Teaching from the Edge:
Transitioning into the Online Course Utilizing Instructional Design and Rubric Evaluation

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Overview

Teaching credit classes on being effective researchers is not a new arena for academic libraries. Taking the same course, however, and revamping the syllabus for an online audience is a relatively new venture. The conversion of an in-person traditional information literacy course is not a simple process and can present some interesting challenges. The authors will share their experience of designing an online course; the pitfalls, successes and future plans for the course. The paper will begin with background information, discussion of instructional design in the developmental process, exploration of the use of learning objectives and instructional technology in order to introduce and reinforce ACRL Information Literacy Standards and campus learning goals, and finally evaluate the use of peer review and the Quality Matters™ Rubric in order to assess the completion of this course redesign.

Background Information

The University of Kansas Libraries (KU Libraries) began teaching LA&S 292 Research Methods & Information Literacy (LA&S 292 for the purpose of this paper), a one-credit course, in 2006. Since then the traditional class setting was very successful and received excellent evaluations from undergraduate students who took the course. The discussions to revise the classroom-based course to an online format began in early in 2010 but due to other priorities the development was

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pushed back to the spring 2012 semester. The decision to move the course to an online format was in part due to the University of Kansas' decision to develop its online offerings as a viable option for students looking to complete their coursework. Another reason was to expand outreach to students who may not be able to take our research classes on campus during the day.

For both the classroom-based and online formats, LA&S 292 is an elective course, designed to be taught in eight weeks or half a semester. Initially, the development of the online version was expected to be a fairly seamless transition. We soon came to the realization that what and how we teach in person is not easily translated to an online only environment. The development of the online course became a more extensive process with some significant challenges. We reviewed the syllabus to determine if we still wanted to teach the same material and determine how to translate it to an online environment. Another challenge we faced was converting certain in-class activities to the online format; for example, conducting library and archive tours. The KU Libraries Head of Library Instructional Services gave us a one year timeframe to develop the course and we were encouraged to pilot the class in the Spring Semester of 2012. This would allow us to address any modifications needed in the summer and then allow us to promote the course for Fall Semester 2012.

Course Design

Designing the LA&S 292 online course began by reviewing what had been taught in the past. Conversation and input from instructors who had previously taught the course was the first step towards the design. There was not complete agreement by those involved on what content should be included in the course, but we did come to agreement on the set

of outcomes needed for this online class. Because we decided to focus on the course objectives, we selected "Backwards Design" as the instructional design method needed to develop the course. "Backwards Design" was developed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McThighe to promote student understanding of the information being taught, rather than focusing on content or activities. Wiggins and McThighe created a simple three stage process for guiding the design of instruction:

I.   Desired results

II.   Assessment Evidence

III.   Learning Plan (Wiggins & McThighe, 2005, p. 257)

The objectives and desired outcomes for LA&S 292 were based on the ACRL Information Literacy Standards. The objectives and outcomes used for the course are listed in the Appendix.

Technology Used

Blackboard Learn was the course management system used to offer the course online because it is the official courseware utilized by the University and the one with which students are already familiar. Within Blackboard we built the course in weekly modules. Each module contained a list of the objectives, assignments, and outcomes that would be addressed. In each module we also tried to embed video tutorials in Blackboard to help facilitate understanding and reduce the amount of written instructions. The majority of our videos included closed-captioning. The videos created in-house had already been completed as a part of our "How to Videos" in previous semesters, and were hosted by YouTube. We only had to copy the embed code to Blackboard. The videos were created using Jing and Adobe Captivate. The two issues we had with Blackboard had to do with pasting text into the modules and when our Blackboard practice course was copied into the actual course shell. The first issue, pasting content, would sometimes cause weird formatting issues that had to be fixed with the text editing option off and using html. The second issue occurred when our course was copied into the official shell (the live class). It made duplicates of all of our content and broke links.

We created interactive learning objects using SoftChalk, which is provided free of charge by our University for faculty and staff use. We utilized these activities to reinforce instruction; for example, the recommended steps in the research process and the parts of a citation were two ways we taught students about the steps of researching and identifying the various parts of a citation. The one problem we had with this software was integrating it into Blackboard's Grade Center. The directions we were given by our Blackboard support team were outdated and not compatible with the version of Blackboard we are currently using. We will do some more research on how to integrate the activities with the Grade Center, but for this first semester we had students report their answers using e-mail or their research journal. Some students had a difficult time accessing these online activities because the Flash component of SoftChalk did not work with their browser. Another way we

tested student understanding and reinforced learning was the use of quizzes in Blackboard that were automatically graded and gave students instant feedback.

