


Chapter 13

Purposefully–Designed and Mindfully–Facilitated Online Courses

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic seriously impacted the ability of educational institutions to deliver in-person instruction. A pragmatic solution was remote teaching, which in most cases was essentially in-person courses delivered synchronously via computer-mediated technology and videoconferencing. Student reaction to, and faculty experience of, remote teaching and learning was varied but generally less than enthusiastic. There was a growing realization that, pedagogically, emergency remote teaching could not satisfactorily replicate either well-delivered in-person instruction or well-designed distance online courses. With the anticipation that higher education will increasingly focus on online delivery, there has been renewed interest, at both the institutional and faculty level, in how effective distance learning online courses are conceptualized, designed, and facilitated. This chapter attempts, briefly but comprehensively, to explore the theoretical and practical issues involved in purposefully designing and mindfully facilitating online distance learning courses.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 brought about a number of shifts and reconsiderations in higher education that had not been previously contemplated. Of particular significance was the rapid emergence of *emergency remote teaching and learning*. Remote teaching and learning sought to deploy a variety of distance learning modalities—such as synchronous and asynchronous online delivery, and blended instruction—and it was quickly pressed into use because of the impossibility of continuing to use traditional in-person instruction during the pandemic (Maqsood et al., 2021; Means & Neisler, 2021).

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Remote teaching and learning was unplanned—an expediency forced by circumstance and necessity. As a substitute for in-person instruction, it was viewed by many as less than perfect and by some as less than adequate. Recent surveys indicate that college students who experienced remote teaching and learning were challenged in dealing with new technologies and with internet connectivity. More significantly, the same research indicates decreased student satisfaction, motivation, and educational engagement. Remote instruction exposed learner disparities in terms of ethnic and socio-economic status, educational access, social support, and academic performance. The challenges and dissatisfactions were also mirrored by faculty discontent. As faculty members scrambled to reformulate, repackage, and reposition their academic offerings, there was a growing awareness—by many, but by no means by all—that remote teaching was significantly different from online learning (Fox, Bryant, Lin, et al., 2020; Means & Neisler, 2021; Means et al., 2020).

This chapter maps the process involved in designing and facilitating an online course. It is a map in the sense that it shows only significant features, relationships, and aspects of the course creation and delivery landscape. It is intended to orientate the reader, who may be unfamiliar with this landscape. The chapter suggests journeys and alternative explorations that might be helpful for new course designers. The chapter also considers course conceptualization, creation, and delivery as a holistic process and not as a series of separate parts that are in some way brought together or independently assembled.

The chapter is constructed as follows. The background section maps the conceptualization phase, in which we consider the significant issues confronting a faculty member asked/ required to create a new online course. The section following this is the central one and it maps design and facilitation phases. The aim of this section is to allow for reflection, not to prescribe or dictate. The maps that it presents should be used for orientation: the reader must determine the personal paths to take and the destinations to prioritize. The subsequent section highlights many solutions and recommendations that might be of value to readers who are contemplating the design of online courses. This is followed by a consideration of future research, while the final section reflects on the chapter as a whole and presents what might be called a way forward.

Background

Before considering the process through which online courses are created, it is useful to understand what constitutes an academic “course”. The Online Etymology Dictionary (n.d.) suggests the word *course* first appeared in English in the 14th century and meant:

‘onward movement, motion forward, a running in a prescribed direction or over a prescribed distance; path or distance prescribed for a race, a race-course’ from Old French cors ‘course’; run, running; flow of a river’ (12c.), from Latin cursus ‘a running; a journey; direction, track navigated by a ship; flow of a stream’.

From a metaphoric perspective, an academic course is a designated pathway along which participants actively try to reach a designated goal or finishing point. A course has starting and finishing points, both of which have to be made evident to the participants. More concretely, a course prescribes an anticipated educational journey by providing learners with the opportunity to encounter selected constructs, considerations, observations, and perspectives related to the core topic (*disciplinary content*). It also

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