Online Course Development: Suggested Issues for Faculty Consideration

Compiled by the Temporary Faculty Senate Committee on Online Courses, IU Kokomo

This set of questions is meant to help faculty consider a range of important issues related to teaching fully-online courses on our campus, before they decide to present a particular course online. As this area of teaching is changing rapidly, this set of questions cannot be viewed as comprehensive or relevant to every case. However, to the degree that a faculty member can anticipate important advantages and disadvantages of online teaching, he/she should attempt to do that. Ideally, these questions will also help spark important conversations within programs and departments regarding the role that online teaching can/should take in their course offerings. The order of the categories below is not meant to convey anything about the relative importance of each issue; it is assumed that different issues will be more important in some cases than in others.

Can the Learning Objectives of the Course be Accomplished via Online Instruction?

- **Is the course designed to primarily convey content, or teach skills?**
- If the learning objective involves mastering content, **do students typically master such content independently, or do they typically need additional explanation** from instructors in order for comprehension to occur?
- If explanation is a necessary part of student comprehension, **are resources available to students via technology to aid their learning** (e.g., videos, tutorials, games, forums or discussion boards where the instructor participates, real-time support available via virtual office hours)? Is the faculty member comfortable with the quality and robustness of those resources (e.g., they are accurate, usable, and resistant to technical "glitches")? Is the faculty member prepared to serve as the default backup for students if those resources fail? [Faculty should be aware that students will expect them to serve as "backup" if learning aids fail in any way, so setting appropriate student expectations at the outset is key.]
- If the learning objective involves mastering skills, **can skills be practiced without immediate interaction with or feedback from others?** That is, can delayed verbal or video-based feedback from the instructor or other students help the student improve in mastery of that skill? Can such feedback be provided in an individualized way as needed, or will the instructor only be able to provide general feedback to the whole group? [Faculty should be aware that students will expect rapid response from instructors when they are requesting feedback or guidance; again, setting student expectations at the start of the course will help greatly.]
- If interaction/collaboration with others is a learning objective of the course, **is a clear system of student accountability instituted** in the course to track such activities? [It is recommended that all online courses involve some interactive or collaborative activities, such as peer discussion or group projects, even if the traditional model for teaching that course does not include such work.]
- Do the learning objectives of the course make clear **whether this material is considered prerequisite** to later learning for some or all students in that course? [If the course is a prerequisite for later courses, it is particularly important that learning supports be high-quality.]

- **Is information on how to successfully complete this course online, a clear learning objective?** [If a particular course is being taught online, a stated learning objective should involve how to succeed in online learning; therefore, training for the student on all technologies and supports which will be used in course delivery should be embedded into the learning activities of that course (usually as part of course introduction). In particular, it should be made clear how each learning activity allows the student to accomplish each learning objective.]
- **Are assessment tools for student learning well-aligned with all learning objectives?**

Can the Course Be Designed to Keep Students Engaged and Maximize Learning?

- Has the **instructor received adequate training** in solid online course design? [Please see the "Online Course Development Fact Sheet" for details about training, compensation, and intellectual property.]
- Will the **course materials be clear, easy to navigate, and well-structured**?
- Will all online materials (internal and external – everything from tools within ONcourse, to external websites used as teaching resources) be **robust, clear, and functional**?
- Will **accessibility** (regarding sight, mobility, hearing, cognition, ESL, and technical/technological literacy) be considered in course design?
- Will **various teaching approaches** – e.g., visual, textual, kinesthetic, auditory, discussion-based, project-based – be used throughout the course to hold student attention and enhance learning?
- Will opportunities for **critical thinking and problem-solving** be offered? Will **diversity and civic engagement** be emphasized, and how?
- Will students be given **opportunities to create their own learning activities** within or outside the learning environment? Can they "improvise" on certain aspects of the course to make it their own, and can they get meaningful credit for creating high-quality products?
- Will the course **be paced in a way that maximizes student control of their learning** (e.g., self-paced modules and flexible deadlines vs. firm deadlines with narrow windows for completion)?
- Is **student feedback on their course experience frequently sought out** by instructors, and responded to in meaningful ways?

Has the Instructor Accurately Conceptualized the Online Teaching Experience?

- Is the instructor prepared to **feel as if they are spending significantly more time on online courses** vs. face-to-face courses? [Research indicates that the actual number of minutes spent in the two teaching modes differs very little, but that faculty often feel as if they are spending more time on online teaching because the time is distributed more broadly over each week than in face-to-face teaching.]
- Does the instructor have a feel for their own "online presence," and **have a plan for personalizing their approach** in order to connect meaningfully with students? [Strong online teachers tend to make efforts to present themselves as particularly open to student needs, fairly spontaneous, and genuine – that is, as a "real person" on the other side of the screen, rather than as a highly-businesslike presence.]

- Is the instructor prepared to quickly identify and respond to struggling students, and to take an active interventionist approach to keep students from falling behind or dropping out? [Students who feel as if they are "on their own" in online courses often show signs of struggle, and most often need extra outreach to persist in online courses.]

Can the Instructor Have Their Online Teaching Efforts Appropriately Evaluated and Recognized?

- Has the **department discussed course evaluations for online courses**, and how they may differ from face-to-face course evaluations?
- Has the **Chair and Dean clarified their views of online teaching** to all faculty within departments and schools that offer online courses?
- Has the instructor familiarized himself or herself with the **process of peer review of online teaching** on our campus? Does the instructor have a plan for having courses formally reviewed?