The Art & Science of Quality Course Announcements: How to Avoid the Trap of the Info Dump

By: Karen Costa
Source: Faculty Focus

It's the night before a major assignment is due and you sit down to post an announcement in your online course. You want to remind your students of the impending due date, and oh yes, there's a great webinar offered by the career center coming up on Tuesday. That reminds you, there's also that article about the history of Wikipedia that you want to share with them too. Come to think of it, now's as good a time as any to discuss the lack of analysis you noticed in their discussion board posts last week. As you write about their discussions, you also decide to include one last link to a citation website you hope will help them improve in this area.

You click "submit" and breathe a deep sigh of relief as you see the announcement post, filling half of your screen. You've shared tons of resources and information for your students. You check off this task off of your unwieldy to-do list. You've done your due diligence as a professor.

Or have you?

In my decade of experience teaching and coaching teachers, I've come to think of the above scenario as "The Info Dump." It's often well-intentioned. You want to give students all of the information that they need to succeed. Your overarching goal is to help.

I've also noticed that this is a time-management strategy for overwhelmed faculty. "I'm swamped for time so let me just blast this all out at once. Phew. I've done my part; now the rest is up to them." In struggling to help manage our own information overload, we pass the overload along to our students. I don't believe it's our intention to pass the buck, but you know what they say about good intentions.

What results from these info dumps is this: cognitive overload. Imagine plugging your hairdryer, iron, and space heater into the same outlet in your house. Boom. Our brains and our students' brains are not unlike that outlet. They have limits. Sweller (1988) developed the theory of cognitive load in instructional design. He suggested that instructors and designers be mindful of the amount and intensity of information we present in our courses and communications. Announcements like the one I described above are well-intentioned bad teaching.

Solution: Plan announcements in advance whenever possible. Develop an editorial calendar to manage content. If you've already posted an important announcement that day and you feel the urge to post again, ask yourself if the content can wait a day. Try to focus on one main idea in each announcement. Use the date release tool in your LMS (if available) to manage your time. You can create daily announcements for the week in one sitting

and release one per day to your students. **Always ask the question, will this announcement do more harm than good?**

Neuroscientists also caution against the huge swaths of black text that are typical in many online announcements and communications. Medina (2010) discussed the importance of creating content that requires students to use multiple senses, but especially their vision. He also stresses that the wiring of our brains is set up so that we gloss over boring things. Few things are less engaging than a huge block of black text filled with logistics.

Solution: Use bullets, bold font, colors, and highlighting to create an engaging visual. Create instructional videos instead of text and embed in your announcement through YouTube. Use free online tools like Canva to develop interesting infographics.

Finally, heed the words of brain scientist, stroke survivor, and TED-talker extraordinaire, Jill Bolte Taylor, who says, "Although many of us may think of ourselves as thinking creatures that feel, biologically we are feeling creatures that think." A good announcement inspires at least as much as it informs. We are, after all, teaching people and not robots.

Solution: Before clicking submit, ask yourself if your announcement speaks to students' minds and hearts. Did you tell or did you teach? Remember and appreciate the distinction. How can you inspire your students? Tell stories. Use inspirational quotes. Encourage your students. Emphasize that you are available to help them succeed. Remind them that you care about their success. Teach. Don't just tell.

By spacing-out content, attending to visuals, and creating inspiring messages, you can avoid the trap of the info dump and begin to develop a sustainable practice of posting quality announcements.

References
Medina, J. (2010). Brain rules: *12 principles for surviving and thriving at work, home, and school.* Seattle: Pear Press.
Taylor, J.B. (2011). *My stroke of insight: A brain scientist's personal journey.* New York: Penguin.
Sweller, J. (1988). Cognitive load during problem solving: Effects on learning. *Cognitive Science,* 12, 257-285.

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SAVE THE DATE…

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MAR 14   Spring Break

MAR 19   Mid-Term Grades are Due

…and the week after:

Myths, Legends and Finding Bigfoot: A faculty member's foray into online teaching
[Brown Bag Lunch Series. Track 2. Research and Best Practices in Online Teaching and Learning]

Learn what happens when the director of a public university's school of kinesiology leads an effort to convert a low-completer program to a totally online program, expecting to support her faculty with resources and guidance, only to realize that "her course" would have to be the first to be converted. It is through her unique experience, serving as both an administrator and faculty member, that Dr. Bryan shaped a viewpoint, and eventually a career direction, that is centered around online teaching and learning.

