Course Syllabus - Online Learning: An Overview

Welcome
 Welcome to Online Learning an Overview. Whether you are a "newbie" to online teaching or a "seasoned" veteran, you will find this course valuable and extremely useful. The participants drive this course through asynchronous discussion and interaction. You may be in for some big surprises in regards to online teaching and learning.   Please note that there are no textbooks required for this course. All materials are available online!

Instructor Information
Hello, my name is Susan Manning and I'll be your guide for this course. You will learn more about me in the first week, so let me just use this space to give you the contact information. Here is how you may reach me:

- Inside the course forum areas. I log on to the course often. I try to stay away from the computer on Sunday. This is the fastest and most reliable method to reach me.
- Email outside at smanning@uillinois.edu (use this especially if you can't log in!)
- telephone me at 630-897-8214

I work from home and you'll find I have an extremely flexible schedule. I log on to the course six days a week. I try to stay away from the computer on Sunday. While exact times vary, I typically log on early in the morning, M-F, again at noon and 8 PM or later. On Saturday the times vary depending on my schedule for the day. For more information refer to my biography at Instructor Biography

Technical Assistance
If you need technical assistance, please contact Virgil Varvel at vvarvel@uillinois.edu or (217) 244-7980.

Course Description
This course runs 8 weeks, including an online orientation. You will probably spend a minimum of 10 hours a week working on the course itself, however the time commitment will vary depending on your input, needs, and personal study habits. The asynchronous online format provides flexibility as to when and where participants study, interact with the materials, their classmates, and instructor. Participants are required to log on to the course a minimum of 3 times a week, but as discussions develop, you will probably log on more often (4-5 days a week).

Topics to be covered in this course are the following:

- An overview of online learning and teaching.
- The online student's role and responsibilities in the virtual classroom.
- The facilitator's role in the virtual classroom, and characteristics of a successful online instructor.
- Strategies to promote communication and collaboration in the virtual classroom.
- Curriculum conversion for the online environment.

Course Goals and Objectives
The goals of this course include:

- Give prospective online instructors an opportunity to experience the virtual classroom from a student's perspective.
- Model facilitator skills and technologies that participants will use in their own online courses.
- Develop a functional understanding of the nature and importance of online learning in the context of contemporary educational offerings.
- Provide participants with an overview of the key elements of an online course.
- Discuss the online student's role and responsibilities in the virtual classroom.
- Discuss the facilitator's role in the virtual classroom and identify characteristics of a successful online instructor.
- Consider strategies to promote communication and collaboration in the virtual classroom.
- Share ideas about how curriculum can be converted to adapt to the online environment.

In threaded discussions via an asynchronous online discussion forum, participants will:

- Identify skills and responsibilities students need to succeed in the virtual classroom.
- Identify skills and responsibilities facilitators need to succeed in the virtual classroom.
- Identify the characteristics of curriculum used in the online paradigm as contrasted with curriculum used in the traditional classroom.

In a collaborative team project, participants will:

- Critique the appropriateness of specific course design elements and technologies with respect to curriculum and course objectives in selected online courses.

In a final course project, participants will:

- Propose instructional design strategies they will use to promote communication and collaborative learning in their own online courses.
- Synthesize the topics covered in this course by converting a segment of their face-to-face curriculum for delivery in the online environment.

Course Structure
The course has a modular structure, which is consistent and predictable. The course Web site has a straightforward design and is easily navigable. Instructions and due dates for activities and assignments are clearly articulated so students know what is expected of them and can easily stay on track. Due dates of weekly assignments are staggered throughout the week (see the course calendar) in order to give participants time to read and comment on their classmates' work before the next module begins. The course design is based on principles of collaborative learning and active participation, as well as sharing of thoughts and problem solving.

For each course Module, participants will be presented with a text-based lecture along with hyperlinks to related online articles. Participants will engage in guided discussions about these topics via the asynchronous conferencing forum. Discussions will be prompted by "advanced organizer" questions inviting participants to consider the topic as it relates to their own personal

teaching situations. Participants will also contribute resources to the class by submitting weekly critiques of online articles or resources related to the discussion topics or by developing a supplemental discussion question related to the Module topic. In a collaborative group assignment, selected online courses will be critiqued in light of the topics covered in the course. Students will choose a course to critique from a list of links to several online courses. The experience of viewing several online courses will help the participants prepare for their final project of adapting a segment of their onground curriculum to the online environment. They will be able to see and discuss what works, what doesn't, and why. At the end of each Module, participants will submit a short summary of what they believe are the most important things they learned that week and how it relates to their job.

Assigned readings and responses to discussion questions should take place during the Module in which they are assigned in order to get the most benefit from the discussions. Instructions and due dates for activities and assignments are clearly articulated so students know what is expected of them and can easily stay on track. Due dates of Module assignments are staggered throughout the Module in order to give participants time to read and comment on their classmates' work before the next Module begins. We know you have lives beyond the scope of this course and since professional adults often have free time on weekends, we have also taken that into consideration. However, if you will be unable to complete an assignment due to professional obligations notify the instructor. Better yet, prepare the assignment early and post it. This will give your classmates a head start in reading and responding to your work. See the course calendar to get an overview of when assignments are due.

