Tools for Online Interaction and Community Building

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Students are most critical of the lack of interaction when taking an online course. It is not enough to say that they will be satisfied with accessing a course online anytime and anywhere—for convenience sake. Students taking online courses desire the same levels of interaction they get in a traditional classroom. However, inherent to the online environment, face-to-face contact is lost and important community building opportunities. This does not mean that interaction, and the sense of community, has to be lost. The virtual classroom is still a community of instructors and learners. There are online instructional tools available that assist instructors in nurturing interaction and building community in the virtual classroom. We will showcase the eCollege.com tools that are effective for online interaction and community building.

Good teaching is good teaching.
We have to remember that--and repeat it over and over--in this day and age of distance learning, correspondence classes, and online environments. Even though the delivery systems for teaching are becoming more diverse, and sometimes more confusing, we must reiterate that the "classroom" is a community of learners. This community, though, whether in person or in cyberspace, has to be nurtured, and this nurturing takes the involvement of administrators, teachers, and students alike.

Evidence exists [name some here?] that establishing good administration in an online program translates to better informed and more enthusiastic teachers. This, in turn, leads to more satisfied students, who report learning more in an online class. [get research here?]

Laying the framework for a tight community (administration→teachers→students) of learners is important, especially when a school is in its infancy of an online program. With all of the other concerns involved with starting on online campus, nurturing a community may not be of the highest priority. However, this aspect is a vital component of that campus built in cyberspace.

Combining lecture and open discussion, we invite participants to engage in discussion and debate about the critical areas and suggestions for best practices and adaptation. The discussion will be enhanced by the multimedia presentation that visually constructs the circular progression of the online community as represented by the three critical areas of our discussion.