This chapter discusses two case studies where face-to-face courses were converted into online courses.

Going Online: Uploading Learning to the Virtual Classroom

Garnet Grosjean, Thomas J. Sork

The rapidly increasing number of Web-based courses and degrees has sparked renewed interest in distance education. Educational institutions and private companies are moving to online delivery. The number and variety of Web-based courses and programs is escalating at a frenetic pace as providers compete to capture market share. Marketing of online learning is carefully framed as delivering educational opportunities to students at locations and times of their convenience, enabling them to cultivate responsibility for their own learning. In fact, offering online courses may be a crucial factor in the survival of modern educational institutions. But as the number of online courses increases, the challenges in their development and delivery become more apparent. Initially, universities simply repackaged face-to-face course materials and posted them to a Web site. But as demand increased, the approaches to online course development became more sophisticated, and a set of best practices emerged to guide the design and delivery of online education.

Planning Courses for Online Delivery

Currently courses are crafted for online delivery in two distinct ways: new courses are developed to meet a specific need, or existing courses are converted to an online format. In this chapter we focus on the second option, the conversion of existing courses for delivery in online programs, and address the underlying theory. It is important that the process be user driven, not technology driven. Technology provides the tools that allow users (students) to address the tasks set by the program.
Issues in Converting Face-to-Face Courses

The goal in converting an existing face-to-face course to an online format is to ensure a quality user experience. Thus, developmental issues must be carefully thought through. A primary concern is maintaining the pedagogical integrity of the course in the translation from traditional face-to-face delivery. Another issue is whether to adopt a team approach or whether a single instructor should develop the course. This decision involves identifying who should be involved in the process, when they should be involved, and why they should be involved. Furthermore, faculty members who participate in the delivery of the online course must be able to acquire the skills and competencies required to teach online.

Establishing realistic time lines is an important step in the conversion of any face-to-face course to online delivery; the introduction of technology often requires additional training or support and may extend development time. Time lines also vary depending on whether the course is offered for credit, given at the graduate or undergraduate level, or offered locally or internationally.

Challenges. Beyond the technical and theoretical challenges in developing a course for online delivery, difficulties should be anticipated in recruiting appropriate faculty as online instructors. Not every classroom instructor is capable of making the transition from the brick-and-mortar classroom to the virtual classroom. And not every faculty member wishes to participate in online development or instruction. The recruitment of appropriate faculty has been likened to a courtship ritual, because faculty require incentives to undertake the additional work load that comes with online instruction. The extra commitment is significant. First, faculty must learn the technological aspects of teaching online. Second, they need to accommodate the additional time required to respond to students’ queries in textual rather than verbal format. Third, they must recognize the complexities of teaching students from different countries and different cultural contexts.

Evaluation in the Virtual Classroom. Evaluating online courses is problematic in a number of ways. Student evaluations at the end of a face-to-face course traditionally focus on their experience with a particular instructor. In online education, however, the instructor’s role is only one part of a much broader experience. The technology, the user interface, and the design of content are all keys in understanding the online learner’s experience. Such a broad spectrum of factors demands new methods to evaluate the learner’s experience in an online course. For example, the visual cues traditionally available in face-to-face instruction are almost completely absent in the virtual classroom, requiring online instructors to identify and use different cues—for example, student participation in discussions and small group work or tracking student movements around the Web site.
In the rest of this chapter we discuss two cases in which face-to-face courses were converted into online formats: a course in a collaborative master of education program in adult learning and global change involving four universities on four continents, and conversion of a face-to-face diploma-level course in planning, first to traditional correspondence delivery and subsequently to online format.

**Case 1: Adult Learning and Global Change**

This case describes the process and procedures used in converting a traditional graduate course (Work and Education) to an online course (Work and Learning) for delivery in the adult learning and global change master of education (ALGC) program at the University of British Columbia. We used a collaborative process to determine the need for the course and developed a plan for curriculum conversion. The conversion involved analysis of the curriculum to determine the appropriate process, development of online course materials, and implementation of the revised curriculum.

A large and rapidly increasing body of literature is available to anyone interested in learning how to develop courses for online delivery. For example, a simple Google search returns more than twenty-four thousand hits in response to the search phrase “developing online courses.” A sizable literature also exists on academy-industry cooperation in the design and delivery of online courses. But multiuniversity collaborations in the development and delivery of a graduate degree in adult education of the type described here are rare; there are few published examples. The story of the development and delivery of the ALGC is one of a radically different master of education program (Abrandt Dahlgren, Larsson, and Walters, 2006; Larsson and others, 2005). Accounts of this program focus on the nature of the cooperative process that joined four universities on four continents in the program’s development and delivery: University of British Columbia (UBC), Canada; University of Technology (UTS), Australia; Linköping University (LiU), Sweden; and University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa. Our account focuses on the process and challenges in converting a traditional (classroom-based, face-to-face, on-campus) course to one appropriate for online, intercontinental delivery.

