



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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EFFECTIVE FACULTY COMMUNICATION IN ONLINE LEARNING: WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE!

How did things go so wrong? When Dr. Adams (fictitious name) was hired as an adjunct faculty member to teach psychology online, he seemed so motivated and ready to work with students. As it turned out, that was not the case. His first course, a spring term PSY 110 General Psychology class, was full with 30 students and went off without a hitch. At first glance, the content was developed and seemed up to par. Wonderful! No problems!

The summer term went well, with no student issues. As summer moved into fall, noticeable changes began to occur. Dr. Adams was again assigned PSY 110 and had a full class of 30 students for the fall semester. But on the very first day of classes, a student in Dr. Adams' class called the Online Learning Department wondering why she could not access the class. Upon inspection, the course had not been opened as it should have been. He was e-mailed immediately to open the course. One mistake, I thought. It can happen to anybody.

Students began calling the first week in the semester with complaints. Dr. Adams was not responding to student e-mails. He was basically MIA. Then I called him. His tone was not overtly challenging, but rather passive aggressive. Now I looked into his course. No content! I notified the Dean of Online Learning, who called him immediately and removed him from the course, and a new instructor was hired. There was a great deal of angst in our department, and I felt much of it myself.

Would better communication prevent this from happening in the future? How could I apply principles of communication to online teaching and learning? As soon as a problem arises, pick up the phone, and make a call. Get to the root of the problem; talk and straighten it out. Emailing is not a clear and effective strategy for problem solving

The situation created a learning curve for our department. We began a process of systematic course reviews by utilizing a quality assurance grading rubric. The findings are shared with individual faculty members in the spirit of improvement. This has raised the level of communication with both full-time and adjunct faculty members.

The need for quality online instructors increases as online programs grow. Effective communication with online faculty strengthens relationships.

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TRANSFORMING THE ACCOUNTING CLASSROOM INTO A LABORATORY

As faculty and administrators, we can agree that student learning is our goal; and we must do what it takes to engage students while they are members of our learning environments.

So how do we “catch,” or engage, the 21st-century learner? Studies reveal that engaging the modern student includes transcending the boundaries of traditional pedagogy where professors use only chalk, board, and textbooks. While not compromising academic rigor, we must make the concepts and learning come alive. We can do this by transforming the accounting classroom into an accounting laboratory.

This transformation requires moving away from lecture and reliance on textbooks as course drivers to a more laboratory, or hands-on, approach to teaching accounting concepts. In an effort to examine innovative ways of teaching and collaborative education, Georgia Piedmont Technical College’s (GPTC) Starnes Center Retrofit Project was born.

The project is a living laboratory for our accounting, automated systems, heating ventilation and air conditioning, drafting, and engineering students. Student labor will be used to retrofit the Center and provide learning experiences. The accounting student is chief accountant for a hypothetical company, Control Systems Incorporated, which specializes in retrofitting older buildings for energy efficiency. The student is tasked with forming a limited liability corporation (LLC), setting up the chart of accounts, and making business decisions as they relate to pricing, hiring, and other operating activities. The student is also gaining exposure to other disciplines such as automated systems, heating ventilation and air conditioning, drafting, and engineering.

As a result of this project, accounting students will:

- Exhibit critical thinking skills
- Apply financial and managerial accounting techniques to various transactions in various accounting situations
- Display sound judgment when making decisions, seeking information, and facing unusual situations
- Demonstrate acceptable written, oral, and non-verbal communication skills
- Display a working knowledge of the project, and
- Display a working knowledge of other disciplines and their responsibilities as they relate to the project.

Finally, accounting faculty must deliberately begin revising their methodology and curricula to include rigorous inquiry and reflective analysis to help develop students’ ability to relate to and use knowledge for solving real-world problems.

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