ONLINE COURSE DESIGN Institute

Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching

The Center for Teaching's (CFT) Online Course Design Institute (OCDI) is a two-week online experience intended to help participants prepare to teach online courses. The OCDI allows instructors to participate in a structured professional development opportunity where they learn about effective practices in online education and can start planning their upcoming online courses.

During the **10-day institute**, which is framed by Wiggins and McTighe's Understanding by Design framework, participants work through a series of modules featuring both asynchronous and synchronous activities.

Each module includes material and activities about online teaching and learning for participants to
1. read and/or watch;
2. process and reflect, and
3. apply to their own course.

On most days, participants meet in **60 or 90 minute Zoom sessions** with their small group cohorts. Each cohort consists of 5 to 7 colleagues and a facilitator— either a CFT senior staff member or a faculty member who has already completed the OCDI. During the synchronous meeting times, participants ask questions and receive feedback on their course design plans and hear what their colleagues are doing in their courses. On some occasions, participants meet in larger sessions with those from other cohorts.

Participants are asked to spend about **4 hours** on institute activities each weekday during the institute; this includes individual work time for developing course plans.

Institute Goals

During the institute participants:

- Develop a course plan for their upcoming online course, one that integrates learning objectives with assessments, assignments, and activities;
- Build one or more sample modules for their course, practicing the skills they will use to build other modules;
- Plan strategies for helping their online students thrive, including strategies for promoting meaningful interaction, social presence, and equitable learning; and
- Learn about the affordances of online teaching tools, identify tools that align with their goals, and develop practical skills using those tools.

" The OCDI will not only prepare you to teach online, but also improve your teaching overall… Make time to engage with the OCDI deeply not only to improve your own teaching, but also to contribute to a community of engaged teachers across the university. "

" Commit to spending the two weeks immersed in this. It is HUGELY beneficial. I learned tons about teaching online and tons about how to improve my teaching in any mode of delivery. I feel energized about teaching in a way that I have not felt in years. "
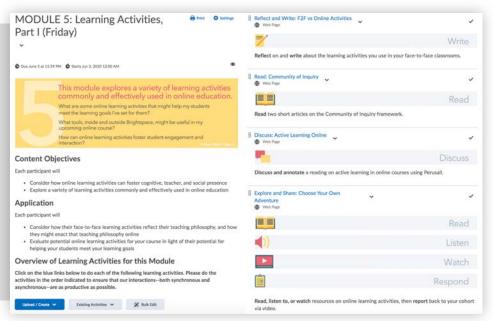
" My advice: approach the entire institute as an eager student! There's so much to learn, and inhabiting the perspective of a student in an online course will reveal a lot about how you want to set up your own courses. "

Institute Schedule

WEEK	DAY MODULE	TOPIC	SYNCHRONOUS MEETINGS
1	Monday Module 1	**Introduction** This module provides an orientation to the institute and its course design process, as well as key principles of online teaching.	Cross-cohort 60 minutes
	Tuesday Module 2	**Goals & Objectives** This module guides participants through the process of articulating course goals and learning objectives.	Cohort 60 minutes
	Wednesday Module 3	**Assessments & Assignments (Part 1)** This module explores a variety of principles and practices for assessing student learning.	Cohort 60 minutes
	Thursday Module 4	**Assessments & Assignments (Part 2)** In this module, participants develop assessment plans for their upcoming online courses.	Cohort 90 minutes
	Friday Module 5	**Learning Activities (Part 1)** This module explores a variety of learning activities commonly and effectively used in online education.	None
2	Monday Module 6	**Learning Activities (Part 2)** In this module, participants develop a set of learning activities to use in their upcoming online courses.	Cohort 60 minutes
	Tuesday Module 7	**Module Structure & Design** This module provides examples and resources for structuring online learning activities into logical modules.	None
	Wednesday Module 8	**Digital Tools** In this module, participants learn to use online teaching tools they expect to use in their upcoming courses.	Tool-based Sessions 90 minutes
	Thursday Module 9	**Course Plan** In this module, participants revisit their course plan as a way to integrate goals, assessments, and learning activities.	Cohort 90 minutes
	Friday Module 10	**Conclusion** In this module participants develop a welcome message for their students and identify what's next in their course planning.	Cross-cohort 60 minutes

Sample Module

Every module includes a banner that lists important guiding questions for that module. More specific information of what participants will know and do is then listed below. In addition, participants are explicitly told how to move through the module by stating what they should click on and when they should complete the activities. Finally, a set of icons are used throughout each module to not only make the course visually appealing but to provide a cue for participants as to what type of work is being asked of them.

