



Active Learning in the Online Classroom

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The popularity of online classes has become more popular as a way to expand educational opportunities [1,2,3]. Hospitality and tourism management programs in general require students to participate in internships so the flexibility of taking online courses is appealing. There has been evidence that there are certain strategies that are more effective in an online environment, just as there are those that are more effective in a face to face environment [4]. Active learning is a tool that has been used in the face to face classroom and has been incorporated in the online learning environment. Active learning tactics have been defined as those that involve “students in doing things and (have the students) think about the things they are doing” [5]. Students have to take an active role in the online environment where as in the face to face classroom they can “hide”. Inherently online learning requires the student to be a more active participant. The level of success in an online classroom can be improved upon if the instructor has a solid knowledge of how to facilitate active learning using current classroom tools.

The role of active learning strategies is to guide students through the learning process by incorporating their own meaning, attitudes, and values [5]. The key is there is less emphasis on the dissemination of information and more on how the student’s skills are developed. Students learn more in the process of learning when they participate be it discussion, practice, review or application. Students should have an active dialog with the instructor and their peers while writing about and debating critical objectives of the course.

Pelz [6] created three principles of effective online pedagogy. The first is active learning based where students do the work. The reasoning is the more time students spend engaged in the content the more they learn with the support of the instructor. Examples include: student lead discussions, students finding and discussing web courses, and case study analysis. The second principle is to promote interactivity where the students are required to interact with each other and the professor. This can be done with small groups or one on one. The goal is getting other people’s perspective regarding the material. The final principle is to strive for presence. These include social presence where students feel safe to express their opinions because they have a sense of belonging from the group work. This makes it easier to commit to the group in achieving the goals of the course. The second is cognitive presence where students feel challenged to further their education based on interesting activities where they are given the tools to evaluate the course material. The final presence is teaching. This is where the instructor guides the students through the learning process and the student feels comfortable and encouraged to ask questions.

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In order to be successful instructors need to remember that students have varying levels of experience in the online classroom environment. A highly structured and organized class can help some of students’ trepidation of becoming an active learner. Students need to have all of the tools necessary to analyze situations and defend their ideas they will be more comfortable and self- assured. Students have to complete readings and assignments without face to face interaction with their peers or professor. However, students may feel isolated and not feel confident with the learning process. An instructor must be certain to stay connected in order to make students feel that they are part of the learning environment. Although students are taking on a larger role they must be guided through the process. Students struggle when they are pushed out of their comfort zones. They are more familiar with passive learning environments and will need more guidance at the beginning of the course.

The goal is to require more intellectual effort by incorporating active learning in an online classroom by encouraging higher order thinking instead of just memorization and recall [5,7]. It addresses different learning styles and in turn increases motivation. Students leave the course more confident in what they learned and will have a better ability to apply the information in their current and future careers.

References

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