

How to Hold Online Students Accountable

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A [2014 report](#) from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that 12 percent of students were enrolled exclusively in distance education courses in 2012 and that 25.8 percent of all postsecondary students took at least one course online.

Student Experience

With the rising popularity of online education come concerns about how to keep students honest and hold them accountable for their work. One important aspect of this is to make your students feel the online class they're taking is a real class. You can accomplish this in several ways.

- Laboratory courses are the core of science programs. Doing simulations prevents students from feeling they are doing actual experiments. It is essential that students conduct experiments common to a traditional classroom.
- A clear timeline for completion will help your students stay on track. Some experiments are time sensitive or the materials shipped to the students are perishable. Indications on when which step needs to be done will allow online students to get the most of their experience.
- Students need concise instruction in order to do quality work. This may require that you take extra steps. In a traditional laboratory course, you can immediately clarify or adjust a step when students are having issues with an experiment.
- Students need to be able to get help if and when they get stuck. Help is crucial for both success and safety. Consider using a message board where students can ask questions and trade tips and advice.

Accountability

You will also need a way to confirm that the students themselves are performing the lab investigations. There are several ways to accomplish this depending on the complexity of the investigation and available Internet bandwidth.

- One way is to require that your students take pictures of the stages of an experiment and add handwritten notes indicating time and date. They can then post the pictures to a learning management system (LMS) and/or email them to you.
- Another option is to have students film themselves performing an experiment. This can help you observe any off-camera coaching.
- Make sure there are questions about the different steps of the lab and the possible results. Having a variety of questions specific to each student's result will reduce the amount of interaction between students.
- You can observe students performing crucial parts of an experiment through a web-based video chat program.

A good combination of student engagement and accountability will increase the success rate of your online laboratory classes and ensure academic rigor.

Works Cited

Ginder, Scott and Stearns, Christina. (2014). *Enrollment in Distance Education Courses, by State: Fall 2012*. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014023.pdf>

About the Author

Eddy van Hunnik started as a Distance Learning Specialist in 2014. He also teaches courses online. Before Carolina, he taught as an adjunct instructor at several colleges in Boston. He has worked as an educator for Medicare and the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and he developed and managed medical programs at Gibbs College. He holds a PhD in Biochemistry from the University of Amsterdam.

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