As a final project, participants will convert a segment of their onground curriculum to the online environment reflecting a synthesis of the topics covered in the course. All along, you should read your classmates' postings and comment on them when appropriate. This course syllabus details your readings and assignments.

Course Requirements

The following activities and requirements apply to this course:
- Complete the online course orientation prior to the start of the course.
- Read the instructor's lesson introductions and assigned articles from the Web.
- Answer weekly discussion questions related to the assigned Web articles.
- Engage in positive and meaningful dialog with classmates concerning the course subject matter.
- In each Module, critique a web-based resource about online learning or develop a supplemental question which furthers the class discussion.
- Write a summary of the key items covered each week and how they apply to your field of teaching.
- Critique one online course in a collaborative assignment.
- Complete a final project in which you adapt one segment of your on-ground curriculum to the online environment.

Communication Tools
Several forms of communication will be used during this course.

Discussion Forum
The discussion forum is the heart of this online course. It is where you will submit all of your assignments, and where you will discuss your work with your classmates.

Chat
For more extended synchronous discussions among multiple class members, we will use the synchronous chat tool. If needed, we will even play with Elluminate, a real-time conferencing program. Most course participants enjoy experimenting with the Chat tool.

Email
As an alternative to the forum, email can be used for communication with your instructor and your classmates. You will also receive feedback on your assignments from the instructor via this mode of communication. Course participant can also use their individual e-mail services to communicate with the instructor and each other privately.

Telephone
The telephone is still sometimes the most effective mode for troubleshooting technology problems or other issues related to the course. Your instructor's phone number and other contact information can be found in the instructor's section of the MVCR Website.

Pedagogical Rationale for Assignments

Course Orientation:
As a culminating activity for the course orientation, students will submit a short biography of themselves to the conferencing forum. This assignment gives participants practice with using the conferencing program and creates a sense of community. It also helps students find common links among themselves.

Module Discussion Questions:
The questions serve as advance organizers to encourage critical thinking and informed participation. Due by the date they are listed on the course calendar, specific discussion questions (requiring a 150-300 word response) will be assigned to individuals with ensuing discussion from all course members. The time specified for the initial posting ensures that all participants have ample opportunity to interact. Some of the most important discussion questions will be recycled throughout the course. Students will thus have the opportunity to consider more in-depth responses to key questions as the course progresses.

Module Article/Web Resource Critiques:
Students will be asked to submit weekly critiques of an online article or Web resource relevant to the course content. The critiques will be due by the date specified on the course calendar. This activity has three functions:

- It allows students to choose what to focus on and take control of their own learning experience.
- It brings outside resources into the course.
- It provides participants with an extensive list of summaries of related resources which they can choose to read or archive for later use.

Module Summaries:
By the end of the module, students will submit a 100-200 word summary of what they feel to have been the most important points covered in the course that week and relate this to their own teaching goals. This exercise has four functions:

- It helps the students reinforce and synthesize the material covered.
- Each student personalizes the material, adapting it to his/her own specific professional needs.
- Students get a multitude of perspectives on the week's subject and how it could be useful to them.
- It gives insight to the instructor to understand what parts of the course have been effective and what may need to be taught in more depth the next time.

Collaborative Group Assignment
Based on expressed areas of interest (gleaned from the biography assignment described above), participants will be arranged in small groups of 3-5 students. You will visit several online courses and choose one to critique together in light of the topics discussed in class. In order to accomplish this assignment, you will collaborate in a private asynchronous conference set up for you. You may also choose to use the chat function to meet synchronously, but this is not required. The group will prepare a collaborative critique and submit it to the class discussion forum for review by other class members. The pedagogic rationale for this activity is threefold:

- Students must synthesize concepts and ideas discussed in class to critique an actual online course.
- The experience of working collaboratively to complete the assignment will give the participants insight into how collaborative group work can be accomplished online.
- Existing online courses will serve as examples for participants to consider as they adapt their own curriculum to the online environment.

Final Assignment
In converting a segment of your own face-to-face curriculum to the online environment, and articulating your role as facilitator of the course, you will synthesize the concepts discussed in this course and apply them to your own professional goals. Also, after successfully converting one segment of your curriculum, you will be able to extend that later to the entire course.

Assessment Criteria
Since this course serves as a model for students as they design their own online courses, assessment, grading criteria, and procedures are important to articulate and model. With this in mind, the assessment criteria that apply to this course have been carefully laid out. See the assessment page in the course orientation for the course assessment procedures. Also, as assignments are made, rubrics to those assignments will be linked when appropriate.

Description of Course Modules

Module 1 - What is Online Learning

Topics:
We will begin to look at the general topic of online learning and compare and contrast online education with traditional teaching. We will also discuss the student's role in the online classroom. A specific learning objective for this Module is to develop a functional understanding of the nature and importance of online learning in the context of contemporary educational offerings.

