Maintaining and Supporting Your Online Learning (Slide 1)

Welcome to "Maintaining and Supporting Your Online Learning", a workshop series offered by the Student Success Centre at the University of Calgary. I'm Dr. Paul Papin, an Academic Development Specialist at the Student Success Centre, and I'll be presenting the "maintenance" side of this workshop series. My co-host, Christian Louden, will be presenting the second, or "support" side of the series.

Overview of This Workshop Series (Slide 2)

The topics covered in the first half of our workshop series are: Keeping up with your readings, taking online-lecture notes, and processing lecture slides. The second half of the series covers studying online with others, doing group work online, and online etiquette.

Course Maintenance: Where the Race Is Won or Lost (Slide 3)

In between the big milestones of major exams and assignments is the less spectacular terrain of everyday course maintenance: keeping up with assigned readings, attending (or, in the online environment, watching) lectures, and going over lecture slides. In the less structured environment of online learning, it's especially tempting to save all your strength for the milestones, but ask any long-distance runner, and they'll tell you that the terrain <u>between</u> milestones is where the race is won or lost.

Workshop Objectives (Slide 4)

In this segment of our workshop series, we'll be talking about the second of three course-maintenance activities, namely, taking online lecture notes. Lecture notes are, of course, one of the basic study materials you rely on to prepare properly for exams. If your lecture notes are deficient, your exam preparation will be, too, no matter how much time you spend on it. By the end of this workshop, you'll appreciate the importance of online participation in the creation of good lecture notes, understand why recorded lectures don't make for good primary study material, and be familiar with some basic lecture-note-taking strategies.

Creating Good Lecture Notes through Participation (Slide 5)

One of the potential perils of online lectures is the lack of opportunity for participation. This potential peril is especially acute in the case of recorded lectures, but it applies to live lectures, too. The reasons for being unable to participate can include students' and instructors' lack of familiarity with the technology, privacy and security concerns on the part of both the university and students, and possible instructor anxieties about their ability to monitor and control online chats. Ultimately, however, you need to find a way to participate, not just for the sake of your engagement in the course and not just to avoid feelings of isolation in the online environment--although these are good reasons in themselves to participate--but in order to ask questions and get clarification on course material you don't understand. Your questions may have arisen in the course of reading assigned material in advance of the lecture, in which case you will have your questions ready in advance, or questions may arise <u>during</u> the lecture. In either case, you need to get answers, be it from the instructor, the T.A., or other students. The chat function is especially useful for asking questions if you're not permitted to ask--or don't feel comfortable asking--a question using your mic, since it doesn't disrupt the flow of the lecture. If the instructor

or T.A. isn't monitoring the chat, you can always send your question to everyone and hope for a response from another student in the class.

I'm not saying that there's no way of getting answers to your questions outside of the lecture, but the lecture is a good place to ask questions because they come up organically there and have a clear context that is sometimes lacking when, for instance, you email your question to the instructor or T.A. after class. The bottom line is that, unless you somehow get the clarification you need, you'll wind up studying something you've written in your notes that you don't understand, and, ultimately, you'll take that lack of understanding with you into the exam.

Given the importance of participating in online lectures, it's essential to find out which modes of participation are available in each of your courses, learn how to use those modes, and decide which one(s) you're comfortable using.

Taking Notes from Recorded Lectures (Slide 6)

Unlike a live lecture, a recorded lecture is captured for you. You may therefore conclude that you don't need to <u>take</u> notes from a recorded lecture. Why should you, when you've got the whole thing at your fingertips, available to watch anytime you need it?

Well, there are a few reasons for not studying directly from a recorded lecture. One reason is that they're simply too long. Too long, in this case, means two things. First of all, they simply take too long to sit through--much longer than it would take for you to study notes from the lecture. Secondly, and more importantly, too long means the lecture contains lots of irrelevant material in the form of instructor asides, anecdotes, and long pauses.