**Development of the ALGC Program.** Development of the ALGC program required extensive negotiation of content and delivery methods among the four universities. Planning began in 1998, and the first students were admitted in 2001. The program offers global perspectives on learning in cross-cultural environments. Faculty at each of the partner universities develop and deliver individual courses in which students collaborate across countries, using resources from the different settings in which they are located. Each of the four partner universities admits students, ensuring a complex four-continent cohort.
Converting a traditional course for online delivery is not a simple or linear process. A number of challenges must be overcome, some of which require skills in the use of technology. The challenges increase almost exponentially when conversion is attempted within the context of an intercontinental partnership. The four partner institutions first determined that six core courses would be required to cover the program's content, and then they identified which university was best equipped to develop which course. Each institution was responsible for the faculty and staff resources needed to develop their assigned courses. The standard format adopted required sections on (1) aims and objectives, (2) content, (3) modes of delivery, (4) activity requirements, and (5) assessment. An additional consideration, related to the process of having the program approved by each university, set up additional barriers to program implementation. UBC was chosen to develop a course on the changing relationship of the economy, workplace learning, and adult education. The development process is described below.

Aims and Objectives. Our first decision was whether to create a new online graduate course or convert an existing face-to-face course to online format. Expediency, combined with a lack of resources, contributed to the decision to convert an existing course, Work and Education, currently offered on-campus, to Work and Learning, to be offered online. In reviewing our aims and objectives, it soon became clear that the purpose of the course would have to be recast in a global perspective to accommodate the geographical distribution of students. To do so we combined international research traditions from adult education, the sociology of work, labor studies, organizational theory, and economics with localized experience to be derived from course participants. Two key themes prevailed: (1) the changing discourse on work and learning and (2) workplace learning.

In the conversion process, we almost overlooked an important consideration. To that point, the purpose and objectives of the course had been framed within a teaching-learning perspective. We soon realized, however, that the framing would have to change to recognize the different cultural contexts of the other institutional partners and their students. So to geographical considerations we had to add cultural considerations, both institutional and individual.

When considering the cross-cultural complexities of teaching and learning processes in the countries developing the program, we had to address the diverse needs of students who may be studying in a different culture and in a language that is not their first language. The decision to conduct the program using English forced us to recognize that the ability to assign meanings to concepts and discussions would require translation in many cases, and this created its own constraints and power structures.

The language of delivery was only one of the concerns when considering the delivery of courses to culturally diverse groups of students. There were a number of additional considerations: cultural differences, religious
and social class differences and interactions, learning style differences, and prejudices and predetermined expectations. This resulted in the integration of international comparisons and examples into the curriculum while being careful to include information on Netiquette—the appropriate etiquette for Internet-based communications and methods of appropriate feedback—to address issues of respect, equity, and fairness in dealing with participants in the program as a reciprocal endeavor. This was based on the understanding that in cross-cultural situations, participants would continually be dealing with socially differentiated ways of understanding and that faculty teaching in the program would have to interact with cultural sensitivity with the students while simultaneously sensitizing students to issues of difference and equity.

Beyond the discussions of cross-cultural complexities among the partners developing the program, invaluable assistance was provided by requesting feedback on course content and methods of delivery from international students enrolled in on-campus courses at our university. What was not considered at the time, however, was the possibility that some students would suffer from disruption caused by political upheaval or natural disasters in certain parts of the world.

**Content.** Once the purpose and themes of the course were established, we began to consider content and staging in relation to the order of courses the cohort would move through. Work and Learning would be the third of six core courses. It would follow Adult Learning and precede Fostering Learning in Practice. The content of Work and Learning would have to build on the former and provide an introduction to the latter. To accomplish this, we divided the course content into two blocks. The first would address the changing nature of work; the second would relate to workforce education and training.

In block one, we chose to depart from the critical analysis of the local labor market that characterized our on-campus course. We expanded the content to make visible shifts in paid and unpaid work, the changing structure of labor markets, and the effects of such shifts on different societal groups. This approach would provide students with an overview of how the discourse on work and learning is changing and was portrayed in various national policy debates. The course then examined the debate on employability skills and explored the link between work organization, labor processes, and skill formation. Finally, we introduced the consequences of economic democracy as an alternative approach to the skills debate.

