

# Facilitator Training Program Manual

## **Introduction**

This training manual is designed to aid trainees in becoming effective facilitators of distance learning. Although the term “distance learning” encompasses a range of delivery modalities, including mail-order courses, in this course the focus will be on online facilitation of learning. Therefore, throughout this manual the terms “distance learning” “online learning” and “e-learning” will all be used to describe the same idea: the facilitation of learning accomplished through online interaction between the instructor, the material, and the students. Regardless of the name assigned, teaching a class online is in many ways fundamentally different than teaching a class in the traditional “brick and mortar” classroom. This manual is meant to help trainees transition from the role of “teacher” in a traditional classroom to the role of “facilitator of learning” in the online environment.

## **Audience**

This manual and the attendant course were designed primarily for instructors who are already serving in that role and who have displayed competency in the traditional classroom environment. Because of this, trainees are presumed to possess a certain level of comfort and familiarity with adult learning theories, the assessment of student learning, course design and evaluation, and basic instructional skills. In terms of experience, the assumption is that trainees will have successfully taught at least one course above the high school level and are proficient in the use of computers for word processing, printing, and e-mail.

## **Course Goals**

The course seeks to produce confident and competent online facilitators who can take the skills, knowledge and abilities they have honed and demonstrated providing instruction in a traditional setting and successfully transition that same skill set into the e-learning environment.

It seeks to help and encourage trainees to develop into excellent online instructors who consistently exhibit the following attributes:

- **Visibility**—the excellent online instructor can establish “presence” and is present frequently in the online environment.

- Compassion—defined by openness, concern, flexibility, fairness, and honesty—the excellent online instructor expresses sincere positive regard for students and delivers student-focused, student-centered instruction.
- Communication—the excellent online instructor communicates with students frequently, provides substantive feedback, and communicates well using technology.
- Commitment—the excellent online instructor is not only a passionate and committed teacher, but sees the value in teaching online and sees the facilitated model of teaching as rigorous and powerful. The excellent online instructor is motivated and a good motivator.
- Organization—the excellent online instructor is organized and a good time manager.

(Palloff & Pratt, 2011, p. 19)

### **Course Objectives**

The following objectives have been created for this course, using the ABCD (audience, behavior, condition, degree) model (Brown & Green, 2011).

At the conclusion of the course the prospective online facilitator trainee will be able to:

1. Identify the attributes of the “excellent online instructor” as set forth by Palloff & Pratt (2011).
2. Describe the roles of the online facilitator identified by Bull (2013).
3. Describe the phases of development of distance learning facilitators identified by Palloff & Pratt (2011).
4. Identify four common attributes of distance learning theories and describe their application to the course the trainee will be instructing.
5. Describe three strategies for engaging distance learners and the trainee’s plans for incorporating those strategies into the course the trainee will be instructing.
6. Describe the mentoring program for online faculty.
7. List the three essential components (Palloff & Pratt, 2011) of an effective faculty management program.

8. Specify the rubric that will be used to evaluate the trainee's performance as an online facilitator and list the components evaluated.
9. Identify the learning management system (LMS) used and list five functionalities of the program.
10. Upload 5 documents into the LMS class space within 10 minutes.
11. Facilitate an online discussion using the (LMS) while displaying the attributes of an excellent online facilitator (Palloff & Pratt, 2011).
12. Prepare the facilitator's bio and upload it into the LMS.
13. Describe the importance of establishing an online presence and demonstrate an online presence in the LMS environment.
14. Draft a letter of introduction that includes instructor policies and provides clear direction to students on their participation requirements.
15. Present information on the LMS in an understandable and engaging way.
16. Instruct students on how to use the LMS to submit assignments in a clear and understandable way.
17. Explain the importance of wikis, blogs, and video to assist online student learning and describe an example of how to utilize each in the class the trainee will be instructing.
18. Describe a minimum of four challenges associated with teaching distance learners and provide a strategy for responding to each.
19. Identify the resources available to faculty and students for assistance in resolving technology issues.
20. Describe the seven keys to effective feedback (Wiggins, 2012).
21. Apply the seven keys to effective feedback when moderating discussions in the online forum.
22. Identify four behavioral challenges instructors may face and corresponding strategies for responding to them as suggested by Kelly (2013).

