

Institutional Examples of Active Learning as Showcased through the Development of a Resource Website

Cathrine-Mette Mork

TOPIC SELECTION

Topic:

“Activity write-up and submission procedures to AL Website”

A website for this liberal arts college has been created a website and will serve as a means to :

- a)** Showcase specific examples of active learning in current use by faculty across disciplines;
- b)** Provide a resource of teaching ideas for new and incumbent faculty – a database that can be searched by discipline, level, critical thinking (CT) skill, and active learning teaching strategy (ALTS).

This is the final phase of a long project wherein active learning teaching strategies currently in use at the school were collected and categorized; critical thinking skill targets were established; rubrics were developed; and e-portfolio systems were implemented. The overarching goal of this “Active Learning Initiative” is to establish preferred teaching practices aligned with theoretically grounded research in active learning. The website will not be live until the end of the year; currently faculty have to log in to view the content.

By year’s end, all faculty members are required to submit to the website several activities they commonly use that:

- a)** Demonstrate use of one or more ALTSs as defined by the active learning working group (ALWG);
- b)** Demonstrate what CT skill(s) (as defined by the critical thinking working group (CTWG)) are targeted through their specific example activities.

Instruction needs to be put in place to ensure that faculty can create activities and submit them to the website in a reliable and systematic way:

- a)** Templates, submission guidelines, and model submissions need to be created.
- b)** ALWG members will be assigned as SMEs to screen submissions on content, language, style, and terminology (especially the categorization of ALTSs and CT skills), as well as any additional audio-visual components. There are also responsible for communicating and troubleshooting with faculty submitters.
- c)** An ALWG member with appropriate with website administration and design will be in charge of the site.
- d)** The platform used for the website is the well-known Wordpress site, and it has already been configured for minimal effort on the part of the activity submitter. Before publishing, ALWG members will edit submissions.

Goal of Instruction:

After gaining an understanding of their need to participate and the nature of the content they are expected to create, faculty will be able to product written explanations of their activities and submit them to the active learning website.

Rationale:

Faculty participation in the Active Learning Initiative has been mandated by the institution, and instructors require the knowledge and ability to submit their examples to the website (or to submit via email; The institution has made clear that faculty are not required to learn to work with the system if they are reticent or unable). Faculty members have varying degrees of knowledge about the ALTSs and CT skill categorization developed by faculty working groups. They require instruction on how to write up activities and how to submit them.

Although the website makes use of the very common Wordpress blogging platform, many faculty have never worked with the system before. Note, however, that the training will not consist of detailed instruction on how to work within Wordpress. Although it is preferable that they submit directly to the system for review, designated ALWG members will accept submissions by email where preferred. The small faculty size makes this option a possibility.

As I the ALWG member who has designed the website and who has been a member of the ALWG almost since inception, it is natural that I be in charge of the instruction. The greatest intellectual challenge for faculty will not be from learning the technical procedures for submitting faculty activities, but will rather be writing up the activities to standards set in the template and determining which of the ALTS and CT skills should be selected as relevant. Within the allotted 20 minutes of instruction, faculty will only be given an outline of what is required for them to do in their own time.

TASK ANALYSIS

Goal of Instruction:

After instruction, faculty will have and understanding of the rationale for their participation. They will understand the nature of the activities they are expected to write up. They will then be able to complete their write-ups, meeting the standards set by the ALWG, and submit them to the site by year's end with minimal website administrator and active learning working group intervention.

Tasks for Instructor(s):

1. Present requirements of activity submission to participants, including:
 - a. A review of the rationale for the website.
 - b. A brief overview of the ALTSs and CT lists created by working groups
 - c. Provision of a template and guidelines for activity submission (hardcopies as well as digital availability on the website itself).
2. Teach participants to navigate the website, following these steps:
 - a. Log into the (private) website, locate backend, view website as future outsiders.
 - b. Locate explanations of ALTSs and CT skills, submission guidelines (including downloadable template), and model submissions.
 - c. Know URLs for ID's recommended resources (such as Youtube videos) for learning Wordpress basics.

3. Instruct participants to submit an activity to the system, following these steps:
 - a. Write up submission within system (or copy/paste) while consulting provided template and guidelines
 - b. Select correct ALTSs and CT skills categories; upload any audio-visual files; save submission for editing.
 - c. Know email addresses of alternative submission route, for faculty unable to submit directly to system.
 - d. Know the editing team and what to expect after submission.

Questions related to the tasks for the SME:

1. What should be included in the template and guidelines and to what degree of detail?
2. What activities should be created to serve as model entries and who will write them?
3. Can concise videos targeted at needs of submitters be created as a resource after initial training, or are recommended outside self-training sources enough?
4. How should submissions not meeting standards be dealt with?
5. Who will be the “senior” submission editor with veto power?

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES AND MEASUREMENTS

Objectives:

At the end of this training, instructor(s) should be able to...

1. Describe the rationale for the website to faculty, as well as an overview of working group content.
2. Explain to faculty how to log into and navigate the website.
3. Demonstrate how to submit an activity to the system (or by email).

Measurements/Evaluation (after instruction):

1. Online, anonymous formative assessment right after instruction to participants (faculty) to determine if they understood rationale, the degree to which they are confident in being able to submit on their own, and their impressions on the overall quality of training.
2. Participants will bring laptops to training to attempt navigation and mock submissions as a type of formative assessment.
3. Instructional designer will meet with SME (both members of ALWG) to determine the extent to which the submissions have followed the template and model submissions.