In block two, we examined the concept of the learning organization to see what practices could be learned from theory and what theory could be learned from practice. Building on the first core course on adult learning, we discussed the impact of work processes and work organization on workplace learning. The course was designed to encourage investigation of why employers chose or declined to invest in employee training and reviewed
different forms of workplace learning. With this approach, we would provide students with an introduction to learning in practice, in preparation for the Fostering Learning in Practice course that immediately follows.

**Modes of Delivery.** In the ALGC program development process, we set the goal of making all syllabi, outlines, lectures, calendars, and assignments available online and ensuring that courses were uniform in appearance and navigation. Consistency in course format was a key factor in ensuring ease of navigation for students. This part of the conversion from classroom to online proved particularly challenging for us. The face-to-face components of the Work and Education course such as classroom discussions, small group work, and presentations had to be translated into an acceptable online alternative. After a lengthy review process, we chose the Blackboard Learning System as our Web site host. The discussion boards on Blackboard would help to replace the classroom discussions that are an essential part of face-to-face learning.

A number of steps had to be taken to prepare course material for use in an online environment. Documents had to be converted into HTML and PDF formats, and templates had to be created for the course on Blackboard (including the home page, course materials, reading lists, and assignment schedules). Another task required the uploading and linking of files to the appropriate sites on Blackboard in accordance with our agreement to ensure that all courses were uniform in appearance and navigation. We had to learn how to add and remove students from the courses, how to administer evaluation surveys on completion of the course, and how to collect and compile survey results. These tasks required a different set of skills and abilities from those required to develop the aims, objectives, and content of the course.

Since the Work and Learning course emphasizes differential understandings of the literature, the instructional format was designed to be as participatory as the distributed learning mode allowed. There would be assigned readings and textbooks, and, where appropriate, copies of readings and articles would be placed on the Web site in easily downloadable files. At this stage of course development, the challenging issue of copyright compliance had to be met. Because the four countries participating in the program had different intellectual property regimes, the partners resolved that the institution developing and delivering the course would take responsibility for compliance with legislation in their respective jurisdictions. When selecting material to post on the Blackboard site for the Work and Learning course, therefore, we had to ensure we met Canadian copyright requirements.

**Activity Requirements.** Students would be required to participate actively in online discussions by engaging with others on ideas from the readings or grounded in practical experience. Each student would take responsibility for leading one online discussion. Students would also work
together on group assignments and student papers related to issues and
trends in adult education, and work and learning would be posted on the site
and form the basis for further comparative analysis.

Assessment. When attempting to determine assessment criteria for
the Work and Learning course, we were confronted by another structural
impediment in the different systems for grading assignments and
courses in use by the partners. Two institutions (LiU and UTS) applied
a pass-fail system; the other two (UBC and UWC) used a graded system
for assessment. All partners had to comply with the regulations of their own
institutions. Adoption of a common instrument for conversion of grading
provided a solution. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is a scale
in seven grades that enables students to transfer academic credits from one
institution to another in Europe. The ECTS grading scale ranges from
“excellent” to “fail,” assessed on the basis of combinations of keywords and
definitions. Each university would then convert the ECTS scale into their
respective institution’s grading scheme.

Additional Barriers. Before we could launch the ALGC program,
finances and local decision making had to be addressed. Each of the four
countries had different ways of funding university programs, varying from
no tuition to full tuition and combinations of the two. For example, stu-
dents in Sweden pay no tuition fees; funding is provided by the state for a
specified number of study spaces. In Australia, master’s programs are
financed solely by tuition fees. In South Africa and Canada, university pro-
grams are financed by a mix of state funding and tuition fees. We were con-
cerned that many students would enroll through Linköping because of the
tuition-free policy. If so, this would require additional resources for
Linköping and restrict the resources of the other universities that require
tuition to either wholly or partially support these initiatives. The solution
was for each institution to restrict admission to students from its own
country.

In terms of local decision making, three further obstacles had to be
overcome: (1) the academic determination of what comprises a master’s
degree, (2) the local approval process for new courses and programs, and
(3) the nature of the approval process. A thesis was required by two of the
partner universities, but a course-based master’s degree was available at the
other two. This difference led to a decision that the program options should
have flexibility; a local options component was introduced that constituted
25 percent of the program. In that period, two universities would have their
students complete a thesis; in the other two universities, students would
complete elective courses to make up the credits equivalent to the master’s
thesis.

The second challenge was in drafting the text of the program and course
descriptions in a way that allowed the administrations of each university to
adopt them without negotiation. The program was to some extent shaped by
this adaptation to local expectations and norms, including the content of curriculum outlines regarding how assessments and courses should be described and the details of reference material required.

