

Transforming Traditional, Face-to-Face Courses to Online or Blended Learning Environments

Advice for Faculty and Instructional Designers

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As institutions of higher education increase their online offerings, the work of higher education instructional designers becomes pivotal. An instructional designer is someone who “applies [a] systematic methodology (rooted in instructional theories and models) to design and develop content, experiences, and other solutions to support the acquisition of new knowledge or skills” (Association for Talent Development, n.d., para. 2). It is pivotal not only for the help and guidance instructional designers provide faculty members as they transition from teaching traditional, face-to-face courses to online or blended courses, but also for the one-on-one support they offer faculty as they work together in this transition. For faculty members transitioning to online teaching, the shift involves accepting change, embracing new experiences, and adapting to the most important aspect of this shift: the student. How this happens varies from institution-to-institution. Some institutions have entire departments dedicated to supporting faculty whereas others

have no support. All kinds of models exist and can differ even within the same institution. Although resources exist such as TOPkit (<https://topkit.org/>), a statewide faculty development program (Wyatt, Howard, Salter, & Tojo, 2018), the reality is that converting face-to-face courses to online or blended formats can be daunting. This is where instructional designers can be instrumental.

Instructional designers can help faculty plan and prepare engaging courses that incorporate learning theories, instructional strategies, and educational technology that are appropriate not only for the learning environment (i.e., online or blended), but also for the target audience of students. Although faculty members may have taught for years, they may not have as much education or training in the science of learning compared to what an instructional designer should know and be able to do. However, collaboration between faculty and instructional designers to transform face-to-face courses to online ones can also be very difficult. It is important to

note that in most institutions of higher education there remains a long history of hierarchies and power relationships between faculty and staff. To help faculty and instructional designers work together, it is important to:

USE LEARNING AS THE FOCAL POINT

Focus on the opportunities that the online environment presents rather than the obstacles. Teaching, no matter the learning environment, is not perfect. And, it often takes teaching an online course a few times to improve and enhance it. It helps to experiment with new approaches, refine learning objectives, and request formative and summative feedback from students. For instance, including a midterm tune up (Milman, 2006) or other types of ways to evaluate the course formatively throughout the course can provide valuable insights from the student perspective regarding the design, content, and delivery of the course.

APPROACH THE SHIFT AS A NEW DESIGN

Many faculty members new to online teaching perceive it through the lens of the face-to-face framework. They can get caught up wondering how they are going to preserve what they believe is most essential, such as regular student interaction, impromptu give-and-take in a discussion on a particular topic, if they are not together in the same physical space at the same time. They want to replicate their synchronous style teaching strategies online and wonder why other approaches might be recommended. Thoughtful and deliberate discussions highlighting the new possibilities for instruction can help shape the new online course so that it builds on faculty members' strengths, but also introduces tested approaches that best help students learn in online environments.

CONSIDER GREEN LIGHT DESIGN'S LEARN MODEL

The LEARN model ("LEARN Model," n.d.) is a conceptual framework for instructional design and educational delivery for higher education developed at Wichita State University. The term *model* is not used as a design theory but rather as design ideas to consider when working with faculty. The characteristics of the LEARN model closely mirror those of the transformational leadership model. Faculty should be involved in the design process; each person brings important and unique experiences valuable to implementing any endeavor. Also, intellectual stimulation encompasses listening to others' input so the new curriculum and solutions result in synergistic outcomes. The LEARN model involves:

- **Listening:** Always start any instructional design project by listening. Recognize the knowledge and experience of the faculty and their role in the design and development process. In turn, it helps for faculty to recognize the instructional design education and background of the instructional designer, particularly one who likely supports faculty across the IHE.
- **Envisioning:** Design and imagination are limitless. It is important to refrain from focusing on the limitations, such as only what the technology tools can do, or what a rubric requires, or what has been done for years. Plus, there are often many different strategies and approaches to help students learn.
- **Adjusting:** Realize what your abilities are, and start there. With each project, add new a new skill.
- **Revising:** As you work together, fine-tune what you have, add what you can, and do the hard job of getting things working.
- **Negotiating:** Good design is a long-term project, and both the faculty member and instructional designer are on

the same team. Consider the skills each of you brings to the table. Avoid making assumptions and foster strong, candid communication. Both of you need to be in on making the course better over time.

As we prepare students to succeed in the 21st century, we need to recognize the opportunities to create engaging course design. Building a strong learning culture involves creating valuable and relevant learning experiences with clear goals and objectives and engaging involvement of all stakeholders in the learning community.

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