

Responsibilities for Ongoing Updates in Online Courses

Question:

We are having discussions about responsibilities in the LMS for updating due dates, checking links, other term-to-term maintenance, and doing quality audits in all online courses. One line of thought leans toward having someone from the instructional design team do all of this routine maintenance on behalf of the faculty members each time, just before the course is offered; another is for the teaching faculty member to assume the major responsibility for these tasks, and consult the ID when necessary; a third is “somewhere in-between.”

Could you please share if and how your institutions have addressed this need, what your practices are, and whether you have established policy about it? How do you resource your current solution?

- Marty Crossland, Ph.D., Professor, and Associate Vice President for Instructional Technology & Online Education, MidAmerica Nazarene University
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Answers:

As with any course, onsite or online, the responsibility for updating dates, checking links, general course maintenance, etc., belong to the faculty member teaching the course. Where there are complicated course cartridges or complicated LTI (Learning Tools Interoperability) issues of course the instructional design team steps up to help.

Maintenance long term is a collaborative effort among the instructor, instructional design team and the program coordinators.

- Dr. Barbara G. Zirkin, Associate Dean Distance Learning, Stevenson University
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Currently a message is sent out to faculty before the start of each semester with a list of online courses the faculty is teaching, and tips/instructions for getting it ready for the upcoming semester.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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The responsibility is on the faculty member. We have instructional designers assigned to departments/ programs and they are available to help faculty when requested.

In addition we built an LTI tool for the LMS (Instructure Canvas) that provides information on the status of our courses. This allows the instructional designer to see the status of courses and interact with the faculty as appropriate.

We also have some instructional design graduate students who help faculty with the content population side of the course during the development process.

- Kevin Reeve, Director – Teaching and Learning Technology, Utah State University
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When copying courses into a new shell, the dates for each module are already preset according to top level programming (we use Moodle). Due dates, however, need to be updated for each assignment. All faculty are reminded to do this on their own. We also remind them to update or remove any references to absolute dates typed in from a prior term. (We emphasize that using absolute dates in courses is not a good practice for precisely this reason. Use day/time instead, but no month/year).

Since courses are copied from prior versions of courses or taken from a master course, the ID Team is tasked with ongoing surface level review of all courses. We check for essentials like updated syllabus, arrangement of content according to standards, gradebook setup, and any anomalies like video files uploaded as raw files rather than into our Kaltura system. Over time, each course improves incrementally.

We have also developed customized reports (via SQL query) to identify courses with/without certain critical things. This enables us to flag things for attention without having to peer into literally every course with eyeballs.

It has taken several years for this system to achieve a manageable level of stability in all courses, but it has finally come to pass. Our culture here urges faculty to “learn to fish” as much as possible, so when we ask them in a review note to do certain basic tasks, we rarely get pushback. If they need help, we are glad to walk them through and it usually sticks. Granted, this method works well enough for the number of courses we offer each term.

The main thing here is to maintain a longterm approach that achieves standards one batch at a time.

- Steve Covello, Rich Media Specialist/Instructional Designer/Online Instructor, Granite State College
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At Mount Saint Mary’s University our Instructional Design team is responsible for copying over our online courses and quality audits, and the faculty member is responsible for making sure the due dates are correct and all of the links still work.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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We recently created a rubric (based on the Chico State rubric) for faculty, department chairs and IDs to use for quality audits in all types of courses. We encourage faculty to use it for self-checks and chairs to use it for “observing” online/hybrid courses. IDs use the rubric when working with a faculty member to create a new online/hybrid course.

- Michele A. Starkey, Ed.D., Associate Provost & ALO, Mount Saint Mary’s University
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At the University of Northwestern – St. Paul, instructors are expected to update their own weekly due dates, but instructional designers from our Online Learning Office check links, copy courses over, make the courses available to students, conduct routine maintenance, etc. We are working to standardize and formalize our expectations for online instructors. We have a mandatory four-week long, asynchronous Best Practices in Online Teaching course that all online instructors must complete; this course equips them to be successful online teachers at UNW – SP. We have program managers or master faculty who are responsible for routine curricular updates and course maintenance. If the work required is less than 25% change to the overall course, the revision is not contracted; if it’s more than 25%, it is contracted.

We utilize the Quality Matters rubric (all of our designers are QM certified peer reviewers) and a credit hour calculator to address ADA compliance, appropriate seat time requirements, baseline quality, and continuous improvement.

- Tanya Grosz, Ph.D., Dean of Graduate, Online & Adult Learning, Assistant Professor of English, University of Northwestern – St. Paul
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