Proceedings of the Roosevelt University Mini-Conference on Teaching

Volume Four
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Editorial Preface

The Fourth Roosevelt University Mini-Conference on Teaching ("RUMCOT 4") was held at the Schaumburg Campus on April 25, 2007. Full-time and part-time faculty members, administrators and staff from many departments at Roosevelt University attended RUMCOT, which focused on enhancing teaching. This year we also welcomed colleagues from nearby community colleges who attended and presented at the conference.

The event featured 11 interactive workshops, teaching roundtable discussions, panel presentations, showcase demonstrations about online learning and exhibit displays. These proceedings provide a summary of many presentations from the conference. The authors address topics that are relevant to teaching at Roosevelt University, such as including service-learning in your class and incorporating innovative technologies into course instruction.

I hope that you find these readings helpful. For additional information about effective college teaching, you can explore related book and video holdings in the university libraries. The complete list of titles is available by clicking the link labeled "Resources for Effective College Teaching" under the "Special Collections" heading of the library's webpage at **http://www2.roosevelt.edu/library/**. The Center for Teaching and Learning, located in Room 1046 inside the Auditorium Library, has even more resources for you to peruse. Ask a reference librarian for the key code to enter the center.

RUMCOT 4 and these proceedings are sponsored by the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President.

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Including Service-Learning in Your Class: How We Did It

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Too often students' experience in higher education is to passively absorb information. It is then students' responsibility to apply this material to areas of their lives (e.g., families, careers or communities) at some later point in time. However, faculty can use a teaching method that simultaneously links information taught in the classroom with the skills and insights that students learn when they volunteer in their communities.

Service-learning improves education by enriching the curriculum and by encouraging students and instructors to put coursework into context. Consequently, academic work and service are completed together so that students study issues and become participants in addressing those issues in a particular community setting (Speck, 2001). The overarching goal of service-learning is to foster the development of citizenship by integrating theory and practice so that students can begin lifelong involvement in social issues and public life.

Various elements have been identified as being essential for service-learning. First, students should be providing meaningful service in a setting or community that is related to the content of the course. Second, students should be involved in an extensive reflection process about their experiences in the community. Reflection allows students to connect what they observe and experience at the site placements with their academic studies in the classroom. Third, service-learning needs to include mutuality, in that both students and the community should benefit from the experience.

The success of service-learning as a powerful strategy is well-documented. More than 150 investigations regarding its effectiveness have been conducted in the past decade alone. Students who engage in service-learning perform better academically. They have higher graduation rates and are more satisfied with their college experience. They become more engaged citizens and demonstrate greater cultural and racial understanding. They develop socially, emotionally and morally because of this work (cf. Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Sax & Astin, 1997).

Moreover, service-learning is an exceptionally versatile technique. For instance, Heffernan (2001) presented a compendium of service components for many disciplines. Architecture students can participate in design projects to enhance the residences of people with physical disabilities; computer science undergraduates can train personnel at community organizations about how to use different software programs; and language students can investigate the use and structure of African American Vernacular English and apply this knowledge to teach reading skills to African American elementary school children. In the remainder of this article, we explain how we implemented service-learning in psychology, history, education and biology courses.

Reaching Out to Children Through Service-Learning

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I teach undergraduate courses in child psychology and service-learning is an integral component of my students' learning experience. Students in my classes put their knowledge into practice by working directly with at-risk children. They have cared for families living in domestic violence shelters, they have cradled hospitalized infants, tutored inner-city teenagers and supported children who grieve the loss of a parent. In fact, my students have contributed over 11,000 hours of service in total to underprivileged children since I started to teach. These opportunities widen students' understanding of others and help them to become more compassionate. Through class discussions and written assignments, students see how topics from the course allow them to better understand children at their sites and they appreciate how their interactions with children clarify the more abstract class concepts. In this section, I explain the steps that I use to include service-learning into my teaching as a template for others.

First, I ensure that community service is consistent with my goals for students' learning for the particular class. Most child psychology courses help students understand the social, emotional and cognitive functioning of children in terms of both normal and abnormal development. Students learn about relevant theory, research and applications as the course progresses.

Using this as a starting point, service-learning allows me to expand my goals for students' learning. In particular, this technique widens my goals so my students can learn how to interact with children in empathic and developmentally appropriate ways. Moreover, field work provides students with the opportunity to apply theoretical and research knowledge in their observations and interactions with children at their sites.

Second, I decide on the number of hours of field work required for the particular class. In my own experience, this number varies widely (i.e., from eight to 72 hours),

depending on the content, level and number of credit hours for the class. Most often, I require students to complete 12 to 22 hours of community service distributed across several weeks of the semester (i.e., two to three hours per week for about two months). I always reduce other course requirements accordingly given the scope of the field commitment.

Third, I help students find appropriate sites for their service-learning work. Some faculty members who use service-learning establish a relationship with one site at which all students volunteer. This has the advantage of ensuring a comparable and well-defined volunteer experience for students, but can create problems in terms of successful coordination with students' schedules or easy site access for a geographically dispersed student body. Instead, I allow my students to find their own community placements that they submit for approval. In particular, the site work must (a) allow direct interaction with children in meaningful ways that connect with the content of the class; (b) occur in an organized setting, such as a school or agency, rather than by informal arrangement (e.g., babysitting); and (c) provide an on-site supervisor who can provide assistance and feedback. I ensure that the volunteer work is mutually beneficial for the student and the site as well.

Students in my classes find placements through their own exploration, a directory of sites that I have compiled, or through Internet resources. Regardless of the type of community service, there are Internet sites that facilitate volunteering which are invaluable for service-learning. These include http://www.volunteermatch.org, http://chicagovolunteer.net and http://www.idealist.org. Students can learn about many ongoing service opportunities after they enter their zip code, maximum commuting distance and interest area into these websites. In my classes, students designate children and youth as the appropriate search term; however, volunteer opportunities also address topics such as health, immigration, media, women's issues, race, computers and technology, hunger and many others.

Fourth, I make frequent connections between the course material and students' placements. I accomplish this by selecting reading and lecture content that is especially relevant for students' site work and by asking students to share their service experiences to inform discussion. Although some undergraduates have some trepidation before starting their service learning work, they all become aware of the benefits. One student summarized:

> As for my field placement experience itself, it has been a roller coaster of emotion that has left me 10 times stronger and wiser than I was before. I thought that I knew what compassion for another human being was. I am now able to give it to others in the most meaningful way imaginable.
>
> I cannot explain how it feels to stare a battered woman in the face and try to tell her that everything will be all right when she is hurting inside and out. When the man that she loves who is the father of her children has stripped her of her dignity and self esteem. I cannot explain how it felt to have beautiful little children standing in front of me with sad eyes and broken hearts because they are scared and sad and they miss their dads. All that I can say is that I spent a lot of time thinking, praying, crying and growing and I will never again be the same and I am so grateful for that. I feel that I have done things to help the people at the shelter, but the life lessons that they taught me are worth their weight in gold.

Often, service-learning allows students to make connections to social issues. As another student commented:

> I think that, although no one would say their life is perfect, it can be easy to forget just how many families struggle with extreme poverty, abuse and/or neglect when we aren't directly confronted with it every day. To continue to be in denial of the fact that there is still racism or destitution in this country is just naive. Obviously, these factors also play a big part in what kinds of adults these children will grow up to be. I have become even more empathetic and open-minded to everyone I encounter, because you never know what a person may have to struggle with at home or behind closed doors.

