



Best Practices for Online Teaching in Textile and Apparel Education

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Keywords: Online, pedagogy, preparation, resources, teaching

Online courses are increasingly common in the textile and apparel discipline, but there are currently no dedicated forums or publications that textile and apparel professionals can consult for guidance regarding best practices for online teaching. The purpose of this seminar session was to create a space in which online course materials and teaching experiences could be shared to move forward with a monograph publication and/or teaching collection available for ITAA members. The session took place in small group discussions with the following topics:

Deciding if online teaching is right for you. Participants acknowledged that there are benefits and challenges to online teaching that must be considered. A benefit of online teaching is that students are already immersed in technology on a daily basis. Online teaching is generally favored for more theoretical subjects. Ideally, an online class would function best with around 15 students; most online courses have 25-50 students. It is the theoretical courses that often have a higher enrollment. A smaller enrollment is better for quality and quantity of communication between the instructor and students. Such communication can be aided by video conference calls with students. A significant challenge for online teaching is the time necessary for course preparation. Time must be spent editing videos, monitoring student performance, and preparing and/or converting materials. Online courses can be beneficial for helping instructors to become more comfortable with current technology. Online teaching may be challenging in more rural areas that might experience internet connectivity issues.

Getting started with online courses and course preparation. The process by which online courses get started varies by institution. It is often the case that undergraduate courses must be offered in person first and a second section of the course later developed for the online environment. It was suggested that instructors begin with learning objectives and then develop teaching strategies when preparing an online course. Participants discussed the importance of assessing student learning needs when preparing an online course. It was suggested that a course be offered as an independent study first to allow for in-depth student feedback. Students are then assisting with the development of the course. However, it is not always possible to offer an independent study; pre- and post-surveys could be used instead. Pilot testing is another option for obtaining feedback before an online course goes live. If formal measures of this nature cannot be taken, course evaluations could be used as a form of feedback at the end of a course and factored in to future course offerings. Participants and attendees focused upon the idea that it is easier to start an online course from scratch rather than adapt existing materials from an online course.

Variations of online teaching and learning. There are a variety of options when choosing how to conduct an online course: hybrid, flipped classroom, and online. Another variation includes having a distance instructor video conference with students who are physically present in a classroom. Each variation must be evaluated against the learning objectives of the course.

Using and adapting existing resources. The discussion of using and adapting existing resources focused upon careful planning prior to the offering of an online course. Participants discussed the importance of training before teaching online because it isn't enough to "dump" face-to-face course material in to an online course. Further, it is important to stay current with training due to the frequent pace at which technology changes. The learning platforms and resources used by participants included online tutorials produced by individual universities, CAD software, iTextiles, live museum tours, YouTube videos, Wild Ginger software, Blackboard, Canvas, Camtasia, and Quality Matters. Quality Matters was stressed as an important resource for training. Resources are more difficult to personalize in the online environment, but resources are generally not all that different between face-to-face and online environments. Participants agreed that listening to students and obtaining their feedback is crucial to the success of a course that is moving from a face-to-face to online environment.

Content and assignment design. Participants emphasized the need to teach students how to learn online as much as teaching them how to learn the course content. It was suggested to have a couple of brief tutorials at the start of the class for how to succeed as an online student. Much of the discussion focused upon how to engage students in meaningful assignments; students often complain about the popular online activity of discussion boards. Different techniques for administering discussion board assignments were discussed.

Coordinators, participants and attendees came back together for a large group discussion after covering the aforementioned topics. The group addressed the question of if online courses are important to have. The majority of participants agreed that this is an increasingly important question to ask in the current budgetary climate of higher education. More and more classes are being offered online to collect additional tuition. The question of importance was also addressed within the context of soft skill development; participants and attendees agreed that online

engagement can hinder the development of such skills. It was suggested that more emphasis be placed upon how to build soft skills in the online environment. The larger discussion also focused upon the need to be flexible, available and detail-oriented as an online instructor. It was suggested to create the course a few weeks at a time and make changes as the class dynamic becomes apparent. Participants also emphasized the need to be personally available to students and meeting students at their level and/or comfort zone. For example, students often flock to Google to find information so incorporating it as a starting point for research could be beneficial.

The session concluded with a discussion of next steps; the development of an ITAA online teaching forum or a yearly online teaching session at conference were favored. Attendees expressed an interest in having a forum in which to get feedback regarding online teaching questions and ideas that is casual and not peer-reviewed. The topics contained in this proceeding will be evaluated by session coordinators and participants for monograph and online teaching forum development.