
Using Blackboard to Promote a First-Year Community

Focused Dialogue Session

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Builds a sense of community/support

- Students have a shared sense of goals and values through discussions (mutual interdependence).
- Frequent interactions are significant in support for first-year students.
- Social Support Theory – Students need multiple levels of support networks their first-year to transition and navigate the university setting.
- Support does not have to be tangible to be positive.

Online Learners

- Students can process information at their own pace versus on-the-spot dialogue.
- Students who engage more often with the learning management systems will receive a higher grade for a course.
- Student involvement online includes: better support from moderator, group involvement, and practical time management issues.

Reflective Learning

- Academic support platforms often include blogging/journaling options; this allows personal reflective learning to develop autonomy and collaborative learning.
- Reflective learning is linked to life-long learning, employability, and increase in postgraduate study.
- Peers and faculty can provide support through feedback in a non-threatening way, increasing students' cognitive awareness of individual learning.

"Digital Natives"

- Today's students think and process information swiftly and rely on technology for answers.
- There are many avenues to deliver information on a 24 hour, seven day a week basis. Today's student wants immediate access and information.
- Students multi-task, prefer active learning, and use technology for social and professional communication.

*Resources located on back.

Overall Themes for Discussion

- The importance of technology and learning driven by pedagogy.
- Building support through interactions with international students.
- The exchange of practical, resource, and academic information to build awareness.
- Today's student and informal communication skills.
- Information outlets will increase over time. How to accommodate that?
- Fostering reflection on university experience and sense of belonging.
- Tangible support versus online support.

Biography

Amber Manning received her Bachelors degree in Psychology and her Masters degree in Counselor Education with a specialization in couple and family therapy. She is currently working on her doctorate in Educational Administration and Higher Education at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC). Her research interests are college student sexuality, first-year adjustment and transition, female student psychological development, and first-generation student motivation.

Amber works as an administrative graduate assistant for Saluki First Year, a program designed to enhance first-year student experience at SIUC. Email her at amann@siu.edu.

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