The third challenge was in the complexity of the approval process at each of the partner universities. These varied from three levels of decision making in Sweden to eight levels in Canada. The internal decision-making process at UBC was so complicated and slow that the university did not have the required approvals in place in time to meet the program's planned implementation date in 2001. UBC faculty therefore had to contribute to course development and teaching in the first cohort without having any UBC students in the program. This situation was rectified by the second intake of students in 2002, but a valuable opportunity to receive feedback from local students was lost until the second year, and the resources that students would have provided in tuition were also forgone.

Summary. Converting a traditional course for online delivery is not a simple or linear process. In this case, we have described the process and procedures used in converting a traditional graduate course, Work and Education, to Work and Learning, an online course for delivery in the ALGC program. We used a collaborative process to determine the need for the course in the program and subsequently developed a plan for the curriculum conversion. The process involved analysis of the curriculum to determine the appropriate conversion process, development of online course materials, and implementation of the plan. In case 2, we provide an example of the conversion of a face-to-face planning course first to a traditional correspondence format and more recently to a Web-based delivery.

Case 2: Program Planning

Since it was originally conceived in the 1970s, the course in question has carried the title Planning Short Courses, Workshops and Seminars and was designed as one of several required courses in UBC's adult education diploma program. The program was developed primarily as practical preparation in the basics of adult education for those who already possessed an undergraduate degree but did not wish to enroll in a master's program. As suggested by the title, the course covered knowledge and skills useful when planning programs in a short-term format, including conferences, symposia, and similar intensive, concentrated, face-to-face learning experiences. In addition to meeting part of the core requirements for the diploma, the face-to-face version of this course attracted large numbers of students from nursing, business, and other professions and disciplines who wanted a practical elective. This course had a reputation of requiring a lot of reading and lengthy assignments but was also regarded by students as highly practical. As the course went through these two conversions, we wanted to retain the elements that seemed to make it so valuable to students.
The history leading up to the development of the online version is important to understand because it influenced the decisions we made about how to take it online and what elements of the face-to-face and correspondence versions should be retained, albeit in an online environment. There are certainly potential benefits to developing an online course unrestrained by history and earlier curriculum decisions, but there were several reasons we did not want to start from scratch. First, we were operating under a general university policy that required all distance education versions of face-to-face courses to provide essentially the same learning experience, or at least produce equivalent learning outcomes. Second, the course seemed to be doing what we wanted it to and was generally well received by students, so we did not want to tinker too much with what seemed to be a successful design. Third, our primary motive for going online was to improve student access rather than to employ all the features that an online version might offer.

**First Conversion: To Correspondence.** The traditional correspondence version used essentially the same readings as the face-to-face version, but relied on discussion questions and short assignments as substitutes for the discussions and question-and-answer sessions of the face-to-face format. The primary assignment in the course was a multipart project that required students to develop a highly detailed written plan for a short-term program of their own choosing. This project—and the overall course—was organized into six planning elements that corresponded to a generic planning model (Sork, 1997, 2000). Students submitted parts of this project throughout the term and received feedback on earlier parts before submitting later parts, so it fit well with the unit structure of conventional correspondence courses and the principle of giving students fast, periodic feedback throughout the term. The reading material and reinforcing exercises were keyed to each unit, so the readings were directly relevant to the part of the assignment the student was then developing. As new literature became available or as we learned from students that they needed more help with some aspect of planning—and we often learned this from student questions during the course or feedback at the end of the course—we did our best to provide enough readings, examples, and resources for further study so students could produce the quality of work we expected.

The biggest challenges we faced as we developed the conventional correspondence version of the course were (1) how to provide students with the print resources they would need to be successful in the course while keeping to a minimum the telephone calls, e-mails, and other requests for support received by tutors and (2) how to schedule the work in a way that took into account the uncertainties of when assignments would be received, how long it would take tutors to assess them, and how quickly the students would receive feedback. Of course, this all occurred when regular mail was the primary means of communication, supplemented with telephone calls during tutor office hours and, later, e-mails.
In 2002, the support unit that administers all diploma programs in the UBC Faculty of Education recommended that we simultaneously update all the adult education courses and convert them to an online format using WebCT. This was good timing for us for three reasons. First, we knew that prospective students were now expecting easier access from a distance to a wider range of courses, and this was the case with those interested in our diploma programs. Second, we had just enrolled the first students in our new online ALGC program and needed some online elective courses for these students. Third, the correspondence versions of these courses were looking dated, not so much because their content was dated but because they did not take advantage of the Web for delivery. This made them harder to access for students and more difficult to update, and it unnecessarily extended the turnaround time on assignments that is so important to minimize in order for effective learning to occur. Another happy coincidence was that a new edition of the textbook used in the course (Caffarella, 2002) was just out, so our revision would reflect the most recent literature.

