

Consultation with Online Learning

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SWK 5203 Social Work Research

It was so nice to meet with you, Dr. Harris. Thank you for listening to me go on and on for over an hour! Don't hesitate to get back with me on solving more manageable chunks at a time.

Contacts

Instructional Designer: Schedule follow ups to further discuss teaching online and building your course with Melissa Padalecki at melissa.padalecki@utsa.edu.

How are your Blackboard skills? Blackboard Tech Support and Training: For help learning to use Blackboard and assistance with technical issues email onlinelearning@utsa.edu, call 210.458.4057, or walk in during business hours at MS 1.03.08.

Library: Contact your librarian for assistance locating content such as books, articles, images, videos, and publisher materials that are legal to put in your online course <http://lib.utsa.edu/services/find-your-librarian/>. The library's copyright group is also a valuable resource: copyright@utsa.edu.

Reference Materials

You will receive a follow up email after your consultation meeting that includes:

- **Planning Worksheet:** Guides you through outlining your entire course. It ensures you align your learning objectives with the content, assignment, and assessments you will use, organized by semester weeks.
- **Syllabus Feedback:** I added comments throughout your existing syllabus and highlighted areas of special attention.
- **Syllabus & Schedule Templates:** Guides you through completing a detailed syllabus and schedule that clearly explains all details students need to know, up front on the first day of class.
- **Syllabus & Schedule Checklist:** Helps you organize the course schedule students need in order to know what they are supposed to do and when.
- **Learning Module Outline Template:** This item will help guide you through planning and organizing a single learning module.
- **Reference Cards:** Fact sheets on contact hours, the cQual rubric for ensuring your course is high quality, creating online content, facilitating your course, handout on collaboration tools in BB, and tips for sustainable lectures.
- **A Blackboard Development Shell:** This is an empty course for you to build in, which you will then copy to your live course shell at the beginning of the semester you will teach. I will also be enrolled to give guidance when you start building your course.

Syllabus and Schedule Review

My feedback on your syllabus is to assist you in preparing to teach this course fully online. Do not hesitate to contact me with questions as the need arises throughout this process. Online Learning has a team of designers like myself as well as development specialists, trainers, and tech support to assist you.

My goal in your consultation is to introduce you to a wide array of information about teaching online, but also encourage you to realize the process is typically a 4 to 6 month project and we will not be able to discuss everything you need to know to be successful. Consider this information as a starting point and then we can meet again to go further into details along the way.

Considerations before you begin this journey:

1. What is the time frame you are working in for this face-to-face to online transition? A shorter time frame will directly affect decisions in building your online course.
2. For how many students is enrollment capped at? Class size will indicate concerns in how you create activities. Larger courses can be more difficult to manage alone without considerations for how you build the course.
3. Are there any special issues when teaching this course face-to-face? If each semester a group of students struggle with a specific topic or assignment or skill for example. The general rule is that if an issue occurs in a traditional classroom environment, it will persist (and often be worse) in an online course if not directly planned for.
4. Will you be finding or creating content? Copyright and accessibility concerns are legally your responsibility to consider before you use other people's work or when you create something from scratch. This includes, but is not limited to formatting documents to be screen reader friendly, using public domain images, writing alternative text for images, and having closed captioning for any videos. The library has experts in copyright to assist you in securing permissible materials for your course. Please be advised that the classroom use exemption does not apply to an online course:
<https://www.lib.umn.edu/copyright/using-images-teaching>.
5. Ensuring your students time on task each week aligns to the contact hours for earning credit is your responsibility. A 3 credit course equals 9 hours of time on task, meaning any work for your course such as reading, checking messages, discussing, writing papers should add up to 9 hours per week for a 16 week course. New online teachers often have too little or too much for students to do. There is no official process for calculating this time other than your personal estimates on how long you feel they should spend on a task or how long it takes you to complete it yourself.

