

Quality Online Course Framework

A Course Design Approach Proposed by The Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence (CTLE), Technology Assisted Curriculum Center (TACC), & Distance Education (DE)

DRAFT

II. The Collaborative Online Course Design Process

The six elements of a quality online course discussed above have been integrated into a flexible course design process that will support and assist instructors as they work on designing, developing, or revising online courses. This process is a four-phase process: (1) Design, (2) Build, (3) Teach, and (4) Revise. Instructors should continually enter in and out of the collaborative online course design process to constantly improve their course design and delivery methods. Depending on what the instructor would like to do, they will be able to enter the process at a variety of points to address their immediate needs. For example, an instructor designing a course from scratch will enter in the Design Phase, where they will work with CTLE to analyze the course situational factors, design course objectives, and structure the course. An instructor who wants to revise a particular learning activity for an existing class will enter the process at the Build Phase. TACC or DE will assist them in looking at options for new technology tools or redesigning the assignment in an alternative way. During the teach phase, TACC and DE provide student support and improve class communication. After the course is taught, the student feedback survey may prompt an instructor to enter the revise phase and work with CTLE to analyze the course data and redesign a course component. Instructors would have an opportunity to either go through the process using self-directed online resources, tutorials and consultations, or they can request personal consultation to meet with consultants to get feedback on their course design progress.

Phase 1 – DESIGN

Pre-Phase Checklist:

Be able to articulate basic information about the course to begin the design process.

The design phase of developing an online course involves:

- Writing course objectives;
- Brainstorming ideas for teaching/learning activities and assessments that would align with those objectives, and
- Developing and articulating a course sequence and structure.

Design Phase Objectives:

During this phase of designing an online course faculty will:

- Articulate learning outcomes in the form of measurable course objective statements (Quality Course Element #1), and
- Design a course organization and structure based on the course objectives that facilitate student learning (Quality Course Element #2).

Rationale:

The process for this 1st phase or course design is called backwards design. This means instructors will first think about what their students should know or be able to do at the end of the course and then work “backwards” to design the activities and assessments that will help their students successfully achieve the end-of-course objectives. This process assures that the objectives, the assessments, and the teaching/learning activities are aligned. Instructors will want to assure that they are really assessing what they say the students should be able to know or do and that the teaching/learning activities will support their assessments. This process will also help instructors focus on what is really important in their course and design objectives at different levels of learning. Making the course objectives visible to their students will help them see the relevance of their course activities and assignments.

Process:

Step 1 - Writing Course Objectives:

1. Situational Factors Reflection

Fink (2003) identifies 5 factors to consider as you begin the design process:

- i. Specific Context of the Teaching/Learning Situation
- ii. General Context of the Learning Situation
- iii. Nature of the Subject
- iv. Characteristics of the Learners
- v. Characteristics of the Teacher

2. Completing the Dream Exercise

Instructors will complete the Fink dream exercise, which will help them articulate their big overarching course goal

3. Writing Course Objectives

- From the overarching goal instructors will write course goals
- Normally, 3-8 objectives is a good number of objectives for a course
- Instructors will receive resources to help write objectives, using action verbs and assessing the level of learning associated with their objectives
- Feedback will be provided on the objectives

Objectives should:

- be stated clearly in the syllabus and made visible to students
- be present at both the course level and at the modules or unit level (those lower- level objectives will be developed in the Build phase)
- align to the teaching/learning activities and assessments
- drive how the course is designed and taught
- be measurable indicators of student learning across the course and learning activities
- include multiple levels of learning based on Bloom’s and/or Fink’s taxonomies

Step 2 - Brainstorming ideas for teaching/learning activities and assessment that align to objectives (completion of an alignment grid)

- Complete the alignment grid (objectives in the first column)
- List assessments and activities that align to objectives (roadmap of course) in columns 2 and 3

Step 3 - The process of structuring and sequencing the course

This step is really about 2 things:

1. Designing the overall structure (how the course is organized)
 - Course materials need to be chunked and be presented in a logical and organized sequence so that students can locate and complete their work
 - The course organizational structure and navigation will be designed
 - Instructors will be given resources and examples for structuring a course and they will learn about the different ways that a course could be structured (modules, units, weekly, by topic, by assignments or by activities, etc)
 - They will make a decision about how their course will best be presented and organized
2. Presenting the sequence to students (how the materials are ordered)
 - Instructors will also learn about how to sequence their course. Questions to consider include: What will be the order of activities? What comes first, last, etc.?
 - Looking at the alignment grid they can see how the activities and objectives might best work. They will be provided with resources to think through the sequencing process.
 - They will then develop the structure of the course on the homepage – creating a folder structure on the homepage. The next step is to move into the Build Phase of the course design process.

By the end of this phase you should have:

- an alignment grid that shows how possible teaching/learning activities and assessments could align to the course objectives; and
- a structure and sequence for the course homepage that demonstrates how the course material will be sequenced, structured, and chunked to facilitate student learning.

Summary

Financial and facility constraints, changing faculty roles (Arreloa, Aleamoni, & Theall, 2001), changing student populations (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Oblinger, 2003), rapidly evolving technologies (Brown & Adler, 2008), and more rigorous accreditation standards (Allen, 2004) are changing how business is being conducted in higher education. In addition, an increasing number of courses are being taught online and the ability to engage students in an online

environment is becoming an even more critical issue during this time of change (Bonk, 2002). In addition at this time, with an impending transition to a new online learning environment, this is also an opportune time for providing a consolidated and coordinated effort for supporting instructors teaching online. Technology tools can provide opportunities, possibilities, cost savings, and can improve the student learning experience if we can design faculty development resources and programs that help instructors not only learn how to use technology tools, but also learn how to design courses on sound pedagogical foundations (Ziegenfuss, 2005).

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