5 Ways to Build e-Learner Confidence with Low-Stakes Grading

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Presented by:

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“5 Ways to Build e-Learner Confidence with Low-Stakes Grading”
Scott Warnock, Drexel University

Frequent Low-Stakes (FLS) Grading Dos and Don’ts
When introducing an FLS strategy into your courses, you should

- Think about ways of giving lots of grades to create a grade-based dialogue with your students.
- Use low-stakes assignments that directly connect with specific course goals and objectives and help build learner confidence and motivation.
- Use smaller, informal writing assignments to encourage your students to take intellectual risk.
- Incorporate frequent, user-friendly quizzes that are focused on specific learning objectives.
- Re-think your overall grading scheme, integrating elements such as quizzes or informal writing into your course requirements, perhaps lessening the weight of your exams or major papers.
- Use learning technologies.
- Use rubrics to demystify grading (see below).

You should avoid

- Basing your final grade on a few large, high-stakes assessments.
- Using quizzes and similar assessments as a pedagogical stick.
- Overcomplicated assessment measures for informal writing.
- Creating quizzes and similar assessments that are tricky or complex, especially if you are going to use many of them during a term.
- Losing sight of your purpose!: If you want students to write to demonstrate their understanding of a key component of a chapter, keep that purpose in mind when you evaluate their work.
- Allowing your use of many informal assignments to create a time burden, because if using many small assignments becomes a time burden, then you won’t use an FLS grading strategy next term!
Quick rubric guide for informal writing assignments

First, what do you want the assignment to accomplish?
- Your answer should be based specifically on course/unit/class goals.
- You need a clear view of these goals to create a useful/usable rubric.

Decide on simple, straightforward areas to assess.
- One or two clear criteria could be enough for a rubric that helps you evaluate informal writing assignments.
- Again, make sure the criteria are integral to the overall assignment goals.
- In many cases, these criteria should be content-oriented & very specific. For example, a short response to a reading could have these two criteria:
  - Demonstrate understanding of the chapter (1 to 5 scale)?
  - Quality of writing (1 to 5 scale) (judged loosely, maybe your readerly response: Did you not understand part of this because of writing mechanics?).
- A key question is this: What don’t you want to worry about? You don’t want to assess everything, or you’ll end up getting frustrated with the use of rubrics – and the use of informal writing.
- Participation, length aren’t great criteria, but they’re something you can work with for a short assignment.

Decide on a number of performance levels for your criteria.
- Develop four or five levels of performance.
- Use simple, clear language: E.g., Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Unacceptable.

Decide what you want say or how you want to respond to examples of a range of student responses.
- This part can be tricky.
- What do you say to the student who has performed best for a given criterion? What do you say to the student who has done poorly?
- Again, the language in your rubric responses should be clear – and this will help you think about the way you are envisioning the assignment in the context of their learning.
Resources and References

http://www.jonathanthughes.com/edu5650/Articles/2Amrein-Effects%20of%20High%20Stakes%20Testing....pdf


http://cusd.capousd.org/edusupport/Deptservices/Education%20Division/PLC/Classroom%20Assessment.pdf


http://www.hastac.org/blogs/cathy-davidson/how-crowdsource-grading

http://wac.colostate.edu/books/language_connections/

http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/05/03/grading


--. Online Writing Teacher. Onlinewritingteacher.blogspot.com.


Lessons Learned From an Online Service-Learning Pilot

By Rob Kelly

Davenport University is considering an experiential learning requirement for all its programs, including those offered entirely online. To explore how this might work, Wayne Sneath, director of experiential learning, worked with English professors Adrienne Lewis and Melissa Lewis on a service-learning pilot in an upper-level professional writing course.

Both instructors had successfully implemented a service-learning component in face-to-face versions of the course, where students produced professional documents for not-for-profit organizations. “When we do service-learning, we try really hard to make a really tight connection to the outcomes of the course so they can get the most out of it and are able to walk away with a professional portfolio piece,” Adrienne Lewis says.

The online service-learning pilot consisted of two models: a group model in which students worked collaboratively with an instructor-assigned community partner, and an individual model in which students worked by themselves on projects of their own choosing with partners in their home communities.

When dealing with service projects such as the ones in this course, distance is not an issue when selecting a community partner because the indirect service of producing brochures, PowerPoints, newsletters, flyers, and other kinds of professional documents does not require on-site work on the part of the students.

