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IF REMOTE LEARNING CONTINUES IN HIGHER ED, WHAT DO LEARNERS NEED TO SUCCEED?

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Although 'remote teaching' in higher education started as a stop-gap measure to ensure that students completed their half -to three-quarters-finished terms after stay-at-home orders loomed on the horizon, the extensions of stay-at-home orders has forced most institutions who want to offer summer classes to do so online. And educators anticipate that some or all of the courses this fall will be offered online, too.

Educational technologists classify this process of moving face-to-face classes online with the assistance of virtual classroom software like Zoom and WebEx to be *remote teaching.* It contrasts with *online learning*, which emerged from distance education and represents a more intentional approach to instruction online: courses specifically designed to achieve particular goals and be taken online, often at learners' own paces rather than through regularly scheduled class sessions. Although they have fundamental differences, remote teaching and online learning share certain similarities, such as providing the majority of instruction online.

Moving to remote teaching ensures that students have access to courses (assuming they have the equipment and Internet connections). But now that it is a more permanent fixture, how can students and their instructors ensure that students succeed in those courses? That is, how can students and instructors best support students in completing courses with satisfactory grades and, more significantly, having mastered the skills, knowledge, and attitudes taught in the courses? This is of special concern because the 'urgent' implementation, even of full-semester courses this

summer, has not allowed for the typical thought applied to designing a course from the start for online delivery.

The International Board of Standards in Training and Performance Improvement, a non-profit organization that develops standards for educational settings and job-related training, addressed this issue in earlier times and, through its research, identified the competencies needed by successful online learners. We prepared these competencies in response to related concerns and findings about online learning. Many higher educators believed that online learning is not effective, although Concordia University distinguished professor emeritus Robert Bernard and his colleagues published a convincing meta-analysis of hundreds of studies showing otherwise (since followed by several similar studies). But Bernard's study and later evidence from other researchers, such as Athabasca University instructor Dianne Conrad and Athabasca professor emeritus Terry Anderson, suggests that certain learning conditions do play a role in the success of online learning.

Our standards address one of those conditions: that students need certain competencies to succeed in studying online. Competencies are short statements providing a general description of a complex effort. The competencies for successful online learners fall into three broad categories: competencies in the personal, learning, and interaction domains of activity.

Personal domain pertains to the ability of learners to manage themselves in an online course. Because many online courses involve much self-study and limited interaction with the instructional team, learners need to "drive" themselves to ensure that they successfully complete courses. Specific competencies in this domain include:

1. Set realistic expectations for online study (such as how much time it takes and the need to set aside quiet time and space to study)

2. Maintain determination to achieve learning goals (that is, focusing on what you want to understand and be able to do as a result of the instruction)

3. Manage the challenges of online learning (such as extended email chains)

4. Manage time effectively (that is, setting and sticking to specific study times)

5. Comply with academic, ethical and legal standards (that is, locating and knowing the academic integrity guidelines)

6. Use technology proficiently (that is, select technology tools that support particular learning needs, such as organizing work on Google Drive)

Learning domain pertains to the ability of learners to take initiative for their learning—not only when things go smoothly but also to recognize when they have problems and seek assistance. Specific competencies in this domain include:

7. Be an active learner (that is, asking in-depth questions through threaded discussions, email, or synchronously)

8. Be a resourceful learner (that is, hunt down information rather than waiting passively for someone to serve it to you)

9. Be a reflective learner (that is, keeping a learning journal of what you learned and how you might want to apply this knowledge)

10. Be a self-monitoring learner (that is, identify when you're confused or having difficulty and initiating a request for help)

11. Apply learning interaction (that is, "making the most" of online discussions by interacting with other students to build an online relationship)

Interaction domain pertains to taking the initiative for, and effectively using the technologies, to work with the instructor and other students. Specific competencies in this domain include:

12. Engage in effective online communication (that is, use it to effectively to advocate for your position on course material, and your learning needs)

13. Engage in productive online interaction (that is, being familiar and comfortable with interactive technology tools)

14. Engage in collaborative online communication to build knowledge (that is, jumping right into collaborations so that you allow time for needed back and forth interactions)

In other words, to succeed at online learning, learners need to take initiative for their learning, keep up with classwork, meet deadlines, monitor the progress, ask for help with needed (and continue asking until they receive it), work effectively with their instructors and other students, and master the technology used in their instruction. It is up to both the student and the instructor, to ensure that the competencies are supported and developed to the necessary level to succeed.

Most of these competencies for online learners are the same as those needed to succeed in the traditional classroom, and many institutions address these issues through their student success programs and, for the institutions that have one, their e-learning units.

But because of the real concern about anonymity in online learning—that instructors might not pay attention to their remote learners nor would those learners make their presence known—the skills become even more important in ensuring successful learning. Instructors need to make more and more frequent outreach to students to minimize the likelihood of anonymity as well as build their awareness of resources for student success so instructors can refer students to

these resources should the need arise. By the same turn, online learners similarly need to make their presence known to prevent anonymity and to ensure that instructors address their learning needs.

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