Finally, I provide students with writing assignments that ask them to describe their interactions and activities at the site, document connections between their volunteer work and the course material and readings, comment on what they learned and catalog their emotional reactions. One of my students observed:

> Completing the journals was crucial to examining and absorbing important events during our volunteering. Instead of just showing up, leaving for the day and repeating it the next week until it's all a blur, we were forced to think about what we encountered, what we learned from those interactions, how that might shape our future choices.

Admittedly, including service-learning in a course can be challenging and time-consuming. However, my students — and many others — often describe these experiences as meaningful, rewarding and even life-changing.

Implementing Service-Learning into World History: How Do You Do THAT?

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This question usually comes up when I discuss service-learning course implementation with faculty and I explain how I implemented this pedagogy in my world history courses: How do you do service-learning in history? As any course that embeds service-learning pedagogy, I began with the course goals and objectives. As Heffernan (2001) clearly states in the *Fundamentals of service-learning course construction*:

> Goals are learning outcomes — broad statements identifying the general educational outcomes you want students to display upon completion of the course . . . Objectives are the concrete measures by which goals will be realized and are usually expressed as relationships between specific concepts. (p. 12)

Essentially, I reviewed my goals for my world history course and reviewed my course objectives that achieve these learning outcomes. The question then becomes: How can the service-learning pedagogy enhance and reinforce the learning objectives in order to produce a greater impact on the learning outcomes? This was my starting point for integrating service-learning into my course.

Since some of the learning outcomes for my World History Since 1500 course are to develop an understanding of global patterns, themes and historical forces that affected societies in all parts of the world since 1500 and to connect such historical forces to the present, I wanted to engage students in a historical force that has influenced the world to the present. One of the main historical forces emphasized in this course is industrialization, as well as its impact on people through the evolution of a new social class, the working class. In order to make history come alive and emphasize the relevance of such historical forces to the present, I implemented service-learning into my course by engaging students in 20 hours of service work in homeless shelters to interact with "the working poor" homeless population in direct service.

After making contact with a community partner organization and establishing a relationship with this organization that manages about 20 different shelter sites, I implemented reflection assignments in my course. In the Service-Learning Cycle, a service-learning model suggested by O'Toole and O'Toole (2001), service-learning reflection is categorized into pre-service reflection, reflection during service and post-service reflection. I implemented a pre-service reflection assignment, three reflections during service (all of which were 1 to 3 typewritten pages in length) and a post-service reflection and research paper (8 to 10 pages in length). This replaced the larger research paper I previously required in this course. The final research and reflection paper allowed students to synthesize their community experiences and to connect it to the discussion on historical forces in modern history.

During the most recent semester, the evaluations from the students in my service-learning world history course not only addressed the course learning outcomes, such as connecting past to present and addressing historical forces through modern history, but also focused on the institutional, mission-related learning outcomes of social justice and engaging in the community. For example, students' comments on the service-learning experiences included the following:

- "It helped with the course and how past events connect to the present."
- "[I] had an opportunity to draw links globally and historically … [Service-learning] stays true to the mission of the University."
- "[I benefited by] changing my way of thinking."
- "This made it meaningful to the mission of the institution."
- "Meeting the [homeless] guests at the shelter challenged my perception of the homeless … It fits well with RU's goals as a University."
- "[I benefited from] the hands-on community service … it made me more socially just."

The ambiguity that often comes with extending the learning of students into the real world through service-learning experiences coupled with structured reflection assignments is offset by increased learning outcomes, more involved students in the classroom and students who become engaged not only in the subject matter, but also in the community, bringing the mission to life.

Service Learning and the GO-GIRL Project

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Background of the GO-GIRL Project

The GO-GIRL Project (Gaining Options: Girls Investigate Real Life) began during the Spring 2006 semester at Roosevelt University. The purpose of the GO-GIRL program is to build 7th grade girls' mathematical confidence, skills and conceptual understanding by integrating mathematics and social science in a technology-rich environment. Undergraduate and graduate education, psychology and mathematics majors who serve as mentors to the girls support the program. GO-GIRL, which was created by Pamela Reid (the current Provost and Executive Vice President of Roosevelt University) and her colleagues at the University of Michigan, is part of a two-year dissemination grant funded by the National Scientific Foundation (NSF). Roosevelt University was selected to adapt and implement GO-GIRL, along with four other universities: Wayne State University, Howard University, Illinois Wesleyan and University of Pennsylvania.

Learning about Early Adolescent Girls

The Roosevelt students who served as mentors in the GO-GIRL Project were all enrolled in the course Adolescent Girls in Theory and Practice (EDUC 352/452, cross-listed as PSYC 381/481) during the Spring 2007 semester and then concurrently with the project after the fifth week. The goals of the course included the following:

- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the basic terms and concepts of adolescent development and psychology in girls through writings, readings and class discussion.
- Compare and contrast elements of some of the main theories of adolescent development, including intellectual, cognitive, social and emotional development of adolescents, particularly in girls and how they may help to explain various aspects of adolescent behavior and learning. Students will apply this knowledge in their consideration of how adolescent development influences the act of teaching and learning.

- Build a conceptual understanding of the needs of pre- to early adolescent girls, demands in school, confounds of poverty and ethnicity, and issues surrounding achievement through gender-based research.
- Design, implement and evaluate curricula in a collaborative, small-group, single-sex setting.
- Practice the role of "teacher as facilitator" and "teacher as mentor."
- Come to an understanding of gender-based research focusing on social, cognitive and academic issues of girls from diverse settings.

The course required the student-mentors to maintain a weekly reflective journal. The student-mentors also designed a career project to teach to the girls; they developed a case study about one of the girls in their group; and finally, they completed the program evaluation. There were also weekly readings and discussions on gender-based research. Most significantly, however, were the student-mentors integrating theory with practical application by taking the theories of adolescent development and methods from the seminar and applying them in the GO-GIRL setting.

The Roles of the Roosevelt University Student-Mentors

One of the main concepts behind GO-GIRL is the establishment of mentoring relationships among the 7th grade girls and their assigned mentors. In three different teams, five to seven girls worked with two mentors to design and complete a GO-GIRL social science research project using "real life" data collected from their peers. With the help of their mentors, the girls:

- Chose a research topic (The topic for this year's project was body image.)
- Designed a survey, posted it on the Internet and collected data
- Analyzed the data
- Formulated and tested hypotheses
- Presented findings to parents and guests

The mentors faithfully worked with the girls for ten Saturdays, 8:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. In addition to checking in their assigned girls and greeting parents each Saturday morning and checking their girls out to their parents at the end each session, the mentors had the following responsibilities:

- Facilitated the completion of the GO-GIRL lessons within their teams
- Led lessons to the entire group
- Supervised the girls on their team for the duration of the GO-GIRL day
- Supported each of the girls in their group, both academically and socially, during the course of the program

What the Mentors Gained from the GO-GIRL Experience

In a program like GO-GIRL, it is typical for mentors and girls to develop meaningful relationships that extend far beyond the program. The mentors also viewed this program as giving them the opportunity to show their real leadership in working in one-on-one relationships and teaching in a real-life situation to small and large groups. One education major (Spring 2006) commented that the GO-GIRL Program better prepared him to work with adolescents than any of the other teacher preparation courses he had taken, including student teaching. The following are just a few responses from the student-mentors' reflective journals:

- "As a teacher, I will use this relationship with the girls to learn from them particular issues that they might be dealing with as middle school girls."
- "How will the girls see me, especially with my being from Africa? Will they accept me as their mentor?"
- "This is my most hands-on experience to date and I was surprised with myself and how I was able to relate to the girls. In the week working up to our first meeting, I was very nervous about how well I'd be able to connect with them."

