

Online classes offer benefits but require skills to teach

When I began my first online course as a student more than 10 years ago, I was excited to see how a traditional class would adapt to a new virtual environment. A month into the class, the sparkle faded. It was clear the course was not much beyond a self-study exercise. I felt cheated out of the education I had paid for. My expectations of what could be achieved in a virtual teaching environment were jaded to say the least.

As an early adopter who witnessed the shortcomings of online learning, I am pleasantly surprised by the many new tools enhancing the way lectures can be delivered online, whether at



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school or in the workplace. While teaching a traditional class recently, I found myself lecturing to a room full of students with glazed eyes. The concepts covered were complex, and it was clear students needed more time to jot down notes and really think about the ideas presented. This experience was

so profound that I decided to record all my lectures and make them available online. Students, in overwhelming numbers, thanked me for providing these video lectures.

Online education provides students several benefits:

- It is accessible anytime, anywhere.

- There are no time restrictions on covering the concepts.

- Students have the ability to pause, rewind and fast-forward a lecture.

I now use a hybrid teaching method, asking students to watch the lecture online before coming to class. With the foundations of the topic covered in the online lec-

tures, I am free to be more creative within the classroom for deeper learning. The overall grades of my class have increased, and fewer students are dropping or failing.

Education across the board is adopting online training. The Idaho Digital Learning Academy reports 98 percent of Idaho school districts have at least one student taking an IDLA course. Online learning continues beyond the classroom and has an impact in virtually every workplace setting. At some point in our lives, we will inevitably be tasked with introducing a new concept or process to improve work performance, document processes for

cross-training employees, or provide remote corporate training for an international audience.

Teaching online has two important aspects often overlooked. Online instructors must be proficient at using technology. Some instructors create their own websites. Other institutions have course-management software such as Blackboard. Learning the software is a significant time investment, and often only limited training is available.

How a subject is taught in a virtual environment is important. Instructors cannot simply take a traditional class and move it into an online format. If your online

strategy doesn't include teaching to all learning styles, you will not engage students, and the subject content will be lost.

Professional-development courses help new online instructors teach using differentiated instruction in an online environment.

Not only do we need to train teachers to teach online for the first time, but as technology develops, maintenance courses for online instruction will be necessary. So while teaching online can be rigorous, the benefits of its application are a staple in today's delivery of education.

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