Module 3A:
1. Understand basic principles of developing an effective, quality online course or training module.
2. Understand the differences between traditional instructional and online instruction.
3. Understand and be able to apply principles of good practice when developing an online course/training.
4. Apply adult principles to online courses as well as training.

3A - Discussion 1 : *Imagine that you are conducting a beginner f2f workshop called "The Differences in Teaching Online." Describe the three most important points that you think that faculty should know about how teaching online is different from teaching in the traditional environment.*

Topic: 3A - Discussion 1 Date: March 14, 2008 7:35 PM
Subject: Colleen's points for faculty... Author: Burnham, Colleen

The first point that I think must be made – at least to my faculty – is that most of them already "teach online"; most are doing a relatively adequate job of incorporating electronic resources into their f2f classrooms via both intra- and internet access. Those who carry a laptop or thumb drive to the f2f classroom are usually doing so for the express purpose of working with web resources and electronic presentations. Often, as soon as faculty members realize they have crossed their own "fear line" [of technology], they are able to begin the discussion of the functional differences between f2f and online class meetings.

I suspect the most dramatic functional difference (my second point) is the appearance of a lack of personalities in the online classroom. The friendliest f2f instructor is frequently the "snootiest" online professor. The quiet f2f student is often the noisiest member of an online class. I have a colleague whom I use as an example whenever I'm given the chance to talk about this phenomenon. Yes. She knows I use her, and she has come to appreciate the significance of her own online behavior. I took an online class with her before I met her. I absolutely hated her online personality! And, it turned out, she didn't like me either. We both even went so far as to avoid each other in the one f2f meeting that was required by the school. A couple of semesters after her course, I went to work for the same school she taught the course through. Our first meeting was a disaster – we both tried to be polite, but we both knew exactly how the other felt.

Anyway… This could become a very long story if I don't just cut to the chase :-) . As I've gotten to know this lady, I've realized that her curt "email it" in the online environment, is accompanied by a really wonderful smile as she types the words. In the f2f environment, she is a terrific listener – she'll nod through a very long story about the difficulties a student has had trying to access the digital dropbox, touch the student's arm and, leaning in as a grammie would, say, "mmm… email it…". Then she winks and walks away. Everyone I've told this story to [on my campus] is shocked to suddenly realize this striking dichotomy of perception. They know "the lady" and can easily imagine the phenomenon. As soon as they "get" the "story", they realize their own vulnerability to the same effect. I've heard several remark afterward that they put themselves through the exercise of re-reading student posts, removing their own "interpretation" as they try to "hear" the student's voice in the words.

My third point is drawn from the previous two. Knowing that we are often already incorporating even a little piece of the "dreaded technology" in the f2f classroom, and at the same being aware of how we might be perceived in the online environment, as it compares with the visual cues of the f2f classroom, is a good starting point for allowing ourselves to experiment a little more confidently in the online classroom. That is, while the jump is dramatic, it isn't really any more frightening than standing in front of a class of strangers while learning a new tool. A confident willingness to try one tool at a time will reinforce one's confidence; eventually that confidence will morph into a certain level of comfort in the online environment.

3A - Discussion 2 : *Using the course evaluation rubric (developed by Dr. Clay and linked within this module), list 3 or 4 specific items that you think that most faculty don't meet. Explain in detail whether or not you think these items are really important. Also, how can such a rubric be used to promote quality in online courses at your institution?*

Topic: 3A - Discussion 2 Date: March 24, 2008 8:20 PM
 Subject: Using the Rubric Author: Burnham, Colleen

I have to admit that I've put one of my faculty through the exercise of having been graded via Dr. Clay's rubric – he's actually not only "one of my faculty", but also my own instructor in the other course that I'm taking :-) He has graciously accepted my request to him to collaborate with me on a project specific to online teaching, and so is "putting up with" any requests I make of him "in the interest of science" ;-)

Before forcing John's techniques through the rubric, I also did a quick, general assessment of our overall online teaching philosophy (and its requirements) at Thomas, using the rubric. (John is the instructor – it's his real name; Thomas is the school name). Philosophically, we do a pretty good job. However with a pragmatic eye, that is, looking at how well and

frequently different features are used by our faculty members as a group, well… it's given me some ideas for workshops that must happen, and at the same time has highlighted the effectiveness of the rubric and John.

