

Inside Independent Learning

Personalizing Your Course

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First impressions matter. This is true for restaurants, stores, and college courses. Students decide whether to complete or drop courses on campus based on their first impressions on their first day or week of class. The same is true for our Independent Learning students. Our research indicates that Independent Learning students who have a positive start to their course are more likely to complete it.

As an Independent Learning instructor, personalizing your course is one of the things you can do to help your students start out on a positive note in your course. It is also true that students who feel a connection to their instructor are more likely to have a

positive start to their course. Whether you teach a D2L or a print course.

There are many things instructors can do to help their students feel connected to the course and their instructor. Some examples include: welcoming new students to the course, making use of videos and photos, using a warm and supportive tone in all student communication,

and carefully constructing feedback to address a student's specific work and progress in the course.

Read on for some ways that you can make your Independent Learning course a personalized learning experience for your students.



Second DCS IL Instructor Appreciation and Professional Development Meeting

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

May 21st from 1-3 pm
Room 7045, 21 N. Park Street
Madison, WI 53715

In the chilly February weather, we again gathered to thank the DCS IL Instructors for all they do.

The online exam proctoring pilot is now well underway, with more course exams being put into D2L each week. Instructors who teach D2L courses can expect that their students will begin to have the option of completing exams online sometime this spring.

We also discussed ways to use assignment feedback as a teaching tool in IL courses. Effective feedback

is supportive, useful, and detailed. It is pitched to the student's current level of understanding. It focuses on "bright spots," or what a student is doing well, and offers encouragement & 1-3 suggestions of what a student can do to continue to improve their understanding of a concept. Instructors may want to make use of

a word document where common feedback comments can be compiled for quick, copy-and-paste use in the future.



Welcome New Students



When students register for an Independent Learning course, they receive a variety of standardized emails from Student Services. These emails welcome the student to their course and explain how they can access their course guides in D2L or print. However, there is no “first day” of class on which

students can get to know their instructor and begin to develop their expectations for the course. When a student registers for one of your courses, you receive notification of that registration via email. This notification contains the student’s contact information, including an email address. One great way to welcome new students to your course is developing a welcome email that you can easily

personalize and send to newly registered students. Your email should welcome students to the course and explain your expectations for their successful completion of the course. Depending on your own instructional philosophy, your welcome email may be short, or it may be lengthy. You may develop an attachment or a series of attachments that help guide your students through course expectations and beginning steps. You may want to include a photo of yourself, a brief audio recording, or a link to a welcome video. The most important aspects of a welcome email is that it fits your needs as an instructor (ideally minimizing your need to answer the same question(s) with each new registration) and it fits your students’ needs as new learners in your course.

You may wish to share your welcome email with Sarah, and even include her contact information for students in case they cannot reach you.

Using Video and Multimedia

Modern technology offers many options for making your course material more interesting and dynamic for today’s learner. Video clips and other multimedia resources can make the course a richer experience for students. In addition, using video in your course helps to personalize the class for your students.

A welcome video is a great way to introduce yourself to your students. Your welcome video can focus on yourself as an instructor or the general topic of the course. Often, seeing their instructor’s face and hearing their instructor’s voice helps students become more engaged with their

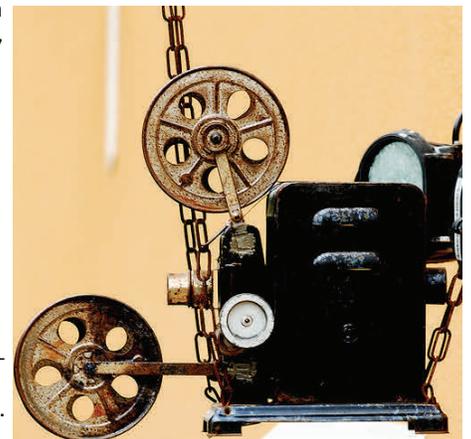


learning and coursework. They also begin to form a connection with their instructor, which makes the course feel more personal.

If you find yourself answering the same questions each time a new student enrolls in your course, you may want to consider making use of a video or multimedia presentation that explains these major concepts. Creating the presentation will take some time, but once finished, it should save you instructional time in the future.

As we revise the courses in the Independent Learning Program, we will be considering other uses of video and multimedia. As you revise your courses, please let us know if there are some general topics or concepts that may warrant the creation of a video “lecture” or a multimedia presentation. Including such resources is one way we can personalize the student learning experience and guide our students toward successful course completion.

Making use of audio and/or video files for student feedback is another way to make the learning experience more personal for your students. Instead of just reading your feedback, some students benefit greatly from hearing their instructor’s friendly voice relaying or reading



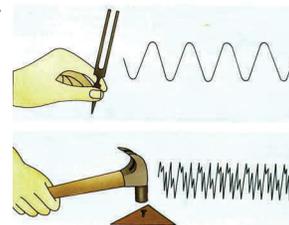
their feedback. Recording audio feedback in the new D2L is easy: There is an audio recording link right in the dropbox. Instructors may also use recording software on their computers to record audio or video files and upload them to the dropbox. Often, instructors find that leaving audio feedback is more efficient and less time-consuming than leaving written feedback. It also allows for a conversation of sorts between instructor and student.

