Online Course Sustainability

Online course development is a team effort requiring input from faculty, instructional designers, multi-media specialists, and videographers. This investment is best supported when the resulting course assets can be repurposed for use in various contexts and across multiple semesters. These guidelines may assist you in developing high-quality, sustainable online course materials.

1. Keep a backup copy of all course content so that it can be recreated if the LMS becomes unavailable.

2. Separate the schedule from the syllabus. Keep everything that relates to due dates in the schedule.

3. Develop a strategy for various types of course content such as HTML, PDF, and videos. Videos and narrated PowerPoints require more of a resource investment than the other two formats. Use text-based media for material that is likely to change frequently and reserve video for more enduring content.

4. Hyperlinks to external websites may change over time. They will be easier to change in text-based content than in a slide embedded in a video.

5. Course materials, such as videos, that require an investment of time and effort, should be made as stand-alone and self-contained as possible. Keeping them short and focused on one topic will make them easier to maintain and update. Like carpet squares in modern office suites, selected squares can be changed without replacing the whole carpet.

6. For videos covering course concepts, avoid mentioning assignments or learning activities. If you wish to provide students with a video to accompany an assignment or activity, create a short one specifically for that purpose, something you can easily change if you update the activity. And refrain from referring to textbook pages or chapters that change when a new edition is published.

7. Avoid referring to specific times ("next Monday," "last fall," "this week's football game") or other parts of the course ("our first assignment," "the exercise in Module 4," "your last paper"). Maximize reusability by avoiding the mention of course names and numbers.

8. Save everything you write to students, especially emails, announcements, and discussion board postings. You may find yourself giving the same feedback across multiple semesters.

9. Self-check quizzes provide an effective means for students to assess their understanding of course content. Create a few new quiz questions for every lesson each time you teach the course. You will soon have a robust bank of quiz and test questions from which to choose. The quiz tool on Blackboard will save and randomize these for you.

10. Create a "Notes for Next Time" content area on Blackboard where you can keep all your ideas for the next time you teach the course online. It will be there waiting for you when you prepare the course for its next offering.