23. Apply the strategies identified by Kelly (2013) in responding to simulated objectionable student behavior in the online forum.
24. Identify two resources for instructors seeking to make their materials more accessible to those with disabilities.

### **Assessment of Learning and Course Effectiveness**

At the conclusion of the course trainees will be assessed to determine their ability to meet the course objectives outlined above. Instructors will assess trainees using a variety of tools. Knowledge will be tested by traditional testing true/false, fill in the blank, multiple-choice, and short essay questions.

Application of the trainee's knowledge to the online learning environment will be measured by having the trainees perform the required tasks (authentic assessment) with a qualitative assessment of trainee performance being conducted by an experienced online facilitator.

The evaluation of the trainee performance, both on the written test and of their first course as instructor will also be used to help evaluate the success of this program in preparing instructors to teach online courses.

Additional information on the effectiveness of the course will be gathered through end of course surveys of participants immediately at the end of the training and again at the conclusion of their teaching their first course online.

### **Online Facilitator Roles and Skills**

Online facilitators need to possess a wealth of skills in order to effectively perform their duties as the facilitators of adult learning in an online environment. By way of illustration, one expert identified the following eight roles of effective online facilitators:

1. Tour guide
2. Cheerleader
3. Learning Coach
4. Individual and Group Mirror
5. Social Butterfly

6. Big Brother (to monitor course participation)
7. Valve Control (to limit information overload)
8. Co-Learner

(Bull, 2013)

To fulfill all of these roles, online facilitators must be able to:

- Clearly communicate student course requirements
- Build a learning community online
- Manage online discussions
- Establish guidelines and manage student expectations for instructor feedback
- Develop learning activities that support student-student and instructor-student interaction with each other and the material
- Assess student learning
- Design assessments, including alternative assessments
- Document student achievement of learning outcomes
- Provide both formal and informal feedback to students and encourage student-to-student feedback
- Develop and apply rubrics
- Seek feedback on instructor and course performance and make adjustments as necessary

(Palloff & Pratt, 2011, p. 94-95)

### **Phases of Development for Distance Learning Facilitators**

In transitioning from in-person to online instructing, practitioners pass through identifiable stages of development that exist along a continuum of both comfort with and competence in this new instructional environment. Although academics have developed several

models, this course will focus on one, the five-phase model posited by Palloff & Pratt (2011). They identified the following five stages:

- Visitor—those faculty who have toyed with the idea of technology integration in their face-to-face classes and who may have posted a syllabus or assignments online or used e-mail for assignment completion.
- Novice—those faculty who have never taught online and who may or may not have taken an online course as a student but have consistently posted a syllabus online and have used some communications technologies to supplement their face-to-face teaching.
- Apprentice—those faculty who have taught online for one or two terms. They may have taught more than one course per term. They are developing an understanding of the online environment and the skills required to teach online.
- Insider—those faculty who have taught more than two semesters online and have taught more than one course per term. They feel comfortable in the online environment, are proficient with course management technology, and have basic understanding of the skills needed for online teaching. They may have designed one or more online courses.
- Master—those faculty who have taught online for multiple terms and have designed several online courses. They have mastered the technology required to teach online and are likely to have integrated technology beyond the course management system into their teaching. They feel extremely comfortable with the skills required to teach online and can be called upon for peer support for newer online faculty.

(Palloff & Pratt, 2011, p. 20)

This course is focused on trainees in the Visitor and Novice stages who are getting ready to transition into the Apprentice stage. But ideally, trainees will continue their professional development in this teaching medium and eventually transition to the Insider and ultimately the Master phases.

