Online Programs at NDNU: MPA Online and Beyond

Presented by: Jordan Holtzman

Professional Development Day
February 17, 2015
The evidence shows...

• Academia is embracing online education!
  – 69% of Chief Academic Officers: “Online education is critical to the long-term strategy of an institution.”
  – More proponents, fewer detractors of online education as technologies evolve and online degree quality improves.
    • 67% of academic professionals rated online courses as having the same or higher quality than face-to-face courses.
    • Online enrollments are growing 10 times faster than overall higher education enrollments.
    • More than 70% of public colleges are offering fully online degree programs.
    • 7.1 million college students have taken at least one course online (about half of all students enrolled)
    • The advent of social media and collaborative technologies have given rise to new models of education facilitated by digital/online technology.

• No longer “a choice” – online education is a necessity!

(Source for above statistics: http://www.ccconline.org)
Where are we?

• Online MPA Program
  – Reached 60+ enrollments at one point
  – Currently about 35 enrolled
  – Graduated our first “cohort” in Spring ‘14
Benefits of Going Online

• Help build our enrollments  
• Prestige and marketability for NDNU  
• Optimize our face-to-face and “hybrid” class experiences  
• Work with cutting-edge open-source education technologies (i.e. moodle, jing, cultura, etc.)  
• Provide flexibility for students and instructors
Online Best Practices – What We’ve Learned

• Timely, frequent feedback is the single most important success factor
• Students need to know you’re there, listening and engaged
• Clear layout and logical progression of course activities
• Repeated instructions (think road signs)
• The more multi-media (text, graphics, video, sound), the better
• “Fancy technology does not a great course make…”
• Only use “proven” technologies in courses
• Social engagement matters a lot
• Use online attendance quizzes
• “Social” courses are better suited for online modalities than technical courses are
How do online courses get created?

- Consultation between Subject Matter Expert (SME) and Deltak to brainstorm a suitable format
- Transform on-ground assignments into online formats
- Create brand new activities / assignments as appropriate
- Modify assignment / activity verbiage as necessary
- Create course map
- Deltak populates the Engage instance using course map contents
- Instructor and Deltak do QA check of course
- Instructor and Director approves: Course is ready for “go-live”
- Run course, note issues and refine for next “go-live” cycle
Creating online courses: Challenges

• The technology is the easy part...
• Finding the right format for the course: What will keep students engaged the most?
• Document versioning has been a big challenge
• Several rounds of revision for:
  – Instructional Clarity
  – Consistency of terms across courses
  – “Bloom-ifying” learning outcomes
  – Language edits to course content
  – “Balancing” workloads
  – Refining discussion questions to generate more/better discussion
  – Integrating best practices into courses
Transforming the Traditional Class

• How do we transform the traditional class into an online format?
  – Engage Activity Menu
  – Videos, Text (preferably in book/”sectioned” format), Links
  – Narrated Presentations

• How do we conduct group meetings and make online presentations?
  – Group Forums (several different kinds)
  – Skype / Big Blue Button / Other Conferencing Platforms
  – Email (yes, students still use it!)

• Instructors’ preferences vary as to how “collaborative” they want their online courses to be.
Course Structure and Planning

• Every aspect of the course must be planned to a “t”.
  – Every assignment, reading, activity, test, paper, instruction, etc. must be spelled out in great detail in the right places (syllabus, introductions, in close proximity to the “action space”)
  – Very little flexibility to change the course sequence once the course has started
  – What is “reasonable” for a 7-week workload?
  – Online students hang on your every word...
Detailed Instructions: Example

• Instructions (think road signs) must be detailed enough to enable students to properly complete assignments

“Research project proposal is due in week 3.”

NOT GOOD ENOUGH


BETTER
Discussion Forums

• Discussion Forums are the “heart and soul” of most online courses.
  – Examples:
    • Instructor describes a “conflict scenario” and asks students how they would respond to it. Then students critique each others’ responses.
    • Student-created DQs: Used in the ‘Leadership Concepts’ course
  – Developing good Discussion Questions is an inherently difficult task.
    • See what’s working (or not) and modify over time
  – Super challenging to develop DQs for more “technically-oriented” courses
    • Solution: Use DQs to elicit such things as:
      – What was most difficult for you when learning this concept?
      – What remains unclear to you about this topic?
      – What are some of the practical limitations of these models and how might we compensate for them?
Course Openings

• Planning and Communicating the “Pre-Work”
  – Courses open the Friday before the semester begins
  – Book orders needed well before the start date
  – Instructor and student introductions / icebreakers
  – Week “0” Instructions
  – Being lenient... 😊
  – Consider not having anything due in Week 1
Grading and Attendance

• Rubrics for graded items are preferable
• Use a limited but comprehensive # of dimensions in each rubric (example: “Content” and “Expression”)
• Very easy for students to track grades at any moment (double-edged sword!)
• “Extra” communication in initial assignments / discussion
• Attendance Policy (Missing equivalent of 4+ hours)
• Use attendance quizzes!!
Finding / Creating Engaging Content

• Finding and developing engaging content
  – YouTube/Vimeo videos
  – Links to other sites
  – RSS Feeds
  – Blogs and social media properties
  – Creating our own content
Grand Tour of Engage