In this webinar, Dr. Bryan debunks myths, shares research and offers her insights and experiences that touch on the most hotly debated issues surrounding online. She discusses in the most practical terms the barriers to online (real and perceived), practical challenges facing faculty and administrators, and lessons learned over the years.
Monday, March 21 (12:00 PM - 1:00 PM), Founders Hall, Rm 127
Register **here**.

DLAC Meeting #2 for the 16SP Semester
The Distance Learning Advisory Committee (DLAC) is a cross-functional team focused on providing guidance in the formulation of guidelines and strategies regarding resource allocation and quality accountability for online instructional excellence, as well as improving the overall quality of distance learning at UNT Dallas.
All of the meetings for this semester will be held on the 4th Tuesday of every month starting in February. Agendas, meeting documents, and web links are posted to the DLIT website for archival purposes.
Tuesday, March 22 (10:00 AM – 12:00 PM), Founders Hall, Rm 127

BITS #3 - Beginnings, Middles and Ends: Motivating and Engaging Your Online Students
[Blackboard Innovative Teaching Series]
Presenter: Paul Beaudoin, Fitchburg State University
Finding ways to motivate and engage the online learner is one of the biggest challenges facing online education. Using examples from Dr. Beaudoin's award-winning classes, "Beginnings, Middles, and Ends" will offer several practical strategies to motivate and engage your online students at any grade level, all semester, so that they stay in class and successfully reach the finish line.
Tuesday, March 22 (2:00 PM — 4:00 PM), DAL1, Rm 336
Register **here**.

Articles

(Click the links or images to read the articles)

5 important revelations from first year online learners

By Meris Stansbury

Source: eCampus News

New research delves into the personal experiences of first year online learners in an effort to understand low retention rates. Despite a record number of students taking online higher education courses, many of those entering for the first time often have incorrect preconceived notions of online learning's extreme flexibility—and it's this notion that may lead to high dropout rates.

This is one of the findings of a new research report that aims to explore the dearth in research about what actually happens to first year distance students once they have enrolled in higher education courses.

Read more…

7 Tips To Create Hollywood-Worthy eLearning Videos

By: Christopher Pappas

Source: eLearning Industry

You don't have to be a movie producer to create top notch eLearning videos that wow your audience. As a matter of fact, the right tools can help you design online presentations that are powerful, profound, and perfectly polished. In this article, the author shares 7 tips to help us develop eLearning videos that are worthy of the silver screen.

Read more…

Networked Learning as Experiential Learning

By Gardner Campbell

Source: EDUCAUSE

As we consider high-impact practices in light of contemporary culture, we must add digitally mediated networked learning to Kuh's list, because the experience of building and participating within a digitally mediated network of discovery and collaboration is an increasingly necessary foundation for all other forms of experiential learning in a digital age.

Read more…

Research: Game-Based Learning Can Help Nontraditional Student

By Dian Schaffhauser

Source: Campus Technology

Game-based learning should just be another tool in the belt, as far as educators in higher ed think, particularly useful for "learning moments" that can help students succeed, according to new research from Muzzy Lane. Likewise, game-based learning is no good if it's pricey and complex to develop; it needs to be inexpensive and "authorable" by the faculty members themselves. And don't forget, students say, to make the games mobile so they work on the same devices the students like to use.

Read more…

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How to Get Results from Video Learning Infographic

The Learning Management System (LMS) is set to touch $7.83 billion mark by 2018. Every month, a staggering 6 billion hours of YouTube content is consumed globally. Learning practitioners estimate that half of the internet traffic worldwide will be through video. Interestingly, 50% of traffic on cell phones and tablets is video. Therefore, will organizations figure out ways to embed video as part of an important learning strategy? Lot of videos that are produced goes unwatched. "The more we think about that, the more it becomes important that we really think about how to make video engaging. So when we spend the time and money making good video, we actually get a return on investment," says corporate expert Jonathan Halls.

Videos are an essential component of eLearning. However, keeping them rich and relevant is far more important, because if made ineffectively, they can lead to wasted learning resources. Find out how to get results from video learning. Here are some key elements before designing video learning content:

- The learning videos must be short, engaging and effective.
- Delivered to learners based on when and where they need it.
- Powerful videos that will draw attention owing to action-oriented shots.

