

What Makes an Online Course “Excellent?”

Susan M. Zvacek, Ph.D.
University of Kansas

Thinking Point ...

Students are accustomed to sharing
space and time, not ideas;

*Whereas online learning
is exactly the opposite.*

(Tim Dotson)

The Challenge

- To create an “Excellent” online course that is:
 - Focused on learning,
 - Built with students in mind, and
 - Designed to be as good as (better than?) a traditional, face-to-face course.
-

The Criteria for Success

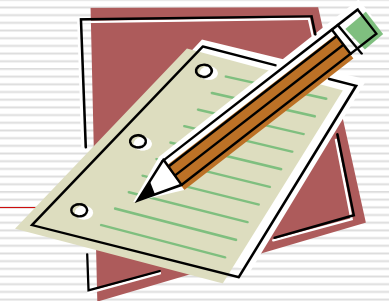
- ❑ Instruction based on learning theory
- ❑ Organizational integrity
- ❑ Affective domain awareness
- ❑ Student support built in
- ❑ Technology supports learning



Instructional Design

The “Big 3” Questions –

- ❑ What should students be able to do as a result of this course? (*Outcomes*)
- ❑ What learning activities will help them achieve this? (*Strategies*)
- ❑ How will you know if they have succeeded? (*Assessment*)



Learning Outcomes

- Observable
 - Measurable
 - Challenging but realistic
 - Encourage skills useful beyond the course environment
-

Learning Strategies

- ❑ Ask yourself, "*What should students be doing to learn these new skills?*" (Not, "What should I be doing to teach these new skills?")
- ❑ Content/Resources/Materials
- ❑ Activities
- ❑ Practice and Feedback
- ❑ Student Collaboration



Assessment

- Aligned to desired learning outcomes
 - Promote transfer of skills to new environments
 - Build in self-assessment activities
 - No surprises and no tricks
-

Organizational Integrity

- ❑ Course plan to help students know what to do next
 - ❑ Content objects are organized logically and sequenced for ease of use
 - ❑ Grading, return of assignments, etc., handled efficiently
 - ❑ Timelines are realistic and understandable
-

Awareness of Affective Domain

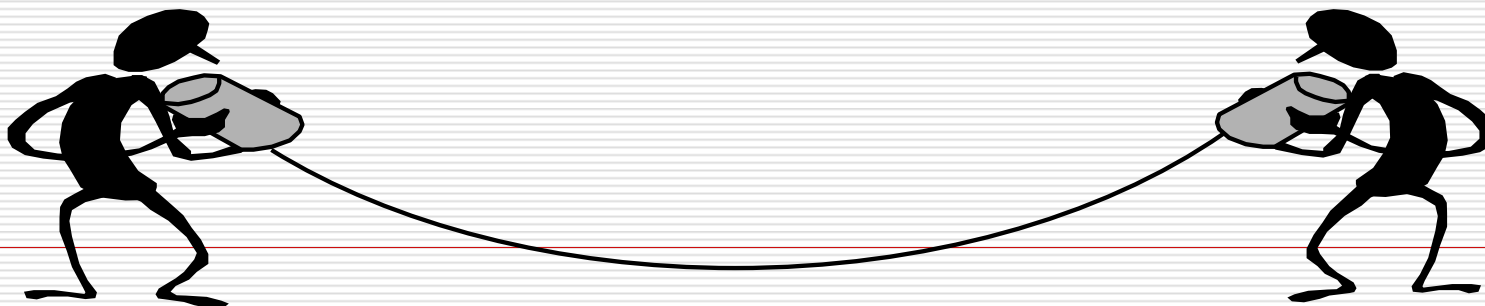
- Establishing the “learning group”
 - Communication elements include student-to-student interactions
 - Motivational elements (ARCS)
 - Attention
 - Relevance
 - Confidence
 - Satisfaction
-

Student Support

- Links to online library resources, tutoring assistance, etc.
 - Faculty contact information
 - Standards of conduct and expectations
 - Technical support information
-

Appropriate Technology Use

- Visual design supports readability and understanding
- Accessibility issues are considered
- Bandwidth limitations taken into account when determining format of content objects



Thinking Point...

- Which is unique to e-learning?
 - Instructional design
 - Organizational integrity
 - Affective domain awareness
 - Student support
 - Appropriate technology use
 - Can we use these criteria for any course, whether face-to-face or online (or in-between)?
-

Summary

- ❑ Online learning can be excellent when we consider what students should be doing to learn, first.
 - ❑ Criteria for excellent online courses is not so different from criteria for face-to-face.
 - ❑ Online courses can be as good as (or better than) face-to-face, *depending on how they are designed.*
-