Good Practice Reminder: Instructional Tone

Tone refers to the way we convey our attitudes in writing through sentence structure and word choice. Careful consideration of sentence length, sentence composition, and word choice can help to convey a professional tone in written communication with students. Before beginning to compose feedback or an email reply to a student, take a moment to consider how you would like the student to feel when the message is received and read. Is it affirmative feedback on written work? Students should feel proud of their efforts this far and motivated to continue on in the course. Are you dealing with an academic integrity issue? If so, students should feel the gravity of the communication. If your tone is wrong in the written communication you send your student, your student may not be able to understand your meaning because they will be focusing

on how the communication made them feel. This can lead to miscommunication, misunderstanding, or even lack of desire to continue work in the course.

Before sending any written communication to a student, it is worth pausing for a moment and re-reading the message. Consider how you feel when composing the message and how you would feel if you received the message. Make any adjustments to the tone of the message that are needed so students will be able to hear *what* you are saying and your message will not be drowned out by *how* you are saying it.



D2L Gem: Leaving Course Feedback

Beginnings are important for student success in their Independent Learning course. Endings are important for final impressions. Students may decide to take or not take another Independent Learning course based on how they feel at the end of a course. They may also decide to suggest that friends and acquaintances consider or avoid taking an Independent Learning course based on how they feel at the end of a course. Student impressions of a course are not necessarily tied to their final grade; students who earn a grade of C in a course but had a positive learning experience are more likely to be content with the learning experience than a student who earns a B but felt disconnected throughout the course.

One way instructors can impact student's final impressions of the course is by leaving final course feedback in the D2L grades tab.

In the past, students may have received no course feedback, a standard final exam report with final course grade, or an email summary of their work in the course. The D2L Grades tab has a convenient tool for

leaving students final course feedback.

In the D2L Grades tab, click on a specific student name. At the top of the record, under the bold "Final Grade" heading, you will see a small link titled "Show Comments." Click on this link

you leave in the "private comments" field will be visible only to you and the Academic Program Coordinator.

The course feedback field is a great place to leave well wishes for the future and possibly suggest the next IL course in the sequence. For example:

"I wish you all the best in your future endeavors. Should you be interested in taking Third Semester Finnish, I hope that you will consider Independent Learning again. Your second semester coursework has prepared you well for the next course in the Independent Learning sequence." If you teach the next course in the sequence, you may even wish to add: "I would welcome the opportunity to work with you again."

As with all written communication, the main goal of course feedback is leaving feedback that is supportive, useful, and detailed. It is true that not all students will access their final course feedback in D2L. However, leaving course feedback in D2L is a professional way to wrap up the course. Motivated students who are accustomed to checking D2L for assignment and exam feedback will appreciate this positive closure to their Independent Learning course.



to view the Feedback field for the final course grade. This is a great place to leave feedback for the students about their performance in the course as a whole. You will also see a field titled "Private Comments." Any comments

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.

Save the Date:

Next DCS IL Instructor

Meeting:

A Working Lunch

May 21st, 1-3 pm

Room 7045, 21 N. Park St.

Madison, WI

31st Annual Conference on Distance Teaching & Learning

August 11-13, 2015

Madison, WI

I was born and raised in Long Beach, California and have been fascinated by books and what's in them since my earliest recollections. I received my primary and secondary education principally at St. Anthony's, a regional Catholic grammar school and high school in Long Beach. It was at St. Anthony's that I made my first academic acquaintance with Latin, but without too much success, I'm afraid, since I found myself overwhelmed by all the cases and conjugations. I did a better job of it, however, upon graduation and my entrance into the Discalced Carmelite Order, where one of my first tasks was to show mastery and competence in Latin as a preparation for intensive work in Philosophy and Theology over the next seven years. Upon leaving Carmel and armed with a

Coming Next Month: Spring Cleaning

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 March 15. If you have any questions that you would like to see addressed in future newsletters, just let Sarah know.



Introducing: Matt Hogan



bachelor's and master's degree, I began in earnest my training in Classics, Latin and Greek, at Tulane University in New Orleans, LA. Tulane only offered a master's program in Classics during my time there, so I later moved on to the UW-Madison to continue my work in pursuit of the PhD. And I've never looked back: the UW Classics Department offered just the program I was looking for—one that combined continuous teaching along with my own research. It was in the course of my graduate studies here that I began work with the Independent Learning Program, teaching Classical Mythology. After graduation and a semester's teaching at Beloit College, I accepted a position as editor with Frederick Cassidy's *Dictionary of American Region-*

al English, where I was content to stay put for many years, expanding my association with Independent Learning from Classical Mythology (370), to Greek (103/104), Latin (103/104/203/204), and Classics 205: *The Greek and Latin Roots of Medical & Scientific Terminology*. It has always been a special pleasure working with Independent Learning students and especially exciting, too, to work with the challenge of moving from print-based courses to ushering in online courses and enriching distance language learning by accommodating it to ongoing technological innovation.