Chapter 11
Developing an Online Course On-the-Fly with an IR State of Mind

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ABSTRACT

Today's higher education professional is beginning to feel the squeeze of higher expectations and the need to deliver instruction in a variety of ways but at always one speed—fast. Faced with an array of delivery avenues, a limited budget, and little time, instructor efficacy could plummet. Collaborative course development, plus a focus on collecting course data for a regime on continuous improvement, can help calm problems of budgets and speed. The instructors of the course decided to first think like institutional researchers: they built a patchwork of course material around a solid, predicable assessment theme. The results of these assessments indicated that students, working online in a hybrid format, performed equally as well as those in a traditional classroom. The instructors felt empowered by the experience.

BACKGROUND

Big State University rises atop the Llano Estacado, a High Plains plateau that stretches from the Texas Panhandle to the southern Rockies of New Mexico. Reminiscent of a modern western swing tune that proclaims, "I see miles and miles of Texas," (Camfield & Johnson, 1977) the university has an expanse symbolic of the state: its nearly 2000-acre campus includes a university with 11 colleges, a law school, and a medical school. Under the old Carnegie classification of colleges and universities, Big State University would be a Research II, a doctoral granting university earning about $50 million dollars a year in federal grants and producing about 50 doctoral degrees a year.

Originally called Texas Technological College, the university's academics have historically mimicked those of land grant colleges, that is, a comprehensive university with strong engineering and agricultural programs. The institution also has a strong history of extension and outreach, but arguably less of a reputation for discovery. Most importantly, technology dominates the history and vision of the university, including its use in commerce, agriculture, and even instruction.

Building on this foundation, this institution has national research university aspirations. Currently, Texas has two national research universities, University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University at College Station. With prompting from researchers and demographers, the people of the state created the Texas National Research University Fund (NRUF) designed to provide a research funding stream to help emerging research universities, like Big State University, become recognized national research universities. The university has recently breached the 30,000 student mark. Furthermore, this year the university is close to claiming the Texas National Research University Fund (NRUF) prize by producing 200 Ph.Ds and expending $45 million dollars in restricted research funds. If successful, it will be the first of a group of seven other Texas universities to reach this mark. As for its academic culture, a research perspective now dominates its arched Spanish Renaissance walkways, high-ceilinged classrooms, and grand sports complexes.

It is within this triumphant march that the university's College of Education finds itself. Historically, its vision has been more regionally-focused, with the emphasis on teacher preparation and certification. However, its graduate programs have steadily grown, making it the second largest graduate program at the university, and largest, *per capita*. This means that the sleepy College of Education is a player in the institution's quest for national research university status. The fuel for this growth in graduate programs has been the switch of many programs from Ed.D to Ph.D

and the delivery of coursework and now whole programs via distance delivery. Distance delivery includes multiple and mixed modalities, including fully online, hybrid online and face-to-face, online, face-to-face, and video conference, live instruction delivered directly to the Internet, and several variations on these, including sites in the Texas Hill Country, the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, and beyond. It is worth noting that the Hill Country and the Metroplex sites are 6 and 5 hour drives, respectively. In this regard, the College of Education is integral in the renaissance of the university as a national research university.

As various College of Education programs deliver instruction online, the educational psychology program must meet increased demand to deliver foundations and research courses at a distance. Program faculty also have taken on other demands, including increased service on dissertation committees, increased methodological support for faculty who are conducting more research, two new concentrations (sports psychology and school psychology), and wide support of grants, including research and evaluation chores. Additionally, the educational psychology program has delivered one particular course, introduction to educational statistics, to graduate agricultural education, nursing, and other graduate students in the human and social sciences, wanting a gentle and applied first taste of the topic.

It is this course that is the focus of this chapter. The instructors of this course face numerous pressures—students from a wide array of programs and interests, with varying levels of readiness for the topic, are taught at a distance. Moreover, faculty in other programs expect the instructors to teach a statistics computer package and prepare students to apply skills in their respective fields immediately, in addition to reaching traditional learning objectives. Situate all of this in the transitory dynamic of an emerging research university, and one can sense the pressures gripping at faculty. How can they maintain viable research agendas with so many competing demands? In such a context,

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