Readiness to Teach Online

1 What is it?

Faculty trained to teach online are in demand. However, there are certain aspects faculty should know to ready themselves to teach online. For instance, do faculty need to be computer experts to teach online? What are the differences between traditional courses and online courses? What are the advantages of teaching online? Despite the vast experience faculties have teaching in face-to-face (F2F) environments, it is important that they know how to use their skills in online courses and what they can do to get themselves ready before teaching online.

2 Why is it important?

Have you been asked to teach an online course? Have you agreed to teach an online course and don't know where to start? Are you already teaching a course and need some help? It does not matter how much teaching experience you have, starting from scratch in a new environment can produce anxiety.

3 How to ready yourself?

Know the differences between online courses and face-to-face (F2F) courses (Boettcher and Conrad, 2016, p. 8-10):

- **Instructor role adjustment:** It's a change from being the "sage on the stage" to being a "guide on the side" (Stavredes, 2011, p. 152). Faculty invests time facilitating learning experiences rather than preparing for live lectures. A *facilitator* focuses on preparing mini-lectures, monitoring discussions, or supporting students' work.
- **Learner autonomy:** Online courses tend to focus on students' learning decisions. Therefore, students must be actively engaged in thinking, dialogue, writing, and/or reflecting to construct their own knowledge. Unlike F2F courses, students cannot passively attend class, waiting for an instructor to illuminate them regarding course

content. It is the faculty's role to create effective stimuli for learning activities beforehand.

- **Content flexibility:** Learner autonomy, the vast number of online resources, and content adaptability to multiple devices dictate that online courses use multiple resources. However, it might be overwhelming for learners to cope with the abundance of materials. The instructor should establish a weekly rhythm and prioritize content.
- **Asynchronous/Synchronous communication:** Online courses rely mainly on asynchronous communication in which learners share their thoughts about content learned in the discussion boards. Synchronous communication in online courses is often used for group work, office hours, presentations, etc.
- **Continuous assessment:** Assessment of online students should be continuous instead of periodic. These could include self-checks and peer and group assessments in addition to instructor feedback.

4 Are you ready to teach online?

Answer the following questions adapted from Ko and Rossen (2017, p. 18-19) to check the basic skills a faculty member needs to start teaching online:

- Can you set up folders and directories on your PC?
- Can you use word-processing software (cut, copy, paste)?
- Can you communicate by email (using attachments)?
- Can you use web browsers to access multimedia like YouTube?
- Can you download files from the network and save them to your computer?
- Can you modify files (e.g. documents, images) and upload them back to your institution's

learning management system (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas)?

- Do you know who to contact at your campus for help with technical support and/or instructor training and support?

You probably answered yes to most if not all of these questions. If so, you are ready to embark on an online teaching adventure. As Ko & Rosen (2010) explain, "Techies don't necessarily make the best online instructors. An interest in teaching comes first, technology second (p. 19)."

5 Are there advantages to teaching online?

Yes, there are advantages! See the advantages of online learning (adapted from Ko and Rossen, 2017, p. 19-22):

- **Strengthens your teaching**: Preparing and designing online courses before launching them increases awareness of what strategies work better for students and allows for improvement.
- In the online course environment you can literally see the strategies, your teaching techniques, and student learning activity outcomes. This visualization and recording of your "teaching" allows you to come back and reflect more easily than in your face-to-face classes.
- Teaching online can also be a **gateway to creative ideas** as you adjust to the medium for your online courses. Creative ideas that you can bring back to your face-to-face classes too.
- **Wider connections:** Online courses allow you to interact with students from all over the world and collaborate with instructors or institutions far away. Many online instructors do not live in proximity to the brick and mortar campuses for which they teach.

6 Additional Resources

Are you ready to teach online?
Take the **Faculty Online Teaching Readiness Survey** developed by the University of Toledo to check your online readiness.

Purdue has many **resources** and teams ready to help. You will find information related to Purdue instructional support, developing online courses, and support to develop student-centered learning environments (IMPACT) in your courses (traditional and online).

7 References

Boettcher, J. & Conrad, R. (2016). T*he Online Teaching Survival Guide*: Simple and Practical Pedagogical Tips. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.

Ko, S., & Rossen, S. (2017). Teaching online (4th ed.). Routledge.

Stavredes, T. (2011). *Effective online teaching.* San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.