### **Theories of Distance Learning**

There are many existing theories that seek to explain how people learn, including Behaviorist, Humanist, Cognitivist, Social-Cognitivist, and Constructivist learning theories. From the preceding selection, the Cognitivist and Constructivist theories would seem to have the most obvious relevance to the way online learning occurs; but, although these theories are still relevant in helping instructors understand the why and how of their students' learning, experts argue that simply seeking to apply these theories to the e-learning environment fails to recognize

the significant differences present in the e-learning environment, in essence missing the forest for the trees (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011).

Building upon the foundation of traditional learning theories, scholars have begun to formulate new learning theories focused on transformation, framing and re-framing, and emergence as the three main elements of contemporary learning in the online environment (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011). Using this construct, an existing state of knowledge is transformed by acts of learning into a new state of knowledge (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011). The process is iterative as the new state of knowledge becomes the existing state and the process continues (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011). Framing and reframing occur throughout the process and the heart of the process, the acts of learning, are transformative in that they “transform” the existing state of knowledge into the new state that emerges from the old (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011).

A key component of the “acts of learning” is the collaborative and communal aspect of online learning (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011). Because the online community is different from and interacts differently than the learning community in an in-person class, the nature of the learning itself is affected (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011).

Common components from many of the emerging research and theories of distance learning include the following characteristics of e-learning:

- Student-centric – with students taking on increasing responsibility for what, where, when, and how they learn.
- Communal – with instructors and students working together to build understanding from the material and interaction with other “communities” affecting the learning as well.
- Affected by transactional distance – with learners and instructors separated from each other by time and space.
- Multi-modal – using many different devices and many different media to interact with the instructor, peers, and the course material.

Support for these theories can be found in many online teaching scenarios.

- Student centric? Students in online classes do not simply receive information from the instructor; instead, they actively decide what knowledge to pursue. Online students are also responsible for learning the course content on their own through their interaction with the course material provided, increasingly augmented by the materials they themselves locate or create online.

- Communal? The interaction that occurs between students, instructor, and the substance of the course material in learning forums such as discussion boards has been described as the “very heart” of online learning.
- Affected by transactional distance? In the online learning environment students in a single class could theoretically come from all four corners of the globe and “interact” through an asynchronous “conversation” spanning minutes, hours, days, or weeks.
- Multi-modal? Students and instructors can engage each other and the material from their phones, their tablets, or their computers using text, audio, or video while located in their office, at home, on a beach, or on a plane, train, bus, or automobile.

It is hard to argue that such fundamental changes in how people are learning in the online environment are not deserving of a learning theory or theories that recognizes these significant shifts and seeks to account for them.

### **Engaging Distance Learners**

When teaching a traditional in-person class, the instructor is presented with a captive audience. It does not automatically follow that the instructor will stimulate the class and end up with lots of student engagement, but the fact that the class is in the instructor’s physical presence and the instructor is able to see and hear the students and gauge the level of interest and comprehension certainly helps increase the likelihood of such an outcome. Conversely, the isolated nature of the students in an online environment and the dearth of visual and other “nonverbal” feedback present a challenge to engagement beyond that experienced in an in-person class. Exacerbating this challenge, engagement by students in the online environment is an essential component of their learning as discussed above. Therefore, understanding why students engage (or not) in the online environment, and figuring out how to improve the likelihood of them engaging is one of the most significant things an online facilitator can do to improve learning outcomes.

Students choose not to engage with each other, the instructor, and the course material for a variety of reasons. They may be intimidated by the technology, the material, the instructor, or their fear of being embarrassed in front of other students. They may not clearly understand what is expected of them. They may be overcome with the requirements of their other commitments including job and family. They might feel isolated and disconnected from the class and the institution. And yes, sometimes they may simply be lazy. Regardless of the obstacles that might inhibit student engagement, online facilitators can combat these tendencies by adopting some best practices aimed at increasing engagement.

