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# Improving Critical Thinking through Effective Pedagogy for Online Coursework - Benefits, Limitations and Best Practices of Online Coursework

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# Improving Critical Thinking through Effective Pedagogy for Online Coursework - Benefits, Limitations and Best Practices of Online Coursework

## **Disciplines**

Accounting

## **Comments**

Presented at the American Account Association Annual Meeting, August 3-7, 2013 in Anaheim, California.

# Benefits, Limitations and Best Practices of Online Coursework

Mary Kay Copeland, CPA, MBA, PhD  
American Accounting Association – National Meeting Presentation – August 2013

# Online Learning

Convenience .....or an improved tool for educating?

# An Improved Tool for Educating if

- ✓ Traditional courses are not merely thrown on-line
- ✓ Courses are pedagogically rich and diverse
- ✓ Courses are built to utilize and optimize the benefits of on-line deployment

# Potential Benefits of On-line Coursework

- ✓ Education more accessible and affordable
- ✓ Opportunity to interact with peers around the globe
- ✓ Students learning is paralleled with professional requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- ✓ Students are more diverse
  - ✓ professionally
  - ✓ culturally
  - ✓ ethically
  - ✓ geographically

Results in educational richness if student interaction is promoted

# Beneficial Components

- ✓ Initial and continuing faculty/student and student/student face to face time
- ✓ On-line dialogues
- ✓ Interactive assignments (drafts to final)
- ✓ Sufficient faculty to student interaction (via email, phone, online dialogue)
- ✓ Active learning components (transfer from faculty centered to student centered learning)

# On-line Dialogue Significantly Increases Critical Thinking Skills

Dialogues – on-line discussions where students develop and communicate their understanding on course topics.

- ✓ Promotes active learning (from spoon fed to student led coursework)
- ✓ Promotes autonomous learning
- ✓ Facilitates well developed, researched responses
- ✓ Includes students less likely to participate in live discussions and minimizes discussion domination



# On-line Learning promotes Self Paced Learning

- ✓ Increases students performance - students are able to master learning objectives at a faster rate
- ✓ Students stay engaged and move to the next higher level

# On-line Learning promotes Reduction in Isolation for Introverted Students

- ✓ Additional Psychological support for introverted students by reducing the feeling of isolation
- ✓ Reduction in drop out rates
- ✓ Moderates conversation monopolizers

# On-line Learning promotes Self Paced Learning

- ✓ Increases student performance - students are able to master learning objectives at a faster rate
- ✓ Students who need more time are allowed to self pace their learning
- ✓ Overall - students stay engaged and move to the next higher level

# Recommendations

## Revamp Traditional Coursework

### Revamp Traditional Coursework

- ✓ Do not merely use on-line coursework as an alternative deployment for a traditional course
- ✓ Rewrite the course to take advantage of on-line tools and tactics that foster increased critical thinking skills
- ✓ Ensure that course are pedagogically sound and diverse

# Recommendations

## Understand Barriers to Learning

- ✓ Age impacted ability to learn on-line,
- ✓ Occupation was not a factor
- ✓ Students with stronger computer, research and information gathering skills were more successful

# Recommendations

## Ensure Sufficient faculty/student and student/student interaction.

- ✓ More important than the delivery method
- ✓ A well developed on-line course results in a significant increase in faculty/student and student/student interaction
- ✓ Include on-line dialogue, email, face to face, phone, etc.
- ✓ Consider beginning with residency or upfront team building
- ✓ Consider a Cohort model to facilitate relationship building

# Recommendations

- ✓ **Require and train professors** to transform and develop their on-line course development and teaching skills
- ✓ **Plan for sufficient course development time** – Pre-developed curriculum seldom available or appropriate
- ✓ **Effective on-line curriculum requires innovation, time, testing and revision**
- ✓ **Complete and test courses before launch**
- ✓ **Technical Assistance** - Make sure the institution provides sufficient technical support and expertise
- ✓ **Planned down time** – Interaction time can potentially be 24/7 if not managed

# Specific Considerations for Accounting Coursework

- ✓ *Include dialogue and discussion options*
- ✓ *Select a text with extensive on-line tools and assessments (quizzes, self study computations, etc)*
- ✓ *Utilize virtual team work and projects*
- ✓ *Incorporate webinars and other visual instruction tools for computations and problems*
- ✓ *Determine mechanism for exams*



# Not all Courses are a Fit for On-line Deployment

- ✓ Courses that include theory, research, reading, synthesizing, and discussion are strong candidates for online deployment
- ✓ Courses where visual observation is required (art, physical education) or extensive computational problem solving (mathematics, engineering, certain accounting and finance courses) may not be a good fit for a 100% online curriculum
- ✓ Consider proctored exams