

How Can Media Richness Theory and Social Presence Theory Improve My Instruction?

Presented by:

Evie Oregon

Assistant Professor, Western Kentucky University

Dr. Evie Oregon is an assistant professor and graduate program and certificate coordinator for the online Intercollegiate Athletic Administration Program at Western Kentucky University. Oregon has a proven track record in increasing student retention and satisfaction, and ample experience in course design, online instructional strategies, and assessments. She was recently awarded a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Innovations Grant to develop, design, and build a 100 percent online program focusing on student-athlete career development.



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Course Design Social Presence Strategies Used and Rationale

Strategy	Rationale
<p>Instructor Welcome Video - Instructor sent a welcome video to the students on the first day of the course.</p>	<p>Foster an immediate sense of online community between instructor and students. Allows instructor to establish his/her social presence at the beginning of the course, affords students both verbal and nonverbal communication cues, so they have a stronger the opportunity to become acquainted with instructor's personality and communication style. Instructors should open lines of communication with students as early as possible (Minich, 1996).</p>
<p>Student Introductory Profile Video - Students record a 2-4 minute introductory video and post to course site vlog. They are required to respond to a minimum of 4 other videos in written format.</p>	<p>Creates an initial dialogue among students, thereby producing a learning community. Students need the opportunity to get to know each other and feel comfortable before learning can take place (Rovai, 2002; Tinto, 1993). "Any information provided, whether it is text or visual helps students create an awareness of each other to begin the process of connecting" (Aragon, 2003, p. 62).</p>
<p>Learning Styles Assessment - Students complete and submit an assessment to the instructor the first week of class.</p>	<p>Allows students to understand their preferred learning style, and the instructor was then able to use the results to determine the best method of communication for each facilitated learning objective. Hughes (2004) suggested that we should focus our efforts on meeting the needs of the learner; not on what is easy to deliver. Knowing the learner and the learner's needs is critical.</p>
<p>Initial Synchronous Communication Meeting - Students set up a 15 minute synchronous communication meeting with the instructor within the first two weeks of the course through Skype, Facetime, Adobe Connect, or other form of video conferencing.</p>	<p>Allows both students and the instructor the opportunity to see each other physically, which afforded each the chance to become familiar with the other's verbal and nonverbal cues, personality traits and communication styles. Assist in relationship building as the student was</p>

	<p>provided the opportunity to view the instructor as “real.” Immediacy is a critical element in social presence, and communication in real time often enhances social presence when handled well (Richardson & Swan, (2003). The personal call in the initial two weeks of the course helps students understand that the instructor is a real person and is interested in the student's success and development</p>
<p>Module Orientation Video - Prior to each module, students were sent a 2-5 minute module orientation video recorded by the instructor that briefly went over learning objective(s), course readings and assignments for that unit</p>	<p>Videos with high numbers of views usually have a direct connection to course assignments (or course assessments). If a video contains required content that a student must use for an assignment or discussion posting, it is correlated with higher view numbers. Research shows one of the benefits video can offer is creating faculty presence in an online environment (Jaggars, Edgecombe, & Stace, 2013).</p>
<p>Instant Messaging - Instructor allowed and encouraged instant messaging via iChat, Google chat and text messaging. Instructor used IM for conducting synchronous chat sessions, as well as to provide individual communication with students.</p>	<p>Maintains a sense of connection with others and gave a greater sense of shared context. Instant messaging helped students feel a greater sense of presence by enabling them to communicate in real-time and be aware of others who are online (Karen (2010).</p>
<p>Online Office Hours - Due to the fact that courses were 100% online, with a large number of adult learners who do the majority of their work at night and on the weekends, instructors made themselves available for online office hours for a minimum of four evening hours during the week, as well as four hours on the weekends</p>	<p>Students who enroll in online courses might not live on campus and this provides an opportunity for online instructors to support these students by hosting virtual office hours (Edwards & Helvie-Mason, 2010). Virtual office hours provide opportunities for students to communicate with their professor without the constraints of traditional office hours.</p>
<p>Text Messaging - In hopes to make communication more compatible with the mobile lifestyle of today's students. Instructors decided to allow and encourage students to use SMS text messaging at their leisure. It was encouraged especially for things that needed be addressed</p>	<p>IM increases the level of access that students have to the instructor. Research has shown that students participating in distance education courses indicated that text messaging is a technology they enjoy using to communicate and that SMS text-messaging tool also provided a medium for</p>

immediately (quiz or an assignment submission needing to be reset).	communication and dialogue, which engendered the "immediacy" sought by many online learners (DuVall et al., 2007).
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Table 4: Course Instruction Social Presence Strategies and Rationale

