

**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 2: e-Learning Course
Selection**

Dr. Bischoff,

It took me longer than expected to complete this assignment, but I needed additional time to reflect how this assignment could help me improve my instructional practices for a course I will be teaching in the fall term.

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e-Learning Course Selection

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Every fall semester of a new academic year, I teach a university preparation course (i.e. UNI 101) for incoming freshmen students. 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. UNI 101 is a one-credit course in which students meet once a week for 75-minutes during 11 weeks of the academic semester. I have taught this course for the last two years, and every year, I have made changes to the course design to ensure students attain the course's goal: to increase students' likelihood of academic and social success at the university. Unfortunately, I am still dissatisfied with my over-reliance on teacher-centered instructional practices in this course and my students' passive role in becoming better informed of the available university's resources and services to help them succeed at this important stage of their lives. Students will benefit from these resources and services if they use them instead of just knowing about them (O'Gara, Karp & Hughes, 2009). For such reason, I will focus the activities of ELT7003 with the objective of re-designing UNI 101 to become a learner-centered environment, where students actively become consciously aware of what it takes earning a college degree.

Today, more high school students go to college to increase their opportunities of a better future, which President Obama has reiterated it should be the goal of every child in America. However, Gardner pointed out as college enrollment has risen, the dropout rate of freshmen and sophomore students has also risen (as cited in Thompson, Orr, Thompson & Grover, 2007). Tinto found that approximately 57% of all college dropouts from four-year institutions leave before starting their second year and around 40% of students who start college studies in America are likely to not complete it (as cited in Thompson et al., 2007). Mallinckrodt and Sedlacek identified freshmen class' attrition rates tend to be higher than any other academic year, usually around 20-30% (as cited in DeBerard, Spielmans & Julka, 2004). Roy Romer, chair of

the group *Strong American Schools*, stated many graduated high school students are unfortunately realizing how misleading was the claim that their high school education will prepare them for college (as cited in eSchool News, 2008).

From my experience working with freshmen students, many of these students not only lack basic skills in mathematics, reading and writing but also lack study skills and work ethics that lead to academic and career success. They often set up unrealistic expectations and academic goals due to misinformation or lack of information about what it takes to earn a college degree, which induces them to make poor choices and costly decisions. There are students who see their first year of college as *grade 13* (Hunter, 2006), an extension of their high school senior year, in which schoolwork is often not a top priority, and they are accustomed to meet school responsibilities with the attentive support of their teachers. A common occurrence among freshmen students in my courses is the lack of persistence when facing difficult tasks, quitting before trying alternative strategies or approaches to overcome the challenges. I am also often perplexed of how naive students are about the serious consequences of their bold actions and decisions regarding their college studies.

No doubt college presents an extraneous set of norms, traditions, routines, language and environment for new students (Hunter, 2006); however, the sooner these students become consciously aware of the challenges and rigor of the new academic environment, the better their chances of not jeopardizing their chances for a better future and not becoming another college dropout statistic. They need to be firmly awakened of what it takes to earn a college degree with learning experiences that empowers them to make informed and better decisions about their academic and career goals. Perpetuating the same passive learning environment that most incoming freshmen had experienced during their schooling years is not going to accomplish such

awakening. 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). 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 need to redesign UNI 101 from an entirely onsite course to a blended course, a mix of face-to-face meetings and online activities. Most of the course activities will take place online by using Blackboard, the official course management system that is used in every course offered at my institution (i.e. St. Thomas University). Face-to-face meetings will be used to provide individualized assistance or advising, address group concerns or issues, do campus tours, listen to guest speakers, and attend academic and social campus activities. In times when more undergraduate courses and programs are delivered through asynchronous online environments, the online component of UNI 101 will ensure my students start developing stronger expectancy for controlling their learning experiences and academic success (Bell, 2007). The face-to-face component will address the lack of readiness for online courses that Bell (2007) identified as typical in late adolescent (i.e. ages 18-25) learners who have done well in traditional classroom settings. Thomas stated that regardless of the hype of the electronic classroom, learning in this modality is a lonely way to study (as cited Liu, Gomez, Khan & Yen, 2007). Even when I will design online activities to develop learning communities, face-to-face meetings will minimize the possible feeling of isolation among my freshmen students. These meetings will create additional opportunities of forging relationships with the instructor and classmates, so a

sense of community and integration to college life is fostered even more (O’Gara, Karp & Hughes, 2009).

As I mentioned previously, the goal of UNI 101 course is to increase students’ likelihood of academic and social success at the university. To attain this goal, students must create a college survival guide that will be published on the Internet (using web 2.0 tools) by the end of the course as a written document, slide presentation, video, or web page. According to Watkins (2005), online courses are most successful when learners can apply knowledge and skills outside the online classroom. Reeves, Herrington and Oliver (2002) recognized that creating a polished product valuable in their own right is an important characteristic for designing authentic learning activities. Gordon (1998) recognized authentic learning situations occur when students publicly exhibit their learning and are judged against real-life standards of quality. Therefore, this survival guide has the potential of becoming an important reference for the students who created the guide and for any student who needs information on how to earn successfully a college degree.

Students must meet the following course objectives when creating the survival guide: (a) to assess the value of a college education; (b) to set up personal goals for college learning; (c) to practice learning skills that facilitate the academic transition from high school to college; (d) to practice personal skills that facilitate the transition to a life of relative freedom at college; (e) to identify and describe available college resources and services that could help their college success; (f) to value the importance of developing relationships with fellow students, faculty, and the community that support and enrich a successful college experience; (g) to evaluate the importance of developing an appreciation for culture and an understanding of the importance of diversity and tolerance; and (h) to demonstrate support to the institution’s mission of providing

an excellent education. The topics I will cover in UNI 101 course follow the recommendations suggested by Dr. Fralick, who did research on a successful and reputable college success courses offered at Cuyamaca Community College in California. Fralick (n.d.) suggested the following topics to be included in college success courses: (a) lifelong learning (e.g. time management skills); (b) career exploration (e.g. inventory of personality types); and (c) lifelong success (e.g. appreciation of diversity). The purpose of the activities I will design for UNI 101 is not to supplement the course but to be the course, as Reeves, Herrington & Oliver (2002) recognized how are the complex activities of learning environments based on constructivist principles, which provide purpose and meaning to the learning experiences. The designed activities for UNI 101 will provide students the necessary learning experiences to create the survival guide in a progressive approach.

Redesigning UNI 101 as a blended course is conducive to the student-centered environment I want to create for my incoming freshmen students. Pursuing a college education involves significant personal sacrifices and costs (i.e. financially, emotionally, and physically) that if students do not know how to manage, it will hinder their chances for a better future. Freshmen students need to experience a classroom environment different from what they experienced in high school. They need learning experiences that help them become active participants and owners of the learning process. They need learning experiences that help them become self-directed and self-discipline learners and individuals. They need learning experiences that use their natural ability, experiences and interests using technology tools for productive purposes. Once I design UNI 101 course in this manner, I will then be satisfied with my instructional practices to help my students succeed in college.

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