Elements for Success - Facilitator

1. Be prepared to use every available technology, and know the technology you’re going to be working with. Know what you can do with it and what your learners can do with it. Technology should be transparent to both instructor and learner.

2. Be prepared to employ novel ways of communicating to incorporate and facilitate collaborative and community activities in your lesson plan.

3. Know your lesson plan and be prepared for activities in advance.

4. Be prepared to stay in close communication with your learners. Be prepared to participate in discussions and to follow student progress closely.

5. Prepare your learners for the distance education experience. Yours may be the first course in their experience where participants are separated across distance. They need to understand their responsibility to ensure a successful learning experience.

6. Remember that every learner learns differently.

References:

The Changing Role of Instructors:

Much as the changing role of faculty in the information age focuses on the shift from knowledge providers to learning facilitators, so too does the facilitator role change from the “sage on the stage” to the “guide on the side”.

Because online distance learning (ODL) is so well suited for collaborative learning, the instructor plays an essential social role. Social responsibilities may include building a learning community, helping learners work in groups, and establishing a culture for productive interaction. The effective ODL instructor keeps online discussions on track, weaves discussion threads, and maintains group harmony” (Easton, 2003, p. 87).

The distance instructor loses a certain autonomy common in the traditional classroom. In online learning, the instructor becomes a member of a team; subsequently, the instructor no longer has total control of the learning environment. For a number of years, teachers and training facilitators managed classes by virtue of their control on information. Now, with instant access to vast resources online, learners are no longer dependent on the instructor alone for knowledge” (O’Neil, 2006).

References:
Pre-Planning Strategies

“The starting point for the conversion of a blended learning program is the set of desired learning outcomes and the breakdown of the key learning points to be covered” (Georgouli, 2008, p. 228).

The process of planning and organizing for a distance education course is multifaceted and must occur well in advance of the scheduled instruction. Issues to address in the planning process (Simonson, 2009):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the balance of face-to-face and online delivery?</th>
<th>- Identify elements best served offline and those better suited to online delivery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who are the learners?</td>
<td>- Analyze the general abilities of the class - Analyze potential learner activities - Understand learner characteristics - Help learners understand context of learning experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is essential content?</td>
<td>- Revisit and revise goals and objectives for instruction - Ensure sufficient content to lead to desired outcome - Integrate online and offline activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What teaching strategy and media should be used?</td>
<td>- Think visually. Focus shifts from lecture to visual presentations - Illustrate concepts using tables, figures and other visual items - Identify tools for delivering quality visual media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the learning environment?</td>
<td>- Identify LMS or other delivery method</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elements for Success - Learner

1. Be open-minded about sharing life, work, and educational experiences as part of the learning process.
2. Be able to communicate through writing.
4. Be willing to "speak up" if problems arise.
5. Be willing and able to commit to 5 to 10 hours per week per course.
6. Be able to meet the minimum requirements for the program.
7. Accept critical thinking and decision making as part of the learning process.
8. Have access to a computer and a modem.
9. Be able to think ideas through before responding.
10. Feel that high quality learning can take place without going to a traditional classroom.

References:

Tips for Being a Successful Online Learner retrieved from http://www.uwsp.edu/natres/rwilke/etap/Tips.htm
Opportunities for Enhancement

Providing supplemental materials in the form of online content and built in flexibility that allows learners opportunities for guided discovery and exploration are common and effective strategies for enhancing the distance learning experience.

Encouraging Collaboration

To promote an open, supportive, and respectful online environment, an instructor can create a discussion area where students post their questions and the instructor posts answers—a frequently asked questions (FAQ) area. This area provides a context similar to the question/answer sessions that occur naturally in a face-to-face setting.

A strategy that encourages more in depth participation is to ask students questions directly related to their postings. Instructors can phrase questions in such a way that all students are encouraged to respond, not just the student who posted the original comment. For example, focus on one point that a student makes and build on it, or offer a contrasting viewpoint. Then challenge students to do further research and share what they find. When instructors respond to students’ postings in these ways, it demonstrates that student comments are valued and encourages them to participate (Durrington, Berryhill & Swafford, 2006).

References: