Assignment 2: Introductory Module for Online Course

Josh Ballem

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University of British Columbia

When I first sat down to begin designing my online course, I needed to do some research as this is not something I have done before. I have taken a number of online courses and worked closely with faculty teaching online, but this was always after they had set up most of the course structure. After reading through many different books and articles on instructional design, I decided to use the “Self-Directed Guide to Designing Courses for Significant Learning” by L.D. Fink (2003) as the basis for my design process. I found the step by step process extremely helpful, especially the five steps in the initial design phase. Within this document, I will outline how Fink’s guide provided an initial starting point for my online course and then I will go through and explain each of the main components of the course and what was the thinking/research behind these decisions.

As outlined by Fink (2003), it is important to start with the situational factors affecting the course. Since the course I am designing is for a large introductory business course with high enrollments, I really tried to keep the situational factors in mind throughout the design process. This course will have over 200 students in each section and for the most part, this will be the students first term in university. Almost all of the students will be taking their first online course and will have little previous experience in business studies before starting in the course. The number of students in the course and their lack of experience at university influenced a lot of the design in the course, especially the general course structure in Moodle and the course outline/instructions. This is the main reason for the very basic design for the site, as I wanted to keep it simple and straightforward for the students. Another important situational factor is the department expectations for the course. Since this course is a pre-requisite for most business courses at the university, the course outcomes were highly related to what students needed to be prepared for subsequent courses. Also, the department views this course as a way to promote themselves to students in other disciplines, with the hope that they will become business majors or at least take some electives in that area.

After determining the situational factors, I decided to follow Fink’s advice and used a “backward design” (Fink, 2003, p. 5) process to build the overall structure of the course. The backward design process starts with the end of course learning goals and works backwards to the beginning of the course structure. With this in mind, creating the course outcomes was the next step in the process. As outlined in the “Taxonomy of Significant Learning” by Fink (2003, p. 9), I tried to include more than just foundational and application learning goals in the list of outcomes. I reviewed many introductory business courses and textbooks (Ebert, 2015) (Solomon, 2016) to develop the foundational knowledge outcomes, but then provided additional outcomes related to general learning, integration, and working within a community of learners.

The third step of process dealt with the design of the feedback and assessment measures being used in the course. As outlined by Fink (2003), I attempted to include “forward-looking assessment” (Fink, 2003, p. 13). Within the discussion forum students will be able to expand on what they learned in the weekly readings and the simulations. Ideally, this will enable the students to use this learned knowledge after the course is over (Fink, 2003). To ensure that the students actually complete the weekly readings, I created a multiple choice quiz for each module. This also ensures that the assessment matches up closely with the learning objectives for the course (Roblyer, 2015). The midterm and final exam will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. The multiple choice questions can be clearly mapped to the course learning outcomes and the short answer and essay questions demonstrate whether or not a deeper level of understanding was achieved.

The next step in the process was to develop the teaching and learning activities. Throughout this step, I tried to provide students with “information and ideas, an experience, and the opportunity for reflective dialogue” (Fink, 2003, p. 17). Although there is a lack of concrete evidence for “learning style-based strategies” (Roblyer, 2015, p.114) I wanted to ensure that students have multiple ways to learn the content. To begin each week, students would be delivered information and ideas through the reading and video lecture. They would then move on to the simulation where they can experience the content in the context of a “real world” situation. Finally, the discussion forums offer the students the ability to reflect on what they learned throughout the week and discuss their ideas with other students in the course.

After creating the learning outcomes, the assessment tools, and the teaching and learning activities, it was necessary to ensure that all of these components were integrated together. I believe I have done a good job of ensuring that the learning activities set up the students well for the assessment components, which are matched up directly to the learning goals for the course.

Once all of the content and assessments had been designed, it was time to create an overall course structure and layout how and when the activities would be delivered to the students. Since most first year courses at the university level follow a weekly structure, I decided to continue with this model. Based on the situational factors outlined earlier, I thought this would be the easiest model for the students to follow. As discussed earlier, within the weekly structure it was important to deliver the readings and “lecture” material at the beginning of the week, so this knowledge could be applied to the simulation and discussion forums later on. Since the multiple choice quiz was designed to measure their understanding of the readings, it was placed in the middle of the week on Wednesday. This would ensure that students would have a general understanding before attempting the simulation and the discussion forum on Friday. Overall, I tried to space out the requirements, with a quiz on Wednesday, the first post by Friday, and reply post by Sunday, so students could develop a weekly schedule for the course.

When it came to deciding on the grading structure for the course, I tried to spread out the grades across the assessment tools to ensure that no one component was too important. The department recommends that a significant portion of the grading be made up of the midterm and final exams to stay in line with other first year courses. With regard to the quizzes and discussion forums, I tried to use the grading as a way to demonstrate to the students the overall importance of each component.

The final step in the process was ensure that the students understand what I have designed for them in this course. The syllabus contains a description of the course, the desired outcomes, student expectations, the grading, and the communication options for students. The goal of the syllabus was to ensure that the students had a good understanding of how the course would function and what was expected of them. However, as was outlined in the situational factors, this is a large course and this will be the first term of post-secondary education for many of these students. With this in mind, I wanted to provide additional resources to ensure a smooth delivery of the course, especially over the first few weeks. The course information section was created to provide students with clear forms of accessing important information and for communicating with both the instructor and other students. The “Ask the Professor” (Roblyer, 2015, p. 170), “Virtual Office Hours” (Roblyer, 2015, p. 171) and “Contact Professor” were designed to give the students more than one option for communicating with the course instructor. The “Learner Lounge” (Roblyer, 2015, p. 172) was created to bring the students together and create a community type atmosphere.

With each of the course information components in place, I wanted the short first week to focus on ensuring the students knew how to access everything in this area and throughout the course. The first week was designed to mimic the following weeks where students need to complete their reading, watch a video, take a quiz, and finish with a discussion post. Ideally, this orientation week will clarify many questions and set up the course well. With a large number of students who are all new to university, this is extremely important.

This has been a great learning experience and I am really looking forward to getting started building the content module for the next assignment.

References

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