Second Conversion: To Online. Two graduates of our adult education master's program—both with considerable experience teaching Web-based courses—had been tutoring the correspondence version for several years, so we enlisted their help. First, we identified what needed to be changed in the content of the course to reflect the new edition of the text, but also to supplement the text. Second, we discussed at length the strengths and limitations of the primary assignment and whether it should be retained as we moved the course onto the Web. One key feature of the assignment that concerned us was that it did not involve any kind of collaboration. The independent nature of this project was a carryover from both the face-to-face and correspondence versions. We knew from the literature the advantages of collaborative learning (Brookfield, 1986; Bruffee, 1987) and also knew that moving online would give us the opportunity to have virtual discussions of the kind we had in the face-to-face course, which were absent in the correspondence version. Of course, one of the great advantages of online delivery is the potential for collaborative learning, but we faced a decision about whether to incorporate collaborative assignments into the course structure. Several considerations led to our final decision, which was to retain the independent nature of the primary assignment while incorporating virtual discussions on topics that seemed to raise the most questions for students. We were concerned about the workload of the tutors—a key practical consideration in going online. We wanted the online time of the tutors to be focused on topics that were not adequately explained in the readings. These were relatively easy to identify from questions that had been posed by students in the correspondence version and problems that had appeared with some regularity in assignments. Once this was done, we were able to structure online discussions so that students could engage in a virtual, guided conversation about some of the more challenging aspects of
planning and then apply what they learned to their individual projects. This approach is in contrast to case 1, where from the outset it was the intention to encourage as much interaction as possible throughout the course and where at least one collaborative assignment was required.

One great advantage to going online and having students submit their assignments electronically is that those who wish can share their work with others, both before they submit a unit—to receive formative feedback and advice from their peers—and after, as a way to share illustrations of the variety of ways that plans can be developed and presented.

It remains to be seen whether we have incorporated enough interaction and collaborative work into the online version of the course to satisfy most students. We have found in our experience with online learning that students have widely varying levels of interest in the more collaborative aspects of online learning (just as they do with collaborative activities in face-to-face courses), so structuring a level of interaction that will be satisfying for most students will require some experimentation.

When taking what is considered a successful face-to-face course online, it is tempting to retain as many of the original course’s features as possible, even though this might not produce the best online experience for students. WebCT, Blackboard, and other online course management systems offer many choices of how to engage students in the learning process. We followed a conservative approach to taking this course online, using only a few of the features offered by WebCT. As we receive feedback from students and review how well the online version seems to be working, we will likely incorporate other features to enhance the learning experience. The advantage of a conservative approach is that it provides an opportunity to learn how various features work, the degree to which they enhance the learning experience, and their implications for workload.

**Summary.** This case is an example of the conversion of a face-to-face planning course to a traditional correspondence course and subsequently to online format. In discussing this case, we illustrate the shifts that must occur in how student-instructor and student-student relationships are understood when traditional courses are converted for Web-based delivery.

Taken together, the two cases discussed in this chapter indicate that flexibility is one of the keys to success when converting a face-to-face course for online delivery. An ability to be flexible in how tasks are developed and delivered is important, as is asking students for regular feedback to find out what is working and what is not working. And, of course, instructors need the courage to be prepared to change if something is not working as intended.

**Implications for Adult and Continuing Education**

Educational institutions and private companies are moving to online delivery of courses and programs at an increasing pace. But as the number of online courses increases, the challenges in their development and delivery...
become more apparent and have implications for adult and continuing education. The increasing recognition and importance of lifelong learning suggests that in the future, adults will seek Web-based programs that deliver access to educational opportunities at locations and times convenient to them.

Converting traditional classroom courses for online delivery is not a simple or linear process. The process requires analysis of the curriculum to determine the appropriate conversion process, development of online course materials, and implementation of the plan. Beyond the conversion of textual materials, there is a need to be cognizant of the shifts that will occur in how student-instructor and student-student relationships are understood when traditional courses are converted for Web-based delivery.

The increasing number of adults participating in adult and continuing education requires the development of more and better programs, delivered using new instructional techniques, to reach people using distance education delivery methods. There is a need to know more about adult instructional techniques and ways to enhance learners' engagement in online and distance learning settings. Educators need to help adult learners recognize and improve their self-directed learning capabilities, evaluate their own competencies, and develop plans to satisfy their individual learning needs.

References


GARNET GROSJEAN is a lecturer in adult education and a senior research fellow at the Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training, University of British Columbia.

THOMAS J. SORK is professor of adult education at the University of British Columbia.