## **Establish a Viable Online Presence**

To make up for their lack of physical presence, online facilitators need to establish an online presence from the very beginning of the class. Instructors can help do this by posting their biographies and sending a letter or posting a video introducing themselves and welcoming the students to the class. But this is just the beginning of establishing and maintaining a credible online presence. Online facilitators need to remain engaged throughout the class and model the behavior they wish to see in their students. This means participating frequently in discussion board conversations, acknowledging student input, moderating discussions, and asking open ended questions that stimulate critical thinking and application of the material to real-world scenarios. It means being open and letting students see you as a person. It means avoiding public criticism of students' input and adopting a collegial and conversational tone in your exchanges with students. It means being a present and productive member of the online learning community you are seeking to create.

## **Build a Community of Learners**

Online facilitators need to create a safe place for learning to occur by building an online community of learners. In the words of Haythornthwaite & Andrews, "A technology does not make e-learning, but rather teachers and learners use technology to create the social space in which learning occurs" (2011, p. 2) Online facilitators have a social role to play in stimulating the creation of relationships not only between students and the instructor but between their physically separated students. To this end, online facilitators need to encourage their students to get to know one another and to share part of themselves (their histories, work experiences, personalities, hopes, and aspirations) with the class. When this happens students will not only get much more from the class by drawing on the collective experiences and wisdom of their colleagues, but such sharing also builds a sense of trust and safety in which difficult and challenging ideas can be discussed and examined without fear of ridicule or rash judgment.

## **Create the Opportunity for an Early Win**

The experience of mastery is one of the factors affecting self-efficacy, a student's beliefs about his or her abilities to complete specific actions (Vilkas & McCabe, 2014). Online facilitators should provide clear guidance on tasks for students to complete at the very beginning of the course and then provide positive (and public) feedback on their successful completion. Having experienced this "win," the students are likely to show an increased level of confidence about approaching the rest of the course assignments and will be more likely to increase their engagement with the material, the instructor, and each other.

## **Work Hard ☺**

If this model of learning that focuses on student engagement and communal learning experiences sounds labor intensive, it is. Many commentators have noted that teaching an online

course actually requires more time and engagement on the part of the facilitator than teaching a comparable in-person course. Some researchers found that instructors need to spend an average of 18-19 hours per week to keep online learners engaged (Junk, Deringer, & Junk, 2011). “Online” does not equal easy for either students or facilitators.

### **Mentoring Program for Faculty**

Each new online facilitator will be assigned a more experienced faculty member to serve as a mentor. Mentoring programs have proven to be effective in “providing visions for technology use, individualizing technology support, breaking down hierarchical structure, establishing open dialogue and collaborative relationships; providing mutual benefits for mentors and mentees; and emphasizing the creation of a learning community for those participating in the program” (Palloff & Pratt, 2011, p. 65).

The goal of the program is to help new online faculty succeed by providing them with an experienced colleague with whom to collaborate. At the end of the formal program, mentees will exhibit confidence and competence in running their own courses and will achieve passing scores on their faculty evaluations. In addition, mentees will be expected to become an active and contributing member of the greater faculty learning community.

Mentors will be drawn from a pool of volunteers who have demonstrated professional competence in teaching online courses and have a minimum of one year’s experience doing so (at least two classes). In addition to their having successfully taught the minimum amount of time and classes, mentors must have been consistently rated in the top 25% of teachers in post-course surveys completed by their online students and have previous experience as either a mentor or a mentee in a formal mentorship program.

### **Management and Evaluation Programs**

As mentioned in the previous section, online facilitators are expected to participate in an online faculty learning community. This approach has the dual benefit of providing a community of support and common interest while modeling and encouraging the kind of communal learning that is (or should be) at the heart of the online classes they teach (Palloff & Pratt, 2011). Participation in this learning community is mandatory for new online facilitators for the first two years. After that, participation is voluntary, but highly encouraged.

