Chapter 11

Standardizing Organizational Tools in the LMS for Your Digital Learning Course

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ABSTRACT

There has been an increase in digital learning course offerings in colleges. The level of training and support provided to guide faculty along the path of effective digital learning course development has varied across the field. The challenge arises in higher education and other educational environments in how to best assist faculty in creating an organized and engaging course for students in their digital learning spaces or LMSs. This chapter focuses on key features for successful course creation and examines how these core organizational tools may pave a critical pathway to present material in an organized manner that is easy for faculty to edit, as well as present in an orderly format that is easy for students to follow and therefore simplifies and even improves their learning process and overall success in their digital learning experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, both higher education and also K-12 educational environments have seen an increase in demand for online and other forms of digital learning (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018). The draw for students to self-select into digital learning courses vary. Some students may not be able to attend as they live on campus as a traditional student and administrative policies may restrict enrollment into online courses. For other students, demands on their time from their careers, their families, and other commitments may interfere with their ability to work independently from home uninterrupted, therefore face-to-face classes may be better options to allow time away from distractions. Some students
self-select into the various myriad of “distance education” courses (i.e., online, hybrid, flex, and many other varieties) out of a preference for flexibility in their learning environments, and also for reasons relating to preferred methods of learning. In fact, students often prefer online coursework for its flexibility when being taught content (Braun, 2008). The K20+ learning environment has noted online and digital learning course formats opening the college experience to nontraditional students. Professors are challenged with teaching courses that have been face-to-face, in an online and/or digital learning setting. The facets of course redesign are not always readily taught to faculty, even in institutions that house teaching and learning support centers. It is possible that faculty may feel more open to teaching using online and digital learning course methodology than in previous years with the advancement of Learning Management Systems, like Moodle, as well as digital materials like streaming videos, web tools, and synchronous discussion tools like Skype (Kaber, 2001).

With the increase in digital learning course offerings and inequitable levels of training and support provided to guide faculty along the path of effective digital learning course development, the challenge arises in higher education and other educational environments in how to best assist faculty in creating an organized and engaging course for students in their digital learning spaces or LMS’s. There is conflicting evidence about student performance in on campus versus online coursework. Some studies show students do better in on campus classes (Harlbut, 2017), while other studies find that online coursework is comparable in preparing students (Harrell, & Harris, 2006). This conflict suggested to the researchers that professors making the commitment to online courses must design excellent courses that are: well-organized, mimic activities in the on campus course, create activities that accomplish the same goals, and are compatible with the online environment. Faculty should support students with instructional materials (readings and videos) that allow them to be as successful in key assignments when they are learning online. The charge of creating excellence and comparable experiences is the focus of this chapter. We examined the use of core LMS instructional design tools, such as the Moodle Book, along with comparable tools in other LMS vendors outside of the Moodle brand, and describe how these core organizational tools may pave a critical pathway to present material in an organized manner. Additionally, we explore design that is easy for faculty to edit and present in an orderly format and that is easy for students to follow and therefore simplify and even improve their learning process and overall success in their digital learning experiences.

BACKGROUND

Creating a High Quality Digital Learning Course

Creating online and digital learning courses that are as pedagogically sound as on campus or “traditional” format courses is possible. Faculty benefit from training so that they can shift their content and pedagogy to this new medium. There may need to be some pedagogical shifts on the part of faculty and they must learn technology that will assist them in teaching in a digital setting in order to provide rich experiences for students (Brown, Lewis, & Toussaint, 2018). When developing courses, Puzziferro and Shelton (2008) discuss that it is a complex process and professors need to consider consistency, design, pedagogy, and framework. This is similar to the steps of designing an on campus class. However, professors must contend with the fact that they are not in the same room with students. They must consider what the best practices in the digital learning environment are and consider changes in their management