One of the challenges of offering online and face-to-face service-learning is Davenport’s seven-week accelerated course format. This format necessitates a highly structured learning experience. Week one features an introduction to service-learning. In week two, students learn how to select a partner. By week three, students should have assessed the partner’s needs, developed an appropriate project, and submitted a proposal to the instructor, identifying the organization, its needs, and the scope of the project.

Group vs. individual projects

Melissa Lewis, who used the group model in her section, assigned groups of three or four to partner organizations that she thought would be the best match. For example, students in the health field were assigned to work with a free

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Managing Controversy in the Online Classroom

By Rob Kelly

Controversy can erupt in any learning situation, and knowing how to manage it is an important skill for any instructor. Online instructors need to be aware of the following challenges when it comes to managing controversy:

- **The asynchronous format.** An instructor in a face-to-face course can defuse a conflict as soon as it arises. "In an asynchronous online conversation, if a student says something and you don’t notice it right away but other students do, they may pounce on the student, and you can get emotions flaring and words going back and forth," says Cristy Casado Tondeur, whose online courses in African-American history and women’s studies often generate their fair share of controversy.

- **Potential misinterpretation of predominantly text-based communication.** In addition to the asynchronous format, the reliance on text-based communication in most online courses opens the door to misinterpretation due to not seeing or hearing the students. When a message is only text, students may interpret its meaning based on assumptions and stereotypes, Tondeur says.

- **Relative anonymity.** One of the strengths of the online classroom is that it can empower students who might be uncomfortable speaking up in class to express themselves in the discussion forums. There is a downside to this relative anonymity—what LaTasha Gatling, who teaches African-American history and African history, calls "Internet thugs," students who feel free to post whatever damaging, hurtful, or incendiary messages they care to with impunity because “they don’t know who I am.”

Controversy is inevitable and sometimes productive. The key is to know how to manage it effectively. Tondeur and Gatling offer the following techniques.

**Anticipate controversy and set expectations.** “In my first post, I tell students that in this course we’re going to talk about issues that they’re going to be uncomfortable with; however, it’s part of the learning process. I ask them to throw away any stereotypes they may have because stereotypes often get in the way of us opening our minds to something new. I ask them to be mindful when they are typing certain words or phrases because they can be hurtful,” Gatling says.

Icebreakers can also be an effective way to prepare students to interact productively and respectfully in the online learning environment. As an icebreaker, Tondeur asks students to post answers to the following questions: What was the best concert you’ve attended? Who would you want to interview? What is your favorite movie? Besides fulfilling a requirement, why are you taking this course?

It’s an activity that lets fellow students know something about one another. This information is also useful to Tondeur as she looks for ways to illustrate concepts that her students will find interesting and relevant.

Tondeur also posts a video introduction of herself to let students know more about her and to invite students to share more about themselves.

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Look for signs of conflict and unease. Some conflict is immediately recognizable in the online environment through heated discussion board posts. But not all controversial issues bring out interpersonal conflict. Sometimes thinking about controversies can elicit internal conflict and strong emotions. Instructors need to be able to recognize signs of this. These signs can include changes in the quality and quantity of posts. Long posts may indicate a student’s attempts to come to terms with a controversy. Short ones may indicate a reluctance to discuss a particularly difficult issue. Some students will contact you directly and let you know they are upset.

Be supportive. When students get upset, they may need extra support, which can be given in a variety of ways. “When I have students who reach out to me one-on-one and say they have become so upset that they cried, I let them know that this is a part of growing. As we grow, we learn things about ourselves. I engage them to find out what exactly caused them to react so strongly,” Gatling says.

These conversations can be conducted via email, but sometimes it helps to connect in more immediate ways via telephone or Skype. “One of the things I do with a student having a hard time is Skype. We can have this conversation live so it’s more personal, so they don’t feel like I’m out there somewhere in cyberspace,” Tondeur says. “Sometimes students need that extra emotional support. They need to debrief. That’s very important if you’re going to be teaching topics that are controversial. If you’re going to invite that controversy, you will have to deal with it when it comes knocking on your door. Not all instructors would be comfortable with that.”

Directly address interpersonal conflict. Interpersonal conflict can occur at any time in an online course. It can unfold within minutes or over a period of days. Left unchecked, it can hinder learning. Tondeur recommends acknowledging conflict as soon as possible. She uses an informal approach and says something like, “Wow! I see you’ve had a very good conversation over the weekend. It seems like it was pretty intense.” “If you insert that at the beginning, then they don’t think you’re blowing them off or not paying attention,” she says.