Managing faculty at a distance is challenging but it is also an inescapable reality in the current world of online instruction. Faculty not only engage in the distance learning of students, but do so from a distance themselves (i.e. they are not physically present at the institution sponsoring the course). In order to meet this challenge, there are three essential elements of any effective faculty management program:

- Communication and community building. Communication with remote faculty needs to be frequent and clear and faculty must feel that they are a valued part of the faculty community, even though they are not present at the organization's physical location.
- Training and mentoring. Online faculty need to be provided with basic training, like this course, on how to serve as an online facilitator. And once trained, they need mentoring as they seek to apply what they have learned as they actually embark on their online teaching journey.
- Faculty support. Teaching an online course requires a large investment of time, and effort on the part of online facilitators. They need to feel valued and supported by the administration.

(Palloff & Pratt, 2011, p. 100-101)

Online facilitators will be evaluated using the criteria set forth by Palloff & Pratt in *The Excellent Online Instructor* (2011). Appendix C of that text contains an evaluation rubric, copies of which will be provided each online facilitator (Palloff & Pratt, 2011, pp. 155-158). Use of this rubric is intended to promote consistency of evaluation and to ensure alignment between the skills identified as essential for effective online facilitation and the criteria used for evaluating instructors' performance of those skills.

### **Learning Management System (LMS)**

The basic definition of a learning management system or LMS is “a software application that automates the administration, tracking, and reporting of training events” (Ellis, 2009, p. 1). But as learning management systems have evolved, they have become much more than simply a way to track and report training. Such systems are also an integral part of the online training environment, used to post resources, assignments, and host the online forums and discussion spaces that are so much a part of the collaborative online learning world.

Online facilitators will use moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) as the LMS for all courses. Moodle offers online facilitators a range of tools they can use to engage their students. Moodle allows facilitators the ability to:

- Upload text, and picture files
- Create text or web pages
- Embed hypertext links to web pages or audio/video files
- Organize materials in flexible ways (e.g. tabs by topic, week, student, etc...)
- Provide a space for students to upload assignments

- Create assessments and track responses
- Moderate a discussion forum
- Populate a database
- Build a wiki

(Moodle, 2014)

Online facilitators are expected to use moodle to present information, such as lectures or videos, conduct class and private discussions with students through the use of the chat and forum features of moodle and to use moodle to receive student assignments and return them with feedback and grades as appropriate. It is important that moodle be the mechanism for all of these tasks. Other systems exist, but utilizing a single system for the bulk of student/instructor interaction provides the best mechanism for tracking student and instructor tasks as well as increasing the inclusivity of communications across the entire class. This will encourage a broader level of participation and reduce the likelihood of individual students becoming isolated or excluded.

### **Technology/Media Tools to Engage Students and Enhance Learning**

Online facilitators are encouraged to take advantage of the media richness afforded through moodle to incorporate audio, video, visuals, and infographics into their course design. If appropriate, games and simulations can also be used as a way to stimulate student interaction with each other and the material, but the use of such more technologically advanced techniques is beyond the scope of this introductory course. Additional training will be available in the future specifically focused on the use of games and simulations as instructional tools.

It is a well accepted pedagogical principle that students learn best when they are exposed to material through a variety of modes and experiences (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). This reflects two separate but important realities, first, that students have different learning styles and “intelligences,” and second, that regardless of the learning style or “intelligences” of a given student, students learn best when engaging with material in ways that stimulate more than one of their senses (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

The fact that students and facilitators do not share the same physical place when using an e-learning environment automatically removes some of the forms of communication that naturally exist in a normal face-to-face exchange of ideas. This makes it even more important that online facilitators use whatever tools are available to help to enrich the online learning experience for students.

Audio can be used as a means to engage in asynchronous dialog by recording, and having students record, their responses to discussion prompts. Audio can also be used to present material, either through the posting of audio files or by having students prepare assignments in which they record their responses.

Visuals can be incorporated in the form of infographics, charts, graphs, pictures, etc... Facilitators can once again use these both to present material and as a vehicle for students to interact with the material. Student assignments can include creating presentations, infographics, or other visual representations of the material being taught or to illustrate their thoughts about or reactions to the material.