Conclusion

A program like the GO-GIRL Project is a "two-way street" for the 7th grade girls and Roosevelt's student-mentors. A primary goal for the girls is to increase their confidence in their mathematical ability by exposing them to math in a variety of contexts, such as research methods, data literacy, statistical tools, technological skills (i.e., use of graphing calculator and Internet research and data literacy software with laptop computers) and career exploration of mathematics and science-related fields. Because many of the girls came from diverse settings, they came to understand that they were all basically the same: they shared the same interests and concerns of most adolescent girls. They also commented that they enjoyed having a mentor for the one-on-one attention with an adult female and felt very comfortable working in an all-female environment.

Roosevelt University student-mentors, who were all female, reported that they benefited greatly from the opportunity to mentor, encourage and support young adolescent girls in learning mathematics. They felt they contributed to helping several of the girls gain more self-confidence and teaching them how to get along with others. They got to know their girls well over the ten weeks by spending both formal class time with the girls and having informal interactions with them in the morning, at lunch and on field trips. As one student-mentor commented: "I feel that I am going to be able to take a lot out of this experience and I feel that the girls will only help me to become a better educator."

Service-Learning in Science as a Way of Knowing

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In the Department of Biological, Chemical and Physical Sciences, many of our students go on to major-related careers in health sciences, research or science education. Thus, our approach to service-learning has been largely discipline-based. We aim to include themes of social awareness and community engagement into a traditional content-driven science curriculum. Our efforts are coordinated through participation in a nationwide initiative called Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities, or SENCER. We work from the existing curriculum to meet the SENCER Ideals and university goals of improving student learning, interest and retention in major-based courses.

The course on which I have focused my attention is Biology 150, Science as a Way of Knowing. Biology 150 is a popular general education option for education and liberal arts majors and it is also the first in a required course sequence for biology majors. While very successful, the course now faces the challenges of maintaining consistency across multiple sections and content and skill retention for students who proceed into science majors. In Spring 2007, I taught a section of Biology 150 at the Chicago Campus and incorporated several new service-learning activities into the existing course framework. These modifications included inquiry-based discussions on the boundaries of science, pharmaceutical marketing and prescription, popular science reporting and other "science and society" topics. Students used these discussions to explore contemporary science issues from multiple perspectives, both inside and outside the scientific professions.

The class also took part in a semester-long "Civic Engagement Project." This project required each student to pose a scientific question that could be answered through community interaction (such as conducting a scientific poll or developing educational materials) or through research into a public health or environmental science issue. The projects ranged from a survey of attitudes on anti-smoking laws to a 4th grade curriculum module on childhood obesity to a quantitative analysis of CTA Brown Line train travel times. As shown in student reports and in responses to course evaluations, students appreciated the chance to pose their own hypotheses and use a scientific approach to issues that affected their lives and their communities. After the course, 81% of the class said that they were at least "somewhat interested" in reading about science and its relation to civic issues and 90% said they were at least "somewhat confident" in their ability to apply scientific information to social concerns.

These are promising preliminary results that will be enhanced by further revisions to the course and will be used to create a course portfolio for use by all instructors. Future versions of Biology 150 will include a greater emphasis on the civic engagement component, especially in sections for non-majors. Class sections for majors will integrate the principles of disciplinary service-learning and the goals of the SENCER initiative into the existing content areas. My long-term goal is that students will be better able to see the relevance of their experience in Biology 150 and will choose to continue their development as broadly trained and socially aware scientists.

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Bringing Experiential Learning Into the Classroom

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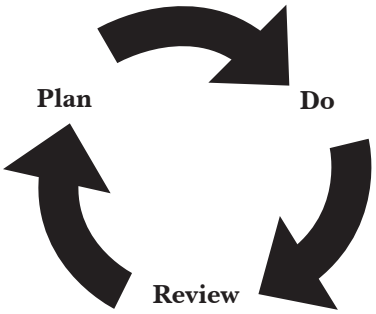
"*Tell me, and I will forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand.*" — Confucius

Confucius reminds us in this quote about the importance of having experiences and how they can be opportunities for learning. The early 20th century American psychologist and education reformer John Dewey made a call in 1938 for educators to appreciate the role direct experiences can have in individuals' learning and growth (Dewey, 1938). Dewey advocated for teaching to become more experiential and less didactic. In doing this, he was advocating that we teach to all types of learners not just the majority of learners. It is estimated that about 65% of the population can be classified as visual learners, 30% as auditory learners and 5% as kinesthetic learners (Conrad, n.d.). Since the majority of learners are visual learners, those tend to be the students to whom educators teach. As educators, we often consider the needs of the visual and auditory learners we have in a classroom when we design our lectures. The use of overhead projectors, PowerPoint presentations or writing notes on a chalkboard while we verbally present lecture material are all ideal ways to deliver material to visual and auditory learners. However, what do we do for those students who are kinesthetic learners? This



is where experiential learning activities can be utilized to help us reach all students. Furthermore, there is growing evidence that experience-based learning is particularly effective for adult learners (Dirkx & Lavin, 1991), which comprises a great number of our students.

Experiential Learning Cycles

Several different experiential learning cycles have been proposed as models for understanding how a subjective experience becomes an important part of the learning process. David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle is one of the best-known models used to understand how experience becomes a teaching tool. The basic premise of Kolb's model is that there are four stages that an individual must go through when using experiences as learning opportunities: experiencing, reflecting, concluding and planning. As an individual progresses through these stages, the person will have the experience, reflect on what learning has occurred because of it, look to theory to understand the experience, and plan how to apply the learning that has occurred to future situations. A simpler version of Kolb's cycle has been proposed and is based on Dewey's theory of experience. In this three-stage model, seen below, an individual will engage in the process of doing-reviewing-planning.

In this model the individual has the experience (do), reviews what happened and what was learned including how it has affected his or her thoughts, values and emotions, and then plan what he or she will do the next time a similar experience is encountered (Neill, n.d.). It is this learning cycle that I utilize when I am planning experiential activities for the courses I teach.

Experiential Learning in the Classroom

Experiential learning can be brought into the classroom in a variety of ways, including such things as field placements, service-learning opportunities or the use of activities with real world implications that target learning by doing. The activities with real world implications can easily be worked into classroom activities or course assignments with some creativity. I often use experiential activities as course assignments for my students. In particular, I will use examples from the psychology course Drugs and Human Behavior to highlight how one would go about implementing experiential learning into a course.

The decision to use experiential assignments in a course is made when designing your objectives for the course. You have to determine what it is you want your students to gain from having an experience as an assignment. Not only must you decide what the goal of the assignment is, you must also decide what type of experience you want your students to have. For example, do you want students to gain practical information about a topic, experience what others in similar situations do, or appreciate the effects of a situation? Once this decision is made you can then begin the process of designing the assignment that will accomplish your goal.

A Specific Example of an Experiential Learning Project

In the Drugs and Human Behavior course I taught, I decided to not teach the course as "content heavy" with a focus on how much students could memorize and recall. Instead, I chose assignments for the students that involved participating in experiences that were very similar to the experiences individuals with addictions go through. Therefore, my goal for my students was to have a greater appreciation of what it is like for individuals with an addiction to experience various situations. Having set that as my goal for the students, I then used the three-stage experiential learning cycle to assist me in the construction of the assignment.