Tips

1. **Faculty most often say this experience is more time consuming than they anticipated.** If you are working within a short time frame, please reach out for time saving solutions. Build the course with your foundational basics and then add "bells and whistles" as time permits. Address the hardest topics first in the event there is no existing content to teach your students and you need to create it.
2. **Be careful to maintain consistency.** This may sound trivial, but it is common to see a syllabus say one thing, the online course to say something different, and the schedule to not match the information as well. Often a syllabus will indicate a % of a grade, but the course assignment has another value. This misalignment or inconsistency results in confused students and increases your workload managing the course during the live semester.
3. **Building accessible content before you need it will spare you the work time correcting the issues in the event a student with disabilities enrolls in your course.** Remember that Blackboard is designed to allow quick flexibility in changing settings for one student, but there is no quick fix for not having closed captions or transcripts available to accompany your lectures. The time consuming work done up front will avoid hassles down the road. Court rulings are favoring this approach and a lawsuit is the last thing you want.

4. **Plan for participation times.** For example, you want your students to have a class or group discussion this week about their upcoming research project? Don't set the due date for Sunday evening and forget about it. Design your instructions to enforce this expectation. Tell them they need to post their input by Tuesday at midnight CT so that there is time to reply to one another during the rest of the week. Login and add your input to extend the conversations. Anticipating that not all students will make time and be proactive without this guidance (so you will end up with 30 posts at the end of the week and no actual discussion) will prevent disappointing participation levels and poor grades.
 5. **Offer online office hours or optional virtual Q&A sessions in real time.** Not everyone will be able to attend so provide a variety of scheduled options to be as accommodating as possible. At the very least, provide blocks of time where you will respond to emails immediately.
 6. **Consider your communication plan carefully.** Your current syllabus indicates you accept assignment through email. We do not recommend this practice in an online course due to the legal need to maintain records. By using the BB assignment tool strictly as the way to receive homework or papers, you will not have to deal with saving files and Online Learning manages the archiving according to UTSA's policy for you. Furthermore, choosing the course messages tool has similar advantages. All communications related to your course will remain within your course rather than being delivered to your email inbox. This is helpful for a few reasons:
 - 1) When you send an email from a BB course there is no record of the "sent" item. This is an issue for you and students. You need it for record purposes in the event a student contests a grade possibly, while they may need it to follow up on. Of course, you could copy it to yourself, but chances are someone will forget to do so at some point and it can be a frustrating situation. The course messages tool does not function that way. It saves your sent items.
 - 2) All messages related to your course will be archived so future issues if they arise will be able to be dealt with efficiently.
 - 3) Course messages require everyone to log in to the course regularly, including you and the students. The more often people visit the course, the more likely they will successfully keep up, learn, and complete the work.
- You can also use the Announcements tool to reach out to the entire class. Announcements are great because they allow students to go back and revisit the post in case they forgot what was going on. The most successful online teachers post at least a weekly announcement reviewing what happened the prior week and what is coming up next, just to check in and keep everyone on the same page. Students really like this. You can even set these up before hand to automatically occur. The announcements tool has an option to send an email when that announcement is posted. This is nice because it will register to students' email account that they need to "come back to class" on occasion.
7. **Use self-recorded videos to answer questions that multiple students bring up.** Informal, low tech, and quick to create, just type your script to be sure and close caption them in the Media Library before linking to your Blackboard course or talk with one of our developers to consider YouTube or other tech options.
 8. **Work with the library to locate content.** They have institutional level access beyond our office or your personal reach that will save you from reinventing the wheel. You will spend less time creating and more time organizing materials, which will help the quality of your course within a reasonable time frame.

Assignment and Assessment Review

Most of your assignments will transfer directly to the online environment with only tweaks to the instructions. Research papers and discussions will simply become assignments to allow students a place to turn the paper in and receive their feedback and grade as well as a location to have the discussion in the online forum.

However, your in-class assignments will need consideration to identify exact what you usually do and how that can transfer suitably into the online class. We can meet again to plan these activities.

