

**NORTHCENTRAL UNIVERSITY  
ASSIGNMENT COVER SHEET**

Learner: **Steven Diaz**

**THIS FORM MUST BE COMPLETELY FILLED IN**

**Please Follow These Procedures:** If requested by your mentor, use an assignment cover sheet as the first page of the **word processor** file. Use "headers" to indicate your course code, assignment number, and your name on each page of the assignment/homework including this assignment cover sheet. .

**Keep a Photocopy or Electronic Copy Of Your Assignments:** You may need to re-submit assignments if your mentor has indicated that you may or must do so.

**Academic Integrity:** All work submitted in each course must be the Learner's own. This includes all assignments, exams, term papers, and other projects required by the faculty mentor. The knowing submission of another persons work represented as that of the Learner's without properly citing the source of the work will be considered plagiarism and will result in an unsatisfactory grade for the work submitted or for the entire course, and may result in academic dismissal.

**ELT7003**

**Dr. Greg Bischoff**

**Instructional design and Engaging E-  
Learning Activities**

**Assignment 11: Designing an e-  
Learning Course**

Dr. Bischoff,

I want to apologize for the inconveniences that I might have created due to my lack of activity in this course. As I said in a previous note, I almost decided to give on this course. However, if I would have given up, it would have been against everything I teach my students (and my children) about facing difficult challenges and obstacles. I want to thank you for your constant e-mails reminding me about submitting pending assignments. I also want to thank you for granting the incomplete grade, so I had additional time to submit pending work. Without your full support, I would not be able to complete this course. For such reason, I greatly appreciate what you did.

I have decided to take a leave of absence after this course. I definitely need time to evaluate my priorities and organize my time before I continue with my doctoral studies. I am currently doing too many things in my life that has taken away my focus from my doctoral studies. I need to regroup to be able to move forward. Otherwise, I will continue experiencing the difficulties I had to complete this course. Once again, thank you for everything you did.

**Faculty Use Only**

<Faculty comments here>

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<Writing Score>

<Date Graded>

Designing an e-Learning Course

Steven Diaz

Northcentral University

## Designing an e-Learning Course

### *Course Introduction*

During the fall term of every new academic year, incoming freshmen students are required to enroll in UNI 101 University Preparation at St. Thomas University, a 1-credit college course. The purpose of this course is to integrate students to the campus life and to help them adjust to the academic environment of the university. Students are introduced to many resources, services, and activities that the institution offers to help them achieve college success. Study skills, time management skills, goal setting, health and wellness guidelines, advising, career exploration, academic and school policies, and many other topics are also introduced in this course. This course is also an opportunity to foster a supportive and caring environment among students, faculty, and staff of the institution, so freshmen students start developing a sense of belonging to the school community. UNI 101 course is one tangible example of how St. Thomas University strives to meet the institution's mission of providing a student-centered learning environment that develops leaders for life.

Typically, UNI 101 is a lecture-based course in which its instructors present important information to students on how they can adjust to the challenges and rigor of college studies. Unfortunately, perpetuating the same passive learning environment that most incoming freshmen had experienced during their schooling years is not going to accomplish the adjustment students need to succeed in college. Students cannot be passive knowledge-absorbers who considerably depend on their instructors to receive information (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004) since holistic learning takes place when students willingly and fully participate in their own education (Folger, Carter & Chase, 2004). College is an opportunity for students to explore their curiosities, interests, and passions by taking risks in new ways of thinking and trying on new experiences

that could fulfill their lives. College is also an investment, financially, emotionally, and physically, that requires students to become consciously aware of the sacrifices that it takes to earn a college education. Students who ignore perceiving college education as an investment tend to suffer costly consequences.

For students to become aware of what it takes to be successful in college, they need to approach their studies in an active manner that requires more initiative, independence, inquisitiveness, discipline and determination from them. My goal in UNI 101 is to help my incoming freshmen students taking greater responsibility and ownership of the learning experiences, so it facilitates their adjustment to the university environment. To accomplish this goal, I decided to redesign UNI 101 from a lecture-based course to a blended course, where most of the course activities will take place online and the onsite class meetings will be mostly used to advise and assist students on an individual basis. The online activities will focus on engaging students to apply the course content to their daily lives as college students. According to Watkins (2005), online courses are most successful when learners can apply knowledge and skills outside the online classroom. The ultimate goal in designing UNI 101 as a blended course is to help my students become active learners and owners of the learning experience, which will significantly improve their chances to experience college success.

