Promoting Instructor Presence in Online Courses

Instructor presence is relevant in both face-to-face and online courses; however, promoting instructor presence in a virtual environment requires pre-planning and intentional course design choices. Listed below are strategies instructors can implement to be “visible” to students when teaching in a virtual environment. The strategies listed will impact the design and organization of the course, its facilitation, and the approach to direct instruction.

Design & Organization

- Organize course materials into modules.
- Present content in multiple formats.
- Create an accessible course introduction video.
- Be transparent to students about the timeframe within which they can expect a response.

Facilitating Discourse

- Send out a welcome email to students.
- Post announcements highlighting connections between course content, activities, and assignments.
- Facilitate critical thinking through online discussions.
- Model proper online discussion.
- Define a non-graded community building space in the course for students to connect around complex learning activities.
- Respond to student questions in a timely manner.

Direct Instruction

- Provide timely feedback that is clear and actionable.
- Clearly articulate course work instructions and expectations.
- Make connections to real world applications and provide clarification when needed.
- Reach out to struggling students.

“The ability to establish presence is closely connected to the ability of the instructor to create a sense of community among learners in an online course.”

- Palloff & Pratt, The Excellent Online Instructor, 2011