

Digital Literacy Course Redesign

Wilma M. Andrews

Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Information Systems
Richmond, VA. 23284-4000, 804-827-0956, wandrews@vcu.edu

Maurie Lockley

University of North Carolina Greensboro,
Department of Information Systems Supply Chain Management
Greensboro, NC 27402, 336-334-4983, maurie@uncg.edu

Abstract:

This session covers the several models of providing digital literacy courses in today's Schools of Business. Faculty are finding that though today's students are really good at the digital skills that will get them fired, they are not so good at the skills that will get them hired. From the budget side, administrators question the continued need of digital literacy courses and want to eliminate them. So what are some options to continue to provide training in digital literacy skills that will help students in their future careers and help administrators with budgeting of these courses? Three models will be discussed in this session: online/self-paced, emporium and flipped classrooms - as well as online products that support these courses. Attendee's participation will be encouraged during a time of sharing since there are several variations to these models that might be of interest to others.

Overview of Session:

Many administrators feel that today's students are very computer savvy and therefore funding is no longer needed for the continued offering of computer application and concepts courses. So many departments are having to look at alternatives to the traditional instructor led, 3 credit courses. This session will discuss three models currently in use and will appreciate input from attendees as to what others are doing.

Online/Self-Paced

The online/self-paced model has been used at one university for over 10 years. It was first proposed during severe state budget cuts. At that time, computer literacy and Office applications were being taught solely by adjuncts in 5 week courses with multiple sessions of up to 7 different courses taught during the semester. Traditional letter grades were given. The administration felt that these courses was no longer needed since students were being exposed to those skills in high school. Plus the feeling was that the only reason students took them was to boost their GPAs. So the decision was made to not offer them in the fall and the adjunct faculty were told they no longer had jobs.

However, it was soon realized that some other departments at the university had these courses listed as degree requirements so if they were going to continue to offer the courses, what other model could they use that would still give academic credit but not

impact the budget so heavily. Online/self-paced/pass-fail was decided upon and a graduate student and one adjunct were hired to get the program started.

Online was new and the publishers were all coming out with programs that provided online training and assessment at different levels. Without those online programs, this model could not have worked. It was also felt that being pass/fail and no longer GPA boosters, the registrations for these courses would eventually go away.

That was not the case at our university. The numbers have actually grown to more than the pre-online numbers though all courses are taught by one full-time faculty member so the move was successful as far as reducing budget costs.

Emporium Model

In an emporium, students work at their own speed using resources that fit their needs, learning styles, and schedules. A variety of materials covering the same learning goal is available. The differing materials provide parallel pathways to successfully mastering the learning goals. The Emporium allows students to choose learning materials depending on their learning style; and then work through the materials successfully. A majority of the work for a high performing student may be completed on-line. Students may freely work ahead and complete their module in advance of the scheduled calendar, thus freeing study time resources for investment in other classes.

The Emporium model improves student success because resources are employed to identify at-risk students and provide individualized assistance. An identified at-risk student receives email, text, and phone messages from the instructor or peer tutors requiring the at-risk student to come to the emporium facility for remediation. Should the student not respond Starfish or a similar system notifies advisors, coaches or counselors.

This method of course delivery uses a staffing model combining faculty, GAs, peer tutors and others who respond directly to students' specific needs and direct them to learning resources. Faculty roles migrate to a "guide on the side" model and away from the "sage on the stage" model of instructional delivery. Three years ago this model tested the peer tutoring model during iSchool delivery of the class. Students responded positively. Emporium delivered instruction in other disciplines indicates that students benefit from individualized instruction.

Course Flipping

This method of course delivery relies heavily on technology to facilitate, monitor and provide intervention (when needed) to students. Flipping the classroom forces students to perform the majority of their course work in an independent study closely monitored using technology. For example, faculty can spend less time on assignments and more time on broadening skills outside of the assignments including tips/tricks that might not be covered in the textbook assignments. Faculty still have face-to-face contact with students so budgets are not necessarily reduced. However, the technology used helps

to inform the instructor of classroom delivery so that the class time optimizes student learning and successful outcomes.

Online products

All of these models have become viable because of the development and support of online training and assessment packages from the major textbooks publishers - SAM (Cengage), MyItLab (Pearson) and SimNet (McGraw-Hill). Designed to be used with either hard copy textbooks or etexts, these online products provide simulations that work as though live in the application. They provide training modules and grading of those modules. They also now provide chapter projects and some even give faculty the opportunity to create and upload custom projects. And embedded in the projects are measures to detect cheating. In addition there are linked gradebooks within the product and/or downloads are possible to other course management systems such as Blackboard.

Digital Literacy courses – Are they still needed?

Faculty who teach the Office application computer concept courses still see a real need for digital literacy courses. As stated earlier, today's students are literate in many digital skills but not as knowledgeable on how to use those skills in a professional world. Many employers state communication skills are essential in their new hires. Digital literacy courses will help to fill the need to communicate both in a written format and in presentations.