Inside Independent Learning

Teamwork in Independent Learning

The Independent Learning Program's mission statement is to enable students to complete undergraduate degrees by: basing its curriculum around general-education degree requirements, providing students with any-time enrollment, and allowing students to work on their own schedules.

In order to achieve the goals stated in the IL mission statement, the IL Program depends on a team of professionals. Administrative members of the IL team are responsible for overall operation of the IL program, including details of registration, technical support, marketing, and instructional design. Instructional team members work closely with individual students to guide their learning in individual courses so they can achieve course goals.

Course instructors depend on their IL team members in administration to ensure that their courses are operating correctly, to field student questions, and to alert to newly enrolled students.

Members of the IL administrative team rely on course instructors to guide student learning (via D2L and iStudy) and communicate student progress clearly (via the official student record, LRMS/LVP).

The Independent Learning Program cannot function or achieve the goals articulated in its mission statement without the team-oriented approach to student services and instruction taken by course instructors and administrative staff.

Together, we help our students complete their undergraduate degrees by providing excellent curriculum, any-time enrollment, and a course schedule that can be tailored to each individual student's needs.

As we look back on 2014, we can be sure that many students were finally able to complete their undergraduate degrees and many more are reaping the rewards of successfully completing their IL courses.

Thank you for a wonderful year!

Announcing the Second Quarterly DCS IL Instructor Appreciation and Professional Development Meeting: A Working Lunch

February 19th from 1-3 pm Room 7045, 21 N. Park Street Madison, WI 53715

Annual IL Instructor Performance Evaluation

2014 initiated a period of positive change and growth for the Independent Learning Program that will continue into the new year.

One of the primary focuses of this change is increased instructor support and opportunities for professional development. The IL Instructor appreciation and professional development meetings are one aspect of this increased focus on instructor support and professional development.

IL Instructor performance evaluations will be another.

In January, the DCS IL Academic Program Coordinator will begin a pilot program for IL Instructor performance evaluations. The focus of these evaluations will be to identify individual instructor strengths and to help facilitate professional development in a few targeted areas.

IL Instructors will work directly with the DCS IL Academic Program Coordinator to identify instructional strengths as well as goals for professional development.

Throughout the year, instructors will be welcome to take advantage of professional development opportunities inspired by the performance evaluation pilot and encouraged to continue to develop their own instructional skills.

Together, we will work to ensure that Independent Learning remains a leader in asynchronous undergraduate learning.

Using Virtual Tools to Guide Student Learning

D2L Chat Function

D2L contains many tools that can be used by instructors to facilitate student learning. The Chat function is a tool that can be used for live-time "office hours" for one or more students. Using the chat function to meet with students is a great way to make yourself available to students for questions during designated times when you are working on other course tasks, such as assignment grading and feedback.

In D2L, you may see "Chat" listed in your menu bar. You may also need to click "More Tools" in the menu bar to see the Chat function.

Once you click on "Chat" you will be brought to the Chat page. If you have not used the chat function before, you will see that no chats are currently available in the "Chat List."

In order to create a new chat, click the "New Chat" button. Then, give your Chat a title. You can designate your chat as a "general chat," which will allow all users enrolled in the course to participate, or as a "personal chat." Designating a chat as a "personal chat" allows you to manually add or remove chat participants from the course member list. You can also add users from other course offerings to a "personal chat." This can be useful if you are facilitating a "new student" chat and teach multiple courses, or if you are providing instruction in a general topic (such as creating a strong thesis statement) to students in several different courses.

In the description field, you can enter a brief or more detailed description of the purpose for the chat. This description will be displayed with the chat title. You may want to include a designated "office hour" time in the description of the chat, or instructions to students regarding how to schedule live time "chat" office hours with you via email.

Click the "Create" button below the chat description box.

You have now created a chat room that students can use to meet with you virtually in real time.

Additional Tools to use when Guiding Student Learning

Unlike students in a synchronous course, IL students can work on learning their course material until they have mastered it. As an IL instructor, you have the unique opportunity to work with students at their own pace to help them master course material. At times, asynchronous email communication is not the most effective way to guide student learning. The D2L chat and discussion board functions are useful tools that exist within D2L. There are many other virtual communication tools available to you as an IL instructor that can facilitate synchronous communication with students.

Skype is a virtual communication tool that can be used at no cost . Many companies use Skype for interviews, and many families use this internet-based tool to stay in touch. You can use Skype for chatting or for making "calls" that can function as telephone calls or video conferences. If you do not already have a Skype account, you can sign up for one at not cost here: www.skype.com/en/

Il instructors with gmail or google accounts may prefer to use google's Home & Office tools while working with students. Google Docs, Google Slides, and Google Drawings can be created and shared with your student(s). This allows you to use the Google tool as a "blackboard" while you work with your student. Combining the Google tools with a Skype call can create an even richer learning experience for your student or students.

Google's social tools can also be used to create a richer learning experience for your students. The groups and hangout tools can be especially useful for instructors who wish to create a space that more than one learner can use at a time.

