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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



Assessing Metacognition Student Performance in Online Learning

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Regardless of how one may feel about online learning (now, during COVID-19, thrust upon us, the willing and unwilling), admittedly it is now a vital and critical academic and professional skill. Helping students become proficient in online learning has arguably become as important as mastering academic content in whatever discipline one teaches.

One way to help students become more proficient at online learning is to actively assess their performance in online discussion forums. Most instructors at least provide a list of minimum expectations, something like: Post at least two entries for every forum; avoid non-substantive posts (“I agree”); post by a deadline for a session; cite references, respond to questions from the professor, etc. Some instructors place limits on word count. Some insist on complete sentences and proper grammar.

In addition to assessing engagement with the course content (academic concepts and course texts, for example), and checking for adherence to minimum expectations as noted above, instructors can help students become more proficient online learners by assessing *metacognition student performance*, those transferable skills and competencies that will serve students well as they become lifelong online learners. Metacognitive assessment helps students become critically aware of themselves as thinkers and learners. Robert E. MacDonald refers to these as part of the “informal observations” [i] that instructors engage in as part of the evaluation of student learning.

Here are examples of metacognition student performance in online discussion forums that you

can look for, assess, and for which you can provide feedback to students:

1. The consistency in the amount and quality of their posts.
2. The quality and kinds of questions students ask during online discussions.
3. The cooperative peer learning skills students demonstrate in discussion forums.
4. The manner in which they receive directions and challenges from the instructor.
5. The way students respond to questions from the professor and other students.
6. Their ability to follow through on assignments and activities to completion.
7. Their level of initiative in asking for help, seeking information, offering critique, and questioning assumptions.
8. Their ability to uncover their own bias and prejudices.
9. Their ability to recognize their misunderstanding and demonstrate corrective thinking.
10. Their ability to come up with novel and original examples.
11. The quality of their written skill in expressing and explaining ideas.
12. Their ability to manage their time and participate in online discussion forums, as well as complete assignments, promptly.

It is no longer enough to help our students master academic content related to our particular scholarship. Part of the work of teaching in this technological age is helping our students become better learners, and that includes becoming more adept at learning in online and virtual environments.

Notes

[i] Robert E. MacDonald, *A Handbook for Beginning Teachers: Facing the Challenge of Teaching in Today's Schools* (New York, NY: Pearson, 1999).

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