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DEVELOPING A TECHNICAL LITERACY COURSE

FOR ONLINE STUDENT SUCCESS AT ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY

by

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Abstract

Online learning via the Internet has grown nationwide in the past few years. The demand has risen, due partly to the fact that adult learners are returning to college with the intent of gaining or completing a degree. Time constraints and accessibility contribute to the increase in popularity. However, with the influx of inexperienced learners, online completion rates have the potential to drop lower than their campus counterparts. In order to prepare students for success as determined by completion, encouraging successful student characteristics coupled with an understanding of adult learning theory must be employed in this online course creation. This paper outlines the creation of such a course, and suggests a schedule of topics to be covered.

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Introduction

The focus of this paper is to outline the implementation of an online course that teaches student success skills for Roosevelt University's online distance education program, and how it fits in with the Bachelor of Professional Studies. The BPS degree is a time-shortened degree for adult learners, aged 24 years and older. This course will be the means to provide students with a foundation for success in distance learning, as well as a foundation for basic management skills, whether personal or professional.

For the purposes of this project, completion rate will be used to determine student success, with success defined as passing a course with a grade of "D" or better. A failing grade or a grade of "I" (incomplete) is indicative of not completing the course.

In a broad perspective, the skills developed by this course can carry beyond Roosevelt's walls and "virtual classrooms". The success of individuals in a career setting may also be determined by their technological skills. As the world becomes firmly embedded in the technology era, workers unskilled in basic computer usage will surely get left behind, but add to that a lack of basic organizational skills, and it could mean the difference between getting promoted or losing a job.

In a more narrow perspective, providing a course in basic technology use as well as building positive (or "good") study habits and organizational skills, students will have a better chance to achieve success in completing their chosen degree.

Technical Literacy Course Development

In developing this course, research is being conducted to find the student's areas of deficiency, as well as potential solutions to those deficiencies. A committee of faculty members has been formed to develop the core content, and information has been documented with regard

to past teaching experiences, both online and on campus.

It has been noted that as more students who may be less technically literate choose to take an online course, the completion rate can potentially lower. I theorize that this may be because students are looking for a "convenient" way to complete their degree, without regard to their own personal learning styles, study habits, and their technological knowledge. According to Doherty (2000), there has been little research done on preexisting student characteristics that may lead them to be a successful online learner, in other words, what they already know before taking an online course. This includes the self-perception of "readiness" to be a self-directed learner. In some cases, a student may not know what they don't know. The development of this course would provide less technically literate students a foundation for that readiness, and develop those characteristics that are found in successful online learners.

In January of 2000, the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) released literacy competency standards for higher education:

The information literate individual is able to:

- Determine the extent of the information needed.
- Access needed information effectively and efficiently.
- Evaluate the information and its sources critically
- Incorporate selected information into his or her knowledge base
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally.

In addition, the ACRL goes on to state that in developing information literate students and helping them "learn how to learn", higher education will provide a foundation for growth and

development beyond the collegiate experience. They go further to include distance education, and encourage that distance learning students should have comparable experiences to "on campus" students. The ACRL's information literacy definition forms the basis of the course. In addition, the model set by Wands and Le Blanc (2001) is being implemented to ensure that the following characteristics will be present in the course:

- Student Centeredness
- Motivation to Learn
- Activity relevant to the topic
- Reward, recognition, and reinforcement of successful efforts
- Transfer of learning by application of new skills
- Environment that is supportive and safe

This is known as the SMARTE model. Additionally, Knowles' (1984) theory of Andragogy can be applied to online learning and create a definition of student success characteristics. The theory assumes certain learning processes that we can use to define student success characteristics:

- That adult learners balance life responsibilities with the demands of learning;
- They are autonomous and self directed;
- They bring with them a tremendous amount of life experiences;
- They need to connect the learning to their knowledge base;
- There must be value in the learning;
- They are goal oriented and know for what purpose they are learning new information;
- Learning is self-initiated and tends to last a long time.

From this list of assumptions about adult learners, we can develop a list of desirable characteristics that an adult learner in the BPS program would need to possess to be successful in an online learning course.

- Self-starter
- Motivated
- Organized
- Independent worker
- Basic understanding of computer use
- Active learner
- Good written communication

Online courses require students to be self-starters, and are by nature asynchronous and learner centered, and it has been found that more autonomous students have a higher achievement rate in this type of course because they require less direction and interaction than less autonomous students. In fact, these types of students prefer to work independently, and have higher achievement and tend to complete their courses they start (Kennedy, 2001). By encouraging students to be independent and autonomous, students will have a greater chance at achieving success in online courses.

Implementation of the Technical Literacy Course

In the course implementation stage, a learning model adapted from Chickering and Gamson's *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* will be employed. This model has since been updated to include technology (Chickering, A. W. , Ehrmann, S.C. 1996) in the teaching and learning process. The model is as follows, with solutions for application in this course using Roosevelt's Blackboard course delivery portal:

1. Good practice encourages contacts between students and faculty.
    - With Blackboard as the online delivery portal, there are many built-in features by which students and faculty can collaborate. E-mail is one of the features. Live Chat and the Asynchronous Discussion Board are others.
    - Since this is an introduction to technology, information from the instructor will have to prepare the students for online communication.
    - The instructor will demonstrate good practice by being "accessible" to students, and participating in all aspects of the course.
2. Good practice develops reciprocity and cooperation among students.
    - Discussion Boards and email will serve to provide students with access to each other, and strive to build an online community.
    - Learning is a very social function, and group work and teams will enhance that.
3. Good practice uses active learning techniques.
    - An online course by nature makes students active participants. The ability to sit in the back of a classroom and be lectured to is non existent. A student must actively participate by seeking out the lectures, posing questions to faculty and classmates, and interact with the learning portal.
    - Other practices may include online quizzing functions, group work, and asynchronous chat sessions.
    - Greater learning takes place when a student is interactive with the content. A course like this will require students to interact with technology via Internet techniques and searches, and research procedures.
4. Good practice gives prompt feedback.