IL instructors who have a UW-Madison log-in can also make use of virtual conference tools housed in the my.wisc.edu portal. Once logged in, click "services" and "web conferencing." The web conference tool by Blackboard Collaborate allows IL instructors to set up individual conferences, determine the number of participants, and invite participants who do not have UW Net ID's. Some of the conferencing tools available to you in Blackboard Collaborate are: video and audio conferencing, large group chats, side chats, shared pages, private pages, shared documents, and a (blackboard) space that can be altered by participants in real time.

One of the best things about virtual conference programs is that they are constantly being developed and improved upon. A simple Google search will provide IL instructors with even more virtual tools that can be used to help facilitate student learning. If you use a virtual conferencing tool that you find to be especially useful, please feel free to share it with your IL colleagues!

Good Practice Reminder: Welcoming New Registrants

First impressions matter to IL students. Independent Learning research has shown that a student's success in a course is largely dependent upon the student's first impression and a student's experiences with the first few assignments.

This means that a student's likelihood of completing your course successfully depends on your first communications with the student. Taking a few extra minutes to ensure that your feedback on the first few assignments is especially supportive and encouraging can have a direct impact on how students read your feedback tone throughout the remainder of the course. Helping students begin their course with a positive attitude influences the student's entire experience in your course, their likelihood of completing your course successfully, and their impression of the Independent Learning program as a whole.

Sending each newly registered student a welcome email is an-other easy buy effective way to introduce yourself to the student, welcome the student to your course, and help the student create a positive start to the Independent Learning experience.

Sending welcome emails to each new registrant need not take more than a minute of your time; many instructors create a standard welcome letter and procedural documents that can be attached to the email and sent to each new student.

When you receive notification that a new student has registered for your course, take a minute to send the new student a welcome email. Personalizing the email for each student by typing their name in the salutation takes only a few moments, but tells students that they are important members of your course.

Authoring a welcome letter with a warm tone will make you seem more approachable and supportive as an instructor and will help pave the way for a positive instructor-student relationship.

Including an offer to help with any questions or concerns as the student begins work in the course underscores the importance of a collaborative instructor-student relationship.

D2L Gem: Linking Dropbox Feedback to the Grades Tab

IL instructors who teach D2L courses enter student grades in three locations: the official student record (LRMS/LPV), the D2L dropbox, and their payroll tally sheet.

D2L users can also view student grades in the Grades tab. Making use of the Grades tab function will allow students to monitor their own grade progress throughout the course. This is also an easy way for instructors to calculate student grades: once the grade formulas have been set in the D2L Grades function, D2L will calculate a student's final grade for you.

Using the Grades tab does not mean that D2L instructors need to enter grades in a fourth location; the dropbox can be linked to the Grades tab directly. This means that any grades and feedback you leave for students in the dropbox can be linked automatically to the student's record in the Grades tab. In addition to facilitating student monitoring of their grade in their course, viewing dropbox feedback in the Grades tab can give students a holistic view of their progress in the course.

All new D2L courses will have the dropbox linked to the grades function by default. However, existing courses may or may not already have this link set. If you currently teach a D2L course that does not automatically import your dropbox grade and feedback to the Grades tab, please let Sarah (skorpi@dcs.wisc.edu) know.

This link can be established for current courses upon request. The timeline of linking the dropbox to the grades tab for existing courses will depend on instructional design availability.

Ideas & Suggestions

Remember, if you have any questions or concerns that you think would be of interest to your IL colleagues, please submit them for future IL Newsletters.

Coming Next Month: The Fall Topic Series

Because all IL courses will soon be offered in D2L, the Fall Topic Series is dedicated to Getting the Most Out of D2L.
January: Assessments and Quiz Tools

If you have any helpful tips or hints that you would like to share with your IL colleagues, please be sure to let Sarah know by January 15. If you have any questions about D2L that you would like to see addressed in the Fall Topic Series, just let Sarah know.

Introducing: Jen Morgan

I am originally from the great state of South Dakota. I grew up there and attended Augustana College in Sioux Falls where I studied Spanish, along with German and French. I decided to attend graduate school to continue my study of Spanish at UW-Madison because I was happiest with a book in my hand – and graduate school seemed the best way to keep on reading! I thought that I just wanted to study literature, but after several rounds of being a TA, I found my passion in teaching language and my focus in applied linguistics and second language acquisition. I have been with Independent Learning teaching introductory and intermediate Spanish for 9 years. Although I do also enjoy traditional face to face teaching, I have found that working with Independent Learning students offers the unique opportunity to work with students from a variety of backgrounds. I enjoy the challenge of working with students with varied experiences and goals for their coursework. I have also enjoyed being a part of the transition from print-based courses to online courses and finding ways to incorporate technology to distance language learning.

Currently, I live in Lodi with my family – husband Thomas and three children. When I'm not teaching (or reading!), I moonlight as a taxi driver to various afterschool and weekend activities. I am active in our small town community through various volunteer positions through the kids' activities, church and schools. Living in Lodi is really the best of both worlds because we have small town life for the most part but can easily travel to Madison when we are looking for more excitement. We enjoy travelling as much as we can as a family. My husband performs in a band so we follow him all around the Wisconsin countryside in the summer, meeting new people, seeing new places, and listening to great music. I am typically behind the camera rather than in front of it so it was tricky to find a picture to include. The picture here is from a recent trip to South Dakota. I am with my sweet little niece, and we are waiting to welcome my brother home from his tour of duty in Afghanistan.