Engaging Students in the Online Classroom

What I learned in my summer vacation
Simply putting lectures in line does not make an effective online course.
Challenges of online education

- Faculty cannot receive nonverbal cues from students
- Faculty may find it harder to communicate enthusiasm
- Students feel anonymous
- Students believe online courses are easier
Opportunities

- Students work at their own pace, when they choose
- Possibilities for flexibility, interactive exercises and creativity (that can be incorporated into the F2F classroom as well)
Establishing a student-faculty relationship

- The importance of introductions
  - Take time to get to know them individually, through use of pictures, video, social media, bios
Establish a student-faculty relationship

- Refer to students by name during synchronous sessions
- If appropriate, refer to something in student’s introduction during the course
- Be available by e-mail, telephone
- Virtual office hours
Teacher presence

- Be an active part of discussion forums
- Check into site every day, or at least every other day
- Communicate with individual students by e-mail when necessary
Create a learning environment that is intellectually exciting and challenging!
Students learn better when they are active participants in the process.
Moving away from the teacher-centered model of education

- The instructor as facilitator rather than as the source of all information and knowledge
  - But we are still important!
- Use a variety of learning activities and instructional methods other than just lecturing
Students feel more motivated if they judge that a course is going to be worthwhile

- Prepare a detailed syllabus
  - Detail deadlines, when each activity will be opening and closing
- Clearly communicate expectations
  - Set clear guidelines for participation
- Generate explicit course goals
  - Connect goals to the topics in the course
  - Periodically ask students to assess their own progress towards these goals
Make the course relevant to the students’ lives

- Use examples that derive from real life situations – case studies
- If appropriate, encourage students to bring their life experiences into the classroom
Promote collaboration between students

- Activities that require student interaction promote engagement and a deeper level of thought
  - Small-group research assignments
  - Sharing resources
  - Collaborative writing via wikis or Google docs
Intergroup collaboration

- Connect with individuals or groups outside of the class
  - Guest speakers
  - E-mail
  - Common discussion area
  - blogs
Use “mini-lectures” that emphasize a point or stimulate a discussion.

- Begin and end the lectures with questions
  - Beginning questions frame the lecture
  - Ending questions encourage students to continue the inquiry
  - Use questions as a link to the discussion board to the next week’s topics
Discussion forums

- Ask the right questions
  - require exploration of a topic
  - develop critical thinking skills
Discussion forums

- Facilitate, but don’t dominate, the discussion
- Share responsibility for facilitation
- Promote substantive and constructive feedback from students to others’ postings
- Assign students different roles in the discussion
  - Facilitator
  - Content commentator
  - Team leader
“Fishbowl” activities

- A small group interacts with the instructor while others observe, and participate in the discussion individually or in teams
- Roundtable discussions
Reflection journal

- A tool to improve learning through critical analysis of what one has learned, and of the learning experience
- Facilitates critical thinking and (perhaps) writing skills
It’s all about course design!
The course site

- The software used is critical
  - flexibility in course design
  - must be easy to navigate
Web pages

- Keep them updated!
- Be creative
  - Uncluttered, attractive
  - Use imagery, audio, video, and interactive features
Advice

- Take an online course before teaching one
- Take advantage of faulty development resources before undertaking an online course
  - pedagogy
  - course design
- Make sure that the technological resources are in place before you undertake an online course, not only for preparation of the course, but to see you through the course
- Do not underestimate the amount of work it takes to prepare and to teach an online course!
A sample of my course design...

Bioethics
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>The basis of morality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overview of the week</strong></td>
<td>Intro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Readings Assignments</strong></td>
<td>readings for week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Theories of Morality</td>
<td><strong>Roundtable BLT</strong> (40 - 60 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utilitarianism</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiz on Assigned Work</td>
<td>Quiz on Readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Forum on Absolute Moral Values</td>
<td>Discussion Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Journal</td>
<td>BLT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Live session:</strong> Applying theories of Morality</td>
<td>Live Session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>3.1Intro</td>
</tr>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overview of the Week</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assigned Readings</strong></td>
<td>HTML Page with Required 3Readings for Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Modern Scientific Enterprise</td>
<td>Monologue Oyster (20 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Scientific Misconduct</td>
<td>Monologue Oyster (20 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiz on Assigned Work</td>
<td>3.5Quiz on Readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Project on Responsible Conduct of Research</strong></td>
<td>Assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment: Paper</td>
<td>Paper #1 due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Journal</td>
<td>BLT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Session on Misconduct in research</td>
<td>Live Session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Video on the Role of Stem Cell research in Regenerative Medicine and in the Production of Organs for Transplant | Interview:  
1. Scientist at lab, importance of stem cells at regenerative medicine lab  
2. Someone who would talk about need for organs, who could give us quotes on how many people are waiting for organs  
3. Perhaps someone who doesn't believe in stem cell research or is against it? Looking for a "right to life" individual. Need to find an appropriate person.  
4. Someone who had received an organ and what it meant to them  
5. Someone on the list who hasn't received one yet  
| Special Produced Video: Studio Interview, Documentary Style (12min) | Produce documentary-style, weave all the 4 perspectives together, Carole sits off camera to listen to the interviews or conduct the interview but off camera.  

Student Takeaways:  
Understand implications of controversy and various perspectives |