Description

From February 2014 to April 2014, I was a participant in a hands-on workshop presented by the Design and Development Services department called Designing and Developing an Online Course. The workshop was held twice a week on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. Participants in the workshop were faculty members at the Main Campus as well as Wayne College, who were able to interact with the on-campus participants using distance learning technologies. The two primary presenters were Mr. Steve Kaufman and Dr. Jill Phipps, two instructional designers who work in the Design and Development Services department.

During the workshop, we participants could access the workshop agenda, instructional materials, links to websites, and other useful resources using a Springboard (Desire 2 Learn) course site that was set up specifically for the workshop. To help us practice using the numerous tools and features of Springboard that were being demonstrated during the workshop, each participant was given a Sandbox course site to make changes without affecting an actual course that was being taught. During one of the last meetings, Mr. Kaufman took professional photographs of most participants, including myself, so that faculty could add photos to their online courses or social media profiles. There was also an opportunity for us to make professional video recordings that could be used as self-introductions or welcome messages to students in an online course.

Here are some of the topics that were covered during the Designing and Developing an Online Course Workshop:

- Designing a syllabus for an online course
- Planning the structure of an online course
- Creating an online grade book, dropboxes, and rubrics
- Creating discussion forums
- Creating quizzes and self-assessments
- Copyright, fair use, and Creative Commons
- Web 2.0 tools and apps to enhance online courses
- Making video introductions
- Using lecture capture and screencasting

During the workshop, I kept a blog describing what I learned from the workshop. There are blog posts from most, but not all, of the workshop sessions. At the end of the workshop, we were asked to present something we had learned from the workshop, such as improvements to an existing online course or how we had applied our knowledge. Since I was not teaching an online course at the time, I shared a Google Drive presentation with the group about what I could take away from the workshop.

Impact

Participating in this Designed and Developing an Online Course Workshop was such an exceptional field experience. Beyond what I learned about creating an effective online teaching and learning
Designing and Developing an Online Course Workshop Reflection

experience, I strongly believe that this workshop is a great model of what professional development should look like. First, I appreciated that the presenters went above and beyond to help meet the needs of all the participants by creating a Springboard course site where we could access materials outside of the workshop and Sandbox sites where we could practice using the skills that we were learning. Faculty members who were working on improving an existing an online course were also assigned an instructional designer who met with participants individually outside of the workshop and provide additional guided support. Since I was not teaching an online course, I did not work directly with an instructional designer. Second, the presenters treated everyone who attended the workshop with fairness, professionalism, and respect. Even though I was not a faculty member, I always felt comfortable attending the workshop and interacting with the other participants. Third, the two primary workshop presenters were supported by other Design and Development staff who were often in attendance during the workshop. These staff members were able to share unique stories and perspectives that added value to our discussions. More importantly, their presence at the workshop indicated to me that the Design and Development Services department works together as a cohesive team that supports each other well. Whenever I attend professional development, I want to feel like there are other people involved who have the same vision and share the same ideas as the person presenting. This adds credibility to what the presenter is trying to explain to the group.

Before the workshop, I was already somewhat familiar with the different tools and features that are available to instructors in Springboard (Desire 2 Learn) as a result of working as a Graduate Assistant in the College of Education. I also took a course called Postsecondary Technology Applications that was actually taught by Dr. Phipps, in which I created my own Springboard online learning module I had to add content, create discussion topics, make quizzes, and add interactive materials. I was still able to learn new ideas for using these tools from participating in the workshop. For example, I learned how to create group discussion forums, how to attach rubrics to dropboxes and grade items, and how to add images and videos to quizzes and discussion questions. I was not familiar with some of the “behind-the-scenes” tools that most instructors don’t know about, including the Intelligent Agents tool that sends alerts to students. In addition, we also learned how to add custom widgets to the course home page, such as a Twitter feed or YouTube video, and change the navigation bar of the course. Creating a custom home page can help improve the design of an online course by making important features more accessible to students. Mr. Kaufman compared the home page of a course to the “curb appeal” effect when looking for a house. If the home page of an online course looks visually interesting, then learners will be more likely to want to explore “what’s inside” the course. I feel that this was an excellent analogy, since everyone in the workshop could relate to it.

Beyond learning about the tools and features of Springboard, other workshop topics that I felt were extremely beneficial to me were the sessions on Web 2.0 tools and apps. Three helpful Web 2.0 tools that were described by Mr. Kaufman were Prezi, Haiku Deck, and Tubechop. Prezi allows anyone to create non-linear, interactive multimedia presentations by zooming into and out of slides and editing the path that relates ideas. Users can also add audio and YouTube videos to make the presentations more interesting. Prezi is a pedagogically-sound Web 2.0 tool because it helps
Designing and Developing an Online Course Workshop Reflection

