

Designing the "Perfect" Online Course

Michael Simonson

Dictionary definitions of the word *perfect* are universally similar: without defect, faultless. Certainly it is foolish to try to quickly define the perfect online course; a course without defect and faultless. However, with the current "rush to go online," many instructional designers, distance educators, and training directors and being asked to design just such a course—an effective, rig-

orous, yet interesting online course—a "perfect" online course.

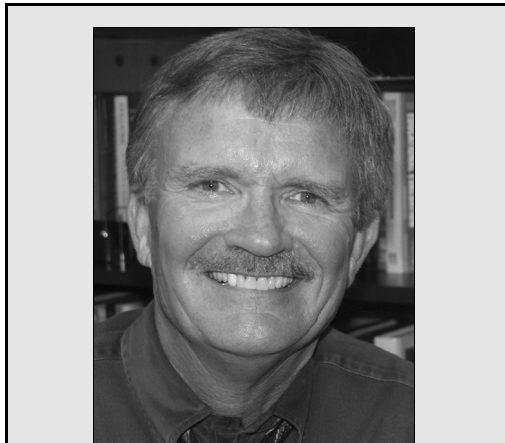
So, for the sake of the naiveté of those asking and the motivation of many distance educators to want to help, let us examine what the best practices literature seems to be indicating about online courses—good, if not perfect ones—and make a recommendation. (Actually, the components of an online course summarized in this column are derived from the recent edition of *Teaching and Learning at a Distance: Foundations of Distance Education*)

When designing an online course, there are three organizational categories to consider: course structure, course contents, and artifacts of learning. It might also be informative to look at the organization of the major subdivision of a typical online course: the course unit.

COURSE STRUCTURE

The typical college course is a three-semester, 15-week course with a title something like "Management of Service Centers," or "Introduction to Educational Statistics." Certainly most educators know that a three-credit college course will meet about three times a week for the 15 weeks of the semester, or for about 45 class sessions.

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