Readings for Module 1:

- Anytime, Anyplace and the Community College: Ten Emerging Insights by Mark David Milliron and Mary Prentice
  http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/jaln/v8n1/v8n1_milliron1.asp

- Is "As Good as Face-to-Face" As Good As It Gets? by Jeannette McDonald, DVM, PhD
  http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/jaln/v6n2/pdf/v6n2_macdonald.pdf

- Predictors of Performance in the Virtual Classroom by Alvin Y. Wang and Michael H. Newlin
  http://www.thejournal.com/magazine/vault/A4023.cfm

Assignments for Module 1:

- Discussion Questions: Answer an assigned discussion question (150-300 words) and read/respond to at least two other students' posts.
- Article Critique: Search and find one online article or resource that relates to the role of students in online education or the nature and importance of online learning in the context of contemporary educational offerings. Post a brief review (150 words).
- Key Items: Reflect on the major principles and issues for this module and apply them to your specific work situation

Module 2 - The Virtual Professor

Topics:
In this module we will look at the instructor's role in the online classroom, and we will identify characteristics of the successful online facilitator and how the facilitator functions in the virtual classroom, as well as course management issues.

Reading for Module 2:

- Assessing Teaching Presence in a Computer Conferencing Context by Terry Anderson, Liam Rourke, D. Randy Garrison, and Walter Archer
  http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/jaln/v5n2/v5n2_anderson.asp

- The Role of the Online Instructor/Facilitator by Zane L. Berge
  http://www.emoderators.com/moderators/teach_online.html

- Impediments To Adoption Of Web-Based Course Delivery Among University Faculty by David L. Passmore
  http://www.aln.org/publications/magazine/v4n2/passmore.asp

- Instructor Immediacy from Teach Online, Virtual University Design and Technology from Michigan State University
  http://teachvu.vu.msu.edu/public/designers/social_interactions/index.php?page_num=2

Assignments for Module 2:

- Discussion Questions: Answer an assigned discussion question (150-300 words) and read/respond to at least two other students' posts.
- Article Critique: Search and find one online article or resource that relates to the role of the instructor in online education. Post a brief review (150 words).
- Key Items: Reflect on the major principles and issues for this module and apply them to your specific work situation.

Module 3 - Adapting Curriculum to the Online Environment

Topics:
In this module we will explore alternatives to the online lecture, and strategies to promote communication and collaborative learning in the Virtual Classroom. In a group collaborative project, participants will visit online courses and critique them in light of the issues discussed in class.

Reading for Module 3:

- Creating Powerful Online Courses Using Multiple Instructional Strategies by Tina Pitt and Anne Clark
  http://makahiki.kcc.hawaii.edu/tcc/tcc_conf97/pres/pitt.html

- Teaching Strategies from the University of Minnesota Digital Media Center
  http://dmc.umn.edu/strategies/strategies.shtml

- Effective Strategies for the Online Classroom by Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt
  http://itlearningspace-scot.ac.uk/courses/keynotes/module1/main.cfm

- Fostering the Student-Centered Classroom Online by Kevin T. McNulty
  http://www.thejournal.com/magazine/vault/A3855.cfm

Assignments for Module 3:

- Question Posing: Construct a new discussion question for this module of instruction that would generate meaningful discussion and could be facilitated using a Socratic style. OR
- Article Critique: Search and find one online article or resource that relates to adapting curriculum to the online environment. Post a brief review (150 words).
- Discussion Questions: Answer an assigned discussion question (150-300 words) and read/respond to at least two other students' posts.
- Collaborative team project: Work with assigned group members to collaboratively review, evaluate and post your evaluation of an existing online course. Read and respond to other groups' evaluations.
- Key Items: Reflect on the major principles and issues for this module and apply them to your specific work situation.

Module 4 - Tying It All Together

Topics:
In this module we will have a Guest Lecturer in our class. The topic will be announced later. We will also talk more about collaboration. In a final assignment, participants will adapt a segment of their F2F (face to face) curriculum to the online environment.

Readings for Module 4:

- Transferring Your Passion For Teaching To The Online Environment: A Five Step Instructional Development Modelby Sherry McConnell
  http://www.usq.edu.au/electpub/e-jist/docs/old/vol4no1/2001docs/mconnell.html

- Lessons Learned Teaching Online by George Siemens
  http://www.elearnspace.org/Articles/lessonslearnedteaching.htm

- Curbing Academic Dishonesty in Online Courses by Mike McNett
  http://illinois.online.uillinois.edu/pointers/2002_05/

- Assessing Learners Online ERIC Practitioner File
  http://www.cete.org/acve/docs/pfile03.htm

Assignments for Module 4:

- Discussion Questions: Answer an assigned discussion question (150-300 words) and read/respond to at least two other students' posts.
- Question Posing: Construct a question for the guest lecturer based on the content of that lecture. These questions will form the basis for interaction with the guest.
- Final Project: Prepare a description of how you would convert your piece of curriculum (i.e., course unit, section, or weekly seminar, etc.) from an existing on-ground class to the online format.
- Key Items: Reflect on the major principles and issues for this module and apply them to your specific work situation.

Course Wrap-Up
The week after Module 4 of the course, your instructor will send you feedback on your final projects as well as individual feedback. This is an extra Module that you can use to reflect on the course content, revisit discussions, read some article critiques you didn't have time to pursue and generally wrap the course up!