Podcast Transcript

In the Classroom 23

Exploring the Interaction Standards for an Online Course Review

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Stan Skrabut: Well, hello, everyone. Welcome back. Thanks for taking time to listen to this episode of the podcast, certainly means a lot. I know you could be doing other things and you are hanging out with me and I really appreciate it. So, we're continuing our journey of looking at the OSCQR rubric, and as a reminder, that is dealing with online course quality control or quality review. This is the fifth portion of talking about the Oscar, the OSCQR rubric, and this section focuses on interaction. There's only six standards in this particular section. But all of them are important.

So let's get started. Number 38, expectations for timely and regular feedback from the instructor are clearly stated, and this is dealing with questions, email assignments. Having been an online student for a long time, one of the things that drives me crazy is when I send a note My instructor or I submit an assignment and then it's like dropping into a black hole that I don't hear anything back. The fact that there's lack of expectations, you have no idea whether or not you're ever going to get an answer. One of the things that you can do is help learner expectations by posting information on when you expect to get back.

You can do this, posting information, when you expect to get back to them if they send you an email, how long-- When they submit their assignments, let them know when they can expect to get the assignments returned. Just adding this little bit of information will reduce the amount of frustration on the learners' part and you will avoid all these questions that they're going to keep asking you. Part of it is this instructor-learner interaction, learner-learner interaction is for Keeping learners on track and for being able to help them prioritize responsibilities and to manage workload. Those are some of the things that you can do.

Here's some ideas that you can specifically implement, create a video as well as other specific instructions that let them know what they can expect from you. Let them know what and when they can get back to you or when they will get feedback from you. If you're going to be out of office, you're out traveling, you're going to conferences and stuff, let students know. There was a couple of times in my course that I was going to be away and I just told them upfront that I was going to be out there, that I may be delayed in getting that immediate feedback to them and they were all good with it. They understood that.

As I commented earlier, if you have an assignment turned in, give them a heads up how long it will take you to grade the assignment, get it back in their hands and certainly, get it back in their hands. I've been in courses where I've turned in papers, I've never gotten them back. I have no idea that feedback's valuable, I have no idea

how well I did or if anything. So, getting it back, that's important. If you're going to delay, be delayed, that's okay, let them know. Just communicate. Let them know what's going on. Give some notice on where you're at and they'll really appreciate.

Number 39, expectations for interaction are clearly stated. This is in terms of netiquette, grade waiting, models and examples, timing, frequency of contributions, being as clear as possible on what the expectations for assignments, discussions, how they're going to be graded on participation, if there's any proctoring for exams, what the due dates, all those little items, you need to tell them upfront. This is especially important for adult learners because they're trying to balance this course in with the rest of their life. We often assume that the only thing they're doing in their life is taking our course. Well, that's far from it.

So when you don't tell them about all the assignments and suddenly you spring on an assignment that they weren't expecting, the frustration just ramps up, and this is not a good way to put together a course. Be very upfront what's due, when it's due, give them as much information, allow them to work ahead if possible, these things are important. They've got to fit this in with the rest of their life and it's just a courtesy that's really important. When it comes to discussions, outlining clear expectations for the timing and frequency of contributions as well as what the standard should be, that way you're very up clear, upfront and clear with the students, they know what to expect.

Before you even dive into this idea of discussions, it's important to reference netiquette info and model respecting discussion. Before you even get started, set the ground rules of what's acceptable behavior and what's not acceptable behavior. That'll help a little bit later. You can also use your students to help establish these ground rules. That way they have more buy-in into what you're doing. Very important to let students know how they will be graded. Rubrics are powerful tools for grading and anything you do, make it more clear, makes it easier for the students to complete the assignment correctly and makes it easier for you to grade.

Number 40, learners have an opportunity to get to know the instructor. Your online course should not be a correspondence course, it shouldn't be just students read something and take a test, turn in an assignment and that's it. There should be some social opportunities. It's really important for students to humanize their instructors. They need to know that you're a real person. When you get out there, it's important to create this welcoming space that you introduce yourself, but also make it real, that we have animals and we have kids maybe and we were students.

All this stuff is important to help the students feel more comfortable. It really ties into this whole business and I know business is an ugly word for academics, but people will do business with people they know, like and trust. If they don't get to know you, and they don't get to like you and they don't get to trust you, then honestly, having them try to buy into the product that you have, which is your course is a lot more difficult. Getting them to know, like and trust you help that connectedness where you get them more engaged with the material that you have.

You want them to know you as easily that somebody who can be-- That's accessible, right? If they have an issue, they should be able to come to you. It's a matter of doing

this communication that you need to humanize yourself. Very often in the course, you have these introductions, everybody introduces themselves as an instructor, you also need to jump in there and introduce yourself. Create an instructor profile. Have everyone else create a profile. Get in there with your personal voice and show who you are. Having a course page. Well, at least where I work, it's a challenge to get instructors to have a course page to talk about within their discipline.

I think it's really important once again, going back to that know, like and trust that they want to get to know what the instructor is about, what they studied, what they are interested in, what they're researching, what they do when they're not teaching, all this comes into play. You need to also establish paths or mechanisms or methods, strategies where they can communicate with you. One of the things that they put in the rubric is give learners permission to communicate directly with you via phone, but also set parameters when you're available to be contacted. 2:00 in the morning is not going to be acceptable for me but I will be willing to take a call for any student almost any time.

