LE1: Expert Insights

José Antonio Bowen, PhD, Former President, Goucher College; Former Dean, Miami University and Southern Methodist University; Author, *Teaching Naked* [00:00:00] So what lesson can we learn from the online fitness environment, which is that most of the value-add is in motivation and encouragement. It's in community. It's in, there are other people here with you. There are other people here watching you, other people here cheering you on. We are all going to try to get to the finish line together.

Narrator [00:00:20] A great conductor prepares and unifies an orchestra, sets the tempo, and ensures the musical performance is ready for an audience. In a similar way, when planning for a new term, you have the power to shape the sounds of the semester before students even log on and set a positive tempo that inspires your students to perform well together.

Flower Darby, Assistant Dean of Online and Innovative Pedagogies, Northern Arizona University; Author (with James M. Lang), *Small Teaching Online* [00:00:41] First impressions really do matter. And the first time your student clicks into your online classroom, it's important to set a positive tone so that the initial impression is one that stays with the student for the duration of the semester.

Narrator [00:01:00] Before the first week, fine-tune your plan. What information do students need to know up front? How will you build peer-to-peer connections? What learning experiences will be most impactful? Take some time to list out your resources and describe the activities you will use to prepare both you and your students for a strong start to the semester. It's also a good time to verify that your course is truly student ready. Activate the student preview in your LMS to see that course navigation is intuitive and to check the tech, preventing student frustration from broken links or missing files. Colleagues and teaching assistants can also help unearth areas of possible confusion for students so you can make adjustments before they dive in.

Flower Darby [00:01:44] It can be very helpful to activate the student view setting in your learning management system so that you can get a sense yourself of what students are seeing, whether transitions and connections are clear, whether it's evident where they should go next after they complete a particular reading or activity. Taking the time to carefully analyze the layout and the structure of the course can really make a big difference in your students' learning and success, as it helps your students focus their attention and cognitive resources on the content.

Narrator [00:02:22] Your regular presence in the course is a key indicator to students that you're more than just an online profile and that you care. You can establish your presence by sending a welcome message or video that communicates to students why you're excited to be teaching the course, how you intend to engage and support them, and that you care about their success. Also include directions for them to access key resources and bring attention to any early due dates.

José Antonio Bowen, PhD [00:02:48] So the most important thing for any first time teacher, whether it's online or not, is that relationships matter and the perception that you care is the primary issue of teaching. So when you're teaching online, it matters just as much. If I think that the person at the other end of the screen doesn't care about me and I'm just a number, I'm less motivated, I'm not going do the work, I'm not gonna show up, all those things happen.

Narrator [00:03:11] An online orientation module, which gives students a demo of the course with information on weekly expectations, how to navigate the LMS, and the purpose of discussion forums, prepares students for success. Studies show students are more likely to persist in learning online when they know how to take advantage of course resources and where and how to seek help.

Flower Darby [00:03:34] For online classes it's important to orient your students to the class experience as the first activity that they engage in. So rather than jumping right into course content, allow a few days or a week for an orientation module. Give students structured activities to help them explore the organization of the course: the main topics, the themes, the assignments, the deadlines, the tools in your learning management system. Help students learn what will be required to be successful as the first thing you do, and then they'll be better prepared to begin working through course content and have a more successful class as a result.

Narrator [00:04:19] In addition to establishing an early connection with you, students benefit from opportunities to build community with their peers early in your course. Be intentional in how you structure opportunities for students to get to know each other and foster trusting, supportive relationships. An introduction forum that asks students to share a bit about themselves and respond to their peers can serve as an icebreaker. You may even greet students by replying to their submission and posting your own introduction, modeling the type of community engagement you expect from students in future discussion forums.

José Antonio Bowen, PhD [00:04:53] So the chat room is important. So I make great use of, so I'm going to bed but we answered, we, all these questions are in this place, so if you have a question, somebody else is probably still awake and they can answer it. If you set this expectation up you can then go to bed. You do have to get up in the morning and check the responses, it's like, okay, I'm sorry those are all wrong, here's the right answer. Or, wow, you all figured it out. This was good. You helped each other. I have nothing else to add.

Narrator [00:05:23] A conductor knows the rehearsal time was worth it when the orchestra comes together to play a beautiful symphony. As the conductor of your course, the time you spend planning for the first module, helping students feel prepared, and building connections with and between students sets the stage for a harmonious semester.