The major course project for the semester was to engage in an abstinence project to simulate what addicted individuals endure in their efforts to become clean and sober. For the doing stage of the cycle, students were asked to choose a behavior, a habit or a favorite food/drink to give up for a 6 week period in order to simulate the experience of trying to get sober. The goal of the experience was not to see if the students could actually succeed in remaining abstinent from their chosen behavior, it was for them to understand the complex thoughts and feelings one goes through when trying to achieve sobriety.

For the evaluating stage of the cycle, students were asked to submit two journal entries each week during the course of the project. The students were instructed to make the content of their journals about their personal struggles or successes with the project and the thoughts, feelings and attitudes they experienced throughout this time. Consistent with the evaluating stage of the experiential cycle, students were also asked to evaluate how their experience simulated what they were reading about the process of achieving sobriety.

Finally, in the planning stage, I asked the students to complete a last journal entry that reflected their thoughts about engaging in the project as well as how their thoughts, attitudes, feelings and behaviors toward individuals with addictions may have changed because of the experience. In a similar fashion, I used the three-stage experiential cycle to design the other course project, which was attending a 12-step meeting and writing a reflective paper on the experience.

What did the students think of these assignments? Interestingly, almost every student in the class commented on the value of one of the two projects in the end of the semester course evaluations. One student stated, "The projects and papers were very different from most classes and I felt engaged in this material more. The first hand experience was invaluable." Another stated, "Made the learning interactive … Make the

abstinence exercise last all semester." It is through comments like these that one can begin to see the value in using experiential assignments in the courses we teach.

The value of such assignments is that students acquire first-hand experience with the topics they read or hear about in lecture and these assignments promote higher-order learning. Experiential assignments can promote empathy and understanding in our students as well as support personal growth. The potential pitfall of such assignments is that students can potentially fake their work and not really engage in the activity you ask them to do. While this may occur, I argue that in order to complete any reflective writing assignment effectively, students have to at least think about the experience. Another pitfall that I did not anticipate was the amount of class time involved in discussions of students' experiences. I had to develop a balance between the amount of time spent discussing student experiences with the other demands of presenting the course materials.

I close with emphasizing that these types of assignments can be incorporated across disciplines and in most classes that we teach. Though there may be a lot of initial planning when designing experiential assignments, they are well worth our efforts. The values far exceed the pitfalls and in my experiences, students have always responded well to them.

Examples of Experiential Assignments

- Any introductory course: Have students interview a professional in the field and find out what it is like to work in their chosen field.
- A research course: Assist students in developing a research tool on a topic of their choice, have them administer it to some friends and then evaluate it as a class for reliability and validity.
- To promote social justice in a class: Have students select a controversial topic related to the course material and write a related editorial supported with research. Help them publish it.

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Understanding by Design: A Planning and Teaching Tool for College Professors

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As college and university instructors, we face numerous decisions:

- Determining what content to teach
- Choosing standards to guide our curricular development
- Identifying the skills most important for students to develop
- Crafting class activities and performance indicators that will produce understanding and learning
- Formulating assignments that provide relevance and applicability
- Creating assessments that will verify learning

We all appreciate the importance of linking subject matter content with skills, activities and assessments. Yet it is sometimes challenging to create courses/units/lessons that are cohesive, comprehensive and meet the educational needs of our students. Carefully constructed curricular design is important to providing relevant instruction. Understanding by Design (UbD) serves as both a planning tool and a process to help us accomplish our instructional goals.

According to Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, authors of the UbD framework, students can begin to understand content in a deeper and more meaningful way. The UbD concept explores a bigger idea, using targeted "essential questions" to deliver thought-provoking lessons of instruction. The Understanding by Design framework allows an instructor to carefully separate skills and knowledge from the performance indicators. It is a framework for designing curriculum, assessments and instruction that explores questions like: What is teaching for understanding? How can you choose content standards to identify the important big ideas that you want students to understand? How do you know that students truly understand and can apply their understanding in a meaningful way? How can you design courses and units to emphasize understanding rather than coverage? What instructional practices are both engaging and effective for developing student understanding?

A valuable resource to help us answer these questions is the Understanding by Design Exchange (see the website at http://www.ubdexchange.org), which is dedicated to the design of curriculum, assessment and instruction that leads students to deep understanding of content. In the Exchange, you can use the backward design template to create units, search hundreds of units created by other participants, integrate state and provincial standards to your unit design, receive feedback from an expert about your unit and keep track of group and individual progress.

What is Understanding by Design (UbD)?

Understanding by Design is a three-stage process in curriculum and assessment planning. "It is a way to engage students in inquiry to understand the larger ideas or concepts" found in all disciplines (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The three stages of UbD include:

1. The initial stage is the planning stage in which instructors identify understandings and determine the desired results. Ultimately, instructors identify what they want all students to know and to be able to do.
2. The second stage is the determination of the acceptable evidence of learning.
3. The third stage is the planning of learning activities and instruction.

The Three Stages of UbD Explained

Stage 1: Planning

Many instructors begin planning a lesson by trying to think of an activity that will make the lesson meaningful. The UbD framework begins with the thinking of what key understandings are required to learn what the instructor deems as important. Then, essential questions are constructed to build or link to the key understandings of the lesson. These questions should not be constructed as one-answer questions or questions that can be answered with a simple "Yes" or "No," but designed to carefully create further inquiring and probing of the topic. The student can explore the lesson ideas and continuously return to the essential questions, attempting to answer them as a link to the bigger picture of the topic that is created.

In this stage, planning begins by identifying the program or course standards that create the backbone of the course. Once the standards have been identified, a unit topic can be chosen to identify specific course work for a set amount of time. Standards can include state standards, national standards, industry standards, program standards or standards set by the educational institution (e.g., the Roosevelt University College of Education Conceptual Framework).

When content topic(s) have been chosen, the instructor determines the "understandings" or "big ideas" that should reflect ultimate outcomes for student learning. Linked to the understandings are "essential questions" that will engage students as they explore and probe this content. As you compose understandings and essential questions, imagine what you want your students to know and be able to do in ten years or in twenty years. Will these understandings and questions be as relevant in the future as they are today? If they are, the relevancies of these understandings and questions have defined the "big picture" of your course content.

According to Wiggins and McTighe (2005), the characteristics of the understandings and essential questions are as follows.

Guidelines for Articulating Understandings (Big Ideas)

- Larger, global concepts
- Core concepts
- Ongoing debates/issues
- Insightful perspectives
- Illuminating paradox/problem
- Organizing theory
- Overarching principle
- Underlying assumption
- Enduring over time

Guidelines for Creating Essential Questions

- Are arguable (and important to argue about)
- Raise more questions — provoking and sustaining engaged inquiry
- Are at the heart of the subject
- Raise important conceptual or philosophical issues
- Recur in professional work, adult life, as well as in classroom inquiry
- Can provide organizing purpose for meaningful and connected learning

Stage 2: Assessments and Evidence of Learning

Stage 2 asks the instructor to consider how to determine if students learned the content, gained the understandings and developed the skills articulated in Stage 1. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) state that the "evidence (of learning) should be credible and helpful."

"The assessments should:

- Be grounded in real-world applications, supplemented as needed by more traditional school evidence.
- Provide useful feedback to the learner, be transparent and minimize secrecy.
- Be valid, reliable — aligned with the desired results of Stage 1 (and fair)."

