Cool Tools

Best Practices

I recently googled best practices for online education and received about 44,000,000 hits on the internet. In this tsunami of information, I have come to the conclusion that there are several "best practices" which have been rated as such since colleges and universities started offering computer-based learning experiences. Here is my take on the most important ones.

1. **Organization:** any online class needs to be organized so that anyone can find his or her way around in your online class, especially those who have no experience with online education. Our students are a diverse lot, and this means that they have widely divergent aptitudes for technology. You should design your online courses for those who have little to no experience with technology as that will guarantee that those with more experience will have no trouble navigating in your course. The goal of online education is to teach, not to confuse.

2. **Communication:** communicate with your students often, and be clear in your communication. Have your students communicate with one another. The reason this is crucial is that all of the research I have read points to the fact that students are more likely to succeed if they have a sense of community in their online class. It is up to you to build this community by having frequent interaction with your students and by fostering interaction between your students. Failure to do this can result in poor student performance and a high dropout rate, neither of which is a goal we need to strive toward.

3. **Simplicity:** Try to keep things as simple as you possibly can in your class. Providing tons of material can be overwhelming to even the most seasoned student, so only include things which are relevant.

4. **Clarity:** Make sure everything has a logical title and all other course materials and directions are straightforward. Make sure there are no spelling or grammatical errors. Your class is a reflection of you and of Angelina College and needs to be as professional looking as you can make it.

5. **The "You" Factor:** Part of the reason any class is enjoyable is the teacher and the way he or she presents the course content. This is true of both face-to-face and online classes as the instructor's ability to do this can make or break any class. As the designer of the online course you should truly make the

class yours by making sure that you have a "presence" in the class. Get to know your students, and let them get to know you as well.

The best bit of parting advice I can give you about best practices it to try to see things from your students' perspective because having a class which makes sense for you is one thing, but having a class that makes sense to everyone is quite another.

If you have any questions on this or any other of Blackboard's cool tools, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Tom McKinney at extension 4522.