Distance Education in Sport: Strategies for Designing and Managing the Virtual Classroom

Kimberly Miloch, Texas Woman's University
Sally Ford, Texas Woman's University
Jason Lee, University of North Florida
Jennifer Kane, University of North Florida

As distance education continues to increase, the manner in which online courses are delivered and assessed has become a central focus for instructors and accrediting agencies (Minasian-Batmanian, 2008). The purpose of this presentation is to highlight key strategies for appropriate design and management of the online classroom. Specifically, this presentation will examine appropriate course navigation and design schemes, communication strategies, assessment, and student to student interaction in the online course environment. Guidelines, suggestions, and tips for implementing these strategies will be provided and discussed.

Navigation in any online environment is essential to the end user (Reeves & Reeves, 2008). The navigation and design scheme is the road map for the end user, and appropriate navigation sets the tone for communication in the online environment. Appropriate navigation directs the student to pertinent information and provides them with a starting point each time they log on to the virtual classroom. The navigation guides the student to pertinent information and serves as a resource throughout the course.

Communication in the online environment, like face to face courses, can be challenging and plays a vital role in student learning outcomes (DeGennaro & Clapp, 2005). Information may be disseminated in numerous ways to students, and special attention must be paid to the content and clarity of the communication. Online instructors may take advantage techniques such as podcasts, film and television clips, video recordings, emails, announcements, and blogs to facilitate communication with students.

As with face to face courses, assessment of both the online delivery of the course and assignments is paramount. Technological tools associated with the course should be utilized to enhance assessment efforts (Cote, Chen, & Keppell, 2008; Jacobs, 2005). Examples include the use of Wikis and discussion boards. These may be helpful tools in meeting course objectives and measuring student learning outcomes (Curdie, 2008).

Many distance education students indicate a feeling of disconnect in the online classroom. Therefore, incorporating interactive elements into the online course is recommended and often appropriate (Durrington, Berryhill, & Swafford, 2006; Pavey & Garland, 2004). Students may connect through group pages, course Wikis, and course discussion boards. These elements may be designed as social elements and utilized in conjunction with Wikis and discussion boards to measure and promote student learning outcomes.