Designing blended intensive mode and online courses

Introduction

Whether the decision to move to an intensive or online mode may have already been made, or you are in the process of investigating such a move, there are a number of steps that need consideration and are necessary to work through. This guide asks you to reflect on pertinent questions, to articulate goals and to substantiate clear objectives for the paradigm changes of course delivery. It may help to write down answers to some of the questions posed as well as your reflections.

Throughout this guide Bigg’s Constructive Alignment will be used to achieve a well-designed and learning oriented course through aligning learning outcomes, assessment activities and course content. This approach also coincides with the CASS Flexibility Delivery Plan. Working online will help you develop not only more digital fluency, but to become empathetic with the student perspective of working in an online environment.

It is important to begin well in advance of the delivery of the course as redesigning can be time-consuming. Effective planning and preparation are essential to any course and the goal of this online course is not only to create a new learning environment that is well designed and well prepared, but also an aid to working out the logistics for the new course. Searching for online material, suitable websites, scanning documents and converting files to PDFs does take time, however, it will build up a solid database that allows you to draw from, to develop complex learning tasks and provide an open and resource-rich learning environment.

- Describe how you see the course changing in format. Specifically, what is the main new learning opportunity you want to create or the pedagogical problem you will to solve by employing the delivery mode?
- Also consider how does the intensive or online mode benefit the student as well as the lecturer and how will they be addressed in the proposed mode?
- Consider how the online mode benefits the student as well as the lecturer and how will they be address in the new paradigm?
Learning outcomes

A well designed course depends on the learning outcomes as they will inform students of your teaching strategies and expectations through explicit statements, why they are learning the material presented, how they can demonstrate their understanding of material and their comprehension of the aims of assessment tasks. As well, they can indicate their learning progression. In turn, well structured learning outcomes should also reduce queries by enabling students to understand what you want them to learn.

Another point for consideration is that students also have their own motivations or learning outcomes. You cannot always know these and can only make a guess as to why they are enrolled in your course. The student centred approach to course design, recognises that students have their own goals and negotiating this is can reflect the shift in power relationships between student and lecturer that student centred learning encourages. Through providing a choice in what, how and why the students study, assists in achieving their goals, providing a strong motivation for learning and course completion. Giving the students an opportunity to articulate what they want to achieve, what their gaps in knowledge and understanding are can be implemented through tools such as reflective journals or even through students being involved in choosing the activities or, even more radically, setting topics within themes at the outset. But more of that later.

If you are redesigning the course, review the learning outcomes of your course stated on the course’s Study@ANU page. These outcomes should be fixed, regardless of delivery method. It is necessary to develop effective strategies to reach these learning outcomes.

If you are writing the course from scratch, use Bloom’s Taxonomy of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation to express your expectations of the learning outcomes. Write 4-6 Learning outcomes for your course, starting each outcome with active verbs:

- Write 4-6 Learning Outcomes for your course, starting each outcome with active verbs such as demonstrate, synthesize, compare, identify, analyse, explain.

- Which of the learning outcomes could be achieved online and which are best achieved face-to-face?

Assessment activities

Assessment overwhelming influences in what, how and how much students study and participate in their study and course. Not only should careful attention to assessment schedule and pace, along with explanation of the intensive or online format assessment, but it is also necessary to ensure that assessment tasks are formative and support learning. This section examines the assessment tasks which are then matched to the learning outcomes you have established.

As you will be aware, there are new tools associated with new technologies, such as wikis, that can be used for evaluating students’ learning progress, and may assist in determining the teaching content and guiding students in their learning progress. Many new tools work well with formative assessment which provides benchmarks along the way. It is worth while looking at the Web2.0 Survival Guide. Although many of these
are for externally hosted services, this informative guide is stimulating, providing detailed explanations and presenting a broad range of tools that can be used in higher education. And you may consider them further down the track.

In an intensive mode course, the timeframe is going to influence and constrain assessment tasks and digesting material embedded within the learning tasks that are active and generate meaningful knowledge within assessment is a challenge in an intensive course. Yet this mode can be ideal for an 'authentic task' or real-world based simulation cases, immersed learning scenarios, role-plays and other experimental methods. These may form the bulk of the intensive, with asynchronous discussions and further active engagement online. This type of learning can be used to examine and analyse ideas in much more depth, that may not be possible in a traditional weekly lecture/tutorial mode. Experimental methods require different assessment tasks and can be used in combination with formal and informal learning tools.