Read also:

- **5 Tips To Create Engaging Video Based Learning**
- **How To Effectively Use Videos In eLearning**
- **7 Killer Tips For Effective Video In eLearning**

HOW TO GET **RETURNS** FROM
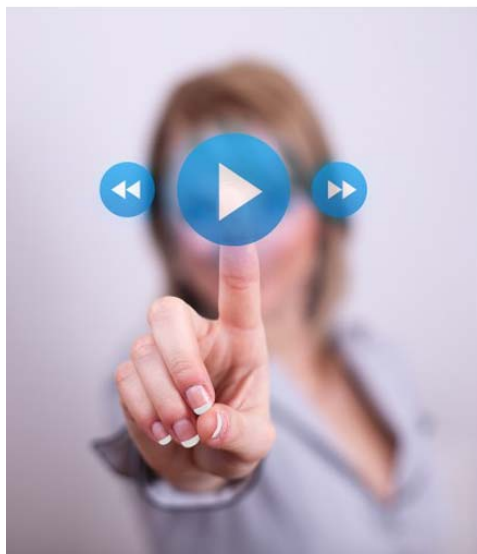## **VIDEO LEARNING**

WHY WE MOVE TOWARDS VIDEO LEARNING

Learning practitioners estimate that half of the internet traffic worldwide will be through video. Interestingly, 50% of traffic on cell phones and tablets is video. Therefore, will organizations figure out ways to embed video as part of an important learning strategy? Lot of videos that are produced goes unwatched. "The more we think about that, the more it becomes important that we really think about how to make video engaging. So when w e spend the time and money making good video, we actually get a return on investment," says corporate expert Jonathan Halls.

6 billion hours of YouTube content is consumed globally every month

You Tube™

50% of traffic on cell phones and tablets is video

75% of business leaders view videos to meet their immediate leadership development needs (Forbes)

98% of organizations would use video as part of their digital learning strategy in 2016 (Predicted)

Instructional manuals, workbooks, and class-room training are out, nano or micro-learning is in, multi-devices are in vogue. Learning is consumed in small chunks. Just in Time (JIT) learning has aroused the curiosity of learners, as it allows learners access to nuggets of information as per their current needs.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS FOR DESIGNING VIDEO-LEARNING CONTENT

Important to have the right script

Proper storyboard

Facilitate access of video content through multi-devices

Ease of presentation

Content has to be fun, engaging and effective

With the **Learning Management System (LMS) set to touch $7.83 billion mark by 2018**, it is essential that the right mode of learning is embraced by organizations to effectively fix the ever-widening and alarming skill gaps globally. Organizations continuously revamp their learning strategies given the dynamic nature of business and skill sets. If advance methods such as mobile learning, bring your own device, and informal learning have enthused learners, video learning is a clear leap toward enhancing learner engagement.

origin learning

More

MAR 28	**Teaching Competencies for 21st Century Learners** (12:00 PM) Founders Hall, Rm 127	**APR 5**	**"What's the Frequency, Kenneth?" Voice Commenting Strategies** (11:00 AM - 11:30 AM) Founders Hall, Rm 127
MAR 31	**Creating Simple Rules-Based Learning from Complex, Technical and Compliance Courses** (2:00 PM – 3:00 PM) Founders Hall, Rm 127	**APR 5**	**"What's the Frequency, Kenneth?" Voice Commenting Strategies** (11:00 AM - 11:30 AM) Founders Hall, Rm 127
APR 4	**Cool Tools for Jazzing Up Your Online Course** (12:00 PM), Founders Hall, Rm 127	**APR 6**	**Using Respondus in Blackboard LEARN** (10:00 AM - 11:00 AM) Founders Hall, Rm 127
APR 5	**Blackboard Open Lab** (2:00 PM - 4:00 PM) DAL1, Rm 336	**APR 7**	**Canvas, an LMS and Beyond** (2:00 PM - 3:00 PM) Founders Hall, Rm 127

Click here to register for any of our **March** events.

Contact Us!

The **Office of Distance Learning and Instructional Technologies** invites faculty and staff to join and participate in our development programs. These events provide an opportunity to network with faculty from other departments, learn new instructional strategies and tools, and become aware of best practices in online teaching and learning. Hope to see you there, and don't forget to register for our workshops and sessions!

Please contact us with ideas and suggestions for future events:

Web: http://www.untdallas.edu/dlit
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