Video can be one of the most powerful instructional tools available in the online environment. Students can upload video responses or assignments. A synchronous experience can be built into the course where students and the facilitator can “meet face-to-face” through tools such as Skype or mobile phone applications such as FaceTime or Tango. Instructors can post video showing their “lectures” or video of events for students to observe, evaluate, and critique. Short of gaming and simulations, this sort of visual case study, with students able to see and hear what happened as if they were there, is almost as close as an instructor can come to creating an experiential learning environment online.

### **Student Collaboration Tools**

Wikis are websites that allow users to collaborate in the creation and editing of web pages (Poore, 2008). Wikis are excellent tools for group project assignments and for building collections and sharing information (Poore, 2008). Wikis can also serve to build a sense of community as students work together collaboratively to build “their” wiki. Online facilitators can use wiki pages to post assignment information, share the aims and objectives of the course, provide instructional materials, or share resources (Poore, 2008). Students can use them to collaborate on projects or create a shared pool of resources (Poore, 2008).

Blogs, short for “web logs,” are websites where the “blogger” can post thoughts and ideas and others can post responses (Poore, 2008). Blogs can be used by the facilitator to prompt discussions or to guide students along a particular line of inquiry. A student discussion forum is really an example of a blog.

As a species, human beings are hardwired to respond to visual input and the concept is deeply embedded in our culture and psyche. “A picture is worth a thousand words;” “Seeing is believing;” “Show me” are all commonly heard expressions that testify to the power of visual images. Skype, FaceTime, and Tango are all examples of internet tools that allow speakers to see and hear each other in real time. Students can use these tools to communicate with each other or the facilitator. Facilitators can use them to present information, answer questions, or facilitate a discussion. The use of these tools allows online facilitators to recreate to some extent the kind of “in-person” contact that is otherwise completely missing from the online environment.

Moodle (the LMS selected) supports and integrates into its structure both Wikis and Blogs. When using wikis and blogs as part of the courses, they should be used within the Moodle platform.

### **Differences in Distance learners**

Distance learners, like in-person students, learn best when they are afforded a safe and comfortable place in which to engage in the process of learning. Online facilitators need to incorporate different techniques to help create the appropriate learning environment for diverse distance learners.

Cultural learners learn best from their peers and those with whom they share a common cultural language and experience. In the online context, where the class may be quite diverse and have many different cultures represented, the online facilitator should work hard to create a new shared culture within the class. Creating a sense of online community will help cultural learners feel comfortable enough to engage in the observational learning they are used to.

Experiential learners learn by doing. Online facilitators should look for opportunities to build “doing” into their classes. One technique for doing this is to create assessments or assignments that require students to actually practice the skills they are learning and to complete assignments that mirror the kind of workproduct they would be expected to produce when they apply what they have learned in their current or anticipated future work environment.

Online learners tend to be drawn from groups not traditionally represented in the traditional learning environment. Such students tend to be older and have careers and family obligations. They also bring a wealth of diversity of experience to the virtual classroom that can be a tremendous asset in the community and collaboration centric environment that characterizes online learning.

### **Synchronous versus asynchronous facilitation skills**

There are opportunities for synchronous communication in online courses; facilitators can set up online office hours, or even schedule a weekly “class” when all students will attend. But the vast majority of online instruction is conducted asynchronously and the ability to engage in an “anytime-anywhere” asynchronous manner is to a large degree what makes online courses attractive to many of the students taking them. New online facilitators need to take the skills they have learned teaching in an in-person, synchronous environment, and transition those skills to the largely asynchronous e-learning environment.

Asynchronous communication can be aided by several practices. Facilitators need to maintain a “presence” in the virtual classroom and to check and respond to posts promptly. Facilitators should also provide clear participation requirements to students to ensure timely and measured asynchronous “discussions.” Facilitators also need to be alert to signs that students are

struggling, failing to participate, not understanding course material, or having an emotional reaction to the course material or student interaction. In the online environment, it may be harder for facilitators to pick up on the clues that some of these things are occurring.