In some cases, it helps to ask students to take a break to cool off before the conflict escalates. Throughout a conflict, it’s important not to take sides, because this could alienate students. “It’s a tricky road to navigate. How can I make students understand that I understand where they’re coming from or why a person feels the ways he feels but also why that is problematic? How can I make the student feel like her voice isn’t being silenced?”

Encourage critical thinking. Controversial issues stir up strong emotions, and students often base their opinions on these feelings rather than on facts. Gatling encourages and reminds her students to come up with their own opinions based on facts versus feelings. “It can be really hard but really rewarding,” she says.

Provide a space for difficult questions. Tondeur encourages students to post difficult questions for discussion. “That’s where you see how a student is processing [the content]. They’ll ask something like, ‘How could people behave this way [referring to slavery] if they were Christians?’ And I’ll respond with something like, ‘This is a great question, but let’s remember we need to put it in its historical context. If you look at history and the way race was viewed during those times, does it help you understand how this happened?’”

Use podcasts. Tondeur uses video podcasts to respond when students express problematic views or when she wants them to pay close attention to a particular issue. The video format adds emphasis and reduces the possibility that students will misinterpret her message.

For more information
LaTasha Gatling and Cristy Casado Tondeur along with colleagues Tom Leamy and Linda Rhoades-Swartz, will lead the workshop “Stirring the Pot: Addressing Controversial Issues in the Online Classroom” at The 9th Annual Teaching Professor Conference. The conference will take place June 1-3 in Washington, D.C. For information, see www.teaching-professor.com.
Designing and Teaching with Returning Adults in Mind, Part 1

By Patti Shank, PhD, CPT

Many of the learners in today’s online courses are adults who are returning to school to upgrade their qualifications. Understanding their needs puts you in a better position to tailor your strategies and help returning adults be as successful as possible.

Learner analysis

When designing training courses for organizations, one of the things instructional designers (like me) do to make sure the training fits the needs of the intended audience is an audience analysis. Some of the questions instructional designers might ask during a learner analysis for an online course include:

- Who are the intended learners for this course?
- What demographics should we be aware of?
- Why are learners taking this course?
- What do they already know about this topic?
- What topics will be most difficult, and what extra support will they need?
- What expectations will learners have?
- What resources do learners need and have?
- What experience do they have using course tools and technologies?
- What is their level of computer literacy?
- How fast an Internet connection do learners have?
- What computer support will they need?

Download these questions as a template at www.magnapubs.com/oc-learner-template.

I highly recommend that higher education organizations conduct a similar analysis of returning adults (through interviews, surveys, and focus groups). The solutions I’ll be talking about in this series of articles will be at the instructional level.

General characteristics of adult learners

Returning adult students come with a host of life experiences and expectations that tend to be different from those of younger college students. And yet, when I look at typical online higher education courses, I often see courses that don’t seem to be designed and taught with these kinds of students in mind. Faculty and institutions that don’t take into consideration adult learners’ unique wants and needs are more likely to experience lower involvement (which means reduced learning) and reduced retention.

Adult learners come into online courses with a wide variety of life and work experiences. They expect to be able to draw from their wealth of skills and knowledge and relate to their experiences while learning.

Adults want to know why they are learning something and how it applies to their lives, experiences, and goals. Adults are willing to understand the theory after they understand the practical application.

The following table contrasts some of the most important ways that younger and adult college students differ.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Younger Students</th>
<th>Adult Students</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seek a degree because it’s the next step on their path</td>
<td>Seek a degree to deal with an important life change or to complete an important life goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete courses because they’re part of the curriculum</td>
<td>Expect courses to add to life or career goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do what is expected to complete the course</td>
<td>Have their own goals for education in mind and participate based on these expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know the application for what is being learned</td>
<td>Expect direct application for what is being learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depend on others to design learning</td>
<td>Accept responsibility for learning if it is perceived as related to their needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See completing the degree as the desired end</td>
<td>Have in mind a specific need for the knowledge or skill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adults therefore approach learning far differently than younger students do. They bring more and expect more. They require learning to make more sense to them, and they expect far more direct application.

Apprehensions of adult learners

Despite the life experiences that adult learners bring to the online classroom, adult learners also bring complex anxieties. Those who have not been students in a while worry about remembering how to learn and study, coupled with myriad anxieties about learning online, especially if they don’t have excellent technical skills. Those with lesser technical skills will be worried about using the online classroom environment, producing electronic assignments, and communicating with their instructor and classmates.