As the instructor seeks to determine the level of student understanding, Wiggins and McTighe suggest some benchmarks to consider. Can the student:

- Explain, connect, systematize, predict
- Show meaning, importance
- Apply or adapt the material to novel situations
- See a plausible perspective among others
- Question assumptions
- See another's (author's/speaker's) view
- Avoid and point out common misconceptions, biases or simplistic view

The above questions can be seen as closely related to Bloom's Taxonomy, which identifies levels of learning as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Bloom, 1956). Both structures (UbD and Bloom) consider the importance of moving from basic knowledge levels to understandings that require higher order thinking skills.

Assessment evidence can be found in various forms. Performance tasks provide proof of authentic, relevant understandings, while traditional tests, quizzes and papers can also be valid in determining learning. The instructor must determine the best evidence of acceptable learning. This can be through authentic assessments (performance, products and exhibitions) or other evidence such as observations, reflections or self-assessments. Rubrics can be designed to appropriately assess both understandings and performance-based tasks.

Stage 3: Planning Learning Experiences and Instruction

Once the assessment has been determined, the instructor can focus on the types of activities that would enhance the understanding of the topic and lead the students through the essential questions. The activities can be individual work, group pursuits, cooperative learning or differentiated assignments based on abilities and interests of students.

Important in this stage is that activities and experiences are both effective and engaging. "The design must blend what is engaging with what is effective. Just because a lesson is engaging does not mean it is effective in causing understanding" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

In designing the unit of instruction, the instructor would plan specific activities and learning experiences that directly link to the understandings (big idea) and essential questions identified in Stage 1. The resulting unit would meet the benchmarks of the standards and course goals or learning outcomes as determined by the instructor or the university.

All three stages of this design must be aligned. Many instructors may be tempted to begin their unit planning by selecting specific activities that they believe students will appreciate or that they themselves view as valuable. However, beginning with Stage 3 does little to ensure that learning experiences are related to understandings and essential questions. The bigger picture of the curriculum must be seen first (through understandings, essential questions and assessments) before the student activities can be truly relevant. As early as 1902, educator John Dewey believed that teachers should:

> Abandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child's experience; cease thinking of the child's experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluent, embryonic, vital; and we realize that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process. Just as two points define a straight line, so the present standpoint of the child and the facts and truths of studies define instruction. It is continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies.

Why is Understanding by Design Important to College and University Professors?

In many ways, Understanding by Design is consistent with pedagogical methods widely accepted as excellent teaching. It is easy for an instructor to find content and to present it to students through lecture, written papers and traditional tests. UbD encourages instructors to delve more deeply into their own content and to appreciate the complexity of the teaching and learning process. UbD acknowledges that for some courses, there are no definitive answers. The point of some units may be, in fact, to allow students to probe their own ideas, to formulate their own opinions and to articulate their views.

When instructors allow for activities and assessments that relate to enduring understandings and essential questions, students are actively involved in their own learning. Indeed, this involvement can lead to greater understanding and further investigation on the part of students.

What Are the Advantages of Using UbD?

Obviously, UbD provides a detailed, specific process to help instructors plan. Templates are available to walk them through their planning and to help test their progress and effectiveness. Goals are set, the important content is identified, skills are defined and assessments are created that clearly relate to material covered in the course.

As college and university instructors, it is important to be reflective about our practice and to examine the planning, processes and products of our craft. UbD uses reflection throughout the process and requires teachers to thoughtfully examine what they are teaching, how they are teaching it and why they are teaching it. The process makes the purpose and content of each class, unit and lesson clear.

Specific Strategies Lead to Student Achievement

In many ways Understanding by Design emulates other planning strategies. Noted motivational speaker, Stephen Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, lauds the importance of starting with the end in mind. Certainly, those who use processes that create mission and vision statements share this view, believing that mission and vision are critical to accomplishing worthy goals. UbD allows both teacher and students to understand the goal and to create an action plan to achieve it. There are no secrets about what the student is to learn, and there are no surprises on assessments. The UbD process can assist the instructor in working with students in a facilitative way. It also provides the students with guidelines to lead them toward greater skill development and knowledge acquisition. In short, Understanding by Design helps both teacher and student accomplish their academic goals.

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From Inside and Outside the Curriculum: Faculty and Librarians Collaborating to Enhance Student Learning

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Faculty and librarians have long collaborated on teaching information literacy skills. At the Third Annual Roosevelt University Mini-Conference on Teaching, University librarian Mary Beth Riedner (2006) and her teaching colleagues explained many of the strategies currently being used at Roosevelt University to improve the quality of student research. These efforts have taken place both in the classroom and in the library, and increasingly these instructions have focused on electronic databases and other online sources as a way of teaching research skills.

Our strategy was to adapt these outreach strategies to the growing information choices for students/faculty, as well as the changing demographics within academia, specifically, the increase in the number of adjunct faculty. Adjunct faculty comprise a growing portion of the faculty at four-year and two-year institutions of higher learning, and there are particular challenges in reaching them. Many times adjunct faculty are not on campus except for teaching and office hour obligations and in this way may not be as integrated in the campus community.

The outreach for adjunct faculty needed to reflect the increasingly demanding information environment in which faculty and students operate. As noted by John Fritch and Scott Mandernack (2001): "The complexity of the information environment and more uncontrolled distribution and access, lead to new issues for users. Reference services, with a stronger instructional role, must become more proactive in providing a fully developed repertoire of services responsive to the multifaceted queries facing librarians today."

The Role of Word of Mouth Marketing

The interactive approach we implemented was built on word-of-mouth (WOM) strategies. According to Lois Kelly (2007), the idea behind word-of-mouth marketing is "simply that marketing is about having conversations and engaging with people in interesting discussions, through new and traditional channels. Technology may be becoming the heart of marketing and communications, but conversations are the soul." Kelly notes that many companies like Dunkin Donuts, FedEx and Microsoft have embraced word-of-mouth techniques.

The library was part of a word-of-mouth pilot project to stimulate awareness of library resources. The library received a grant to train almost 40 adjunct faculty members on library resources through five workshops. The goals of the orientations were two-fold:

1. Introduce adjunct faculty to the new formats and technologies that have sprung up since they were doing their own intense library research.
2. Help guide adjunct faculty to develop assignments and other strategies to increase student library usage.

At one-and-a-half hour library orientations, faculty were shown how they could use library resources in a multitude of ways to support the curriculum, including class visits, specialized introductions to specific databases and one-on-one research consultations.

The workshops were very well received as evidenced by the comments of many of the participants. One instructor said, "Fantastic! This helps me help my students. They usually know more about the Internet than I do, but less about research and citations. However, you know so much that I do not. It's like having a specialist with 20,000 second opinions." Another faculty member opined, "This workshop was very helpful! Because my class is four hours long, I will do a brief demonstration using an upcoming assignment as an example."

Librarian Jane Malik, one of the coordinators of the WOM campaign, was pleased with the results. "We were impressed with the amount of interaction that the faculty showed at the orientations. It was a good opportunity for us to preview library resources as well as what faculty could expect from general library orientations for their students."

Immediately after the orientation, two adjunct faculty members set up instruction classes for their students and one gave her students extra credit for coming into the library to get help.

The orientations were successful not only for the collaborative inroads that were made, but also because all participants as well as department deans were put on an email list. A summary of the orientation was mailed to all these participants to remind faculty of the value of using the library. There was also the benefit of having librarians work as a team and in this way further develop their teaching skills.