#### *Summary of Selected Course Activities*

Throughout ELT 7003, I designed several course activities that I will be using in UNI 101 during the upcoming Fall term. Each activity was carefully crafted to be engaging, fun, interactive, reflective, collaborative, creative and/or authentic; but most importantly, each activity was carefully designed to achieve UNI 101 course's goals and objectives. No course activity was designed for activity sake or to be assigned as busy work. The course activities were

carefully designed to follow the *Phases of Engagement* guidelines suggested by Conrad and Donaldson (2004) to help learners and instructors gradually become acquainted with their new roles in the online classroom. The activities that I designed in ELT 7003 can be organized in one or more of the following categories: introductory/icebreaker activities, collaborative/team activities, course-related/content activities, and interactive activities.

One of the activities that I designed as introductory/icebreaker activities was the *Virtual Poster* with the purpose of creating an atmosphere that allows students to feel comfortable with themselves and St. Thomas University's environment. Using a web2.0 tool called *Glogster*, students will create interactive online posters by inserting text, photos, graphics, videos, music, links, and other features to show who they are as a person. I wanted to move away from the traditional introductions of posting short biographies since my goal was to facilitate introductions in a fun, creative and expressive manner as suggested by Conrad and Donaldson (2004). Knowing students' predilection and savviness using social networking sites as a form of self-expression, I inferred that my students will be more expressive and creative introducing themselves with the use of multimedia and hyperlinks than using only text.

The peer activity *Comparing Library Notes* was one of the collaborative/team activities that I designed for UNI 101. This activity was designed to provide an opportunity for students to apply a note-taking strategy during the learning session about the school library. Due to the significant amount of information the librarian shares to students during this session, learning about the library services and resources could be an overwhelming experience for students to recall in future library visits. For such reason, I inferred this was a good opportunity to introduce students about note taking techniques that could help them recall and retain effectively information, a necessary skill to succeed in college. After the library session, students were

required to compare their notes with a classmate and provide constructive criticism about their peer's notes. This peer-review activity is an effective introductory activity for my students to understand what it takes to collaborate (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004); in particular, this type of activity promotes accountability during collaboration since it is virtually impossible for students to avoid participation during peer reviews (Paulson & Faust, 2008).

I designed three course-related/content activities for UNI 101, but my favorite activity was *Three-Keyword Goals*. The activity was designed with the purpose of providing the opportunity for students to develop the habit of establishing personal goals that lead them to academic success. Setting goals involves deep reflection to motivate anyone to take action to achieve the goals. Based on my experiences teaching UNI 101, I know most freshmen students lack experience of practicing goal setting, and when they do, they perceive the task as complicated and worthless for them to continue developing the habit of setting goals. For such reason, the activity *Three-Keyword Goals* consists in simply finding three keywords that give my students a broad sense of three goals they want to accomplish during their first year in college. These keywords represent the core idea that set the appropriate mindset for students to pursue actively the achievement of their goals. By finding three empowering and easy to remember words, students are most likely to be driven and persistent in achieving their goals. Students identify these words after narrowing their goal statements from 25-words statement to 15-words statements then to one-word statement. This activity involves thorough reflection from my students, a necessary skill to become consciously aware of what it takes to succeed in college and life in general.

Designing interactive activities was the course content that I enjoyed the most in ELT 7003 since I had the opportunity to integrate for the first time several web2.0 tools in my

instructional practice. One of the interactive activities I designed was *My Career Profile*, which has the purpose of providing the opportunity for students to self-assess their goals, interests, and abilities to engage actively in career exploration and planning earlier in their college studies. As part of my responsibilities for working at the Academic Enhancement Center of St. Thomas University, I am responsible to advise, mentor and teach undeclared major and at-risk students. These students typically are undecided on what they want to do with their educational and career future because they lack information and guidance on how to assess and explore what they want to accomplish in their lives. For such reason, the interactive activity *My Career Profile* was designed to provide students the opportunity to initiate the process of becoming actively engaged in their career exploration and planning. In this activity students use different technological tools, such as Sigi<sup>3</sup>, SlideShare and LinkedIn, to help them in the early process of career exploration and planning.