- Using the capabilities of the Blackboard portal will provide feedback, but the instructor must also be fully engaged.
- Discussion boards can provide asynchronous feedback, while live chat sessions can provide immediate feedback.

5. Good practice emphasizes time on task.
    - Time management skills are enhanced by the tools that Blackboard provides. Online calendar features as well as task monitors all assist in this.
    - Realistic projects with realistic goals will provide students with "mini-successes" along the way to completing the final project.
6. Good practice communicates high expectations.
    - Setting the goals and objectives for this course will tell the students what they can expect to learn.
7. Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.
    - In this adult program, all students bring with them a multitude of experiences. Adult learners are unique in the respect of their life experiences. Bringing those experiences together in a course, and sharing those experiences bring the online community together.

The following course schedule will be proposed initially to the faculty committee for consideration. Each member of the committee will be able to voice their concerns, and express their ideas to supplement or change any of the modules.

12-Week Course Format and Topics

Required Texts:
A Concise Guide to College Success, Carpe Diem. John Arthur. 2004 Pearson/Prentice Hall. ISBN: 0-13-112934-1

Student Resource Guide to the Internet, Student Success Online. Cynthia B. Leshin. Prentice Hall. ISBN: 0-13-621079-1

Topic	Week / Tasks
Module One: Course and Online Orientation	**1 - 2**
Week 1	
Explore the course site.	Update your personal profile in the Blackboard portal Introductions and icebreaker exercise Read online welcome from instructor
Using email properly • Proper subject heading • Writing an email • Signing an email Adding attachments	Send an email to the instructor, follow procedures as laid out in this lesson.
Week 2	
Terminology	Read terminology and definitions in the Course Information area.
Introduction to learning and the Internet	Read Chs. 1 – 3, Arthur Read Chs. 1-2, Leshin
Have questions about the course? Have questions on the terminology?	Week 2 Discussion. Post any questions you may have about the course or the terminology.
Module Two: College Success Skills	**3 - 5**
Week 3	
Time management skills	Read online lecture found in Week 3 folder.
Create a time management calendar, using the template found in the Course Information area.	Post your calendar to the discussion board. Has this exercise helped you get organized? Are your expectations realistic?
Roosevelt policies and procedures	Read the RU policy on the RU website: www.roosevelt.edu Read Ch. 8, Arthur

Topic	Week / Tasks
Week 3 writing assignment.	Write a one-page report on "What plagiarism means to me". Post your paper to the Week 3 Discussion Board. Read your classmates reports, and compare to your own. Are there differences? What did you learn from doing this report?
Week 4	
Critical Thinking	Read Ch.4, Arthur
Active Reading • How to read journal articles and referenced material	Read Ch.5, Arthur Week 4 Discussions: Post your thoughts to each discussion, tell us why. Read your classmates postings. Do you agree or disagree? Do your classmates make a point that you have never thought about?
Week 5	
Writing papers for college level courses.	Read Ch. 7, 9, 10, 11, Arthur
Module Three: Technology Basics	**Weeks 6 - 10**
Tech basics	Read Ch.--- of text Read online lecture
Trouble shooting	Discussions
Browser basics • What's a cookie? • Clearing the cache and temporary files	Menus and settings
Getting around the internet	Take an online quiz
Determining what is useful on the web • Webquest	Pick a topic, and create a web quest. Outline useful vs. useless websites. Explain why you think they are. Use the template located in the Course Information area. Read Ch 4, Leshin

Topic	Week / Tasks
Module Four: Intermediate Technology and Skills	**Week 11 - 12**
File types and their uses File extensions • .doc • .pdf • .gif • .jpg • Resolution and using images • Raster vs. vector • .rtf	Tech talk Read online lecture Post questions to the discussion board.
Using Web-editing software	**FINAL PROJECT:** Develop a simple web page using web-editing software. Post it on the Internet free spaces by week 11. Share the URL in the Discussion Board. Browse your classmate's web pages.
	EXTRA CREDIT: New digital camera? Post a picture. Choose the correct file type and resize the image to proper resolution. Post in the Discussion Board. No camera? Then practice scanning an image, and post it.
	Discussion
Reflections and wrap up.	Discussion

Text books will be evaluated from the above selection, and were chosen by myself in the role of course developer. One additional text will be chosen to cover the areas of technology and software. As of this writing, no text was found. Faculty members will serve as "consultants" in the final approval of the project. By bringing their expertise and experiences in both the physical classroom and virtual classroom, crucial information will be shared, and result in a knowledge base that can be accessed by all within the program. The result will ultimately be a sharing of

resources uniformly, so that all students will be able to have the benefit of the entire faculty, without differentiating from classroom to classroom, or classroom to online. This is not to say that each student's experience will be mandated to be exactly the same, but all students will be encouraged to be creative and contribute to the best of their ability.

Conclusions

With the creation of this course, the students enrolled in the BPS program will gain the skills they need to succeed even if they have little or no experience in college. This will also foster foundational skills that translate to professional and personal tasks, and heighten the desire to complete the program, and perhaps they will achieve their goals, one of which is to graduate with their baccalaureate degree. To me, this is the most important aspect of this course development.

In addition to offering this as a complete course to supplement the BPS program at Roosevelt University, each module will be able to be delivered as individual components of a professional training series that can be offered to corporations seeking to increase the literacy level of their current staff. Just-in-time training is a widely accepted method of upgrading employees' levels of performance. In these days of multitasking, everything must be able to be re-purposed in many different ways, and continuously undergo change and restructuring.

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