Objectives and Applications

MODULE	OBJECTIVES *Each participant will…*	APPLICATIONS *Each participant will…*
1	• Surface prior knowledge, questions, and perhaps misconceptions about online teaching and learning. • Understand key frameworks and principles for online education, including backwards course design, the Community of Inquiry framework, and time and organization in online courses. • Consider the recent history of online education, with a focus on issues of equity and inclusion in online teaching and learning.	• Identify key challenges they expect to face in teaching online, as well as advantages of the online environment for teaching and learning. • Get to know members of their Online CDI cohort, as preparation for future peer-to-peer feedback on their colleagues' online teaching plans.
2	• Consider how they identify learning goals for their face-to-face courses and how that reflects their teaching philosophy. • Reflect on the learning goals and objectives they have for their online courses that might need adaptation or will be harder to reach. • Explore commonly used structures for organizing online courses, specifically the use of modules to address learning goals and objectives over time.	• Draft or redraft a list of learning goals they have for their upcoming online course and identify learning objectives that will help students reach those larger course goals. • Outline a potential organization or structure for their upcoming online course that assigns goals and objectives to course modules and that reflects key milestones and course schedule constraints.
3 **4**	• Consider how their teaching philosophies are reflected in the learning assessments of their F2F courses, and how these may translate online. • Analyze the affordances and limitations of various student learning assessments in an online environment, with particular attention to formative vs. summative assessment, inclusive and equitable practices, engaging and generative reflection, processes of evaluation and communication, and collaborative assessment, among other factors. • Explore learning assessment methods commonly and effectively used in online education. • Understand methods for assessing courses and instruction for the purposes of reflection and improvement.	• Develop at least the beginnings of an assessment plan that is integrated with their teaching philosophy and learning objectives, provides sound evidence of student learning, scaffolds assignments, includes clear criteria for evaluation, and is based in principles of engagement, inclusion, equity, and collaboration. • Explore their peers' examples of assessments for online courses. • Understand student experiences of various online tools, including embedded lecture video, quizzes, discussion boards, surveys, collaborative notation, and online rubrics. • Identify tools they will use to assess student engagement and learning in their courses, including student feedback surveys and click data.
5 **6**	• Consider how online learning activities can foster cognitive, teacher, and social presence. • Explore a variety of learning activities commonly and effectively used in online education.	• Consider how their face-to-face learning activities reflect their teaching philosophy, and how they might enact that teaching philosophy online. • Evaluate potential online learning activities for their course in light of their potential for helping their students meet the learning goals.. • Compile a set of learning activities they might use in their upcoming online course that foster cognitive, teacher, and social presence and align with their course goals and objectives. • Identify potential technical and pedagogical challenges posed by these learning activities, for both students and teacher.
7	• Integrate pedagogy and practice through module building. • Explore resources about how to make course materials accessible to students.	• Develop one module or unit of their choosing based on course plans.

8	• Identify a small number of online teaching tools that reflect one's teaching philosophy and the resulting pedagogical choices in an online course. • Explore digital tools training resources.	• Continue developing a module or unit of their choosing based on course plans. • Practice with a small number of online teaching tools they expect to use in their upcoming online courses. • Collect resources and instructions to share with students who will be using digital tools.
9	• Consider how course elements align to create a clear path for students' learning. • Review course plans in light of core pedagogical principles and practices identified throughout the Institute, modifying plans as needed.	• Consider how their learning goals and objectives, assessments, learning activities, and module structure fit together as a course plan. • Review the course plan for alignment. • Review the course plan for elements that promote social presence and teaching presence. • Review the course plan for other elements that promote equity and inclusion. • Identify open questions and next steps.
10	• Integrate pedagogy and practice to support students as they learn online. • Discover people and resources on campus that can support their online teaching. • Understand course design, teaching, and revision activities that will need to take place after the OCDI.	• Create an introductory welcome module, announcement, or page • Collect resources to share with their students. • Sketch out a plan for before, during, and after teaching including details such as how much time to spend doing which tasks related to course design and facilitation.

Read and Build: Making sure your students feel welcome and supported

Now that you have sketched out your entire online course, it's time to circle back around to the beginning and ensure that your students feel welcome and oriented. Think about what it is like for Vanderbilt students: every single course they take will organize online learning a bit differently. Every Brightspace course is a new maze to learn. Every instructor uses a new web-based tool to sign up for. It can be a lot to process. Think back to the alternate module 7s we looked at on Tuesday. Even small changes can require a lot of flexibility from our students.

In order to let our students know they can be successful in our course, there are things we can do throughout the semester to promote belonging. Watch this short video for a clear discussion about making online courses more welcoming.

4 Tips to Make an Online Course More Welcoming

A welcome resource for students is a way to start the semester off on the right foot. It can be an announcement, an email, the first module of the course, or in another prominent place in your course. A great place for a welcome message in Brightspace is the "Syllabus" tab in the Content area that has room for a syllabus, a welcome message, and any other content you might want to add.

When creating your own welcome resource, consider:

• resources like this one from the University of Central Florida, and this one from the University of Alaska Fairbanks that provide practical ways to create a welcome experience for students. They both recommend including information in your welcome about how and when students should access the course and how to get help.
• You might also want to go back to the welcome announcement we created for this course. What parts of that announcement would you like to use in your own course? How would you do things differently? Now that you have finished up this student experience in an online course, what do you wish you had known from the beginning?
• Some students will experience frustrations around using unfamiliar technology. How will you point them to help resources for Brightspace or other tools you will be using? They will need help both in the welcome resource as well as within the modules and assignments. Anticipating their questions and making clear how they can reach out for help is important.

Based on the resources linked above and your own preferences, **create a welcome resource for your students in your Brightspace course.** Consider where your resource will live and what it will contain to help your students feel comfortable in your course.

To do the next step in the module, you can either return to the module homepage or you can click the forward arrow on the right hand side of this page.

Sample Web Page

Pages within modules typically refer back to what was previously done and provide a rationale for what participants are being asked to do in the upcoming activity. They include a mix of written information provided by the CFT as well as other resources like videos and readings embedded within the page. The embedded resources can be videos, annotated PowerPoints, or articles created by CFT staff, or they can be external resources. Participants are then prompted to complete various activities to help them continue building their online courses. These might include reflection exercises they do on their own, contributing to discussion boards within their cohort or across the entire OCDI, engaging with various internal learning management tools such as the quiz or assignment features, or engaging with external online learning tools such as Perusall or Flipgrid.

Key Resources

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