Collaboration Conversations Are Key

In addition to these efforts to get inside the curriculum, there was also a strategy to reach students outside the curriculum. The library has a series of general library research workshops scheduled throughout the semester to help students conduct general research. A large percentage of the students who come are offered extra credit from their instructors for attending. The library sought to build on this by encouraging faculty (both full-time and adjunct) to give their students extra credit for attending a workshop.

The strategies used to get inside and outside the curriculum will be further refined. Future orientations may be opened to full-time faculty. New adjunct faculty members come to Oakton all the time, and there are always new library services to promote. The current database of names will be expanded, and it will therefore be easier to keep people informed of library activities.

Collaborative efforts that focus on instruction and are adaptable (in this case to meet the needs of adjunct faculty) are clearly an important component of information literacy strategies. As noted by Geoffrey Nunberg (2005), "In the end, then, instruction in information literacy will have to pervade

every level of education and every course in the curriculum." Librarians and faculty will continue to collaborate both inside and outside the curriculum to achieve this goal.

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Top Ten Tips for Teaching Online

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Research into online delivery systems has produced a growing consensus around "best practices" for online learning techniques and pedagogical methods. Our workshop communicated a sampling of practical suggestions and reflective approaches to online teaching geared towards faculty who are new to the experience.

The "Top Ten list" below compiles both best practices and our own reflections on online teaching, gleaned through several years of experience. Grateful acknowledgment is offered to the attendees of the session, including Karen Gersten, Cheryl Boncuore, Caleb Paull and Sid Barsuk, among others. While intending to be light-hearted in its approach, these tips are substantive comments on pedagogical approaches to online teaching.

10. Enhance Blackboard Posts with Simple HTML Coding

Using simple HTML code to produce bold, italics and colors can make a simple message stand out for students. A few HTML codes are quite simple:

Feature Name	Turn the Feature On	Turn the Feature Off
Bold		
Italics		
Color Red		
Color Blue		
Color Green		
Color Purple		

While HTML appears onerous to the technically-challenged, software like Microsoft FrontPage can be manipulated to easily produce the code without any programming knowledge. Open FrontPage, type in text and manipulate with the standard toolbar functions to add bold, italics or colors. Then look to the bottom of the FrontPage window for the tab "HTML" and click on it. This will reveal the HTML code used to produce the effects. Copy and paste the HTML code into a Blackboard post or an announcement to enliven a post.

9. Encourage Healthy Discussion Habits by Laying Out Clear Posting Guidelines

An identified best practice for posting is being specific regarding the number of posts students need to publish each week and by when. If your Discussion Board is full of "I agree" and "That's interesting" comments, make it clear in your syllabus that you will not give credit to students who use those phrases.

Students need to be clearly told to think analytically, to engage readings and to respond with "quality" posts, not just "quantity" ones. Clear guidelines and detailed expectations make evaluation more straightforward and allow an instructor to nudge students in the desired direction.

8. Construct an Effective Online Test by Setting Time Parameters

Using tests can help ensure that students are reading their text according to schedule. The key to a good online test is to assume that students will use the book. So asking questions in an applied way is critical. Also be sure to randomize the questions so that two students would not be able to take the test simultaneously online while discussing the questions on the telephone. Another good technique is to not reveal the length of the test, but to set a time limit. Students will not have the luxury of reading the text to discover the answers during the exam because they will be uncertain of the length of the exam. Disallowing back tracking and revealing only one question at a time are equally good practices.

7. Use "Internet Rumors" as a Learning Tool

While many see the Internet as clogged with distracting, dangerous and deceptive messages, these can be turned into a valuable learning experiences. Use spam that hits your email box to help students utilize their research skills. Use it as a basis for a critical thinking exercise, identifying good sources of information on the Internet and discrediting junk sources of information. Discuss strong sources and appropriate deductive processes.

6. Develop Professional Relationships Online through Effective Communication Strategies

Online learning should not shut out all other means of communication. Use not only personal email but also the telephone to have back door and off-line conversations with students about academic progress or appropriate netiquette. Reaching out to low-performers in the class can help get them back on track, just as in the classroom. A verbal word of encouragement through a phone call from the instructor might be all they need to develop and implement good study habits.

5. Build a More Dynamic Online Lecture by "Chunking" Content and Incorporating Images

Translating course content from the classroom to the computer screen can be a challenge. Online lectures that become miniature textbooks can become daunting to read on a screen. By breaking up or "chunking" content into small pieces, the student has a better chance of "digesting" it. Page layout, images to support your message metaphorically, and graphic demonstrations are vital to communicating content online. Instead of modeling a lecture after your notes or a book, think about modeling it after a brochure or a magazine. The "white space" on a page can be as valuable as the content itself in keeping a student from feeling bogged down in text.

4. Make Grading Papers Online Easier by Using Grading Rubrics

Students might ask for "example" papers. What they really want is to know what you're looking for when you are grading their papers. Provide students with a rubric of how you evaluate their work.

When grading student papers, cut and paste a copy of the rubric at the end of their work. Then show the student how he or she is being evaluated by highlighting the section that indicates his or her performance level.

Rubrics can be created for every assignment and are a valuable part of setting expectations. Terry Morris from Harper College graciously gave us her rubric for discussion board work, which may be found at: http://www.harpercollege.edu/doit/docs/sample_rubric.rtf.

3. Make Group Activity More Productive

Incorporating group activities into your coursework is a valuable practice. However, setting the groups up for success is just as important as the assignment you create. Some best practices around group work include:

- Pre-assigning students to particular groups
- Assigning roles to students within the group and explaining the purpose of each role
- Having students create a self-evaluation of their participation in the project and attaching points to this aspect of the assignment
- Having students evaluate one another's participation in the project and attaching points to this aspect of the assignment

2. Use the Internet as Your Classroom by Asking Simple Research Questions

Because your course is online, don't think a trip to the library is out of the question. Create research assignments for students and ask for tiered levels of sources: a disreputable source, a common knowledge source, a business or organizational source and an academic source. Allow students to justify why they selected a particular source over another and to give you the positives and negatives about their selected source.

1. Teach in Your Pajamas!

This tip is, in actuality, a real advantage of online teaching. But it also reminds us that teaching and learning take place all the time, not just in the classroom or in front of a computer. Teaching when comfortable and focused, at the time of day of your choosing, leads to better performance. Further, due to the virtual nature of the online classroom, instructors can teach from a variety of locations. Debra Orr offered her recent experience of teaching online from France while the class was studying intercultural communication. Discussion centered around differences in the approach to life, dogs in restaurants and even appropriate morning greetings.

These tips are by no means exhaustive and we look forward to future RUMCOT sessions to enhance and add to the already extensive knowledge about how to effectively teach online.

Trigger Questions on Blackboard's Discussion Boards Encourage Students to Use Critical Thinking

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In the courses we teach, we'd like students to do more critical thinking. But critical thinking doesn't always happen unaided.

Yet for those of us who teach blended learning courses (face-to-face classes with a Blackboard component) or those who teach completely online through Blackboard's course management system, critical thinking "triggers" can come through our carefully-chosen, strategically-worded discussion board questions.

Writing a discussion board question for either type of course requires critical thinking also on the part of the instructor. But what exactly is critical thinking?

In a single sentence, critical thinking can be thought of as identifying what reality is, how to relate to it, and how to handle it.

