Handout for Principles of Online Learning – Facilitation

Strategies for good online facilitation:

- **How to engage students in the learning**
    - Design good activities and promote active learning
    - Use icebreakers
    - Create a relaxed learning space
    - Encourage learners to ask questions, share experiences, and collaborate
    - Ask questions that force learners to engage with the subject matter
    - Use different media or education technology (make sure it is something accessible to students and that it serves a purpose)
    - Mix up activities – do discussions, have collaborative activities, problem-solving etc.
    - Break content into 'bite-sized' pieces
    - Connect subject matter to real-life examples or experiences
    - Try to be a 'guide on the side', not a 'sage on the stage'
    - Ask them for feedback on the activities and make changes if needed

- **How to motivate students**
    - Be present – don't disappear!
    - Connect their learning to something real in their own experience
    - Set clear goals, deadlines and expectations about participation
    - Create a sense of belonging
    - Give immediate feedback
    - Deal with problems that come up as soon as possible
    - Encourage, or use, self-assessment
    - Design with universal design principles (CAST)

- **How to maintain participation of students in the course**
    - Assess regularly so they have feedback on their learning
    - Respond in discussions – pose additional questions
    - Be flexible based on their response to activities
    - Engage with learners regularly (e.g. communicate weekly, office hours)
    - Reach out to students directly if they are lagging behind

- **How to create 'community' in the course**
    - Welcome students to the course (e.g. welcome video, student intro videos/activities)

- o Create a class communication plan (i.e. how will students connect with you)
- o Make students active participants in the course (e.g. include students in setting clear goals, ground rules, and expectations)
- o Structure discussion into the course (provide/negotiate discussion guidelines)
- o Have a 'social' discussion forum for non-class related discussion
- o Stay connected (e.g. hold virtual office hours, regular check-ins, reach out to students, encourage student-student & student-student interaction, provide frequent announcements, provide weekly summaries, etc.)
- o Use synchronous sessions for interaction
- o Have a 'suggestion box' discussion forum for students to offer feedback on the course
- o Be aware of student disruptions that may negatively impact the learning community

- **How to encourage collaboration**
  - o Promote collaboration through small group assignments, real-world scenarios (case-based learning), simulation, and group discussions
  - o Set clear expectations for activities, assignments, and discussions
  - o Give clear instructions
  - o Keep group sizes small
  - o Encourage debate within the context of the subject matter
  - o Pose thought-provoking questions that encourage group discussions and problem solving
  - o Promote active learning through activities like discussion forums, study groups, peer feedback, peer mentoring, peer facilitation of learning, team presentations, breakout rooms

- **How to determine if students are learning**
  - o Provide regular and frequent feedback
  - o Use formative assessment techniques throughout the course to make sure learners have absorbed the information before moving on (See "Techniques to Check Understanding" and "Active Learning Continuum")
  - o Encourage reflection through activities that help students plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning
  - o Share rubrics with students to clearly communicate learning objectives and grading criteria
  - o Schedule 1:1 or group check-in conferences (e.g. while students are working asynchronously or synchronously in breakout rooms)
  - o Check for understanding during synchronous sessions
  - o Utilize feedback settings in Moodle activities

Tips for facilitating synchronous sessions:
- Create an agenda for each session
- Make each session relevant to students (e.g. connect synchronous & asynchronous session, offer novel content and activities)

- Ask participants to prepare something for the session
- Ask students to take the lead or suggest topics for sessions
- Ask participants to keep their cameras on
- Cultivate active learning (pose questions, have students interact with content)
- Check in with students (can be an informal 'how are you doing?')
- Build community (for example, ask students to share their personal learning experiences)
- Provide chance for collaboration (e.g. group work, breakout rooms)
- Provide feedback (could be one-one-one with students, or groups)
- Break up sessions into chunks (e.g. 15-20 mins with clarification pauses, interactive activities)
- Offer alternatives for students who are unable to attend the session

Tips for facilitating asynchronous online discussion

- [Online Discussions: Tips for Instructors](#) (University of Waterloo)