Those who are juggling family, career, and social commitments and are returning to school for the first time in

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Frequent, Low-Stakes Grading: Assessment for Communication, Confidence

By Scott Warnock, PhD

After going out for tacos, our students can review the restaurant on a website. They watch audiences reach a verdict on talent each season on *American Idol*. When they play video games their screens are filled with status and reward metrics. And after (and sometimes while) taking our classes, they can go online to www.ratemyprofessors.com.

Today’s students grew up in a culture of *routine assessment and feedback*. Yet when they click (or walk) into our courses, the experience is often quite different: there are few high-stakes grades, big exams, or one-shot term papers. Despite critiques of high-stakes testing — Wideen et al. (1997) said such “examinations discouraged teachers from using strategies which promoted enquiry and active student learning […] this impoverishment affected the language of classroom discourse”— teachers often still see “assessment as an index of school success rather than as the cause of that success” (Chappuis and Stiggins, 2002).

Certainly, grades, when misused as what Filene (2005) calls a “pedagogical whip,” can lead to problems: Grading curves pit students against each other, fostering strategic rather than deep learning (Bain, 2004). High-stakes grading may contribute to grade inflation (Rojstaczer and Healy, 2010). Grading pressures may even encourage cheating.

I offer the strategy/philosophy of frequent, low-stakes (FLS) grading: simple course evaluation methods that allow you to provide students with many grades so that an individual grade doesn’t mean much. FLS grading can work in any course but is especially useful online, as it provides grade transparency for students and creates a steady information flow. FLS grading can have several advantages:

- **It creates dialogue.** Frequent grades can establish a productive student-teacher conversation, and students have an ongoing answer to the question, “How am I doing?”
- **It builds confidence.** Students have many opportunities to succeed, and there is a consistent, predictable, open evaluation structure.
- **It increases motivation.** FLS grading fits into students’ conceptions of assessment and evaluation.

While some may resist grade-centric approaches, remember, in ideal teaching, perhaps *everything* is formative and you have small ratio, even one-on-one, interactions with students. Maybe there are even no grades at all. But such ideal environments are rare. We must give grades, so the issue is how we grade to the benefit of students.

We need strategies to provide online students with meaningful communications about the course, and what is more meaningful to students than clear grade data? Frequent grade information also provides motivation, another especially important factor in online student success (i.e., see Schrum & Hong [2002]). Frequent, immediate grade data should help students overcome procrastination far better than that delayed reward of the grade far off in week 12.

FLS grading does mean that you will re-conceptualize the grading function in your course, and while FLS grading has a summative micro structure, the overall structure is formative. You can remove unproductive grading pressure, encourage intellectual risk-taking, and discourage plagiarism/cheating. And especially online, your overall response strategy will include this grade-based dialogue with your students.

You can still have your major papers and exams, but with FLS grading, a series of low-stakes assignments helps uncover points of intervention long before any high-stakes evaluation. Teachers are busy, but FLS grading can actually result in less work overall if done right, as *dialogue occurs through the grades*. For FLS grading, you will shift your course requirements, like this:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Grading Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three big papers: 25 percent each</td>
<td>Three big papers: 20 percent each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam: 25 percent</td>
<td>Exam: 10 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal work: 20 percent</td>
<td>Quizzes: 10 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two exams: 35 percent each</td>
<td>Two exams: 20 percent each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper: 30 percent</td>
<td>Weekly quizzes: 25 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four short response papers/posts: 20 percent</td>
<td>Final paper: 15 percent</td>
</tr>
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The meaning of “frequent” will vary based on your teaching style. At one time, I provided as many as five grades per week. I have shifted my approach, clumping

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New Technology Does NOT Equate to Less Teaching Effort

By Errol Craig Sull

The software and course delivery systems available can confuse, disorient, and befuddle the online instructor. Using this technology takes much more than powering up our computer and clicking here and uploading there. It requires finely honed skills to integrate the software and systems so students have an optimal learning experience.

What follows are suggestions and reminders to help with new software, tools, and course delivery systems.

You must teach more, not less, when using new technology. Many instructors believe the more technology in place within the classroom, the less teaching—not true. There is more to coordinate, more to keep adjusted, and more material to deliver than previously.

Never believe that whistles and bells can replace a good instructor. No matter how great the software or its tools, the course needs a highly effective online instructor. Students need you to decipher, explain, and interpret course information and assignment comments. They need you to direct, focus, and motivate them. They need you to answer questions, clear up confusion, and reduce anxiety in so many aspects of the online course.

