Online Course Design

Before embarking on any course design process, instructors should first check the Ryerson University course management policies, which have been developed by the Senate and the School of Graduate Studies:

- **Undergraduate Course Management Policy** [http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol145.pdf] Ryerson University Senate.
- **Graduate Course Management Policy** [http://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/senate/policies/pol151.pdf] Ryerson University School of Graduate Studies.

For more **general course design tips**, see the LTO's resource page: http://ryerson.ca/lt/resources/general_strategies/getting_started/course_design.html

L. Dee Fink' "Five Principles of Good Course Design" describes a good course, whether online or face-to-face, as one that:

- Challenges students to higher level learning
- Uses active forms of learning
- Gives frequent and immediate feedback to students on the quality of their learning
- Uses a structured sequence of different learning activities
- Has a fair system for assessing and grading students

Fink's model for Integrated Course Design suggests using the **situational factors** of the course (number of students, course level, elective/required, etc.) to answer the following questions:

1. **Learning goals and objectives:** What do I want students to learn?
2. **Feedback and assessment:** How will students (and the instructor) know if these goals are being accomplished?
3. **Teaching/learning activities:** What will the instructor and students need to do in order for students to achieve the learning goals?
4. **Ensure these components are integrated:** How do the different elements of the course support and reinforce each other? (Fink, 2005)

Another way to think about online course design is through the **ADDIE** model of instructional design. ADDIE stands for analyze, design, develop, implement, and evaluate. Below is a description of each of these levels with some potential steps to be completed (Bates; Flexible Learning Australia):

1. **Analyze:** identify all the variables that need to be considered when designing the course, such as learner characteristics, learners' prior knowledge, resources available, etc.
   a. Develop learner profiles
   b. Identify learning spaces and devices
   c. Research learning resources
   d. Determine delivery and assessment strategies
2. **Design:** this stage focuses on identifying the learning objectives for the course and how materials will be created and designed (for instance, it may include describing what content areas are to be covered and a

storyboard outlining what will be covered in text, audio and video and in what order), and deciding on the selection and use of technology, such as an LMS, video or social media;

    a. Storyboard the design
    b. Plan and test using prototypes
    c. Design online learning spaces
    d. Explore and refine technology options
    e. Consider using repositories

3. **Develop:** the creation of content, including whether to develop in-house or outsource, copyright clearance for third party materials, loading of content into a web site or LMS, and so on;

    a. Decide to insource/outsource
    b. Conduct texting
    c. Ensure security, backup, and access requirements are met
    d. Confirm licensing, copyright and accessibility

4. **Implement:** this is the actual delivery of the course, including any prior training or briefing of learner support staff, and student assessment;

    a. Prepare for e-learning
    b. Provide entry points for learners
    c. Conduct delivery and assessment
    d. Provide tools for learners

5. **Evaluate:** feedback and data is collected in order to identify areas that require improvement and this feeds into the design, development and implementation of the next iteration of the course.

    a. Collect, interpret and understand data
    b. Share results

Differences between face-to-face and online teaching

There are some special considerations to keep in mind when planning an online course. Creasman notes the following major differences between face-to-face and e-learning:

1. Online learning can be asynchronous, with students working independently on different tasks and at different times.
2. Participation is non-linear, with students participating in multiple discussions at once.
3. Online discussion often favors the written word.
4. Communication is slower because of the separation between students and instructor.
5. The volume of information in an online course is often much greater than in a face-to-face course.
6. The online model of learning transforms the instructor from being the "sole conduit of information and knowledge" into a facilitator, "helping students to not only navigate course concepts but to shepherd them into becoming autonomous learners" (Creasman, 2012).

Effective online course design should incorporate the following elements

1. **Have students work collaboratively** – this guided approach to active learning is especially effective with adult learners
2. **Have students make connection between concepts** – engage students with the material by connecting

it to their lived existence, whether that means allowing them to use examples from their workplace or from stories in the news.

3. **Build student-instructor interaction into the course** – because of the distance and time that separates instructors from students, instructors must ensure they establish a strong social presence in the course.
4. **Keep course content and assignments carefully balanced, allowing students an appropriate amount of time to assimilate the material** – the volume of information available to students in an online course can overwhelm students if they aren't given a suitable amount of time to work through the content.
5. **Match learning outcomes to appropriate technology** – course objectives should drive your choice of technology, not the other way around. "Mix up your technological offerings and match them not only to what you want your students to learn but also to how you want them to learn." When considering the addition of a new technology to your course, you may want to review this checklist for adapting new social learning tools: http://ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/programs/teachingtech/Web20Checklist.pdf
6. **Leave ample time to plan your course** – Online courses, unlike face-to-face courses, require a good amount of testing before they can be run. This testing should check to make sure that instructions are clear and that all the modules and links are working properly. Once the course begins and learners have begun interacting with content; it is highly recommended that you not change or move the content.
7. **Prepare your students to use the required technology** – don't assume that students will be familiar with the specific tools you will be utilizing. Try to determine their abilities before the course begins, and provide the necessary support. Also ensure that students are aware of any privacy or confidentiality concerns that they might encounter while using the technology, as well as the guidelines for acceptable behavior in online forums or discussions (Creasman, 2012).

Assessment in the Online Environment

Designing assessments for your course learning outcomes is a crucial part of course design. Terry Anderson from Athabasca University describes the essential aspects of assessment in an online environment:

1. "Student assessment of any kind requires that the teacher be explicit, fair, consistent, and as objective as possible"
2. "Detailed feedback provided as near in time as possible to the performance of the assessed behavior is most effective in providing motivation and in shaping behavior and mental constructs"
3. "Models of online learning also stress the capacity for direct communication and feedback from teacher to the student. This feedback is provided as an integral part of the discourse facilitation function of the online teacher."
4. Providing explicit direction, modeling behavior, and "implementing an explicit assessment framework" are important steps to take in the online environment, where different areas of course work may be subject to assessment (Anderson, 2004).
5. Finally, think about how your assessments align with your learning outcomes: "Alignment is the connection between learning objectives, learning activities and assessment. An aligned course means that your learning objectives, activities and assessments match up so students learn what you intend and you accurately assess what students are learning" (University of Colorado). For more on this topic, see our Teaching Tips handout, "Matching Assessments to Learning Outcomes" http://ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/resources/handouts/examslearningoutcomes.pdf

Work Cited

Anderson, T. & Elloumi, F. (2004). *Theory and Practice of Online Learning*. Athabasca University,
http://cde.athabascau.ca/online_book/index.html

Bates, A.W. (2015). *Teaching in a Digital Age*. BC Open Textbooks.
https://opentextbc.ca/teachinginadigitalage/

Center for Faculty Development. (2007). *Assessment & Instructional Alignment: An Online Tutorial for Faculty*. University of Colorado Denver, http://www.ucdenver.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/center-for-faculty-development/Documents/Tutorials/Assessment/index.htm

Creasman, P.A. (2012). Considerations in Online Course Design. *The Idea Center*. Idea Paper # 52.
http://www.theideacenter.org/sites/default/files/idea_paper_52.pdf

Fink. L.D. Five Principles of Good Course Design. Teaching & Learning Center, Cedar Valley College.
http://tlccvc.org/finksfive.htm

Fink, L. D. (2005). "Integrated Course Design." *Idea Paper #42*. http://ideaedu.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Idea_Paper_42.pdf

 "Implementing E-Learning" (2014). Flexible Learning Australia. http://flexiblelearning.net.au/infographic/