Active Learning Overview

Active learning is the process of incorporating carefully-planned instructional strategies to promote learning through manipulation of new content knowledge to complete activities that show understanding and accurate usage rather than passive engagement like watching and listening. In simple terms, active learning is about moving from thinking/consuming to doing/applying.

Cognitive Domains of Learning

Utilizes the following Bloom’s Taxonomy’s hierarchy of learning that are categorized by mental skills. The cognitive domain deals with how we knowledge is acquired, processed and used.

- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Evaluation

Approaches to Course Modality

Examples:

- **Face-to-Face:**
  Students are manipulating and applying new knowledge to “show” learning by doing an activity in class that applies the new information. Instructor is able to assess accuracy of learning through observation of use.

- **Online:**
  Students are reacting to and/or applying new learning through the use of discussion boards, smaller/shorter assignments and assessments using tools that allow for quick review like mind maps, wikis, blogging, presentation tools, interactive content, etc.

- **Integrated Face-to-face & Online (Blended/Hybrid):**
  Students are in class manipulating and applying new out of class knowledge to “show” learning of materials. Instructor is able to assess accuracy of learning through observation of use.

Assessments

- Provides instructor with the ability to gain quick feedback
- Use as a formative assessment
- Monitor and adjust lessons as needed according to feedback
Benefits

- Increase engagement
- Motivate learning
- Encourage participation
- Practice communication skills
- Provide collaboration opportunities
- Increased degree of authenticity (real-world application)

Barriers

- Needs to be carefully planned
- Larger classes may limit the types of strategies that can be used
- Greater support will be needed in early implementation
- May experience early push back from students

Small and Large Class Sizes

- Provides a method of accountability
- Using it as an accountability tool encourages higher attendance
- Focuses on core elements of content

Low Risk vs High Risk Strategies (see the Active Learning Strategies handout for specific strategies)

|                              | Low Risk Strategies          | High Risk Strategies
|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------
| Class Time Required          | relatively short             | relatively long      |
| Degree of Planning           | Carefully planned            | Spontaneous          |
| Degree of structure          | More structured              | Less structured      |
| Subject Matter               | Relatively concrete          | Relatively abstract  |
| Potential for Controversy    | Less controversial           | More controversial   |
| Students’ Prior Knowledge of the Subject Matter | Better informed | Less informed |
| Students’ Prior Knowledge of the Teaching Technique | Familiar | Unfamiliar |
| Instructors’ Prior Knowledge with the Teaching Technique | Considerable | Limited |
| Pattern of Interaction       | Between faculty & students   | Among students       |