Use software to highlight, integrate, and spotlight the course and students—but never let it overrun the course. It can be easy to get caught up in the bright lights of technological wizardry—yet we must always remember instructional technology’s role: to enable us to offer education online and to enhance the pedagogy of our courses.

Understand how each piece of software can be used in your class. The more we look under the hood of each piece of software debuting in our courses, the more we discover a variety of tools; it’s crucial to know how each part of the software can best be used in our courses. And it is important to know that not all tools will fit a course. Take the time to play around with all working aspects of the software, then plug in whichever works best wherever in your course.

Continually search for new software and updates so you can keep your class current. Software quickly becomes obsolete. You can’t always update software installed by your institution, but always look for updates, patches, and user information for software you acquire. The more you know, the better you are able to use your software wisely.

Be proactive in introducing students to new software. You will always have students who are not tech savvy, especially with software for your course that they otherwise might not use. Be sure to give as much information as possible on how they can best benefit from the software, and let them know you are always available for questions.

Check out websites and listservs that focus on new software you are implementing. For each piece of software that is part of your class, chances are strong there is a corresponding listserv, chat room, blog, or email newsletter/information sheet. Take advantage of these. Sometimes there are tricks and tips offered that don’t come with the software instructional guide.

Try out technology related to online teaching. Perhaps you’ll discover something quite helpful. There are three sites that offer a nice listing of technology that is great for teaching: http://alternativeto.net/software/prezi/ (PowerPoint, Prezi, and like sites), www.moreofit.com/similar-to/

www.softchalk.com/Top_10_Sites_Like_Softchalk/ (SoftChalk, Moodle, and other such e-learning sites), and www.similarsites.com/site/mycomplab.com (for sites on editing, grammar, punctuation, etc.). Nearly all of these are free.

REMEMBER: 40-watt bulbs can become 100-watt bulbs can become 200-watt bulbs—but too much light can also blind or detract.

Please let me hear from you, including sending along suggestions and information for future columns. You can reach me at errolcraigsull@aol.com. If you’d like a complete copy of my “staying organized and saving time” websites.

Errol Craig Sull has been teaching online courses for 17 years and has a national reputation in the subject, writing and conducting workshops on distance learning. He is currently putting the finishing touches on two online teaching books.

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many years may be facing doubts about their ability to handle these new burdens.

Next month I’ll begin to get into specifics about designing online course experiences that take advantage of what adult students bring to the online classroom.

Patti Shank, PhD, CPT, is a widely recognized information and instructional designer, writer, and author who helps others build valuable information and instruction. She can be reached through her website www.learningpeaks.com and on Twitter @pattishank.
various small assignments into one weekly grade so, each week students get one status grade, although I can break that down to individual assignments for them if asked.

I’ll focus on two particular assignment methods: informal writing and quizzes.

**Frequent short, informal writing assignments** can take many forms:
- Responses to readings or focused content questions
- End-of-unit notes on important or confusing points, questions
- Journals
- Brief annotations or notes about calculations, charts, tables
- Metacognition: Have students think through/reflect on reasoning, thinking, writing processes

The technological environment of online learning is a major asset in using short, informal writing. Technology reduces the paper shuffle, easing logistics, and digital writing forums and tools allow students to write to one another, making open dialogue a fundamental course component. Message boards are an easy-to-use and readily available dialogic technology for online courses, and blogs or even wikis can be used to replace notebook-based response journals.

Rubrics provide structure for responding to writing and demystify evaluation – for you as well as the students. A simple rubric for brief informal writing could involve two simple criteria, on a scale of 1 to 5:
- Demonstration of understanding of a key idea
- Writing quality

When developing a rubric, remember what you want the assignment to accomplish. You do not need to evaluate everything. For instance, if you want to evaluate their understanding of a main idea about a chapter but end up pegging them for dangling modifiers, you will likely become frustrated and may give up on using informal writing. Think about simple, specific, often content-oriented goals you want to assess. Rubric performance language/levels can be simple, excellent to poor, and reflect a range of responses. You can use rubric creation tools like Waypoint Outcomes or Rubistar.

**Quizzes** need not be a pedagogical stick. Quizzes should be easy to create, take, and grade. They should have a specific objective. For instance, I always give straightforward, weekly online reading quizzes, almost at this level: “What large sea mammal is featured in *Moby Dick*?” I just want them to read.

