



# Instructors' Perceptions of the Best and Worst Practices in Online Classes

Student: Kylie Bennett      Mentor: Dr. Erica Berte  
Indiana University-Purdue University Columbus  
Division of Business



## Abstract

Instructors have difficulty designing online courses that are effective and help students learn the necessary course material. To assist instructors to better develop online courses, this research project has the purpose of identifying instructors' perceptions of the most beneficial practices in designing and teaching online courses.

## Introduction

Online learning has become increasingly more popular over the last few years, so universities are offering more online courses to meet student needs. According to the Babson Survey Research Group, in 2013, over 2,800 universities were offering online courses and 7.1 million higher education students were enrolled in at least one online course, which is a 6.1% growth from previous years (Sloan Consortium, 2013). This growth is occurring because online classes offer a wide range of advantages: convenience and flexibility, increased student enrichment, and cost-effective choices (World Wide Learn, 2013).

## Methods

- Quantitative Research
- Primary data collected through a survey (Survey Monkey)
- Surveys were sent to 199 instructors (full time and adjunct faculty) at Indiana University-Purdue University Columbus

## Review of Literature

Research shows that keeping students engaged and actively participating in an online class will help develop critical thinking skills (Zappala, 2012). Students express that active participation makes for a "good" university course, while lecture-only formats are considered "poor" university courses (Harrinton, 2012). How can online classes promote critical thinking and student's participation? In addition, it is important to establish good instructor-student relationships in an online course. Instructors should communicate with students often and be prepared to alleviate student fears and solve problems (Sull, 2009).

## Sample Questions

In your online classes, how effective are the following teaching strategies in assisting students to develop communication skills (written/oral)?

	Not used in my online class	Ineffective	Of Little Effectiveness	Moderately Effective	Effective	Very Effective
PowerPoint	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
PowerPoint with Audio	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Videos	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discussion Forums	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Live Chatroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quizzes/Exams	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group Projects/Assignments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Individual Projects/Assignments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assigned Readings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How frequently do you communicate with students about the class?

- More than once a week
- Once a week
- Every other week
- Once a month
- I do not communicate with students about the class

## Results

Results of the survey show that instructors believe assigning individual projects/assignments are the most effective teaching strategy for online classes. However, 65% of instructors only assign an individual project/assignment every other week.

Teaching strategies perceived to be the most effective for:		
Improving oral and written communication skills	Ind. Projects/Assign.	75.00%
Increasing participation and engagement	Discussion Forums	60.61%
Developing team work skills	Group Projects/Assign.	42.42%
Learning course material	Ind. Projects/Assign.	81.25%
Developing critical thinking skills	Ind. Projects/Assign.	58.75%

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many volunteers who took my online survey and for the input from other members of the Indiana University – Purdue University Columbus staff such as Dr. Lauren Burch, Sally Jamerson, and Dr. Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick. I would also like to thank the IUPUC Office of Student Research for funding.

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