Welcome to Instructional Design Issues in Creating Online Courses! I am Scott Vigallon, and this presentation will focus on those things that you need to consider when designing an online course.

If you’ve ever taught a course before in a face-to-face environment, you have instructional design experience. You might not know it, but every decision you made either putting that class together or teaching it, you exercised instructional design. So while you are designing an online course, draw upon your instructional design experience.

A couple of other things before you take the plunge:

Because designing an online course takes a lot of time and effort, you’ll want to pace yourself. It’s too much work to do in a short amount of time, and the last thing you’ll want is to procrastinate until the very end. Therefore, set deadlines for yourself, and space out your tasks.

Also, consider my model course as a template. You have access to it, so you’ll want to review it thoroughly. All of the design tips discussed in this presentation are incorporated into my model. One of the major reasons I created it is so it will save you time from doing the same thing. The model can easily be uploaded directly into your course. You can use the whole thing if you want, or you can modify it however you’d like. If you only want certain pieces of the model, like a couple of assignments, just ask me for those, and I’ll send them to you.

I’ve mentioned instructional design, but what exactly is it? If you ever want to impress people with your knowledge, tell them that instructional design is a systematic method of designing and developing instruction. If those impressionable people then ask you what the heck that means, tell them that instructional design is simply applying good teaching principles to curriculum design.

So why is instructional design important? Well, I’m sure you’ve noticed that online learning is increasing rapidly not only throughout the United States, but also throughout the world. There is lots of competition for students out there. Some of that competition comes from other colleges and universities, and some comes from for-profit companies like the University of Phoenix. With online learning, students can take courses from any provider they want.

Here are some of the benefits of online learning from an instructional design standpoint. These benefits are not from an institutional standpoint, so I won’t mention anything about increasing enrollments, increasing revenues, solving limited classroom space problems, etc. These are benefits to your students.

First of all, online learning is interactive. Don’t believe the myth that students sit at home in front of the computer and don’t interact with anyone. Online learning is about interaction.

Online learning can address multiple learning styles. For example, you can add pictures and videos for your visual learners, audio clips for your auditory learners, and simulations for your kinesthetic learners.
Online learning can address multiple intelligences. Similar to learning styles, the multiple intelligences theory takes it a step further and says that students can learn in other ways, such as through music or through interpersonal or intrapersonal assignments. You’ll learn more about multiple intelligences later in this course.

One of the great things about online learning is the ability to give students immediate feedback. This works particularly well with quizzes that contain objective questions. Immediately after submitting a quiz, students can see their results and read any feedback the instructor has inputted.

Slide 6

As mentioned previously, my model addresses many of the instructional design issues needed in online courses. If you choose not to use my model, make sure you address the issues in your course.

You’ll need to identify the learning outcomes so your students will know exactly what they need to be able to master in your course. Aside from the outcomes for your course in general, you should also write specific objectives for your modules and for your assignments.

Any time you introduce new content into your course, you should try to connect that content to what the students already know. This tends to increase learning.

Within every module, you should aim for at least one assignment in which students are interacting with other students. This could include a whole-class discussion assignment or a group assignment.

For those students who want to learn more about a topic, you should provide enrichment for them. This can be done in the form of links to web sites that contain additional information. Conversely, if students struggle with a topic, you can provide links or information that will help with remediation.

Slide 7

One of your goals in designing an online course should be to build a community of learners. Research has shown that when students don’t feel connected to the instructor or other students, they tend to drop out or don’t do well in the class. Conversely, success rates rise when students feel connected to their instructor and fellow classmates. In one of the Module 1 assignments in my model course, students begin the process of building a community by introducing themselves in the class discussion board.

You will also want to find out exactly who your students are and what experiences they bring into your class. For that reason, you should conduct a learner analysis at the beginning of the class. There is a Module 1 assignment in the model course that asks students why they enrolled in the course, what they already know about the content of the course, and what they hope to learn. There is also another assignment that will give you information about your students’ technical abilities. You can use this information, for example, when deciding who should be placed in which group for a group assignment. It’s nice to match tech savvy students with non-tech savvy students.

Student retention is an important issue in online courses. You can address this early in your course by giving students assignments in which they can succeed. My Module 1 assignments are relatively easy, so the hope is that when students succeed in them, they will continue in the class.
The Module 1 assignments, each of which has a different objective, utilizes a Blackboard tool. So while the students are completing their tasks, they are learning Blackboard at the same time.

Slide 8

Designing for interactivity is huge in online courses. Obviously, you will be interacting with your students, and although this takes time, your students will benefit. You can interact with students by email, discussion boards, within groups, by chat, and by feedback on assignments and quizzes. You can even use the telephone or instant messaging or your on-campus office hours.

Your students can use many of the above methods to interact among themselves. This interaction is crucial in building your community of learners. Design many of your assignments so students can work together.

Your students will also appreciate interacting with technology. CDs or DVDs that come with textbooks often have interactive lessons, such as science experiments and other types of simulations, that students can conduct. Many of these are also on the Internet.

Slide 9

Teacher-centered classes in which all the instructor does is lecture, make the students read out of the book and take quizzes, don’t work well online. Online courses are not self-paced courses; they are collaborative, and you are the facilitator of this collaboration. If you are going to lecture, keep your presentations relatively short and try to add audio and/or visuals to them.

In order to save you from a barrage of emails, try to help students discover their own answers. They will learn more that way. One way to do this is to set up a Discussion Board called Student-to-Student Questions, and encourage students to go there first for questions and answers before emailing you. Another way is to post Frequently Asked Questions, and encourage students to utilize them.

Slide 10

Obviously, you will need to learn the technical aspects of Blackboard in order to know what it is capable of. If you don’t want to add your own content, you can explore what the textbook publishers have to offer in the Blackboard format. Please read the information on textbook publisher content in Module 6 of this course before you begin your research.

As in the face-to-face classroom, it is important that you set expectations for students early in the course. Many students might never have taken an online course before, so you will need to detail exactly what you expect of them. Perhaps more important online than face-to-face, you will need to write clear directions, particularly for your assignments. Ambiguity online can lead to student frustration.

Slide 11

There are several instructional design features built into Blackboard. One of those is the quiz function, which you use not only for quizzes and tests, but also for pre-tests, practice tests, and surveys. In fact, you can use a survey to poll your class on a timely topic in order to begin a discussion.

Beginning in version 6.3 of Blackboard, you have the ability to selectively release content to students. For example, you can set your course up so that a student can’t access a piece of content until she has scored 80 percent, or whatever, on a quiz.
You also have to make sure that the content of your course is accessible to students with disabilities. We are mandated by the state chancellor’s office, not to mention the federal government, to design courses that meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Slide 12

To ensure quality in your course, you can compare your course against the Guidelines for Good Practice. These guidelines cover teaching in all modalities, not just online. Most cover what I have already talked about in this presentation, so I am just going to read them. You should refer to them as often as necessary.

Good teaching practice:
- encourages effective contact between students and faculty
- develops reciprocity/cooperation among students
- uses active learning techniques
- gives prompt feedback
- emphasizes quality time on task
- communicates high expectations
- respects diverse talents and modalities of learning
- uses appropriate tools

If your course meets the guidelines above and incorporates the suggestions throughout this presentation, you should feel very confident that you’ll be teaching a well designed course.