Penn State's Faculty Senate (2004) has described critical thinking as "clear, precise and purposeful mental activity. Typically, it's associated with solving complex real world problems, generating

multiple (or creative) solutions to a problem, drawing inferences, synthesizing and integrating information, distinguishing between fact and opinion, or estimating potential outcomes" (Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs, Pennsylvania State University, Appendix, Glossary, para. 33). Other universities have similar definitions. But Penn State's Faculty Senate added, "In nearly all cases, acquiring critical thinking competence requires that students be provided with opportunities to identify and challenge the assumptions of meaningful problems in a discipline as well as to explore alternative hypotheses or ways of thinking and acting" (Appendix, Glossary, para. 33).

That's our task: to provide those opportunities … to make our discussion board questions relevant, to use ideas and levels that students can work with comfortably, and to discuss problems they really care about. One way we can do that in our courses is often to ask discussion board questions that go beyond requiring "know-and-recall" and "demonstrate comprehension" answers. Instead, we can phrase our questions to require our students to use the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy: analysis, synthesis and evaluation (University of Minnesota, Center for Teaching and Learning, 2006).

Focus on content when starting to think about creating discussion board questions. What developments in your course and discipline do you want your students to deal with? Why have you chosen these particular topics? Have you thought through your reasons? Do these topics make sense for these students, in this course, during this semester?

Next, determine your discussion board topic's relevancy for your students. What's meaningful — and why — to you or your colleague may not be immediately apparent to a second-semester sophomore — until you explain why the topic is important and post sources of information and website links that help your students understand. Here you can explain why this topic is important to you and to your students and their world. Then, let them analyze your underlying values that made you choose this topic and state whether they agree, disagree or feel conflicted.

For example, medieval scholastics debated how many angels could stand on the point of a pin (New Dictionary, 2002). At first, students may think that's a silly argument. However, if they analyze the external links you've provided or look at primary documents you've posted, they may come to see that these philosophers were wrestling with the nature of reality — whether reality was physical or spiritual and reflected the value conflicts of their society. The key questions in a society reveal what it is that the society values. The medieval authorities valued God and the transcendent reality. Today, what do we value? How do we know it?

Another part of relevancy relates to freshness. Frequently, students have talked about certain topics or social issues so much that instead of analyzing them rationally and critically on the discussion board, or offering pertinent facts, they're merely repeating what they feel, often based on unsupported opinions. Frankly, they may be bored.

What's current (if that's appropriate) that fits in with where you are in the text? Can you have them search for new studies … new discoveries … and, having students use reasoned analysis, consider what the findings might imply? An open-ended "what if?" Discussion board questions can often be a productive way of getting genuine discussion going, instead of becoming a rehash of trite material or top-of-head reaction.

Once you've determined your content area and you have given your students the resources to understand the facts, ask your students, "What's next?"

That's the critical thinking process where they will use Bloom's three highest levels in his taxonomy to stimulate critical thinking. First, analysis separates the whole into component parts: classifying, outlining, comparing and contrasting. Then synthesis combines ideas to get a new whole. Finally, evaluation makes and explains value decisions about issues (Bloom, 1956). How can these work together to help promote critical thinking? Students must draw their own conclusions about how they can use these tools with each topic.

For example, students in a blended English 102 class (Argument/Analysis/Research Writing) read a text on global warming and discussed various views about greenhouse gas emissions. They were asked to locate three carbon calculators on the web, so they could determine their approximate level of personal or family emissions by using each of the calculators. They posted their results on the discussion board (i.e., demonstrating synthesis). Then they looked more closely at their findings.

Their discussion board questions also asked, "Assuming you used the same data (i.e., the number of people in your household, your driving habits, your monthly miles driven, your make and year of car), did the results from each calculation seem to agree? If not, can you think of possible reasons for the discrepancy? What factors might be outside your control that could influence results?" These prompts promote students' analytic thinking.

In addition to posting the URLs for each site on which they'd located the carbon calculators, they posted their reactions to any information they'd learned from the sites that surprised them. Each student also compared and contrasted the results from the different calculators. Finally, they responded individually to each other's posts. As a follow-up question presented during the next week, students were asked, in view of their findings, to list three things they might try doing to cut their personal or family emissions and to predict how likely they'd be to actually do them. This demonstrates application, also part of Bloom's taxonomy.

Similar discussion board questions that require these critical thinking skills can often be added to courses in other disciplines. Check out the creative websites and see what fun critical thinking can be!

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More Websites

http://www.criticalthinking.org/page.cfm?CategoryID=64&endnav=1
The Critical Thinking Foundation's page. Included are links about to how to design instruction using critical thinking concepts, a sample American history course and a sample assignment.

http://www.ion.illinois.edu/resources/tutorials/assessment/bloomtest.asp
Illinois Online Network's Sample Test Questions: Six Levels of Learning. Examples of questions used to assess student thinking at each of the six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

http://www.ion.illinois.edu/resources/tutorials/assessment/bloomtaxonomy.asp
Illinois Online Network's assessment of learning objectives, with skills demonstrated and question cues for each of the six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

http://powayusd.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/projects/literacy/CriticalThinking/default.htm
Strategies for critical thinking skills, with lesson plans for teaching some of them at the high school level.

E-Commerce Development: Tour the 2006 Blackboard Greenhouse Exemplary Online Course

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There is no single standard for determining quality in online courses. Some instructors upload their lecture slides and objective tests and call it an "online" course. Others spend months developing interactive, multimedia case studies intended to engage students (in addition to the seemingly ubiquitous lecture slides and tests). Students often register for an online course without any idea of what they're in for. Instructors often have never taken an online course themselves and are unsure of how to convert a face-to-face course into this new medium. While there's nothing like the actual experience of learning online to help you become a better online instructor, viewing an example of a quality online course can be quite helpful. Learning management software companies such as Blackboard Inc. make this possible through their course award programs.

Blackboard Greenhouse Awards

Blackboard recognizes excellence in online courses through their award program, the Blackboard Greenhouse Awards, a national competition in which courses are judged by a rigorous rubric. In 2006, the rubric included the following categories: instructional objectives, content presentation and learner engagement, communication and collaboration, assessment of learning, learner support and technology elements ("Blackboard Exemplary Awards," 2006). In many cases, the exemplary courses are available for anyone to access and explore. This article provides an overview of the 2006 Blackboard Greenhouse Exemplary Online Course: CIS 218 E-Commerce Development (new course number WEB 240), at William Rainey Harper College.

The E-Commerce Development Course

The E-Commerce Development course introduces foundation concepts in E-Commerce and was created with cross-program utilization in mind. It contains topics useful for majors in business, information systems and web development. The course may be accessed at http://harper.blackboard.com with username: bbguest and password: bbguest. This is a synchronous course. All students work through the material during the semester. The design of the E-Commerce Development course utilizes a variety of Blackboard tools including discussion forums, group pages, linked assignments and surveys. These tools help to facilitate a wide range of e-learning activities such as semester-long projects with built-in coaching/mentoring milestones, opportunities for students to create e-commerce stores, web research discussion questions, multimedia e-commerce business ethics case studies and review activities using multimedia puzzles and games.

The Blackboard course site is divided into a number of sections accessed by the navigation area on the left side of the browser window: Announcements, Your Instructor, Syllabus, Course Schedule, Course Material, Communication, Resources, Student Tools, Harper Library and Tech Support. The Announcement section is updated about three times per week and provides students reminders and hints about assignments. Instructor background and contact information is within easy access in the Your Instructor section.