### *Reflection*

Designing the course activities for UNI-101 was a worthwhile and authentic learning experience, as I expected to be when I started ELT 7003. Even when I had difficulties completing the course assignments due to time management and motivational issues, I believe that I acquired useful and valuable knowledge that will help me become a better instructional designer of e-learning environments. I once had the experience of designing an online math course (i.e. MAT 098 Arithmetic Review), which unfortunately, it did not produce the expected outcomes. After taking ELT 7003, I now realized how poor was the instructional design that I used to design such math course.

In MAT 098, I assumed that using technological tools was sufficient to create an engaging e-learning environment, since multimedia resources and interactive tools were

available for learners to use at their disposal. Regrettably, this instructional design resulted to be a self-paced individualized math course, characterized with minimal interactions and collaboration with other learners and the instructor. Watkins (2005) stated that “interactions with other learners are a necessary component for achieving many types of active learning” (p. 3). In addition, there were no reflective activities in MAT 098 to help students internalize the course content and make connections with real-life experiences. My first experience designing an online course resulted to be a passive learning experience for my students as they often experience in the traditional class lectures. As Watkins (2005) confidently assured, class lectures are not always the most effective way to provide learning experiences.

On my second opportunity designing an online course (i.e. UNI 101), I took advantage of the opportunity of applying an alternative instructional design to enhance the e-learning environment of my course. This alternative instructional design or framework (i.e. Phases of Engagement) is based on a collaborative learning process, where the instructor and learners are co-participants in building the knowledge base of the course (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004). For every course activity I designed for UNI 101, I ensured that students not only use technological tools to achieve the course objectives, but also have the opportunity to build relationships with classmates that will facilitate interaction, participation and collaboration during the course activities. “Activities that required student interaction and encourage a sharing of ideas promote a deeper level of thought” (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004, p. 5). By designing course activities in this manner, I am helping my students to become active learners who will constantly reflect about their learning and take ownership of the learning process. My students will benefit from becoming active learners since it will increase and enhance their awareness of what it takes to succeed in college.

Even when the activities I designed for UNI 101 are creative, fun, interactive, and collaborative, I expect students to resist accepting their new roles as learners. As a matter of fact, I already started implementing the course activities that I designed for UNI 101 in the current Fall term and already many of my students have complained about not understanding what to do, being overwhelmed with the workload, or not pleased working with a peer or group. Unfortunately, most of my freshmen students have experienced learning environments where the instructor provides them everything they need to learn, which have made them feel comfortable with this passive approach for learning. Many of my students have shown lack of initiative, inquisitiveness, discipline, and determination, which are necessary to become an active learner. This passive approach for learning from my students implies that I must be more patient, tolerant and flexible handling students' academic performance while they adjust to their new roles. As Conrad and Donaldson (2004) recognized, interacting, and collaborating is not an intuitive experience for many of my students due to their learning experiences were predominantly on lecture-based classrooms. This definitely is a con that I will need to overcome from the course activities I designed.

Surprisingly, another con that I have already experienced in the current Fall term with the course activities I designed for UNI 101 is how many of my students are not as technological savvy as I expected them to be. I assumed that my digital native students were proficient using many of the web2.0 and productivity tools that are used in the course activities I designed. However, I have informally discovered that my students' extensive participation of social networking sites does not imply they know how to use technological tools for academic and productive purposes. I have been focusing my efforts in teaching my students how to use the

technological tools that are part of the course activities. The good news is that my students learn immediately how to use these tools.

As Watkins (2005) foresaw for those instructional designers who use his e-learning activities book, this course (i.e. ELT 7003) stirred my creativity when redesigning UNI 101 from a lecture-based course to an engaging blended course. I had the opportunity of trying and implementing instructional strategies that I was hesitant to use in the past due to my lack of knowledge and discouraging teaching experiences. I also was able to integrate web2.0 tools and open source software that I have long been waiting for the appropriate time and the right lessons to use in my instructional practices. No doubt that I have become a better instructor with the knowledge and skills I acquired in this course. However, this course provided one of the highlights of my teaching career when I was able to showcase my knowledge and skills about e-learning in recent online training for new faculty. Thanks to what I learned in this course, I was offered an online teaching position at a school located in New York. Therefore, I was able to enjoy the most authentic learning experience of my doctoral studies in this course.

## References

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