

Successful Distance Education

It is important when designing a course for distance education that several key factors are taken into consideration. Most importantly of course, would be to continue to ensure that the student remains the key focus of instruction, and not the technology used to deliver the material (Simonson, M., Smaldino, S., Albright, M., & Zvacek, S., 2009). Whatever the technology used, it is important that the course provide effective collaboration between other students and the instructor.

A study conducted by David Kennedy and Tim Duffy showed that online education was most successful when collaboration was high in a course. The collaboration should not end at this level, though. The instructor should work collaboratively with other knowledgeable staff and the support personnel. As Instructional Designers, we may not be experts in the fields we are creating instruction for. By creating a team to help design the instruction initially, and collaboratively listening to others design inputs, the chances for creating successful instruction will increase.

In the design of the course, it is important that this collaborative nature is designed into every lesson (Kennedy, D. & Duffy, T.) as well. Students must communicate with each other, and the instructor, either through synchronous or asynchronous discussions. This allows students to interact and develop a better understanding of the material. Providing the students this interactivity helps relieve some of the boredom and isolation that many students in distance education feel (Ginsburg, L., 1999). A study showed that as student interactions increased, the students became more comfortable with asking questions and felt the instructor was doing a better job (Harnar, M., Brown, S., & Mayall, H., 2000).

When creating lessons, the instructor must use technology they are comfortable with (Burge, L. Sept. 2007). It is more important for a lesson to work reliably every time for every student, then to have the newest technology that may not be properly supported and fails constantly (pg. 11). This doesn't mean Instructional Designers should ignore new technology however. Instructors should constantly be on the lookout for new and useful technology as part of their profession. The key is to practice and ensure that the technology is better than existing tools and that it is stable for the variety of users you may have in the course.

A final point of consideration is equivalency. The course should deliver the same concepts and level of instruction as a traditional classroom, but changed to create the most successful instruction given the different delivery method (Simonson, M., et al). A course given in a class with a live lecture does not have to be delivered exactly the same over the internet, in fact doing this would be detrimental to the instruction. The designer must adapt the instruction to provide the best instruction at all times, not the same instruction.

Resources

Burge, L. (2008). 'Crafting the future': pioneer lessons and concerns for today. *Distance Education*, 29(1), 5-17. doi:10.1080/01587910802004811

Ginsburg, L. (1999). Educational Technology: Searching for the Value Added. *Adult Learning*, 10(4), 12. Retrieved May 29, 2011 from EBSCOhost.

Michael A Harnar, Scott W Brown, & Hayley J Mayall. (2000). Measuring the effect of distance education of the learning experience: Teaching accounting via Pictoretel. *International Journal of Instructional Media*, 27(1), 37. Retrieved May 30, 2011, from Research Library. (Document ID: 50829860).

Kennedy, D., & Duffy, T. (2004). Collaboration--a key principle in distance education. *Open Learning*, 19(2), 203-211. Retrieved May 29, 2011 from EBSCOhost.

Simonson, M., Smaldino, S., Albright, M., & Zvacek, S. (2009). *Teaching and learning at a distance: Foundations of distance education* (4th ed.) Boston, MA: Pearson.

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