Syllabus and Course Schedule

Palloff and Pratt (2001) stress the need for setting clear expectations. The Syllabus section contains a detailed description of course policies and rubrics for selected assignments. The Course Schedule provides a "roadmap" to the course — again emphasizing what to expect.

Course Material

The Course Material section is organized into course modules. Each course module is designed to follow Gagne's events of learning as described by Broadbent (2003). A variety of e-learning activities including a multimedia case study website, group mini-projects (website evaluations), guided research and multimedia review games are included in the modules.

Communication

To avoid the isolation of a classroom of one, Maeroff (2003) describes how collaborative areas such as discussion boards can be used to create a community of learners. The community of e-commerce learners can access the discussion forums in the Communications section: a weekly mandatory discussion question forum and optional forums about Readings and Assignments, Web Project, Extra Credit and a Virtual Café. According to Palloff and Pratt (2001), discussion is the most effective way to promote online learning — the right type of discussion question can encourage student participation.

Resources, Tech Support, Library

The Resources section contains links to related websites for student reference. Student tools allow easy access to grades and instructor comments on assignments. Tech Support and Harper Library link to college-provided information.

Engaging the Learner

The key to the successful engagement of learners in this course is the accommodation of varied learning style preferences — both cognitive and social. The course activities include reading the text, viewing slides, participating in discussions, playing multimedia review games, viewing multimedia case study stories and discussing the case studies in small groups. This provides a variety of individual, small group and large group activities. According to Grasha (2002), using a variety of instructional methods "introduces an element of unpredictability and novelty into the classroom" — keeping students engaged (p. 216). Madden (1993) suggested that the activities in a quality online course be varied in nature. Online learners benefit from a variety of teaching strategies and learning activities that accommodate differing learning preferences, increase the engagement of students and meet or exceed planned learning outcomes. In addition, the multimedia group case studies meet the characteristics of an authentic activity, such as relevance, collaboration, using a variety of resources, including complex tasks that are completed over a period of weeks and diversity of outcomes (Reeves, Herrington, & Oliver, 2002).

A Look Back

When I first started teaching online, Blackboard was not available at Harper College. I created a website and an eGroup (now Yahoo! Group) discussion board for my students. We've come a long way since then. Part of my journey has been learning about how to teach online and how to design quality online courses. The Making the Virtual Classroom a Reality (MVCR) online faculty development courses offered by the Illinois Online Network, http://www.ion.uillinois.edu, at the University of Illinois had a profound impact on both my online teaching pedagogy and course design skills. I heartily recommend this program to anyone interested in improving his or her online teaching or instructional design skills.

Conclusion

An online course is never complete — there are always new activities to try, suggestions from students and (of course) new editions of the textbook. The E-Commerce Development course is a work in progress. With this in mind, I invite you to review the Greenhouse Exemplary Course Awards rubric, explore the E-Commerce Development course on Blackboard and (hopefully) find some new ideas to use in your own courses.

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iTunes U at Roosevelt University

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Roosevelt University is participating in iTunes U, an online instructional media project supported by Apple Computer. The project takes its name from the Apple iTunes client program that supports the service on the desktop. iTunes U is a free, hosted service that provides tools for distributing multimedia files over the Internet. Although iTunes U has many uses, our primary motivation for offering this service to the Roosevelt Community is to support instructional use. The Division of Information Technology, in collaboration with faculty from the College of Education, has initiated a pilot program, and the system will be used for the first time this summer. The pilot program will be extended this fall to all interested faculty.

iTunes U Overview

Although multimedia materials can be posted for downloading from any web page, iTunes U provides a convenient way for instructors to assemble, manage and distribute these materials to students through an interface that resembles a website. The iTunes U system offers these advantages over ordinary downloading techniques.

- Apple provides a Roosevelt-branded host site to which can be added special sections dedicated to individual classes (much like Blackboard). Access to these dedicated class areas is secured by password so that only the instructor and enrolled students can enter those areas and use the materials.
- Files are downloaded from this service to the desktop using iTunes, Apple's popular online audio/video file management system. This is the same program that supports downloading content from Apple's music service of the same name. Windows and Macintosh versions of the iTunes client program are available at no cost from the Apple website.

- The iTunes U service supports podcasting, a file delivery method that allows users to automate the download process by "subscribing" to the course. When the subscription feature is activated in an iTunes U course, students will be notified automatically as soon as new material has been posted for downloading. Students can then download and view the materials on their desktop or laptop computers, or, for maximum portability, can copy them to any handheld device that supports media storage and playback. This includes not only the Apple iPod device that gives podcasting its name, but any MP3 player or smartphone that supports the iTunes U media formats.
- The media files delivered by this service are stored on Apple's own server. This represents a substantial savings of local file storage space.

Examples of the Use of iTunes U

Instructors can use iTunes U to distribute audio and video clips in any of several common formats (currently the system supports audio files in ACC or MP3 format, video files in MPEG-4 format with H.264 compression and PDF files). Examples include film excerpts, demonstrations, performances, debates and audio and video archival materials.

Instructors can record lectures in audio or video formats and make them available to students after the class for study. The system also supports the uploading of student-created material for distribution to the instructor, or optionally, to the rest of the class. Virtually any type of material than can be stored in one of the supported audio and video formats can be handled by iTunes U.

Hardware and Software Requirements

Instructors producing original material for distribution using iTunes U need to have access to appropriate audio or video recording and editing tools. Faculty with microphone-equipped laptop computers already have the minimum equipment necessary to create usable audio content, but the range and quality of recordings can be much improved with the use of better equipment. The ETRC office will be offering the use of microphones, cameras, multimedia processing tools as well as production assistance and can also provide training for faculty interested in learning how to develop their own multimedia materials.

Once materials have been acquired or created and converted to the proper format, all that is required to upload the materials to Roosevelt's iTunes U site is Apple's iTunes client program. This is the same program that students will need to access the materials once they have been uploaded. The use of a web browser is also required, but only to complete the login process. After authenticating themselves, users will do all of their work from the iTunes environment. Once materials have been downloaded to some appropriate device, iTunes is no longer necessary — all that is required is the appropriate playback software (for example, Quicktime).

Course Setup in iTunes U

For the initial pilot phase of Roosevelt's iTunes U project, classes will be configured for instructors individually by request. The setup process is straightforward. After receiving the request the iTunes U administrator creates a new course area on Roosevelt's iTunes U home site and provides the instructor with a login. Provisions will also be made for authorization to the students in the class to enter the site. Once the course has been set up, the instructor can enter the course area and configure it according to the requirements of the course (e.g., creating subject-specific tabs for different types of materials or for different sections of the class and modifying access and uploading rights as needed).

As currently configured, Roosevelt's iTunes U site can be used either as a stand-alone service or as an extension to Blackboard, providing automation and convenience in the handling of multimedia files not available in the Blackboard environment. Instructors can associate iTunes U materials with Blackboard by building links within Blackboard to specific content items in iTunes U, thus presenting students with an integrated bundle of services.

More Information

Apple's website has a section dedicated to information about iTunes U: http://www.apple.com/support/itunes_u/.

Copies of the iTunes program can be downloaded from http://www.apple.com/itunes/download/.

Several universities have opened their iTunes U sites to the general public. These pages will illustrate some of the tools that are made possible by this technology.

http://itunes.uic.edu

http://itunes.berkeley.edu

http://itunes.stanford.edu

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