

# **Designing Effective and Engaging Online Courses**

**Proposal for a new faculty training course.**

## **Needs Assessment**

Faculty Senate identified the need for additional training on how to design and teach online courses. They felt that the current training on the technical side of Blackboard is excellent, but does not cover the theory behind design for effective online teaching. The proposed solution is an additional course offered through the training department taught by instructional designers and designed to go beyond the technical side of online courses into effective design and practices. The course would have multiple components: First, a face-to-face component that is half presentation and half open discussion/panel discussion. The next component is an online course that allows instructors to review course material as well as see further examples of good practices versus bad practices. The final component would be a collaborate meeting to answer further questions and to demonstrate best practices in the Collaborate environment.

## **Goal**

Course instructors will gain a greater understanding of how to design and teach effective and engaging online courses.

## **Objectives**

Given the essential elements of effective course organization, professors will design their content and objectives in a manner that facilitates student understanding.

Given the basic principles of facilitating interaction and discussion in online courses, professors will consider how to apply these principles in a manner that effectively improves their courses.

Given the main principles of facilitating active learning and collaboration online, professors will consider how to apply these principles in a manner that effectively improves their courses.

Given the ideals of effective assessment and evaluation for online courses, professors will design their course activities in a manner that effectively connects evaluation with course objectives.

Given the core ideals of community-building activities for online courses, professors will work to incorporate these ideals into their course design.

## **Assessment**

At this point, no assessment is planned for this course.

## **Learner Characteristics**

Learners are University professors who have expressed a desire to learn more about designing courses for the online environment. They will more than likely have some familiarity with the Learning

Management System. They will possibly also have a wide range of experience with teaching online, from completely new to years of experience.

### **Learner Context**

The initial context will be a learning lab in the Learning Center. The course will be continued online through a Blackboard course and then will be completed with an online session in Collaborate.

### **Instructional Strategies**

#### **1. Course Introduction**

Look at the different roles in an ideal design situation (SME, designer, instructor), and how each is a huge field in itself. But in most situations, professors are expected to take on all three roles. Therefore, course design is part of a larger field that is constantly growing and changing. Professors should look for ways to stay in the know on changes and research. This is not a “learn once and you are set” topic.

#### **2. Content Outline**

##### **a. Face-to-face Section**

##### **i. Course Organization**

1. Always start with well written goals and objectives
2. Make sure everything makes sense – well written, complete instructions, spell out time commitments and expectations, provide summary lists (including a start here page), etc.
3. Chunking content and using headings
4. Open Educational Resources
5. Using announcements and email

##### **ii. Facilitating interaction and discussion**

1. Students need to connect with you and each other.
2. Welcome message videos, injecting your personality, and online office hours.
3. Student collaboration and cooperation expectations

##### **iii. Facilitating active learning and collaboration**

1. Active learning versus passive learning
2. Critical thinking and deep learning
3. Don't stop with exams and discussion boards

##### **iv. Assessment and evaluation**

1. Have a plan from the beginning – how you will give and receive feedback.
2. A grade is just the beginning – rubrics, comments, and interaction.

##### **v. Community-building activities**

1. Connect your students with the larger community of practice related to the course – blogs, forums, online sessions.

2. Have your students contribute to your community of practice.
3. Work current events into your course.
- vi. Q&A / Discussion Time
- b. Online section
  - i. Examples of best practices versus not-so-best practices
    1. Poor organization versus good organization
    2. Poor goals versus well written ones
    3. Bad video versus good video
    4. Poorly written discussion questions versus well written questions
    5. Poorly written test questions versus well written ones
    6. Vague grading scheme versus clear grading scheme
    7. Passive learning versus active learning
    8. Critical thinking versus basic
  - ii. Advanced teaching strategies
    1. Twitter, Facebook, and other popular websites.
    2. Simulations and alternate reality
    3. Problem based learning
  - iii. Extra resources for extended research
- c. Follow-up Collaborate session at the end of the week
  - i. Best practices for using online collaboration tools
  - ii. Answer questions and concerns about course issues

### **3. Assessment**

- a. No assessment for this initial course
- b. Future assessment methods might include a completion certificate or badges of some kind to be placed in online courses.

<http://cnx.org/content/col10559/1.2>

<http://thejournal.com/articles/2004/09/01/faculty-training-for-online-teaching.aspx>

### **Instructional Resources**

White board with markers (initial face-to-face section only), Internet-connected computers, Blackboard account.

### **Formative Evaluation**

Course plan will be reviewed by other Instructional Designers for input and changes. First offering of the course will be to a small group of instructors to serve as a pilot course.

### **Future Direction**

This course may start off as a stand-alone course, but ultimately it needs to be rolled into an online teaching certification or program of some kind. It can be connected with the existing training course on

Blackboard Basics, and then expanded with a series of advanced teaching topics that mix how to use specific tools with best practices.

A section in the training newsletter on Instructional Design updates could be a good way to keep faculty updated on new ideas and developments.

Long term, some type of faculty symposium of some kind can be created that allows faculty to “show off” what they are doing in online courses to their peers. ACU had a luncheon like this that was very popular among faculty – sometimes booked months in advance.

### **Course Description:**

So you know how to use the tools in Blackboard, but what do you do now? This course will look at the basics of designing online courses to engage your students in an effective manner. The initial face-to-face meeting will cover subjects like organization, interaction, discussion, active learning, collaboration, community-building, and any questions you might have about course design. This will be followed by a week-long online course with short modules that compare effective course design with ineffective design. The course will conclude with an online Collaborate wrap-up meeting to examine using virtual meeting tools in your courses.

### **Interesting Thought:**

“School is often built around the “content fetish,” the idea that an academic area like biology or social science is constituted by some definitive list of facts or body of information that can be tested in a standardized way. But academic areas are not first and foremost bodies of facts, they are, rather, first and foremost, the activities and ways of knowing through which such facts are generated, defended, and modified.”