INSIDEINDEPENDENTLEARNING

Save the Date Announcements:

Coffee with Sarah: November 13, 2 pm at Beans & Cream Coffeehouse (345 Cannery Square, Sun Prairie)

Quarterly IL Instructor Appreciation and Professional Development Meeting: November 20, 1 pm at 21 N. Park Street, Rm 7045

Distance Teaching & Learning Conference 2016 : August 9-11 dtlconference.wisc.edu

Continuing Studies
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

"Backward" Course Design:

During current and future IL Course revisions, instructors and course revision authors are encouraged to take a step back from the details of their courses and think about the big picture by answering the question: What should students know about the topics covered in this course in five years? This method of course design is commonly called "Backward Course Design." This design style is especially effective when:

1. Students are in a course sequence and need to be ready for the next course in the sequence by the end of the semester
2. Students need to have mastered some specific content by the end of the course
3. Instructors want to be sure that course materials, course content, and student assessments are in line
4. Courses are being prepared to undergo an academic review
5. Instructors/course authors need to prioritize & cull student activities because students are asked to complete too much for the number of credits in the course

As you can see, backward course design can be a useful course development tool, but how does it work?

The first step is to think about the course as a whole. What do students need to know or do at the end of the course. Another way to ask this question is: if you see your student at the grocery store in five years, what do you hope your student remembers from your course?

The second step is to express these things in the form of course goals: "By the end of this course, students will be able to _____."

Next, make a list of things a student needs to learn or skills a student needs to master in order to achieve these course goals.

Then, distribute the topics in this list logically throughout the course. (For IL courses, a good standard for a 3-credit course is 8-12 assignments.)

Once you have determined which topic will be covered in a unit, determine how a student will demonstrate mastery of this topic. (Possible ways a student can demonstrate mastery include: an auto-graded quiz, short answer questions, an essay, creating an activity (teach the topic to someone else), creating a video or power-point presentation about a topic, creating a poster about the topic, writing a "newspaper" article about the topic.)

Then, determine what a student will need to learn in lecture ("study notes") to be able to complete the assessment properly.

Finally, select a reading assignment that the student will complete before or while working through the study notes.

This method of course design has some specific advantages in that all materials and assessments are aligned for students. It is clear to students what they are learning and why, as well as how this learning relates to overarching course goals. For IL students, this clarity can make it easier to manage their study and successfully complete their courses. Such clear course design can also be useful for course instructors who work with multiple students in multiple units at the same time. Finally, such clear alignment of course content, course materials, and student assessment is helpful for course reviewers during regular academic course reviews.

D2L Gem: Rubrics

In the September edition of Inside Independent Learning, we highlighted best practices for assignment feedback. In this edition, the D2L Gem features a powerful tool to assist instructors in leaving timely, specific, personalized feedback.

Student-friendly D2L Rubrics offer instructors a quick and easy way to communicate to students how well their submitted assignment meets expectations.

Rubrics have the advantage of being visible to students *before* students submit their work. This helps students set performance expectations for themselves and increases their ability to self-assess. Instructors who use rubrics can be confident that they have clearly communicated performance expectations to students. In addition, instructors can give students specific, personalized feedback on their assignment performance at the click of a mouse. Instructors can use the rubric calculated grade for the student assignment grade, or adjust the grade as needed, making rubrics a flexible and functional feedback tool.

For more information and sample rubrics, please go to www.rcampus.com and click on the rubrics tab.

If you would like to use rubrics in your D2L course, please contact your academic program coordinator (sarah.korpi@wisc.edu)

Good Practice Reminder: Online Writing Lab (OWL)

Independent Learning courses have many advantages for students. One of these advantages is clearly stated academic learning objectives; students know in advance what their academic content focus is in each unit and how they will be assessed on their learning. Independent Learning courses offer students flexibility in their course completion and learning pace. There are also many value added benefits of Independent Learning courses, including improved writing skills. Due to the text-based nature of Independent Learning courses, IL students have more opportunity to practice and improve their writing skills in Independent Learning courses. This can be especially true of ESL (English as a Second Language) students.

For IL instructors, working with student to improve on their written communication skills can be a rewarding component of IL instruction.

At times, some students might need more feedback on their writing than a single IL instructor can give. They may need a review of basic essay format or grammar and punctuation rules. For instructors who are not teaching composition courses, this can make the process of assignment feedback time consuming, and it can be difficult to ascertain how much of the course content students have understood and mastered.

In such cases, students and instructors can benefit from the Online Writing Lab (OWL). IL students can submit their assignment questions and their essay responses to OWL, and they will receive feedback from a writing coach on their essay format, grammar, and punctuation. The writing coach can also help students to see points in which their response does not address the topic of the essay question.

Using the OWL can help students to feel more confident in their written work and improve upon their writing skills. Referring students to OWL can also save IL instructor time; instead of spending time commenting on essay format and clarity of writing, instructors who use OWL can focus their feedback on course content issues while providing students the important opportunity to improve upon their writing.

Students can access OWL here: owl.wisconsin.edu

Introducing: Jeff Kirsch

Jeff Kirsch received his A.B. from Miami University and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Spanish Language and Literature from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He taught full- and part-time in the UW-Madison Department of Spanish and Portuguese for many years. For 39 years, he has worked as an IL instructor, as when he was in graduate school and the sole Portuguese teaching assistant, being the IL Portuguese instructor went along with the job. Thus Jeff began working with Independent Learning, keeping the Portuguese IL position when he was director of the Spanish language program at Tulane University in New Orleans for five years. After he returned to Madison he became the

ad hoc instructor of all Spanish and Portuguese IL courses in 1995. Before, but especially after this date, he has written and updated innumerable Spanish and Portuguese IL courses. In 2002, he became the full-time staff member in charge of Spanish IL, as well as Spanish for Reading Knowledge, a position from which he'll retire in 2016 and then move to Palm Springs, CA with his partner.

Outside of work, Jeff has published three novels, including the Madison-based Madlands and God's Little Isthmus. Using his knowledge of Romance languages and German, he has coached spellers for the National Spelling Bee since 2006, with four spellers being national finalists and one finishing as high as 3rd place.