



Enhancing retention with Blackboard

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Professor Preciado has been working over the last three decades in the Education Department, and he was one of the first faculty to use Blackboard in the Classroom. In this interview, he explains how he uses Blackboard to make an online course more engaging.

Why Blackboard now?

Let me clarify that without a doubt better advisement, mentoring and related students' services are critical because we can improve graduation by retaining students. Aside from well tested student services interventions, I believe that how we engage students in the classroom is a major factor in retention.

I am a firm believer that the tools available on Blackboard can help us deliver the material to better engage students and to provide consistent positive

and corrective feedback. By doing so, instructors can have a positive impact on retention. Let me just say at the onset that Blackboard is just a tool, a way for faculty to deliver content. It is the instructor who decides how to present the material and design ways to engage students to promote lifelong learning.

Let's talk about BB now and how it can be used to retain students. What would you do first if you were to take advantage of this technology?

It all begins with planning your course delivery. The Syllabus sets the tone, and it is a good way to start the planning process. Students get a general sense of the overall expectations. Also, I talk about what students should do to succeed in an online class. And to ensure that students read said documents, I create a quiz.

What are the typical assignments for a Learning Unit?

I usually have an average of 3 assignments per week depending upon the content and the complexity of the Learning Unit. Typically, I have quizzes and Discussion Board Forum assignments.

How do you keep them engaged?

In addition to your typical test/quiz of the chapter, I also add brief quizzes about short readings or videos about relevant topics to spark additional interest. As for the quiz presentation, I found that having up to three attempts (in which the last attempt is the one that counts) is a good strategy. Students are asked to study before attempting a quiz again. Since most students want to get a better grade, they welcome the opportunity. After each attempt, they know their score, but they don't know which questions they got wrong. The quiz randomly presents questions from a large and diverse pool of items, so they usually get different questions in each attempt. Plus, to avoid taking three attempts in a row, students must wait 30 minutes between attempts to encourage them to study more. The rationale is to have students engaged with the content as much as possible.

What are the Discussion Board Forum Assignments about?

The use of the Forum is as a way for students to comment on their understanding of weekly readings. I believe that by carefully planning, one can come up with queries that elicit participation and interest in the topic at hand. I usually provide a model or detailed step by-step instructions so that students

know how to complete the assignment. I encourage the use of the avatar to facilitate interaction. I make sure feedback is given to the first two students who respond to the Forum so their peers can be motivated to do the same. Finally, I use the grading notes to provide individualized feedback for students who fail to complete the assignment correctly and to congratulate those who excel.

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

Prof. Preciado arrived at Hostos Community College in Spring 1988. He is past President of the World Congress Committee, and currently holds leadership positions in several international organizations including Founder and President of the Iberoamerican Congresses of Health Psychology. Preciado has made numerous presentations at national and international conferences. Dr. Preciado's areas of interest include global health, online education, and disseminations of scientific information via international conferences. He has been the recipient of international recognition/awards.

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