

Functionality tools: Time management approaches for facilitating an on-line course in Moodle



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Abstract

Teaching Web-based courses requires efficient time management and organizational skills of nurse educators. Faculty new to the on-line teaching environment may find the time demands related to facilitation of learning, student evaluations, and course communications greater than anticipated. This article suggests time management approaches, in the context of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) *Seven Principles for Good Practice*, using tools available in a learning management system.

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Courses offered through an on-line delivery format have emerged as a prevalent alternative learning environment that provides nursing students with flexibility as they work toward achieving their academic goals. However, the offering of on-line courses has added another facet to the role and responsibilities of the nurse educator. Teaching Web-based courses requires efficient time management and organizational skills. Nurse educators who are new to the on-line teaching environment may face overwhelming time demands related to promoting student learning, student evaluations, and course communications (Button, Harrington, & Belan, 2014). Limited current literature exists regarding time management approaches related to facilitating an on-line course. While originally developed to communicate best practices guidelines for traditional classroom instruction, Chickering and Gamson's (1987) *Seven Principles for Good Practice* can be translated for use in the on-line environment. This article suggests time management approaches, in the context of the seven principles, using tools available in a learning management system (LMS). Examples using

Moodle are provided; however, other on-line formats have similar features.

1. Learning Management System

Learning how to facilitate an on-line course is often described as a challenging experience (Du et al., 2013). Lack of faculty knowledge regarding the LMS may be a contributing factor of the significant time commitment experienced by faculty new to facilitating an on-line course (Button et al., 2014). The LMS serves as a technological platform for presenting course content, supporting engagement in learning, and evaluating student learning outcomes. Moodle is an example of one of the most common LMS (Capterra, 2014). Schnetter et al. (2014) suggest that a thorough understanding of the LMS's functions and capabilities contributes to enhanced faculty efficiencies. Thus, using a variety of functionality tools available in the LMS may improve faculty productivity while supporting principles of good practice. A variety of resources are available to assist the nurse educator in becoming familiar with the tools. For example, valuable information can be gained by visiting the LMS's product Web site (e.g., www.moodle.org). The nurse educator can also find

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helpful resources within his or her own institution's information technology service. This service functions as a point of contact for faculty technology needs and may provide orientation classes with practical application opportunities and standardized on-line learning modules. Often, this department will have a dedicated resource person (e.g., instructional technologist) to address specific questions and make suggestions for course enhancements using the capabilities of the LMS.

2. Activity Tools

As in the traditional classroom setting, nurse educators are responsible for promoting positive student learning experiences in the on-line environment. Good practice encourages active engagement that supports diverse ways of learning, contact between students and faculty, and the development of reciprocity and cooperation among students (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). However, developing effective on-line modules that require students to actively and purposely engage in the content may require more preparation time than classroom activities (Button et al., 2014). Nurse educators new to the on-line environment must carefully consider and address andragogical challenges not always encountered in the traditional face-to-face setting (Smith, Passmore, & Fought, 2009). Utilizing activity tools available in the LMS may improve faculty productivity related to interacting with students and developing activities that support exploration and analysis of concepts, sharing of ideas, and collaboration. Examples of activity tools available in Moodle include, but are not limited to, chat, forum, lesson, and wiki. To use an activity tool, the nurse educator would first click the "Turn editing on" button located in the course. Next, he or she would select "Add an activity or resource" in the course section where they would like to add an activity. A list of available tools will be displayed. An overview and examples of use for each tool can be found by clicking on each displayed option. The nurse educator can quickly scroll through the activity tools and identify the right tool for the proposed learning experience. After the appropriate tool is selected, prompts that guide the nurse educator during the development and delivery of the learning module are offered. Through using activity tools the nurse educator can streamline the process for incorporating a variety of learning experiences in the course that reflect best practice while addressing the unique challenges of on-line learning.

3. Assessment Tools

Students interact and participate in on-line courses in a variety of ways. For example, students may debate course concepts in a discussion forum, or collaborate and converse with peers via a wiki. Such learning activities create an environment that requires the nurse educator to approach assessment methods differently than in a face-to-face setting

(Smith et al., 2009). Good practice provides prompt feedback (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). As with all learning activities, nurse educators should be timely with grading student performance in the on-line environment. Given the lack of real-time interaction between students and the nurse educator, prompt feedback in an on-line course facilitates successful application of course concepts by students (King & King, 2010; Smith et al., 2009). However, on-line assessment of learning may require use of technology in a format the nurse educator is not familiar or efficient with. In turn, the nurse educator may experience an increase in time demands for providing prompt quality feedback (Smith et al., 2009). Utilizing assessment tools available in the LMS may improve faculty productivity in providing prompt and constructive feedback. Examples of assessment tools available in Moodle include, but are not limited to, gradebook, assignments, rubrics, and course reports.

3.1. Gradebook

In Moodle the gradebook can be accessed by clicking on the "Grades" link located in the "Administration" block of the course. This assessment tool can be set up so that it tracks and tallies the overall course points at face value. The gradebook can also be set up to automatically calculate percentage values that correspond with assignments that are weighted. In either case, the overall learner grade is tallied, automatically updated, and immediately visible to the learner with every value entered. This includes values entered directly or populated into the gradebook. Use of this functionality affords the faculty access to accurate real-time gradebook information, without the burden of cumbersome tally or data reentries in multiple programs. The course gradebook also allows for immediate review and reflection by course learners.

3.2. Assignments

Placing an assignment submission link within a course enables faculty to collect student work, review, and provide feedback within the LMS. Through this tool, the student can submit word-processed documents, spreadsheets, images, and audio and video files. To use this tool in Moodle, the nurse educator would follow the same procedures as previously discussed for using activity tools in Section 2. Using the assignment tool saves faculty from needing to directly enter values into the gradebook. Through the link inputted grades and faculty feedback comments directly populate into the gradebook. Thus, use of this tool allows faculty to efficiently evaluate performance and provide valuable feedback in a time-saving manner.

3.3. Rubrics

In addition to assignment submission links, Moodle supports the creating and/or embedding of standardized rubrics into

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