# Latest ways to engage your learners online

*Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from the new LERN book, Third Edition of* Advanced Teaching Online *by William A. Draves. Advanced Teaching Online is one of the most popular books on the subject.*

### Revitalizing Your Course Mid-way

Even the best online courses can experience complacency and boredom half way through the course. "Keep up the momentum" urges Roberta Ross-Fisher of St. Louis, an online professor with Walden University (Ross-Fisher, *LERN Magazine*, Sept. 2004). Some of Ross-Fisher's top ways to revitalize your course mid-way:

- For one week, post a quote of the day and have students find quotes.
- Provide some clues, then have a "mystery guest" join your discussion board for a week.
- Create and host a "jokes" thread.
- Create a mini-webquest for the week.

### Generational Differences

Julie Coates, in her pioneering book *Generational Learning Styles* (Coates, 2007), says that generations learn differently. There are currently five generations currently engaged in learning: Silent Generation (born 1930-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Gen X (1965-1980), Gen Y (1981-1999), and Gen Z (2000+).

You as an instructor also teach based on the learning style of your generation. Many readers of this book are Baby Boomers or Gen X instructors teaching Gen Y and Gen X learners. Thus, understanding the generational learning characteristics of the generations you are teaching is important. It is even more so because of the generational sensitivity of the online environment.

"The day of the multi-age classroom is here, and the issues of how to manage diverse populations in the workplace are upon us," writes Coates. For teaching Generation Y, Coates recommends more experiential learning, lots of structure, using technology, incorporating games, and offering multiple options for performance, and other teaching strategies relevant to Gen Y.

### Students post audio

It happened in my online class one day. A faculty participant from the University of Wisconsin-Madison recorded a two minute message specific to our class and posted it in the class discussion area. I was pleasantly surprised. When I asked our techie, he said our server has been set to allow participants to post audio.

This is another great learning tool. With a $10 microphone, your students can record and post their verbal presentations, comments and other ideas in audio form in your online classroom. The more variety, the better. The more involvement from your students, the better. Students posting audio is another good technique to enhance their learning.

### Student Orientation.

Every institution reports that retention has improved, with fewer student drop outs and greater achievement and satisfaction, as student orientation has increased. That is, the solution to online retention and satisfaction is to have more student orientation.

Student orientation consists of two parts: technical orientation and learning orientation. Don't forget to include how we learn online and the learning aspect of an online course in your orientation.

Generally, the requirement is to pass the Student Orientation test; with the other meetings voluntary, optional or alternative benefits.

What works. It all works. Practitioners have reported success with all of these techniques, including:

- Week-long student orientation,
- Face-to-face student orientation for online classes, in addition to online orientation,
- Quizzes for students to take to "pass" orientation, or for their own benefit,
- Real-time chats as one option and opportunity,
- Requiring completion of online orientation before receiving password to the course,
- Student mentors or peer tutors.

### Weekly or Unit Welcomes

Do a separate and different "welcome" for each unit or week of your online course. It doesn't have to be long. It does have to be positive, enthusiastic and warm. The weekly welcome constantly involves your students, tells them there is something new, and solicits their enthusiasm.

### Online Icebreakers

Online instructors report excellent success with online icebreakers at the start of the course. Here are some of the latest new online icebreakers teachers have shared:

- "Find someone who…" Give students a list of 10-20 items someone may have, and have them find a person with each of the items.
- "What you have always wanted to do?" Each person shares his or her thoughts.
- "Find 3 things in common." Break the class into small groups and have them find three things in common.
- "Pair off — ask odd questions." Pair up participants. Prepare a list of odd questions for them to ask each other.
- "Crazy characteristics." From a list of 20 crazy characteristics, each student tries to find someone with that characteristic.

**Advanced Teaching Online**
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**William A. Draves**