Blended Learning Quick Start Series:
Maintaining human presence in blended learning

Introduction

Through all forms of delivery, it is important to consider the human presence of staff within the learning and teaching experience.

Human presence is especially important in blended settings as the effectiveness of digital delivery is often determined by both the visibility of the academic to the student, and of the students to one another. Human presence is also crucial in fostering and maintaining a sense of community. In the digital environment, a tutor's presence needs to strike the right balance between supporting students effectively whilst not being seen to be hyperresponsive or on-demand.

An effective blended learning environment is one where equal thought and consideration has been given to both the physical and digital teaching space. Therefore, it's important to think about your digital teaching spaces in the same way that you think about your physical teaching spaces. Just as you expect your physical teaching spaces to be friendly, engaging, and accessible, you should expect the same from your digital teaching spaces.

Option 1: Communicating effectively

One of the most effective ways to maintain a human presence is through communication. You should clearly articulate to your students how you will communicate with them, and in what measure. There are many different ways to communicate with students and so you should think carefully about which channel(s) you will use. For example, Blackboard Discussions could be used for day-to-day queries, while time-sensitive information could be posted on the Announcements area in Blackboard.

Option 2: Using video

Blackboard modules represent the virtual 'home' for much of your teaching, and so it's important that students get the very best from them. One way to help with this is through effective use of video. For example, you might embed short ReCap videos within Blackboard to introduce each topic. Equally, you may choose to record weekly summary videos to summarise the week's learning and to prepare students for the following week.

Option 3: Engaging in online activities

Blackboard Discussions and other collaborative spaces can be a great way to engage students, however, without careful management they can quickly stagnate. Think carefully about the purpose of the discussion and regularly 'check in' to ensure that the discussion is on track. A few carefully placed comments and questions can be very effective at maintaining engagement.

Option 4: Show your face

Remember to upload your profile photograph to Blackboard and encourage your students to do so too. If you are delivering synchronous online teaching, remember to enable your webcam video.