BOOK REVIEW
Michelle Rogers-Estable, *Book Review Editor*

Excellent Online Teaching: Effective Strategies for a Successful Semester Online, by Aaron Johnson

Roberta (Robin) Sullivan
State University of New York at Buffalo

Aaron Johnson describes his book, *Excellent Online Teaching: Effective Strategies for a Successful Semester Online*, as succinct (it's just 60 pages in length), but dense. This is accurate. It effectively covers course organization, communication, feedback, grading, student interaction, and many other topics relating to the practice of effective online teaching strategies. It is a very easy read because of its minimalistic size, but its usefulness to the distance education community is vast. Because of its concise nature it is highly likely that an instructor would and could engage in the book's content and dedicate their time and attention to the adoption of the strategies mentioned within the book's chapters.

The goal of this book is to provide instructors with practical advice and tips regarding the effective delivery of online instruction. The book includes many strategies that can be directly applied to a variety of online teaching situations. The audience for this book is mainly instructors and instructional designers. The straightforward advice relating to online learning is useful to for anyone who would like to create engaging online learning environments. This book does not focus on educational theories, instead the book highlights practical ways instructors can effectively facilitate an online course.

Johnson, the associate dean of educational technology at the Denver Seminary in Littleton, Colorado, has over a decade of online teaching experience and also as a technical adviser and faculty developer. Even though he is not a prominent scholar who has written numerous research articles, he has very successfully written an engaging text that is very approachable.

A topic, addressed in many of the book's chapters, is creating interactive and dynamic online relationships. The importance of

• **Roberta (Robin) Sullivan**, Online Learning Specialist, Center for Educational Innovation, State University of New York at Buffalo. Telephone: (716) 645-7703. E-mail: rrs@buffalo.edu

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relationship building is a key strategy to create an engaging course. The book's preface begins with an analogy to picture yourself trying to keep a relationship with a close friend or relative who has moved to a distant country. It is pointed out that it is possible to sustain the relationship, but intentional effort is necessary to build habits to maintain the relationship. A main point that Johnson stresses throughout the book is to nurture a successful online course you must build relationships. He prominently states that readers are encouraged to contact him and provides his phone number and email and an easy to use contact form on his website to encourage communication by his readers. He also stresses the importance of being explicit in course communications. He states that, "facilitating threaded discussions isn't just a habit; it's an art." His advice provided to instructors is to make a point to learn and use students' names. Relationships and interaction are key factors in the community of inquiry theory, one of the most widely cited theories relating to online teaching. This important element of community building is prevalent throughout the book, however, it is not mentioned is the context of the community of inquiry framework.

Johnson provides numerous examples, templates, and other resources, which are available through the book's website. The resources are broken down by chapter and are available to be downloaded and manipulated to suit one's needs. He even goes as far as saying readers should feel free to "copy/paste and edit as you see fit." A few of the examples include recipes to write effective email announcements, discussion forum prompts, rubrics, etc. Each of the practices suggested within the book can be immediately implemented in the classroom.

This book, published in 2013, was skillfully written, keeping in mind that online learning is a rapidly evolving landscape. The book's content is enduring and very relevant. It was written with a conscious effort to have the content stay timely and current. The companion website (http://excellentonlineteaching.com), provides many resources and a blog discussing the concepts raised in the book. The blog has been updated, but not as regularly as would be desired. Keeping the blog posts continually updated would be a helpful step toward keeping the book's content alive in this rapidly evolving field.

This book is very inexpensive; a hard copy is only $7.99. An electronic version in Kindle format is just $4.99. This is a small price to pay for a practical resource that you can keep with you at all times and have teaching advice tucked in your purse or pocket.

The book's website highlights a downloadable resource guide titled, "Free Go-To Discussion Prompt Guide." This resource is available to download even without buying the book (http://eepurl.com/byT-W9). This resource includes prompts to encourage learners think more deeply about topics discussed in an online forum, for example, "tell me more about," "what if …" and "what would you choose? And why?" This resource emphasizes a main idea within the book that discussion and interaction are keys to successful online learning environments.

An advantage of this book is that it is also available in eBook format. Considering that the book's objective is to provide online learning for students, it makes sense to model the advantages of an electronic format. The construction of the book also takes care to not dwell too much on specific technologies. Johnson stresses that technologies are just tools. The technology tools that are described in the book are described in a generic way. Specific tools are not identified and this is one of the reasons why the publication does not seem dated. A surprising advantage of the electronic eBook format is that a simple copy/paste function results in the pasted content also includes a citation for the copied text at the same time.

The overall conclusion is that this book is a very worthwhile read for anyone who is interested in teaching online. Because of its brief format it is very reasonable to expect that anyone can take advantage of the knowledge and ideas that the book conveys to create or improve one's teaching abilities and their online course.

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