Development Plan

1. **Use the planning worksheet to layout your course details.** This document is designed to become your course schedule at the end of the process. Errors, misinformation, and unaligned course goals to content often occur when a planning worksheet is not used and referred back to regularly.
2. **Identify the parts of your course that do and do not work online.** For example, mandatory attendance at an in-person event may not be possible for a student studying abroad or serving in the military. Is your intent in having that policy to exclude students out of the area? It is best to state any such conditions in ASAP for students to be notified before enrolling in the course.
3. **Decide how you will change the parts that do not work.** Anticipate how you will handle problems that come up. Explicitly state all info, no matter how trivial such as where do they click to find the item, how do they turn it in, what do they do if they have an issue. While in a face-to-face course you may refer them back to the syllabus, an online course needs to have instructions in each part of the course. You don't want them to have to leave what they are doing to go back and find out what the instructions are somewhere else. This increases the chance they feel lost, confused, and frustrated. Did you have a class discussion in your traditional course? How will you replicate the learning online? Assign a monitor to facilitate or participate yourself to model expectations? Quality is more important than quantity or you will find students put forth less effort because they are trying to move on to accomplish things more quickly. Be critical in choosing your assignments as well to reduce your workload. Reading multiple comments from every single person in your course and responding is extremely different than people taking turns in the classroom and eventually running out of time.
4. **Use the syllabus template to rewrite your syllabus.** Pay close attention to removing verbiage related to the classroom. Ensure all instructions are thorough by not using phrases like, I will provide additional details later in the semester." Avoid leaving anything to assumptions and consider how your students will accomplish each assignment so you can address those steps explicitly. Your communication plan and grading scheme are extremely important. How will you be available to help students who have trouble? How do you want them to help each other? How will you host your office hours? When? How many points is everything worth? How do they earn an A, B, C, D, or F. What about late work? Makeups if they missed a deadline? Do all your points add up correctly?
5. **Use the schedule template to rewrite your schedule.** If you completed the planning worksheet, this will be as simple as deleting the objectives column and making the document portfolio rather than landscape layout. The learning objectives are useful for students, but placing them in the BB learning module will allow students to connect them to the content. The schedule is instead simply used as a guide for what to do and when. Creating the syllabus and schedule separately will allow your students to easily refer to the schedule often. A table format is easier to follow and should always include exact due dates and times with the time zone. Your students may be anywhere in the world. Using separate columns for content they will consume (readings, lectures) versus assignments they will do (papers, tests). Place all info in order of the date it will occur, for example instead of listing important dates at the top, incorporate those dates into the place they fall within the schedule.
6. **Build Your Blackboard Course.**
 - Your navigation menu should have a link for each major area you will have students visit.
 - You should have an orientation section with a picture and bio introducing you at minimum or even better a short video, and some of the most important items from your syllabus: like the course description, objectives, required materials, and even a grading scheme summary. Don't worry that

info is also in your syllabus, repetition in an online class is a really great thing for supporting students and avoiding confusion.

- You should have a direct link to your syllabus and schedule.
- You should have a technical support section. Students have trouble, they need help, so covering this information before they need it will reduce your workload and prevent issues from becoming overwhelming.
- A discussion board with a Q and A forum. Your communication plan should address how you expect students to interact in this space. To reduce the amount of email you receive, most instructors tell students to post their non-private questions in the Q and A forum and encourage them to help one another. You still need to check in and participate though to avoid incorrect information being spread and to maintain instructor presence.
- Additional discussion board forums for each homework assignment/paper if you want to encourage communication amongst students. Assigning discussion activities that require students to talk about projects is a good way to build community and address what would be an attendance policy in a face-to-face course.
- Your content should be grouped into learning modules that contain all the items students need to complete that section of work.

Course Organization Recommendations

I will layout a recommended organization for your course in a development shell and enroll you as the instructor. Use the link in your follow up email to access Blackboard or log in from <http://my.utsa.edu/>.