Examining Online Teaching: Considering Essential Teaching Aims

A well-designed course is foundational to an effective online learning environment and supports the instructor's efforts to foster key teaching aims. Beyond the goals for the course itself (which usually target the concepts, skills, and applications needed to succeed in the course), instructor's also want their courses to support the learners' success and development in broader ways. They focus on specific **teaching aims** and the actions they can take to promote them.

Some of the most common and impactful teaching aims for online courses include the following:

- Ensure students engage with core content in active, meaningful ways.
- Foster critical, higher order thinking and challenge taken-for-granted ideas and practices in the discipline.
- Facilitate interaction between students and build a class community.
- Support students in becoming more independent online learners.
- Guide student learning through frequent feedback, instruction, and ongoing dialog with them.
- Ensure students understand the expectations and standards for success.
- Create a climate in which all students feel respected and welcomed.

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In the reflective comments below, note how the instructor is considering her approach to meeting one of her teaching aims through self-questioning.

Which teaching aim do I want to consider today?

I want to consider how I foster critical, higher order thinking and challenge taken-for-granted ideas and practices in the discipline.

What am I asking my students to do?

I ask my students to complete the readings and view the videos before entering the discussion forum. Then, I ask them to discuss the information in the content with each other according to my prompt which requires critical application of the content and debate. Finally, I ask my students to complete a similar analysis on another case.

How am I communicating my expectations to my students?

I discuss the purpose of the learning activities in the syllabus, and I provide instructions along with a rubric for students as a reference.

What evidence is there that my students are successful, or perhaps struggling?

Student feedback indicates that there might be some confusion and that some students don't feel comfortable to participate in the debate in the discussion forum. I noticed that several students use tentative language in their posts and frame their position in deference to others in the course. They don't seem to be willing to defend and debate. Some students on the other hand do engage in the debate, perhaps in too spirited a manner sometimes, but this seems to follow when I have corrected someone's thinking.