Course management system (CMS) assessment tools allow for simple quiz features like question sets so not all students receive the same questions, and I use the basic simplicity, frequency, and low-stakes aspects of my quizzes to discourage cheating.

The primary question most teachers have is this: How do I give lots of grades without breaking my back? Again, use a simple grading scale for individual assignments: 1 to 3, 1 to 5, 1 to 10, or even a check/check plus system. You can share/display grades in a CMS grade book. Remember, the object is creating grade-centric feedback, and the time payback comes when students do not constantly have to reach out to you about class performance; they already know, and when they do raise questions, the conversation is more focused than, “So, how am I doing in this class?”

FLS grading can demystify course assessment, letting your online students know how they are doing. Done right, it can result in less work/stress for teachers, helping identify struggling students early. A stream of FLS grades allows student to know where they stand so they can better reach their goals in our courses.

**References**


Scott Warnock is an associate professor of English and the director of the Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum at Drexel University.

**For more information**

health clinic.

Despite the efforts to make appropriate matches between students and community partners, the group model had problems with buy-in from the students and the community partners as well as the typical problems encountered in online group work; some students dropped the course, some failed to meet deadlines.

Students collaborated within Blackboard, using the discussion board, chat, group emails, and document sharing.

“They worked admirably, but their hearts weren’t in it as much as we’d like,” Melissa Lewis says.

Although those who worked in the group model were “pleasantly surprised” that they could participate in volunteerism at a distance, they also reported that they didn’t feel as though they had been challenged. “I’m not sure, but perhaps this was so because they were not responsible for facilitating the project,” Adrienne Lewis says.

The individual project model worked better than the group model in the pilot, due mainly to the students’ commitment to projects they chose within their own communities. “They were highly encouraged to engage with organizations that they may have already been involved with—schools, churches, and other kinds of organizations where they may have had an in,” Sneath says.

When students were asked what they considered the best part of the experience, one student who worked individually with a partner organization replied, “The open-ended aspect of the project, in that I was able to work largely with whomever I chose. I had the ability to be creative in the project.” Another said, “The best part of the experience was that I got to work in my own community, and I’m proud of being able to work in my

own hometown.”

One of the keys to working successfully with these partners was emphasizing the importance of communication. Melissa Lewis reached out to the partner organizations as soon as she knew who they were and remained in contact them throughout the course. “Both [the individual and group models] need that instructor presence to make sure that everything runs smoothly. If there’s a problem, I’m the one who needs to hear about it,” Melissa Lewis says. “I also found it helpful to have a couple partners in the wings in case a partnership didn’t work out so students would not be left without a project.”

Future directions

Based on the outcomes of the pilot, the individual project model will be the one adopted at Davenport. However, several administrative and instructional design issues remain.

Partner participation. One improvement Adrienne Lewis would like to see is community partners’ direct participation in the course. “We’ve done it in a couple courses but on a very limited basis. A lot of it depends on questions from a security point of view about adding outside folks to our system. But the bigger question is the partners’ comfort level with the technology. Even if we can get them into Blackboard where students can use the discussion board to work with partners, how savvy are the partners in being able to navigate Blackboard, and is it really worth it in the context of a seven-week course?”

End-of-course event. A best practice in service-learning is disseminating and recognizing results. In face-to-face courses this includes the participation of the community partners and is followed by a celebration, something that has yet to be done effectively in these online courses. “If you have 20 students inviting 20 different partners into a Blackboard session, it can prove difficult, if not impossible. We solicited feedback and words of thanks and gratitude from the partners, and we shared that with students via presentation software. [Students] appreciated that, but it doesn’t quite match the networking, engagement, and sense of accomplishment that the in-seat version has,” Adrienne Lewis says.

Instructor compensation. One of my primary responsibilities lately has been to make the case to the administration for some additional compensation for faculty who do any kind of substantial experiential learning. We learned that not only does it take extra time, but it also really does deserve some compensation for additional work and time,” Sneath says.

Adjunct instructors. Many of Davenport’s online courses are taught by adjunct instructors. If experiential learning becomes a graduation requirement, adjuncts will need preparation to include service-learning or other experiential pedagogy.

Virtual volunteering. There are many organizations that offer virtual volunteer opportunities that could be incorporated into a service-learning course. Some students in the pilot used www.volunteermatch.org to find community partners, and Sneath plans to explore other groups as well. “I think there’s a lot of opportunity for us to be thinking about the concept of virtual volunteering and how to transfer that into true service-learning through connections with those purely online organizations.”

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