If I'm in a meeting, I can't do it but otherwise, let's do that. Schedule progress meetings, check in on your learners, see how they're doing. That's another tool. With tools like Zoom, Zoom is a great tool for doing virtual meetings, very easy to check in with students. I have done this on occasion especially if I have a student that's struggling with something, we'll get on a Zoom call, we'll sort it all out and they walk away tremendously happy. Things that you want to do. Number 41, course contains resources or activities intended to build a sense of class community, support open communication and establish trust.

At least one of the following, an icebreaker, bulletin board, meet your classmates, ask a question discussion forum, something like that. This goes back to the idea, an online class is not a correspondence course. That having group activities, that can certainly be part of your online course. I just finished with a course where the students, it was all about group activity, that was the biggest part of it. Being able to learn together as a group at a distance virtually, that's an important skill in today's world, being able to do that. That was part of the learning.

Other ways that you can build communities, well, when you're talking about activities that build the class community, they basically fall into three categories, social activities, which focus on self-expression, cognitive activities will focus on academic and professional goals and getting started activities which familiarize learners with course materials and technologies. Ways that you can do that, having an icebreaker discussion that they jump into a topic to find something that's common among the group and building one of those discussions.

Certainly, introductions, that's a way to get a course started, that they could also read an article or preview the text and share their insights and opinions. Post the question, have the first learner to access the discussion, answer that question and have that person post the next question, that somebody else need to jump on. Having a place, a student lounge, hallway discussions, somewhere where students can go and talk about things that are not part of really the curriculum discussions, but having a place where they can go and talk about other things.

That's also very useful in a course. The thing that you want to do is those avatars for discussion are really important. You want to get away from everybody having an egghead as soon as possible where they actually create their own avatars. They don't necessarily have to be their profile picture. Some people are not comfortable with that, but instead, they may have a picture of their dog or a flower or something like that. It does a couple of things that when you're in the discussion, it helps to differentiate between the speakers of the course, that having that visual element is really essential.

Getting them to update their avatars and their profile pages, that's important. That you also should model this by having a very detailed profile page yourself and make sure that you get that out there. Also, as an instructor, participate in any of the welcome activities that you have going on. Number 42, courses offer opportunities for learners to learn interaction and constructive collaboration. We're in a whole different world that being able to collaborate virtually is an important skill that we need to master.

Collaboration in an online course fosters constructive learning by enabling learners to be active participants, take initiatives, think critically, engage with each other in dialogue. Different ways to do it. These previous episodes, I talked about all kinds of multimedia. We have video and audio and text and imagery and just all kinds of different things that you can have students use to be able to do this. By requiring learners to engage with each other, the design of such activities requires them to assume more responsibility for their learning.

This often leads to a deeper level of connection or engagement with the material, so are definitely important things that we should consider. Ways that you can facilitate this, assign a different learner to moderate your discussion forum, to help stay on track. That could be part of participation. Using tools like VoiceThread, this adds up multimedia elements. Using sites like Diigo or Pinterest to curate materials that they find in the course, that you can have this open for not only their course but every other course that follows that you can build a Pinterest board around a specific topic and just leave it open for them to keep adding to it even later.

Building a course WikiProject that they can collaborate on or build content on, different ways of doing that. Also, case studies, role-playing, those are all things that you can do to work on this learner interaction and getting them to work together collectively. Part of it, they should reflect on what's being added to the course. That's why I'm a really huge fan of the discussion post model that I use is IRA post. It requires three insights, resource and an application and it really reflects on what they thought was important in the course and what they could add to the course and how they're going to use it in the course.

Then other students glam onto this and give their feedback on those particular items. Lastly, number 43, learners are encouraged to share resources and inject knowledge from diverse sources of information in their course interaction. Basically, what you want students to do is not only reflect on what's in the textbook, but also go out into the real world, into the internet and find other resources that are very useful to that particular topic and bring those back into the class and talk about them. Get them to think about at this higher level where they're analyzing it and they're reflecting on it

and they're synthesizing it as part of the knowledge that they have and making them active participants in the classroom.

This particular section has a number of ideas that you can introduce into your class. We've talked about introducing outside resources, but building those collaboratives, social sharing sites, Diigo, Pinterest, footboard, those are different ways of doing this. Blogs are another powerful tool. It combines the reflection as well as the sharing of resources that you can do that. Also, using good old fashion, annotated bibliographies as a part of a group project and keep them in the course for a review tool. That is what we have today under interaction. As a recap, let's go over those really quick.

Number 38, setting expectations for timely and regular feedback from the instructor that are clearly stated for questions, emails and assignment. Number 39, expectations for interaction are clearly stated that you're talking about netiquette, grade weighting, models and examples and timing and frequency and contribution. Number 40, learners have an opportunity to get to know the instructor. Number 41, course contains resources or activities intended to build a sense of class community, support open communication and establish trust, getting to know, like and trust.

Number 42, course offers opportunities for learner to learner interaction and constructive collaboration. Number 43, learners are encouraged to share resources and inject knowledge from diverse sources of information in their course interact. Well, there you have it. We just knocked out the fifth section of the OSCQR quality rubric and we have one section to go. Tune in next week and we'll certainly talk about that but in the meantime, let me tell you about my book.