Stumbling Made Me a Better Online Instructor

"Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm."
– Winston Churchill

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Introduction

- The *QM* model is designed to infuse quality in the online classroom.

- This model is almost foolproof - - almost.

- The instructor plays an important role in completing quality assurance of the online course.

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Introduction

- The following case study documents how (a) one instructor inadvertently lost track of quality teaching and (b) found the path back to quality instruction through 20 actions items

What this presentation provides

- Summary of a course that was derailed

- 20 steps taken during the second semester to place the course and students back on track

Case study

- I've been in higher education for 30 years and teaching online for 20 years. Of course the amount of time doesn't mean quality teaching.

- Up until I accepted "*this one online honor's course*" my course evaluations were significantly above average - - - as in the 95% range.

Case study

- My courses regularly fill to maximum capacity and I am consistently asked by students for an overload, independent study and/or letter of recommendation.

- Students and faculty alike consider me an extremely talented instructor….and then "*this one online honor's course*" comes along.

Case study

- This course is a system wide course whereby the same syllabus and requirements are taught by every instructor.

- Two weeks prior to the beginning of the semester, the instructor received (a) the syllabus and (b) the LMS blackboard assignments.

- Due to limited time, the composition of course structure remained the same.

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Case study

The composition of the course is:

- 10 students

- All project-based assignments

- Students are required to meet with the instructor face-to-face at least twice during the semester

- They make an honor's website based on a research project and

- Present at a research symposium

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Case study

- In my regular courses I set mandatory deadlines with no exceptions

- In this honor's course, I allowed late assignments. I was more lenient with the students.

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Case study

- The justification for the leniency was based on:

    - the students were high achieving,

    - able to manage time, and

    - the course was for one credit.

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Case study

- In hindsight, students may have thought:

  - I didn't care

  - It didn't matter

  - It wasn't important

Case study

Instructor's communication with students included:

- Every weekday information was provided on the Announcement Board and sent to students' university email

- Reminders of assignments and due dates were repeatedly provided throughout the week

- If a student asked the instructor a question via email, an explanation was sent individually to the student and clarification provided on the Announcement Board and sent to students' email

Case study

During the one-on-one meetings, comments from some of the students include:

- I don't know how to complete a project,

- I am procrastinating, or

- I have everything under control I just don't hand in the assignments on time (i.e., the instructor is getting mixed messages)

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Case study

- During the one-on-one meetings, I ask them why they haven't mentioned these issues before….crickets could be heard in the room.

- I felt as if I always taking "one step forward…two steps back". Whereas I once considered myself a highly organized instructor, I now feel as if I am on the Titanic during the final last moments of the sinking.

The missing link - - - Connecting with the Students

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Case study

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End of semester course evaluations revealed that students:

- Didn't feel a connection with the instructor

- Felt there was little communication - - even though announcements were regular

- And didn't understand the assignments

The missing link - - - Connecting with the Students

Case study

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Realization from students' comments:

- I was making announcements and emailing students but not making "the vital connection"

- My willingness to accept late assignment may have been a sign that (a) I didn't care, (b) the assignment didn't matter or (c) the course isn't important

Case study

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Realization from students' comments:

- I was so busy learning the concepts of the course I didn't have time make the students #1 priority.

Result: step back, begin again with the basics – QM standards

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Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
1	Course copy is effective in providing a starting point.
	• Then build your course.
	• Make adaptations to fit your style.
	• Include photos to add flavor and personality.

Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
2	Never underestimate the amount of time a course will require based on the number of students. • A course with 10 students may take as much time as a course with 30 students. • The type of assignments and the students' needs dictate the time allocation.

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Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
3	Make feedback applicable and real. • Don't just copy and paste a generic statement. • "Good job" isn't meaningful. • Include statements from the student's assignment.

Lessons learned

N	Recommendation

4	When students don't hand in an assignment, email them.
	
	 • Let them know that you are:
	
	      • watching out for them and
	
	      • you care that they succeed in the course
	
	 • Remember that it is easy to "hide" behind a computer.

