

Course Planning: Part I

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In the last module we talked about how a student learns online and some of the common issues that affect online learning. In this module we will discuss how to develop a course to avoid these common issues, set up students for success, and be sure that the course effectively covers all of the information that the student needs to learn in order to reach the course goals.

Online Advantages

Flexibility

Availability of
the course



So first of all, let's look at some of the major reasons why an instructor may choose to teach a course online:

One of the most obvious is Flexibility.

- The instructor can teach from anywhere at anytime
- Also the students have access to the course around the clock; so they can fit it into their schedule and lives. This becomes especially apparent during the summer; students can go home and take UF courses while working or visiting family. And this will prevent them from trying to get these summer courses from community colleges near their hometown.
- Another flexibility advantage is that it will free up the instructor for research or other professional and personal opportunities (although the allocated teaching time will not change, the traditional face to face schedule is all but eliminated)

Another major advantage to teaching an online course is the increased Availability of the course

- We can offer more sections and more seats so to speak IF you have the support of TA's to farm the sections out to.
- Again, a successfully designed course will easily be rolled over from a typical 16 week semester to a shorter summer session with only a few modifications.

Online Advantages

- ▶ Ease of maintenance
- ▶ Save Funding
- ▶ Parking



Other advantages to teaching online is the ease of Maintenance

Once the course has been fully created, it should require the instructor little time to maintain it during the running semester, and this, as I said before, frees the instructor for research or other departmental duties.

And, of course, the most talked about advantage of distance learning
Is online courses can save money. There are costs involved in the use of on campus building spaces, such as energy and maintenance staff.... those costs are virtually eliminated.

And lastly you don't have the parking issues that we are all too familiar with.

Online Disadvantages

- ▶ Development time
- ▶ Technology



While there are many advantages to teaching online There are also a few disadvantages....
Starting with Development time:

There is a significant time commitment at the beginning of the process. Possibly as much as 2 whole semesters of work.

It will take about 3x as long to move a course to an online format than how long it will take to prepare for a face-to-face course – and that is assuming that a face-to-face course is being adapted into an online course and is not brand new course that's never been taught.

And then, once an online course is created it becomes a matter of maintaining and modifying the course. That can take time.

Even if you have a course designed and developed for online delivery you will need time allocated to roll it over for new semester. But rest assured that the vast majority of the course is already prepared so that all materials and lectures can be reused. Online courses are very adaptable and can easily evolve along with the subject matter.

And then there are disadvantages that come along with Technology or the lack of technology.

There are obviously benefits to face-to-face learning that simply can't work in an online course, or at least not the same degree... and while there are New technologies emerging every day to bridge those gaps, these technologies inevitably come with a learning curve, both for the faculty implementing the technology and

the student using the technology. For some students it can be very intuitive, but there will always be learners that have difficulty with any and all technology. And even if they don't attempt to be successful with it, they will try to use it as an excuse in not completing work. We try to head off any problems with students using technology by creating very detailed tutorials. Including visual instruction through videos and screen captures. So always keep in mind that the more technology you utilize the more questions and difficult students you will be working with during the running time of the course. We want technology to assist the students in learning; we never want it to hinder a single learner in being successful. If a student fails it should be due to the academic rigor of the course. Not a challenging technology or tool....

Online Disadvantages

- ▶ Perception of support needs
- ▶ Out of sight, out of mind?

There is an unfortunate perception that the instructor's job is complete once the design phase is complete, but that is far from true. There must be semester long commitment from the instructor and TA's.

An online course is not automatic and there will need to be additional TAs for additional seats

Out of Sight, but not out of Mind

Once again, A quality online course does not run on autopilot interaction with students is key. And constant input and feedback is strongly recommended.

Design as you go: Why?

- ▶ Busy
- ▶ New course
- ▶ Last minute replacement instructor
- ▶ Unclear estimate of work required



There are many reasons you might try to design a course while teaching it but most faculty tend to be too busy during the semester prior to an online course pilot to create the course in advance.

Or it might be a new course that has been added to your teaching load, or the previous instructor has just left and you have been asked to take the course over.

However, many people do not realize how much work is required to create a quality course for an online environment.

Design as you go: Challenges

- ▶ Material is left out
- ▶ Course flow
- ▶ Cohesion of materials
- ▶ Assessment alignment
- ▶ Inconsistent expectations

Problems inherent in design as you go, are comparable to a house being built with out a floor plan being drafted first.

Materials unfortunately can get left out. And while you will most likely at the very least have an outline for the course. There will be materials that can either get forgotten by getting lost in the hustle and bustle of a running semester, or that need to be abandoned due to unforeseen roadblocks or limitations of the course management system.

Secondly, it is difficult to create a smooth course flow when you design as you are teaching the course. Once again the design process is like an architect creating a blueprint before building a structure. Once you have that blueprint to give you an overarching view of the entire course, you can get a better feel for the flow of required work and improve upon such if the need be.

It will also give you insight into how well the materials will stack up together to support the course goals and objectives.

One of the biggest issues we see in design as you go and in a lot of face-to-face courses is the issue of Assessments that assess the wrong things. You will hear more about the importance of objectives and assessments in the upcoming modules but the only way to assure the alignment of all materials, assignments, lectures and assessments is to design the course in full well before it's launch date.