Related to the excessive length of recorded lectures is the fact that they are insufficiently processed. By processed, I mean a number of things. To begin with, you haven't made any of the decisions note-takers have to make, such as which information to bother writing down and which information to leave out. These decisions are based on your understanding of the relative importance of the various things the instructor says during the lecture. (As an aside, if you don't <u>have</u> a sense of that relative importance, then you need to go back to your course outline or textbook to find out what the objectives of the lecture are.) Processed information also means information that you've put into your own words and illustrated with examples that make sense to you. If you don't process the recorded lecture material in this way, then you may well be re-listening every time you play the recording to opaque, technical-sounding explanations of concepts without relatable examples.

A final reason for not studying directly from a recorded lecture is that it's very difficult to integrate with your reading notes--assuming you've taken notes from the assigned reading, which is something you should definitely do. Integration of lecture and reading notes is essential if you want both sources of information to illuminate each other. If you study your notes one day and the lecture another, are you going to be able to remember what each one said about the same concept? Probably not. You'll be doing a big favour to your brain if you gather related information from your notes and the video in the same place, where you can study it as a coherent whole.

Some Note-Taking Basics (Slide 7)

We can infer from the limitations of recorded lectures a few basic principles of good lecture-note-taking.

First, don't try to write everything down. That's what court stenographers do. If you write everything down, then you may as well be studying from a recorded lecture. The only difference is that you'll be the recording device. Just as video cameras capture everything in their field of view and make no decisions by themselves about what's worth recording and what isn't, a student who tries to write down everything is recording everything they hear or see on the board without making decisions about what's worth recording. The resulting notes are not only too long but fail to distinguish between main ideas and details, let alone connect them in order to give some sense of the big picture. If you find yourself trying to write everything down, it may be because you've come to the lecture unprepared. So make sure you've read and taken organized notes from the assigned reading in advance. Then you can write down from the lecture only what the reading didn't include. You can even leave some space in your reading notes below each topic, and write your lecture notes in the appropriate space.

The other problem with writing everything down is that you don't give your brain the opportunity to absorb fully the meaning of the words you're writing down. Note-taking becomes an all-consuming and almost mechanical process.

Even though much of your sense of what will and won't be important in the lecture is acquired during your pre-reading of assigned material, you still need to make these value decisions in the lecture itself.

One way of doing so is to pay special attention in the first couple of minutes of the lecture, when the instructor is likely to mention the lecture objectives. The beginning of the lecture, like the end of the lecture, is a rhetorically significant moment. Both the beginning and the end feature a summary: in one case, of what's to come and, in the other case, of what has already been discussed.

Paying attention to certain visual cues is also a good strategy for identifying what's important in a lecture. One such clue is when the instructor returns to their lecture notes after an ad-libbed discussion or time away from the lecture podium. This return usually signifies that the instructor has said everything they wanted to say about a certain topic or sub-topic, and needs to refresh their memory about the next main idea they plan to discuss.

Verbal cues are an even more dependable source of information, not only about main ideas, but how those ideas relate to each other. So listen for language like: "There are three main theories about X" or "The key characteristics of X are...".

It's worth noting that, although anything the instructor writes down on the board is potentially note-worthy (especially in the era of Powerpoint), it's never a good idea to focus on what the instructor writes down to the exclusion of what the instructor says out loud. Working feverishly to get down what's on the board can prevent you from actively listening to and understanding the lecture. Also, just as you need to be selective in your recording of what the instructor says, you should be selective in your recording of what the instructor writes down.

Summary (Slide 8)

And so, to sum up, if you want to take good online lecture notes, there are a few basic strategies to consider. First of all, make sure to familiarize yourself with the available modes of lecture participation in your various courses, and choose the ones you're comfortable with. Your participation will ensure that you don't end up studying from a set of lecture notes with explanatory gaps. Secondly, take notes even from your recorded lectures. Recorded lectures may seem to be a convenient study material but they're too long, not personalized enough, and hard to integrate with your notes. Finally, use course and lecture objectives to structure your notes in advance, and look for visual and verbal cues from the instructor <u>during</u> the lecture in order to identify main ideas and their relationship to each other.

ADS Contact Info & Thank You (Slide 9)

I hope you enjoyed this workshop, and that you'll use some or all of these strategies to maintain your note-taking. Feel free to watch other segments of this series. If you'd like to book a one-on-one appointment with an Academic Development Specialist to discuss strategies from this workshop or others, you can go to: www.ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success.

Thanks for attending!