Overall, John got a great score – thanks the gawds! He is my teacher, after all :-) I've asked him to let the "score" sink in before he tells me what he thinks of the rubric as an assessment tool for the Thomas instructors. My one direct question to him is, "Is it helpful to see where your weaknesses are, according to this particular rubric?".

Interestingly, John lost most of his points on items that I suspect might really be institutional responsibilities, rather than things that should be left up to the individual online instructors: links to tools (and instructions for use), use of audio & visual materials, adaptive learning materials, and where to get help. Each of these apparent failings on John's part are really institutional "problems" as a result of security "barriers", limited server space [for storing a variety of AV materials], and badly designed help-buttons. For example, even I didn't know, until a year or so into my gig as the Blackboard lady, that the help-button in Blackboard comes directly to me?! We struggle with the server space issue several times a semester. More than a couple of full-length lectures stored in a BB course folder will bring the system to a screeching crawl.

As I've alluded to in other posts, I have participated in some really bad online courses in the past. And it's important (for John's sake) that I make the point that I've used John as a "test" because he does an excellent job organizing, presenting, choreographing, and "revamping on the fly" – I knew two weeks into his course that he somehow knew what he was doing :-) The rubric "proves" my impression quite nicely.

Rather than address this discussion question with what my faculty don't accomplish, I'm going to list the features in John's course that "made the difference" for me. (I know. n = 1. But I hear the same comments from other students all the time :-)) The first thing I noticed – and, as a closet geek, loved -- was John's ReadMe doc. It was positioned in the course folder to be read before anything else could be accessed. It wasn't a how-to as much as a statement about his expectations of us as students. He calls it "Online Rules" (I've attached his document) and covers everything from "you're grad students, so…" and "net-iquette…" (sic) to the expected number and quality of discussion posts. Each student knew exactly what he expected of them behaviorally before entering the "classroom".

The second feature of John's class is his own discussion board activity. Working with the "spoken rule", "My experience with discussion boards is that when the great and wise Oz (a.k.a. your instructor) weighs in on a topic, the discussion stops in deference to the great and wise one., he "drops by" only a couple of times a week, adding quips and comments (he's half leprechaun ;-)) when a student comment strikes his funny-bone, seems off-topic, or is precisely on-topic. He is always there "lurking" on Wednesdays, but only comments occasionally. I've just checked the stats for the course. John visited the discussion board only 99 times out of the 2124 total hits. (Another colleague complains – brags? – that she ends up with over 3000 hits per course??)

John can get away with this apparent inactivity for several reasons (my third highlighted feature). The syllabus is comprehensive: it lists definite due dates along with those that can be considered flexible, and the topics and readings are clearly organized. He is faithful to his self-imposed schedule: he is always available online on Wednesdays, either lurking in the discussion board or answering email; he will chat if need be, and is willing to participate in any other student-initiated communication. He is always "in the game", that is, if he notices that someone hasn't posted for a while, he contacts that person in a variety of ways (email, chat-ping, phone, discussion board post) to check for miscommunication, etc. Every member of the class has participated in his course and, significant at Thomas – no-one has dropped the course!

Finally, John's first "assignment" was that we introduce ourselves via the discussion board. He wrote a relatively long and personal bio of himself as an example of what he wanted us to say about ourselves. And then actually read all of our bios so that he could get a sense of who we are and what role we might play in the online classroom. A great example of his use of our info was a particular group that I was assigned to – I know he did it on purpose because I "felt the need" to comments to him about my group-mates. The group was made up of three male traditional "5-yrs" (our day MBA program), a man about my age, and me – do you hear the "family" that John created :-)? And, boy did that other "parent" come in handy about 3 days into the group project when the three traditionals started "whining" – the older man and I "visibly" donned our mum and dad hats, calmed the egos, and we were all able to continue. When I called John on the maternal position he'd put me in, he just laughed and told me that he'd done it entirely on purpose. He believed that the older man and I had "synergy" in the online classroom, and had counted on us to "keep the others in line". I call that masterful choreography – and I told him so ;-)

