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LINKS Online Teaching Tips

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"A few things matter most. Find those things." - Richard Koch

A Google search of *"online teaching tips"* (quotes included) yields 31,900+ hits. Clearly, there are now many web-based resources to assist instructors in crafting and executing online courses. And, online education resources at the instructor's local institution are likely to offer plentiful advice for new online instructors.

This LINKS White Paper highlights special considerations arising in online courses (compared to traditional classroom-based courses) which include team-based competitive business simulations as a course component.

This discussion is relevant to all online courses which include team or group activities, such as traditional cases and group projects.

Online Instructional Environment

- Exploit the LINKS Simulations website resources throughout the online course, especially the video resources included on the LINKS website.
- The online instructional environment typically includes recorded lectures as a major component. Michele Bunn (University of Alabama at Birmingham) offers this advice to the online instructor: *If possible for online classes, integrate discussions of LINKS concepts (e.g., forecasting, manufacturing, pricing, and performance assessment) into recorded lectures or into other course materials. Provide frequent opportunities for online students to connect the LINKS analysis and activities with the course material. This typically happens in a live class on an ad hoc basis, so it is important to plan for it in the online class.*

Simulation Teams in Online Courses

- Strongly encourage LINKS teams to communicate regularly via teleconference rather than solely using e-mail or private course-specific chat rooms. Within-team teleconferencing fosters more expansive back-and-forth conversation among team members when compared to relatively brief e-mails, texts, or chats. If your institution's online program doesn't offer teleconferencing capabilities, part-time students who are employed full-time may have convenient teleconferencing access within their work environment. And, of course, Skype, Google Chat, and Google Hangouts are accessible to everyone at no or nominal cost.
- In forming LINKS teams, attention to the students' geographical locations is relevant. A team with members from Brazil, Qatar, and Singapore will have obvious difficulty in meeting together simultaneously online or via teleconference. Thus, forming LINKS teams with members from "relatively close" time zones is prudent, so as not to unduly burden students.
- Consider using smaller-sized LINKS teams in online courses ... perhaps even two-person teams, especially with the small- and mid-sized LINKS Simulations. It's much more difficult for an individual to become "lost" in the online-team crowd within a smaller-sized team. Also, two-person telephone conversations don't require teleconferencing capabilities.

Student Assessment in Online Courses

- Use two early LINKS quizzes¹ (perhaps each weighted as 10% of the total LINKS grade) to ensure that each online-course student is LINKS-engaged at the beginning of the simulation event. The first quiz might be scheduled just before the first scheduled LINKS game run, with the second quiz scheduled no later than just before the third scheduled LINKS game run. An early immersion into LINKS ensures that students acquire adequate simulation knowledge and helps create enthusiastic participation within the online team environment.
- Use a combination of individual-student and team-based written reports -- both mid-event and post-event -- rather than relying solely on an end-of-event team-based report to ensure individual-student accountability.
- Include LINKS-related questions on course examinations. Advise your students of this assessment element in your course syllabus.

Within-Event Individual and Team Monitoring in Online Courses

- Use multiple, private team presidential review meetings (via teleconferences) to assess the relative contribution of each team member. More frequent presidential reviews are preferable in online environments in comparison with traditional classroom-based courses.
- Nancy Stephens (Arizona State University) offers this sage advice: *In an online course where the students can't see the instructor, constantly reinforce your availability. Otherwise, students may feel that they are imposing on you and that their questions and issues aren't important enough to bother you. They may become disconnected from the school. I posted at the end of almost every Blackboard announcement a friendly offer, e.g. "As always, please do not hesitate to get in touch if I can be helpful."*

Additional resources for LINKS online teaching, and elaborations on these key LINKS online teaching tips, are accessible on the LINKS Simulations website. In particular:

Instructor Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• December 2010: Stacey Hills (Utah State University), "Individual Performance Assessment in Large Group Projects"• July 2010: Dwight Dowdell (Dowdell & Associates), "E-learning and LINKS in Corporate Education"
Professor's Column	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• September 2012: Nancy Stephens (Arizona State University), "About LINKS Online" Revisited• October 2011: Carol Scovotti (University of Wisconsin - Whitewater), "Five Lessons Learned Teaching LINKS Online"• July 2010: Chester Xiang (Clarkson University), "Online LINKS SCM"• March 2010: Karl Manrodt and Susan Manrodt (Georgia Southern University), "Two-Person LINKS Teams at Georgia Southern"
White Papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• LINKS White Paper #5: "Individual Performance Assessment in Business Simulations"• LINKS White Paper #12: "LINKS Teaching Tips"

¹ If your institution's online education system doesn't support timed multiple-choice examinations, use an open-book format (e.g., schedule the quiz for a time-block, e-mail the quiz to students at the start of the time-block, and require e-mailed answers from the students by the end of the time-block).