Design as you go: Challenges

- ▶ Unclear syllabus
- ▶ Student frustration
- ▶ Down time
- ▶ Untested technology

A few other design as you go challenges are the risk of an unclear syllabus or instructions to guide them through the course.

This can cause Frustration on the part of the student. And an extra high failure rate.

Another challenge is “Down time” that can cause the course to lose momentum

And lastly Untested technology can and has caused courses to implode into a disorganized frenzy of student panic

Design in advance: Challenges

- ▶ Time
- ▶ Loss of “teaching moments”
- ▶ Ability to make changes “on the fly”



The best way to prevent all of these problems is to fully develop a course prior to teaching it. As with all things, there are some advantages and disadvantages to developing a course in advance.

Disadvantages (perceived or real)

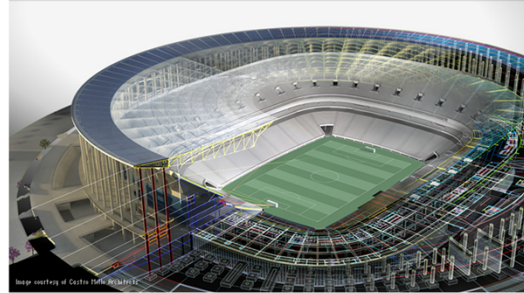
Is the Time commitment prior to the running semester.

Also it becomes harder to make changes on the fly. Hopefully there won't need to be changes made, due to a thoroughly designed and developed course, but if the subject matter is closely related to current events, would be an example of difficulty in making sudden, last minute changes. Difficult... but not impossible. Webcams and video hosting services such as Youtube can allow for a very quick injection of content to students on the fly.

Design in advance: Advantages

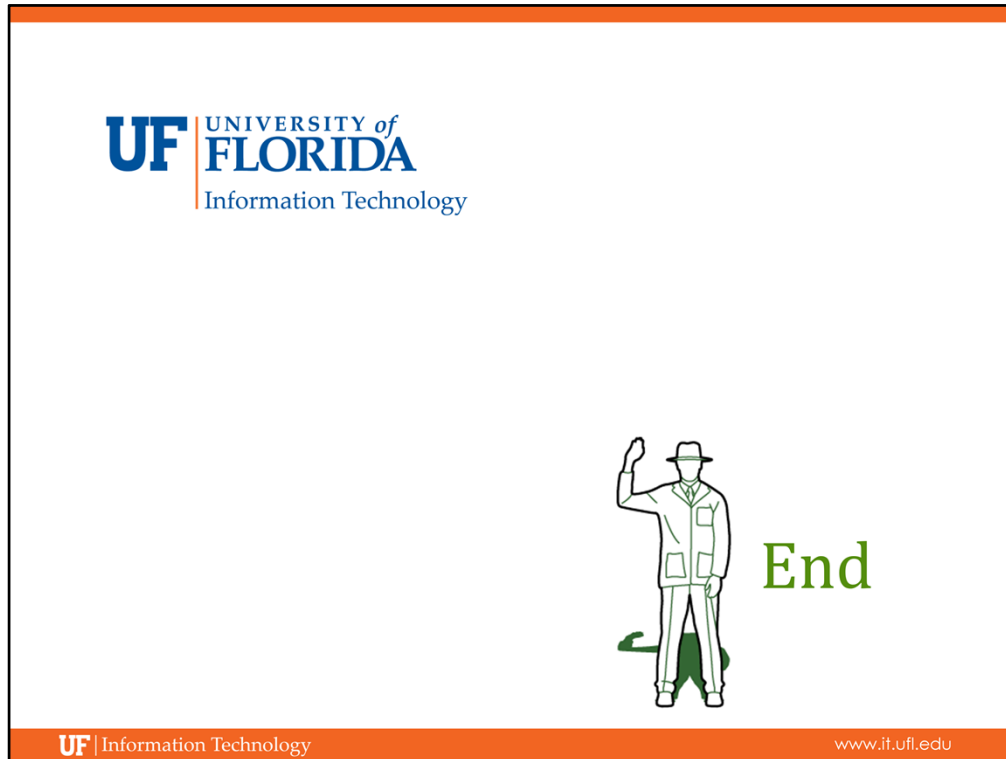


- ▶ Clear expectations
- ▶ Alignment with objectives
- ▶ Consistency
- ▶ Course flow
- ▶ Proactive
- ▶ No surprises
- ▶ Evaluation



And then we have the advantages of designing the course prior to teaching it.

- There are clear expectations presented to the students.
- There will be measurable objectives that can make assessments a lot more accurate than a design as you go course.
- There will be content and materials that directly align with the objectives and course goals.
- There will be well structured learning strategies that WILL increase retention of the content.
- One of which is consistency. Consistency in various aspects of the course and skilled web design is proven to assist learning.
- Another advantage to designing the course is allocated time and opportunity to be proactive (with technology, supplemental activities, and such)
- Also, There will be no pesky surprises. (Or at least very few!)
- And most importantly there will be an opportunity to evaluate the course and make necessary revisions before students are exposed to it.



That concludes this first lecture on course planning and the best practices in the design phase of creating an online course. Thanks.