Course Announcements - Instructor sent a minimum of two announcements each week, which consisted of weekly updates, course reminders, when assignments were scheduled for submission	Instructor sends weekly announcement dates consistent, sending module reminders every Monday morning and weekly updates on Thursdays. This keeps the students informed on a regular basis and eliminates any ambiguity about what was expected and when materials were due.
Quality Emails - Individual and class emails were used during IAA courses.	Email can be used in three ways in online teaching: class email, group email, and individual email. According to Horton (2000), class email is "email broadcast," and it is used for important announcements such as schedule changes, to correct misunderstandings or clarify misconceptions. Group email can be used to provide students with ideas, guidance, or feedback on group projects. Individual email can be used for many situations, such as answering individual questions, providing feedback on assignments, motivating students to learn, and following up with students for special situations.
Discussion Board - Instructor responded to initial posts/replies and periodically throughout the semester on subsequent submissions.	For the first initial discussion board it is imperative that the facilitator comment on student posts to guide their learning. If instructors do not plan on responding to all posts, it is important to inform students of this in the beginning and reiterate that all posts will be read so as to prevent a perception of lack of interest. The instructor should intervene when the discussion seems to be struggling or headed the wrong way (Palloff & Pratt, 2001), but should not over-participate in the discussion, as this will be considered stifling and restrictive

<p>Netiquette Policy - A netiquette policy was posted in the syllabus and on the discussion board forum. It is also noted in the courses orientations videos.</p>	<p>Offering an education in netiquette, the etiquette of online communication with students provides a firm foundation for establishing a socially present classroom and a community of learners (Weiss, 2000).</p>
<p>Video Feedback - Often times instead of sending a general class email with a summary of assignment remarks or discussion feedback, instructors would record an assignment feedback video to send out to the class as a whole.</p>	<p>Allows instructor to further enhance the sense of the online community by reinforcing video communication contact, as well as address needed feedback on assignments.</p> <p>Research has shown that students who receive individual video feedback from their instructor find it to be beneficial supporting findings that asynchronous audio feedback is helpful (Ice et al., 2007; Oomen-Early et al., 2008; Borup, West, & Graham, 2012).</p>
<p>Phone Call - Instructor made sure to call each student, at least once throughout the semester</p>	<p>Individualized communication strategy that allowed feedback on an assignment or praise for the work submitted to that point while solidifying a sense of realness by the student in regards to the instructor. A way to develop rapport and initiate social presence, a phone call personalizes the instructor and helps dispel the impression that online classes are just interactions with technology (Gunderson et al., 2014).</p> <p>This method may not be suitable for large courses. Virtual office hours for the entire group of students through video or audio conferencing are an alternative option. Along with designated times you allow students to call you. You can also ask students if they would like for you to reach out to them via phone.</p>
<p>Most Valuable Discussion Board (MVDB) - After the conclusion of each discussion board, the course instructor would pick an MVDB and email the entire class congratulating that person on their participation in that particular discussion</p>	<p>Allows group acknowledgement, provided praise for extraordinary work, and created a bit of friendly competition amongst students. The instructor noticed a increase in quality discussion board posts, and students began to surpass the minimum</p>

<p>board, while encouraging others to submit high quality, in-depth, posts.</p>	<p>required of each submission, after the first MVDB was announced. If an instructor places emphasis on discussion board participation with a grade weight of 20% and clear guidelines for participation, student engagement and community development are more likely to occur (Rovai, 2001, p. 45).</p>
<p>Concluding Letter - After the final project, instructor sent a class email summarizing the course; highlight the high points and sending best-wishes to all.</p>	<p>Instructors encourage students maintain future communication so that the sense of the online community, and personal relationship, would be ongoing even after completion of the course.</p>