

InnovaEDU network
Learn to Tea(ch) series

Tartu seminar: “Designing and delivering courses in an online and blended environment: tools, methods, processes and challenges”

Summary of good teaching practices

Introduction

The following summary of good teaching practices has been collected as a result of group brainstorming activity during the seminar program. It includes recommendations from the teaching and administrative/support staff members from partner institutions (University of Tartu/J. Skytte Institute of Political Studies; Riga Graduate School of Law; Uppsala University; Aarhus University and Norwegian University of Science and Technology). The main focus on the seminar centered around challenges and opportunities of planning and implementing online and blended courses in various degree programs. The central issues and recommendations of addressing them could be formulated as follows:

Developing peer-to-peer interaction and peer-review activities in an online environment

To facilitate activities that promote peer-to-peer learning in an online environment, it is important to:

- **Set a clear framework and process for peer evaluation in an online environment by finding an appropriate online tool to match your objectives.** Consult with your instructional designer on the most feasible online tool, which is supported by your university’s Learning Management System (LMS), helping you to technically and didactically setup and implement a peer-review process.
- **Set “ground-rules” for online evaluation. Provide clear and concise information to students on the code of conduct for online peer assessment.** Students should have a precise understanding of the purpose of and expectations from such activity.
- **Create support material to guide students’ peer evaluation.** Develop additional assessment rubrics or visual tools in your Learning Management System, which could assist students in providing feedback to their peers. The following rubrics could contain more detailed and expanded information on what constitutes sufficient feedback.
- **Monitor online progress of students and intervene when necessary.** To ensure that all students get the most from online peer evaluation exercise, it is crucial to ensure that they follow the set rules, and no one is experiencing any technical issues with completing or following up on the assignment. In this respect, it is important to constantly monitor the progress of students through the Learning Management system and include reflective and feedback mechanisms for students, enabling them to consult with the lecturer or seek help when necessary.

Enhancing interactivity in webinars

To encourage more live interaction during webinars it is important to:

- **Create an open and “welcoming” environment for your webinars.** The first steps in encouraging interactivity in your webinars, is to make sure that students feel comfortable in an online setting. To ensure that, provide students with helpful information prior to the webinar about the overall setting of the session: how they can pose questions and interact with each other and the instructor.
- **Try to divide your webinar into relatively short sessions to make sure that students don’t lose focus throughout the entire webinar.** Try to plan your class by laying out different activities for respective parts of your webinar. The activities can vary from individual to group tasks, from a short poll to a breakout-room, but try to keep them consistent and in line with your planned class objectives. It is important that your questions and tasks remain meaningful – the tool shouldn’t be more important than the content.
- **Develop various triggers throughout the session.** One of the effective ways of engaging students during the session could be brief questions/triggers in the form of a poll or interactive survey, which can quickly re-engage a student; give them an opportunity to self-test their knowledge and give a lecturer an overview of students’ progress and comprehension of material.
- **Assign (a student) moderator for a webinar:** it might be good to have an additional moderator for your webinar, who will keep an eye on online chat and assist the instructor with engaging with the online chat questions.

Designing video content for lectures

To prepare video content well-fitted for online learning, it is important to:

- **Consider technical setup for video recording.** It is important to bear in mind that a good audio, light and camera angle play a significant role on how the recording will turn out. It is recommended to test the potential setting for a video prior to making a recording.
- **Prepare your script or talking points.** Try to prepare some talking points, a script, and/or slides prior to recording - it will help you to stay focused and on point while recording.
- **Think of the duration and structure of your lecture.** Think about the most effective ways of conveying information to the students and which video format might fulfill this purpose in the most feasible way (e.g. explainer video; talking head; interview; screen-capture). If your lecture is longer than 20 minutes, think about dividing it into smaller parts and adding tabs to the structure of your lecture so it is a) easier for students to find information and b) easier for you in a long-term to update specific section of the video with a more updated information if new research or data comes out on the discussed topic.