, repetitive, low-stakes assessment designed to provide information to the student and teacher concerning current level of understanding. Formative Assessment focuses on feedback, and provides opportunities for improvement.</p>	<p>Final outcome assessments designed to measure the level of knowledge or understanding gained by the student. Summative assessment focuses on achievement, and typically does not provide opportunity for revision.</p>



# Variety is the spice of life





# Outsourcing Multimedia

- Web Search:
  - Point your browser to: <http://www.merlot.org>
  - Click on *Browse Resources* to begin





# Consider Student Navigation

- Design patterned unit homepages
- Utilize a repeated, predictable learning cycle (each week contains: lecture, discussion, group activity, homework assignment)
- Design consistent templates for assignment pages, discussion threads, etc.
- Provide check-in points for longer assignments.



# Readability

1. Using Colors
2. FONT SELECTION
3. Length of Sentence/Paragraph.....
4. Chunking Text

# Readability



## Using Color

- Use with discretion
- Warm colors pop, (they almost seem to jump at the viewer)
  - Red,
  - orange
  - yellows
- Cold colors seem to recede into the background
  - Blues
  - Purples
  - greens

## Font Size

- Use larger font sizes for headings
- Use italics and color sparingly
- Avoid underlining (*to avoid confusion about whether or not the text is hyperlinked*)
- Most importantly, use visual cues, font faces, headings, and font sizes *consistently throughout your content.*
  - This consistency presents content in a professional manner and aids your students as they read your course content.



# Readability

- Length of sentence paragraph
  - Highlighted keywords/hyperlinks
  - Meaningful sub-headings
    - (not "clever" ones)
  - Bulleted lists
  - One idea per paragraph
    - users will skip over any additional ideas if they are not caught by the first few words in the paragraph
  - Half the word count than conventional writing
- Chunking
  - Numbered or bulleted lists
  - Horizontal lines
    - (used to place breaks between sets of material)
  - Content Items
    - if you have a large amount of text, you might consider placing the text in two content items, possibly broken up by a short quiz or discussion
  - Tables



# Accessibility

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- Follow web accessibility guidelines
- Consider students' technology
- Adhere to Section 508 (learners with disabilities) principles
  - Provide text-only alternatives
  - Write descriptors for images
- <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/508/508home.html>



# Brainstorming: Instructional Design

- Using the *Instructional Design Grid* provided, start brainstorming what each week of your new or redesigned online course will look like.
- Begin by thinking of those elements you want to include in *each* week.



# Best Practices for Online Content Facilitation (teaching)

Before we get started, what would you *most* like to learn about teaching online?





# Orient Students

- Encourage students to figure out if online learning is right for them
- Provide an orientation to the platform so technical concerns don't overshadow learning
- Be explicit about your expectations:
  - For participation in threaded discussions (including responses to peers)
  - For classroom conduct
  - Regarding timeliness and the pace of the course



# Build Community

- Send out a “welcome” email
- Create an “introductions” thread for students to post personal information
- Create a “students only” lounge
- Assign an “interview” assignment (assign each student someone in the class to interview)
- Post a lengthy instructor biography
- Create a virtual “office” with set “hours”
- Post a communication plan (the types and frequency of your communication; what students should do if they have problems...)
- Include your phone number



# Promote Active Learning

- Be an active participant in your course
- Make sure your discussion posts continue the conversation
  - Pose questions
  - Ask for clarification/extension
  - Quote other students
  - Post regularly but don't dominate the conversation
- Post weekly announcements and/or send out a weekly “welcome” email



# Provide frequent, predictable feedback

- Create rubrics for online discussions
- Create an evaluation template
- Update the gradebook on the same day each week
- Point students to support resources as needed
- Be conscious of “tone” in your written communication
- Consider a once-per-term phone call to students
- Allow students to provide feedback through informal and anonymous means