WSU Global Campus Course Experience

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SPEAKER 1: Global Campus students are able to take advantage of an online learning experience that allows them to engage any time, anywhere.

CHELSEA ROLLINS: Hi. My name is Chelsea Rollins. I am the ASWSU Director of Student Events and Programming, and I am also a WSU Global Campus student. One of the reasons that I chose WSU Global was because I was actually going to do WSU Pullman, and life happens. I ended up in Dallas, Texas, and when it was finally time for me to come back and get my degree, Global just seemed like the perfect opportunity. It allowed that leniency for me to come back to finish my degree and to graduate as a Coug, which I'm very excited about.

SPEAKER 1: What does this experience look like? The online classroom is a website, often housed within a learning management system which provides a suite of tools to support teaching and learning. While the physical design of a Global Campus course is used intentionally to drive home several key learning strategies, it is important to note that the specific LMS is not the key.

What matters are the principles that guide the design of the course space, and these are LMS agnostic. Each Global Campus course space includes a front door, which is the home page on which are listed the student learning outcomes, so that they are highlighted each time the student enters the online classroom. Global Campus courses are built on the same foundation of student learning outcomes, and require the same level of rigor as WSU face-to-face courses. At WSU, a course is a course. A degree is a degree. There is no differentiation between online and face-to-face.

TOM POWERS: The main misconception is that somehow it's an easy way to complete some kind of requirement. It's actually a more challenging way. But then on the other side of that, of course, is that you actually learn more. Obviously, the more you put into something, the more you can get out of it.

SPEAKER 1: Once a student has entered the course through the home page door, there are several tools and strategies used to positively impact the learning experience. Learning theory suggests three very basic keys to a successful online course-- engage the students with the content, with each other, and the students with the instructor.

A combination of strategies, policies, and tech tools drive the design and delivery of high-quality, rich and robust online learning experiences based on these principles. First, let's talk about ways to connect students with course content.

Students are more engaged if content is provided in a variety of formats. So ideally, courses content is delivered as a combination of text, media, presentations or recorded lectures from faculty, links out to preproduced videos, library articles, and more. Additionally, active learning is as critical in the online space as the physical classroom.

We work to ensure inclusion of activities such as simulations, hands-on lab experiences, and interactive reflective activities that promote metacognitive thinking. We may lean on technology tools such as Perusal or VoiceThread to promote engagement and active learning, but it is not only technology that draws students in and connects them with the course content.

Other means of doing this include making it relevant to individual students, and use of authentic tasks. Engaging students with content also means keeping them on task and engaged in the learning process.

While Global courses are asynchronous, they are not self-paced. Students are kept on track and connected with both peers and faculty by working through the course together. Courses are structured so that students need to log into the course space two to three times per week, with assignments and activities due ideally weekly, resulting as well in frequent feedback from instructors.

Each lesson page starts with a to-do list of what the students need to accomplish that week in order to complete the lesson and the course schedule. This helps keep them on track through the term. Beyond working through the course together, students need to be intentionally required to connect with one another. This does not happen as automatically as in a physical

classroom, where students see and visit with each other before, during, and after class, so online courses use several strategies to build connections between students. Use of online asynchronous discussion boards is the most common.

JOHN SNYDER: The discussion boards are designed to be a community. For that reason, I don't grade them on substance. I don't grade them on content. I want them to talk with one another and to work with one another. My role in that process is to prompt thought, to prompt conversation.

KATY WHALEN: In history courses, I know that we do one of the main assignments that goes throughout the semester-- and this might be true of other, again, disciplines online as well-- are those discussion board posts requiring that they show that they're engaged with their reading, but that they're also engaged with each other.

SPEAKER 1: Many courses also require collaboration through group projects.

KATY WHALEN: Recently I designed History 111-- redesigned History 111. And at the end of that, I had them do a group project, trying to facilitate in even a smaller way that kind of intense interaction with one another.

AMY MAY: We also do some group projects, where they actually work in groups. And so they get separated into online groups, and they will work through things together. And I will come in-- and then I'm working with small groups. And I'll come in and speak to them through that board. They do lots and lots of collaborative work and learning together.

SPEAKER 1: Every online course includes an introduce yourself activity, through which students not only learn to use the online discussion platform in a low-stakes way, they also begin to build connection with their peers. In addition, Global students have many of the same opportunities outside of the classroom to foster community.

CHELSEA ROLLINS: I'm very thankful to WSU Global for providing me with the opportunity to do things that I never would have done, but still making it feel like it's a college campus. Like, I still

have to meet with my advisors. I still have office hours with my professors. I still get to attend events and be a part of programs.

And I'm in Honor Society, and I get to interact with my classmates outside of the classroom as well. And honestly, as somebody who's done both, I don't see too much of a difference.

SPEAKER 1: The introduce yourself activity also opens the door for building connection between the faculty member teaching the course and the students enrolled. One of the concerns heard most frequently from faculty considering teaching online is that they will not get to know or feel connected to their students. In fact, in the words of Brenda Boyd—

BRENDA BOYD: Well, probably the biggest misconception is that you don't have much interaction with your faculty members.

SPEAKER 1: But faculty must make this effort, be present in the course space, and provide students an opportunity to get to know them, starting with their own participation in the introduce yourself activity, and posting of a welcome message.

THERESA JORDAN: In terms of developing a classroom community, that starts from the first day where I introduce myself. I share as much as I can as what's appropriate about myself, and who I am and why I like history, and looking forward to teaching the class. And then ask them to share what they're comfortable about themselves. That's optional. It's not a requirement. And I don't require them to post it, but I'm looking for them, hoping to do that.

And then I respond to those posts. Everyone who sends something that first week saying something about themselves, and I share something about-- so we try and develop that kind of rapport and dialogue in that first step for a classroom community.

SPEAKER 1: Additional strategies to support this interaction include the instructor participating in the discussion board, including their voice and image in the course space through recorded lectures and other types of class communication.

JOHN SNYDER: Getting them to engage and to let go of their fear and to enjoy the process is what's key. And the only way that I know to do that in the online context is to dive into the discussion boards, and be very aggressive in being present. And I think being involved to make that experience happen is what makes the class successful.

SPEAKER 1: Most significantly, motivating, learning, and keeping students connected requires providing timely and detailed feedback. Rubrics and annotation tools, along with frequent assignments and timely grading, help faculty to accomplish this goal. Students in well-designed courses, which include the components described here, describe their courses as having the same feel as those in the physical classroom.

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For Global Campus students, their experience is their classroom.

CHELSEA ROLLINS: I love that WSU in general has such an awesome, like, sense of community within itself. Like, when you see somebody and they say, Go Cougs, it doesn't matter if you're Vancouver, Everett, Pullman, Global, whatever, it's a Go Cougs back. And I think that's awesome. In general, I just think it's a really awesome opportunity, and everybody should be a WSU Global student.

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