We used the announcements tool in Blackboard and e-mail to communicate with students about their assignments and to answer questions. The Research Journal feature in Blackboard was also utilized for communication purposes; students used it to tell us what they had learned each week and to communicate any confusion they had about the topics for a particular module. We used the journal to give students feedback, to encourage them, answer questions, and clarify misconceptions.

Formative Evaluation

We asked colleagues in our department (Instructional Services) and others in the Libraries to review the course and provide feedback. It was very helpful to have former instructors review the information because they could share their insight on what had worked with their traditional class and what had not. The one other librarian we asked outside of our department to look it over gave us great feedback on ways to scaffold the learning in the course. We also asked one of our undergraduate student assistants, who is a journalism major, to run through the weekly modules for anything that could be misconstrued especially our directions for each week. We reviewed our course using the Quality Matters™ Rubric. The Quality Matters Rubric is a widely accepted set of standards used to evaluate online and blended courses. This is also the rubric that our Center for Online and Distance Education uses to evaluate online courses at the University of Kansas. We asked the University's new Center for Online and Distance Learning (CODL) staff to review the course and give us feedback. The assistant director of CODL gave us suggestions for clarifying instructions in the online course and they assigned an editor to review the syllabus and give us feedback. There was miscommunication about when the course would begin so we received the feedback on the syllabus and course content after the course had begun. However, the feedback was detailed and some of it could be implemented immediately. The rest of the edits will be addressed during the summer rebuilding of the course.

Summative Evaluation

Now that the course has been taught once, we have taken the time to reflect on what we will do differently in the future. Although the hands-on activities were tested after being loaded, something disconnected between creation, activation and student use. Checking hands-on activities to ensure they are still functioning correctly will be something to review before each week's module is activated. When asking students to download software to use for an assignment, both PC and Mac versions need to be available. Ease of use is another consideration, as some students just are not comfortable using technology or web-based software. We do not want technology to be a barrier to learning.

Although we had challenges and will be making changes, we do feel that we did some things right. We did a

good job of planning the course, having the online class completed and available before students started the class, and allowing colleagues to examine and critique the modules before we launched. We included video tutorials to assist in the explanation and demonstration of the research process and how to use library resources. We clearly stated objectives and outcomes upfront for students. We were responsive to student questions and issues and graded students' efforts, giving them feedback in a timely manner. Going forward we will continue to assess and update the course to make certain that the content remains relevant and the instruction is accessible and engaging to the students. We will also consider providing this instruction in a hybrid format so that students who would like to or need to meet face to face can benefit from that opportunity as well.

CONCLUSION

Online learning will continue to be a popular option for students who need a flexible schedule. This format is another opportunity for libraries to teach students the valuable skills of research. When transitioning from the face to face environment one should first consider what the objectives of the instruction are and develop the course around those objectives, not simply try to copy what has been done before. Technology should enhance the learning experience, not create barriers, so select and test it carefully. Piloting the class the first time it is taught will allow instructors to perform a trial run and tweak the instruction before marketing and offering it to a large group of students. When thoughtfully designed, information literacy instruction can be a success in the online environment!

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTORS

Kim Glover is the University of Kansas (KU) Libraries Instructional Design Librarian and has an Instructional Design degree. She has a background in developing and teaching online courses for 7 years. Nikhat Ghouse is the Virtual Reference Librarian at KU Libraries and has over 12 years of experience teaching information literacy instruction to a wide variety of students and faculty. She has taught LA&S 292 for three consecutive semesters. With their backgrounds in instructional design and information literacy, they were ideal candidates to design and teach the online version of the research methods course.

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APPENDIX

Course Objectives

- To present the transferable research process and search strategies for retrieving information

- To provide an introduction to information resources and selecting appropriate sources

- To outline a transferable, systematic plan for critical evaluation and use of these resources in a variety of ways

- To promote the effective use of information to accomplish specific tasks

- To introduce concepts of academic integrity and ethical use of information

Course Outcomes:

- Students will determine the nature and extent of an information need in order to identify a variety of relevant sources

- Students will compose search strategies in order to access and retrieve useful and relevant information

- Students will articulate and apply evaluative criteria to resources in order to determine the credibility of information

- Students will gather and organize information meaningfully in order to communicate research products effectively

- Students will show evidence of synthesizing ideas, interpretation of information, and revision of queries

The authors, who were also the course designers, builders, and instructors decided to use a research journal, quizzes, research assignments, and annotated bibliography to assess learning