Chapter 14

Development of a Distance Education Internet-Based Foundation Course for the MBA Program

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Course development is a task that requires a methodology if it is to result in a cohesive, well organized unit. This paper details the procedures to develop a distant education foundation course for the MBA program. All MBA courses using this methodology are delivered to students enrolled in several universities within the Wisconsin System.

INTRODUCTION

In the University of Wisconsin system, several institutions have been designated as non-doctoral institutions. Of the twelve institutions in this category, several provide an MBA program. Even though all of these institutions have been engaged in distance education media such as compressed video, two-way audio/video, and Internet delivery, they were basically functioning as independent institutions. Looking to provide efficiency and effectiveness in education, five of the institutions formed a consortium to supply foundation courses leading toward the MBA program. It was the intention of the consortium to allow each institution to continue to provide the MBA as they had envisioned it and, at the same time, to allow students to obtain prerequisite educational background prior to entering the MBA without eating up the resources needed to administer the graduate program.

In addition, the administration at each of these institutions wanted to have the
flexibility of providing enrolled students in the respective MBA programs the opportunity to take courses from another institution if they so desired.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

The increasingly volatile business environment that students face when they graduate drives the need for ongoing curricular improvement. Alumni report that their familiarity with technology and their ability to use it for self-training have enhanced their position in the business world. Integrating the use of learning technologies into the curriculum can provide students hands-on experience in using both the Internet and groupware applications, such as Lotus Notes.

By using both synchronous and asynchronous technologies, the institutions sought to achieve the goal of providing students throughout Wisconsin with access to quality educational opportunities while lessening the need for costly duplicate investment in educational resources. Through a careful mix of faculty and technology, consortium participants felt the quality of course offerings could be enhanced.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Asynchronous, computer-based courses have been offered for more than a decade, and research findings have been reported concerning several aspects of learning in asynchronous versus traditional classroom environments. These findings include:

• Higher satisfaction. Asynchronous students feel that the system is a valuable part of their learning (Wilson and Whitelock, 1998), that they have better access to professors, that classes are more convenient overall, and that they took a more active part in their courses (Hiltz and Wellman, 1997).

• Greater learning. Students take advantage of the extra time, course resources, and problem examples that are available (McIntyre and Wolff, 1998), and they frequently work harder to keep up with their classmates (Hiltz and Wellman, 1997).

• High enthusiasm. Asynchronous students are more enthusiastic, at least initially, and this frequently leads to production of an overwhelming amount of communication during the first few weeks of an asynchronous course at a pace which falls off later in the course (Hiltz and Wellman, 1997). This problem may be mitigated through system design, which can be used to structure message volume and, potentially, student enthusiasm to more sustainable levels (Stoney and Wild, 1998; Warren and Rada, 1998).

• Fewer interpersonal interactions. Asynchronous students find it more difficult to socialize (Wilson, Morrison, and Napier, 1997). They interact less and develop substantially fewer new friendships in class (Hiltz and Wellman, 1997).
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