### **Technology Management Issues**

Technology management issues can arise in various ways. Some students (or new facilitators?) may have difficulty using the learning management system. Tutorials are available on the main campus website and additional assistance is available via moodle user groups on line, the technical support staff, the facilitator (for students) and the faculty mentor (for new facilitators)

Another technology management issue is lack of familiarity with different applications or software programs. Again, tutorials are available to assist, not only from the main campus resource center, but also on the internet through the sites associated with the particular applications or programs and through social learning platforms such as Pinterest and YouTube. Facilitators should encourage students to seek out answers on their own, but be prepared to assist them or help direct their searches if they encounter difficulties.

One technology management issue that can create large difficulties for individuals and organizations is the need for data security. Attacks by organized groups and freelance hackers threaten the private and personal information of students and faculty alike. Online facilitators should discourage students from posting non-relevant sensitive personal information in public forums and should not release information about students to any third-party without the appropriate documentation and clearance from administrators. Beyond this, moodle was selected, in part, because of the security measures built into the application that are designed to protect against unauthorized access, data loss, and misuse by unauthorized parties (Moodle, 2014).

### **Classroom Management Issues**

Just as the in-person traditional classroom needs to be managed to ensure the best environment for student learning, so too does the online classroom. Three very important classroom management issues, feedback, challenging behaviors, and accessibility, are addressed below. Although these issues exist in the traditional classroom, the differences between that environment and the e-learning environment merit their discussion in this course.

#### **Feedback**

Providing feedback to students is arguably the most important thing any instructor can do to help facilitate student learning. In the online environment, facilitator feedback is an irreplaceable component of a successful online course.

Feedback can be provided in a variety of formats: text messages, e-mail, comments on projects, comments in discussion forums, or even audio files or a video conference. Regardless of the format, some key aspects of feedback remain constant. Grant Wiggins (2012) offers seven keys to effective feedback. Helpful feedback (as opposed to advice or criticism) is:

Goal Referenced	Feedback should be offered in the context of its relevance to the achieving the desired goal.
Tangible and Transparent	Feedback should capture measurable and verifiable things.
Actionable	Feedback should be concrete, specific, and useful; it is something that can be acted upon.
User-Friendly	To be actionable, the feedback must be clear and understandable to the student.
Timely	Feedback is most effective when received close in time to the event giving rise to the feedback.
Ongoing	Feedback is a type of formative assessment, to be truly effective, feedback needs to be followed by opportunities to improve the performance.
Consistent	Information passed in the form of feedback needs to be stable; rubrics can help ensure consistency of feedback.

(Wiggins, 2012)

### **Challenging Behaviors**

Challenging behaviors arise in the online classroom just as they do in the traditional in-person classroom. In the online environment though, some behavioral issues are naturally negated by the inherent distance involved, while others can be exacerbated by the online environment. In his article, *Managing Controversy in the Online Classroom*, Robert Kelly provides a thoughtful analysis of some of the potential problems found in an online classroom, as well as facilitator responses designed to prevent or remedy the behavior (Kelly, 2013). A synthesis of these suggestions (Kelly, 2013) is presented in table form on the next page.

Possible Controversies in Online Environments and Strategies to Prevent or Respond to Them

