**TLI GRANT REPORT 2015**

**Stephen Snyder**

**Summer 2 2015**

**Introduction**

In Summer 2015, I offered ENGL 136, Graphic Novel, as a Web Only course. The fundamental purpose behind offering this course as a Web option was to increase enrollment in a Summer Gen. Ed. literature course. Over the years, I have found students reluctant to enroll in Summer literature courses. Even the Graphic Novel course, with its popular culture appeal, suffered from low enrollment. Literature courses, by design and expectation, require lengthy reading assignments. This limits enrollment due to Summer Session time compression. Also, as this course is not required but only satisfies general education credits, students may be reluctant to register given the limitations on financial aid.

To resolve this problem, I offered ENGL 136 as a hybrid option in Summer 2014. This section did not enroll to a reasonable minimum, so I cancelled the course. The hybrid option faced a scheduling challenge. Communication from enrolled students and from students who wished to enroll indicated conflicts with class meeting times. One solution seemed to be offering the course as Web only. I selected Summer Session 2 2015 because Summer Session 1 often under-enrolled. Ten students enrolled in the course, though there was significant fluctuation in numbers from April through June.

**Project Design**

My first application for a TLI grant related to ENGL 136 was returned with the recommendation that I attend the E-Learning Academy and re-apply in the future. I participated in the E-Learning Academy in Fall 2014, attended all sessions and completed all assignments. Though the technological content of the E-Learning Academy was limited, I was able to make extensive structural revisions to ENGL 136 based on the planning/organizational lessons. I restructured the course from a more traditional 15-week model, compressed into a 6-week accelerated format, into a tight and manageable 11 module format with all assignments and goals stated both in the syllabus and in the module schedule.

All modules were integrated with the CMS/Angel. Students were expected to complete two modules per week. Each module carried a specific due date. All tasks per module were noted. Most were connected to folders, drop boxes or the assessment tool. Course assignments were connected to the gradebook and recorded automatically. Students were also sent regular reminders regarding quiz activation and essay due dates. Essay grades were promptly entered in the CMS gradebook, along with brief comments per student.

In order to ensure that students worked regularly on the course, and progressively through the modules, drop boxes and quizzes were integrated and regulated. For example, in order to open a quiz tool and take a quiz, students were required to anticipate quiz questions and submit a homework assignment to the appropriate, integrated drop box by a specific deadline. In order to submit an essay, students were required to anticipate potential writing topics and submit a homework assignment to the appropriate drop box by a specific deadline.

Students were also offered the opportunity to attend virtual office hours. Virtual class meeting time options were offered on the course syllabus.

From the syllabus:

Optional class discussion will take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9-10am via Adobe Connect. Students will need to confirm their attendance 24 hours in advance. The instructor reserves the right to cancel or re-schedule optional class discussion via Adobe Connect 24 hours in advance.  
   
In-person and other Adobe Connect office hours are offered by appointment. Tuesday and Thursday mornings are preferred. Students are expected to communicate directly with the instructor to schedule an appointment. No meetings are required.  No in-person meetings are expected. Phone consultations are also an option, but these must be scheduled as well.   
  
Students are free to email the instructor at any time. Replies are typically posted within 24 hours. Students should expect delayed replies on Weekends. Students are expected to reply to all emails sent by the instructor, if only to confirm that the message has been received and understood.

These options clearly indicate a reluctance on my part to accept the Web only course as a form of de-facto independent study. My expectation was also, quite clearly, that communication frequency would serve as the rule rather than the exception.

**Learning Outcomes and Discussion**

The discussion of outcomes for this report remains qualitative as any quantitative data cannot be compared to previous data. However, in the future this could change significantly. It is interesting to note that I encountered a set of new problems, particularly centered on the communication details from the course syllabus excerpted above. Students, in large part, were reluctant to communicate. They expected simple and direct solutions to complex problems (often disregarded entirely) and were further reluctant to engage in conversation or discussion. I expected a more assertive approach to this alternative format. I encountered typical student behaviors and attitudes. Students, for the most part, either disregarded my attempts to communicate altogether or contacted me only for exceptions and extensions. Few students contacted me to discuss their progress or to take advantage of essay revision opportunities presented in the syllabus. And after the initial Adobe Connect session in the first class week (attended by only one student, who could not navigate the interface), no student requested a session in the virtual classroom.

Students appeared to live in the moment of the module. Most students approached the course one module at a time. Only two-three students seemed to review the syllabus and the complete and detailed Summer Session module schedule in advance. Several students disclosed that they had not read the syllabus, and that they had not kept pace with the course. At least two students had taken vacation away from adequate technology and sought special consideration on late materials after the fact and with no advanced notice. Even the two strongest students dismissed some of the finer details of the course syllabus regarding the final reading assignment. The course materials provided by the bookstore on the course schedule contained an error due to a title being on back order. An adjustment was made to the course and syllabus prior to the beginning of the session and prior to activating the course.

In particular, students found the research/scholarship assignment a significant challenge. Students did not know how to develop a bibliography or submit it as assigned, in advance of the project. Some students disregarded very specific written guidelines on appropriate sources and databases. Students were restricted to JSTOR. Yet some students still submitted webpages or encyclopedic database entries. In future offerings, this assignment will be broken into three smaller, more manageable assignments with more detailed and directed instruction. The more flexible I was with the original assignment, the more problematic it became for students. They appeared to be overwhelmed and intimidated by this assignment.

**Conclusions**

By the end of the Session, most students had completed most assignments, and most assignments were completed on time. The overall performance of the class seemed typical with a typical grade distribution. Given the specialized nature of the content for ENGL 136, I expected the distribution to weigh heavier in the higher grades. Most students completed the course successfully with limited contact and communication. The course enrollment increased from past offerings. In these aspects, the project was successful. However, the degree of success remains limited. Future Summer Sessions offer the opportunity to extend and refine the project. Adjustments to improve the description and expectations of assignments, along with the revision of some assignments to make them more accessible to students, are in progress.

Engl 136 is being offered again in Summer Session 1 2016, as both hybrid and Web only. The sections will be merged.

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