learners visualize connections between ideas or the hierarchy that exists among ideas. Prezi is also a useful tool because presentations can be made and viewed offline. Haiku Deck allows anyone to create simple presentations using images that have Creative Commons licenses. Haiku Deck searches for images based on the words that are typed on each slide. Therefore, this is a useful tool for anyone who is concerned about not violating copyright. Tubechop allows anyone to create shorter clips of YouTube videos and embed the clips into websites or even online courses. This is a pedagogically-sound Web 2.0 tool because it helps instructors focus on content in a longer video that is relevant to what students need to learn. In addition, since the video clips are shorter than the original YouTube video, there is less time for students to get distracted and lose attention or interest. Three of the iPad apps that Mr. Kaufman showed us that I thought could be helpful for me in the future were Air Server, Teacher Kit, and Show Me. Air Server allows anyone to connect their iPad to their laptop and present their iPad to a larger group. Teacher Kit is a classroom management app that allows instructors to create digital seating charts, take attendance, and even record class participation. I feel that this would be a very helpful app for both higher education faculty members and K-12 teachers. Show Me is a great app that mimics what instructors can do with an interactive whiteboard in a classroom by drawing on the iPad. Instructors can also import images, such as maps or PowerPoint slides, into the videos and draw over them on the iPad. Instructors can export Show Me presentations as videos to post online. I feel that the Show Me app can be used across the curriculum, so it could appeal to instructors in a variety of academic disciplines. It would appeal specifically to instructors who are interested in creating a “flipped classroom” environment where lectures and demonstrations are posted online for students to watch outside of class. Since I am not sure whether I will be working in a K-12 or higher education setting in the future, I was pleased that most, if not all, of these Web 2.0 tools and apps can be used in almost any instructional context.

One workshop topic that was not particularly helpful to me was learning how to use the e-Portfolio tool. This new feature to Springboard (Desire 2 Learn) allows students to collect, organize, archive, and share examples of their work that illustrate their learning. Students can include documents, presentations, videos, graphics, and so much more in their e-Portfolios. Students can share these digital artifacts with others by exporting their e-Portfolio to the myDesire2Learn website. While the e-Portfolio tool sounds helpful, I thought it was confusing to use and offered very limited options compared to creating an actual e-Portfolio website. There were only a handful of layout options, and I was unsure whether there was actually a direct URL to access an e-Portfolio once students create it. At first, I was excited to learn about how to use the e-Portfolio tool because I thought that students in the Instructional Technology program, including me, could use it for their own personal e-Portfolios for graduation. However, I was disappointed that the e-Portfolio tool was not as user-friendly as I hoped and would not recommend it to others.

While completing the workshop, I realized that designing and developing an online course is truly a collaborative effort. It requires teamwork and support among instructors, instructional designers, multimedia production staff, IT support personnel, and even students. After all, providing students with convenient, yet dynamic learning opportunities is a primary goal of designing and developing online courses. Everyone involved in the design and development process should have the same
vision and goals, yet it is acceptable to have different ideas and perspectives about how to achieve those goals. Even though this workshop was about designing and developing online courses, the same principles of teamwork, collaboration, and shared vision should be applied when planning other examples of technology integration. This is true not just at the higher education level, but at the K-12 level as well. If there are competing interests and not everyone has the same vision for a project, then a technology integration project might not be as successful. While differing opinions are acceptable, everyone involved in a technology integration project needs to come together for the goal of improving teaching and learning and meeting the needs of today’s 21st-century students.

**Intent**

After completing this workshop, I will be able to directly apply many of the skills that I learned as a part-time faculty member at The University of Akron this fall. I will be teaching a completely online class called Multimedia/Hypermedia for the last seven weeks of Fall Semester 2014 while the full-time instructor is on leave. This role will give me a unique opportunity to develop my skills as an online instructor. The full-time instructor already has all of the instructional materials (documents, videos, discussion questions, rubrics, and other items) created and organized well within the course. I have already taken the course as part of my graduate program, so I am familiar with the structure and layout of the course. Since the full-time instructor (Dr. I-Chun Tsai) has already developed the course and taught it several times, my role will be more of a facilitator instead of an instructional designer. Completing this workshop, however, has prepared me well to succeed in this role. I will be able to respond to students’ questions that are posted in Dr. Tsai’s Virtual Office. I will serve as the moderator for several Blackboard Collaborate class meetings to review the instructional materials that are posted in Springboard, review requirements for class projects, and answer questions. I will be able to provide feedback to students in the discussion boards and post students’ grades online. I will be able to post news items or send out class e-mails if I need to remind students about important deadlines or provide suggestions if students are having trouble with parts of an assignment. Since this class is very technical and asks students to learn how to use HTML code, I might use the News Feed on the course home page to post “tips of the week” or other helpful suggestions for students. Since I am familiar with the navigation, tools, and features of Springboard, the university’s learning management system, there will hopefully be a seamless transition when I begin teaching Dr. Tsai’s class this fall. I will recommend to her that I am involved in the course from the beginning of the fall semester, so that students know who I am and I have the chance to interact with the class.

In addition to being able to apply what I learned in the Designing and Developing an Online Course workshop this fall, I can also apply the skills and knowledge to my overall professional teaching career as a whole. Designing a course with aligned objectives and assessments, providing specific feedback to students, using interactive multimedia tools to enhance course content and appeal to diverse learners, and treating students with fairness and respect are not strategies that are unique to online courses. These strategies, and so many others, can be applied to all teaching situations. I hope to be able to apply what I have learned in this workshop no matter what and where I might be
teaching in the future. I have used Haiku Deck, one of the Web 2.0 tools featured in the workshop, to create several presentations for my blog and other classes. Even if I am teaching online at another university that uses another learning management system, I would still be able to take what I learned in this workshop and apply it to that specific instructional content. I also plan to apply for a middle school teaching position at a K-12 online public school here in Ohio, so I can definitely cite specific skills or knowledge from the workshop in my application or during the interview process. If I get a position, then I would be able to put these skills into practice and give students a quality online learning experience. Overall, this workshop was an extremely valuable professional development experience that will help me become a more effective online educator and more informed decision-maker in the future.