OK. I've written enough, so am going to pull what my daughter calls a "buud-doomp-boom" - and just stop ;-)

Attachments:
OnlineRules.docx

Mod 3B Course Critique : *Go to the Discussion Board and post a critique of the online course or module that you chose. Point out at least two things that you like about the course, and at least two things that could be improved. Cite specific examples from your readings. How might your online training module differ (perhaps self-paced with no interaction needed, for example?). Be sure to react to the responses of at least two of your classmates and consider/ reference what you learned in the readings.*

Topic: Mod 3B Course Critique Date: March 31, 2008 6:39 PM
Subject: PubMed - I like it! Author: Burnham, Colleen

I also chose PubMed for reasoning similar to Krysia's: I am responsible for teaching information literacy skills to our faculty and our students, so regularly come up against the challenge of creating practical tutorials. Frankly, I liked the PubMed site so much, I've asked our library webmaster to post the link for our students.

The first feature that I really like is that it's chopped up into different "action-based" tutorials. At first, that they weren't "real action" felt a little clunky, but as I worked through the tutorials, I appreciated that I was being led through the most efficient "protocol" for searching (et al.) rather than being given the opportunity to "screw up". (As a rule, I prefer to teach "experimentally", allowing the learner to "test" different techniques - I'm not always right ;-)) The examples were practical, and I think I actually learned some new "stuff". I've been searching PubMed for a lot of years, and still came away able to apply new tricks.

The second nice feature was that most of the information was produced as viewlets. I wrote in my notes "I love the application -- I wonder what it is?". It just felt smoother than a regular old PowerPoint or captured desktop. I really came to appreciate the "call-out" glossary, as well as the table of contents and tabs. To tie this to our readings, it seemed I could "interact" with the training as much or as little as I was able to figure out without sacrificing huge amounts of information. I can easily imagine my most naive instructor -- technology and/or IL -- "wandering around" the training pages, searching for particular answers without getting awfully lost, or stumped by the techniques required to navigate the pages.

I do have a third "I like" -- the information was both PubMed-specific and generalizable to other database search engines. There were several general tutorials (e.g., bolean searching) that apply to all searching, not just PubMed.

Unfortunately, not all of the pages seemed current; many were produced before PubMed went essentially open access [thanks to the Freedom of Information Act]. As I worked through the table of contents, I found myself wondering if I could trust all of the techniques the NLM was teaching me. While I'm relatively confident that the "...last updated in January 2008" statement is correct, I also know how easy it is to "lose" a webpage in the updating process.

And finally, while one click on "Return to PubMed" does indeed take one to the actual database search engine, there's no easy way to get back to the complete tutorial. It's not an awful "trip back", but I'd like it to be a little more graceful.

Mod 3C: Planning : *Post your training course plan here. Remember, your plan should include: 1. Training objectives. Include overal objectives and specific objectives. 2. Activities: Come up with a list of possible activities for the f2f workshop. Your list should be pretty long - you can always cut back. 3. Evaluation: Determine how you will check to see what they have learned. Remember, focus on the objectives. 4. Feedback: How will you let your trainees know that they are doing a good job or when they need improvements.*

Topic: Mod 3C: Planning Date: April 3, 2008 5:12 PM
Subject: Information Literacy Workshop Proposal Author: Burnham, Colleen

I'll confess up front that posting this proposal feels just a little bit like recycling a paper. I wrote this proposal for the purpose of creating a faculty development "course" a couple of years ago. While I've held to the premises outlined, it never made it to the faculty senate for approval (which really means the dean wasn't prepared to formally reward for participation). --> the format et al. has never really been "tested". So after getting Janet's permission, I've decided to use it for this assignment. I have no "peers" at Thomas, so am hoping you all can help me add whatever magic you think is missing :-)

Attachments:
InfoLitProposal.docx