Possible Controversies	Strategies for Responding
<p>An asynchronous online format allows for the possibility of conflict to erupt between students without the facilitator’s immediate awareness and ability to intervene.</p>	<p>Anticipate controversies and be open with students that they may and do occur sometimes.</p> <p>Set behavioral ground rules for students’ to follow and model the same good “netiquette.”</p>
<p>Miscommunications may arise as a result of the predominantly text-based communications combined with assumptions and stereotypes on the part of the senders and receivers of the information.</p>	<p>Be alert for signs of conflict and when possible (and appropriate) intervene promptly and address the conflict directly.</p> <p>Acknowledge the human tendency to stereotype and request students to attempt to resist this tendency.</p>
<p>The relative anonymity and lack of face-to-face accountability may encourage inappropriate online behavior (e.g. bullying, name-calling, harassing) by “internet thugs.”</p>	<p>Intervene promptly and reinforce the expected behavioral ground rules.</p> <p>Consider using video podcasts in responding to significant or emotionally charged issues.</p> <p>If necessary, enlist assistance from administration for additional intervention that might include student services and disciplinary components.</p>
<p>Some students may have an emotional reaction to some of the course material that is undetected by the facilitator.</p>	<p>Be alert for signs of unease including a change in posting patterns or emotional language in students’ posts.</p> <p>Be supportive and engage students to assist with their unease. (Consider using context richer media such as Skype or telephone when dealing with these issues).</p> <p>Encourage critical thinking with its attendant focus on thoughts and facts as opposed to emotions and feelings.</p>

(Smith, 2014)

## **Accessibility**

Online facilitators have both a legal and a moral obligation to assist learners who face challenges to overcome them to the maximum extent possible. To that end, online facilitators are expected to make the materials used in their classes accessible to those students who may be suffering from a disability. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. Although not binding on non-federal agencies, Section 508 practices should be followed by all online facilitators to prevent the unintentional creation of barriers for their students. Guidance and tools can be found under the *Tools and Resources* tab at [www.section508.gov](http://www.section508.gov).

In addition to following the Section 508 guidelines, online facilitators should be sensitive to the possible presence of students with disabilities within their classrooms and be prepared to assist such students or refer them to the appropriate office. There are many resources available to such students, but those students may be unaware of the existence of those resources or unaware of how to access them.

## **Conclusion**

Hopefully this course has assisted trainees begin the pursuit of their goal to become excellent online facilitators. But it is a journey. Trainees should expect that questions will arise and scenarios will develop where they, as new online facilitators, need guidance or assistance. Use the contacts developed during this course; reach out to mentors, peers, and instructors; they stand ready to assist.

Welcome to the online learning community and good luck on the journey!

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## Course Schedule

### Day One

Times	Subjects	Notes
0900 -0950	Program introduction Icebreaker/Administrative issues	
1000-1050	Attributes of the Excellent Online Instructor	
1100 – 1150	Roles of the Online Facilitator	
1200-1:00	LUNCH	
1:00- 2:00	Phases of Development for Distance Learning Facilitators	
2:00 – 2:50	Theories of Distance Learning	
3:00 – 3:50	Engaging Online Students – theory and practice	
4:00 – 5:00	Engaging Online Students – theory and practice (cont.)	

## Course Schedule

### Day Two

Times	Activities	Notes
0900 -0950	Introduction to LMS (moodle)	
1000-1050	LMS practicum	
1100 – 1150	Management and Evaluation of Faculty/Faculty Mentoring program	
1200-1:00	LUNCH	Get acquainted lunch with assigned mentors
1:00- 2:00	Tools for Engaging Online Learners/Establishing Presence and Building Community	
2:00 – 2:50	Engaging Learners Online Practicum	Trainees will take turns moderating online discussions based on previous blocks of instruction using the LMS.
3:00 – 3:50	Engaging Learners Online Practicum (cont.)	
4:00 – 5:00	Providing Feedback Online	

## Course Schedule

### Day Three

Times	Activities	Notes
0900 -0950	Handling Challenging Behaviors	
1000-1050	Feedback/Challenging Behaviors practicum	Trainees will provide feedback and handle scripted challenging behavior scenarios using the LMS.
1100 – 1150	Technology Management and Accessibility Issues	
1200-1:00	LUNCH	
1:00- 2:00	Review/Wrap-Up	
2:00 – 2:50	Self-directed lab practicum	
3:00 – 3:50	Assessment activities	
4:00 – 5:00	Assessment activities	Including course evaluation survey