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Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
5	Don't assume students know how to read a grade book. • Make a statement on the announcement board when each assignment is graded. • If you keep the grade column as blank, meaning the student didn't hand in an assignment the student may think you didn't grade the assignment yet.

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N	Recommendation
6	When there are multiple assignments within the same week. • Place each day's assignment in a separate mini-Learning Module (e.g., Learning Module 2-A; Learning Module 2-B).

Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
7	Post assignment reminders on the announcement board. • Post a summary of the week's assignments on Monday. • Check in at least three times a week, preferable at the same time. • Send a copy of the announcement to students' university email account.

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Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
8	Place discussion board links within the Learning Module for easy access. • One discussion board link should be designated for "frequently asked questions" - - - students can pose questions to the instructor on this link. • A second possible link would be for student groups.

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N	Recommendation
9	Set a timeline for grading • Inform students when assignments will be graded (e.g., within three days after the assignment is due). • When assignments are graded, post an announcement on the announcement board. Encourage students to check his/her grade book.

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Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
10	Adhere to the timeline set for grading (e.g., 3 days) • Consistency is very important to students. • Now that a timeline has been set for grading, adhere to the timeline.

Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
11	Provide students with information on association of the relationship between the Learning Objectives and assignments. • Explain the relevance of the assignment to one or more Learning Objective. • The explanation could be included on the assignment document.

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Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
12	Be a broken record. • Throughout the semester keep reminding students of due dates and timelines. • Remind students if you (a) don't accept late assignment or (b) the penalty of a late assignment. • Availability of office hours and/or assistance.

Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
13	ADA compliance and Universal Design is not an option. • It is the law. • Online delivery must have closed captioning. • If you offer a video, you must have approval.

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Lessons learned

N	Recommendation

14	Interaction builds social presence.
	 • Interaction can be in three forms
	   • student-to-student
	   • student-to-instructor
	   • student-to-content
	 • Consciously build interaction into the syllabus.
	 • Make interaction mandatory, applicable and important.

Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
15	Encourage student interaction in additional to the mandatory interaction. • Offer student driven discussion sites for study purposes. • Wikis and online learning sites promote learning and social engagement.

Lessons learned

N	Recommendation

16	Complete a "deep dive" regarding the purpose of each assignment.
	
	• Make sure each assignment is:
	
	    • relevant to one Learning Objective;
	
	    • applicable to students' life and/or major;
	
	    • understandable; and
	
	    • fair regarding time and point system.

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N	Recommendation
17	Present a humanistic tone of voice in the communications. • Be friendly without being a friend. • Be professional without being a robot. • Give clear feedback. • Be positive and upbeat.

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Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
18	Check your email frequently throughout the day. • Today's students are used to immediate feedback. • Instructors need to be a bit more flexible when working with students. • Responding only on certain days or in the evening may be convenient, but it may be stressful for students.

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N	Recommendation
19	If you want netiquette to be offered by students, the instructor must always follow netiquette rules. • Avoid slang. • Make sure grammar and spelling are accurate. • Be professional when communicating with students.

Lessons learned

N	Recommendation
20	Give explicit instructions. • Just because students are technology savvy on a cell phone, it doesn't mean they automatically know how to operate the LMS. • Be specific on the time an assignment is due (e.g., 11:59EST). • Use grading rubrics.

Summary

- A new course and/or group of students can be:

  - an exciting adventure of learning or

  - send the instructor into a tailspin.

- If negative momentum builds and continues to gain, students lose out on a quality learning opportunity.

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Summary

Quality instruction *is not* influenced by:

- the number of students in a course,

- number of credits the course if offered, or

- length of time in higher education.

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Summary

Every semester and every course presents new challenges to offering quality education. We as instructors are responsible for:

- laying foundation for a quality course, and

- building roadways for interaction between students, instructor and content.

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Thank you!

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Questions?

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