**Assessment Tools**

Both formal and informal learning are valued in the constructivist approach. What needs to be weighed up is whether formal tools such as essays and tests/exams are suitable and efficient. Choice of tools needs to parallel the ratio of online and face to face learning. Informal learning tools such as forums, wikis and blogs can be used with journals, field study worksheets, role-playing, building databases, and libraries as long as they are aligned with learning tasks. There are simple tools, such as building a database on Wattle, which can be configured, for example, to a task whereby students are asked to post 3 reviews of books/articles/websites onto the site's database; and only then does the database open up and the students have access to everyone's reviews. If there are 10 students in the course, that multiplies to 30 reviews. This is a collaborative effort, potentially producing a solid database, illustrating that you don't have to provide all resource materials.

- **List the tools you think you may be able to use for an intensive or online course.**

Reflective journals have been used for a number of years particularly in the education and nursing sectors, and at ANU they have been used for internships. An online journal not only records the daily activities but is used to reflect on the nexus between theory and practice. The wiki tool in Wattle can configured so that the journal is private and only between the lecturer and student - each student is assigned to one single group, with only one group member.

**Continuous feedback or assessment for learning**

Depending on the course configuration, it may be difficult to provide the ideal of mechanisms for continuous feedback throughout the course. In a course running over weeks, continuous assessment and feedback helps the student to evaluate their progress and they can make adjustments for the next stage of learning. This also helps the lecturer determine how the course is working out - as planned or needing adjustment - while the course is in progress. For students, having an active role in the formative assessment process where they can monitor what they are learning, adapt their learning process in response to the results of assessment, encourages and assists them in being active, engaged and critical in their assessment. Feedback can also contribute to future planning.
Additional Resources:
http://www.engsc.ac.uk/er/theory/constructive_alignment.asp

- Think about the assessment tasks that you would use under the traditional course. Could these be efficiently used in intensive or online assessment?

Aligning

- Make sure the assessment task mirrors what you intended the students to learn by listing the learning outcomes in one column and the assessment tasks in a second.

- Draw arrows from the assessment tasks to the learning outcomes.

- Clarify the objectives of the task to aid the learning process, and promote active and meaningful learning – students perform to higher standards when they know up front explicitly and clearly what is needed in order to do well.

Marking Rubrics

Marking rubrics are essential for communicating to students the lecturer’s expectations and, when written clearly, makes assessment transparent. It contributes to students taking responsibility for their learning and gaining some control over assessment.

A Marking rubric can be utilised in a number of ways not just for you to match up the tasks with grades - students could be involved in writing the rubric. You need to have a good idea of the direction of this exercise and be prepared to guide the process. Designing the rubric with you at the outset assists students in clearly understanding what the intent of the assessment activity is and assigns them some responsibility or ‘ownership’.

Rubrics can also be used for self-assessment and peer-assessment once the work is completed, or even at the draft stage. For self-assessment, refer the students back to the rubric either before they hand in the final assessable work (the student could review their work step-by-step against the rubric) or after the work has been graded. The student can respond to the rubric and state where their weaknesses are how they can improve, or indicate where they have improved since the last piece of assessable work.

Peer assessment is attracting increasing attention from educators looking for new ways to improve learning outcomes. For peer-assessment work can be swapped between students, under supervision.

Course content

Time is the moderating force in how much is covered and how much students can digest, analyse and reflect upon within an intensive course. You will need to divide up which topics are more efficiently delivered in the intensive mode.

Face-to-face lecturing by a guest where knowledge transfer is one-way could be improved by making papers available on-line beforehand and using the guest lecturer to actively engage directly with students. Not only is it more stimulating, but it avoids fatigue when concentrating for an intensive period of learning.
Having material beforehand also allows for some digestion and reflection, allowing the student to participate more fully in dialogue and class discussion.

Reading material for use online needs to be in PDF format. This can be done by scanning from the copier (and sent by email) or if your computer has a program, saving as a PDF file. Note: ANU has a restriction of, in general one chapter or 10% of a book, whichever is the greater. For more information, check the ANU Library website.

Wattle allows you to upload your resource material so that it is available to students online. Because of copyright laws and agreements, third-party material should be sourced through the library. Material can be uploaded without going through the library but it is at the discretion of the lecturer who has to take responsibility for this action, and is accountable if the course is audited.

- List the Topics to be covered, indicating which is best for face-to-face teaching and which can be configured to online activities