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Reimagining INFO 101: A Tale of Revisions and New Beginnings

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Abstract

Realized that video you love showing in class is nearly as old as your students now? We've been there. Lander University librarians spent this summer collaborating to redesign INFO 101, our 1-credit information literacy course. The goals were to keep the course fresh, useful, effective, and synchronized across instructors and delivery methods. This initiative included reformatting into an eight-week schedule offered twice per semester, moving to a new textbook, establishing a shared Blackboard sandbox in the university's recommended online course template, and ditching the final project. Results will be discussed from the Fall 2021 sections taught face-to-face and online.

Keywords

information literacy, course redesign

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Realized that video you love showing in class is nearly as old as your students now? We've been there. Lander University librarians spent this summer collaborating to redesign INFO 101, our 1-credit information literacy course. The goals were to keep the course fresh, useful, effective, and synchronized across instructors and delivery methods. This initiative included reformatting into an eight-week schedule offered twice per semester, moving to a new textbook, establishing a shared Blackboard sandbox in the university's recommended online course template, and ditching the final project. Results will be discussed from the Fall 2021 sections taught face-to-face and online.

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Reimagining INFO 101: A Tale of Revisions and New Beginnings

In the spring of 2020, schools around the globe were forced to shutter in-person education and attempt to quickly recreate their classroom in a virtual setting, yet still provide the same caliber of educational content. Lander University was no exception. Our experiences of unexpectedly shifting modalities, and later teaching in classrooms altered by health and safety standards, led us to the conclusion that we needed to redesign our information literacy course, INFO 101.

We needed a course which was not only consistent across modalities, allowing for quick changes, but in overall curriculum and course components. The Lander University librarians came together to compare our past content and outcomes and redesign our course so that it reflected a combination of our teaching methods, our most successful assignments, new content to meet current information literacy standards, and consistency across all modalities. We identified four goals on which to focus our redesign efforts: course model, synchronization across modalities, open educational resources (OER), and access to shared content.

Offer 8-week course model

The librarian who originally developed the course (no longer on staff) taught a 75-minute face-to-face class once per week, for ten weeks, starting at the beginning of the semester. Two of our librarians had continued to teach the course following this model. The other two librarians had been teaching the course asynchronously online over the full semester. All agreed it would be better for all sections to be consistent in length, to ensure students across sections were being asked for the same amount of time commitment. We decided to adopt the pre-existing 8-week (half semester) model Lander had already developed for some other online courses, with the face-to-face sections meeting for 50-minute classes twice per week.

Lander's Dean's Council and Academic Success Center had asked previously if Library Services might adopt this 8-week model during the second half of the semester as a retention effort, to offer a catch-up opportunity for students who'd had to drop a class. Our librarians preferred offering the course in the first semester half, so that students have time to apply their new research skills to final projects in other classes. To satisfy these competing objectives, we decided to offer sections of the course during both halves of the semester.

Synchronize all modalities

While creating a course which provides a consistent learning experience, no matter who is teaching, was a critical part of our decision to redesign INFO 101, our main impetus was driven by the need to efficiently move between the in-person and the online classroom. When Lander University moved all classes online in the spring 2020, the difficulties of quickly switching between modalities became starkly apparent.

Previous INFO 101 sections, prior to Fall 2021, had been designed and taught at the discretion of the instructing librarian. There was some synchronization, in that the content covered was agreed upon as a group, as well as the use of textbooks. But visual content, in-class work, assignments, and tests could be shared or independently crafted. How the content was taught online versus in-person was also at the discretion of the instructing librarian.

Synchronization allowed us to work together to create a course that still allows us to teach with our own style, but give the same quality content in each course, regardless of modality. We chose our textbook and learning objectives together, as we would have done in the past, but we also designed every assignment, quiz, and discussion as a team. Other details, like grade scale and rubrics, were also created. Synchronization does not mean that all content was required to be used or taught in a strict manner. Audio and visual components were shared but could be used at the discretion of the instructing

librarian. Additional content such as PowerPoints or lectures were also created independently, which allows the instructing librarian to apply their own unique teaching style.

There are several potential benefits which we considered before synchronizing modalities. As discussed, it would allow us to switch between modalities quickly and efficiently at any point during the semester. Students would have the same course curriculum regardless of format or instructor, which then would allow us to better gauge how the students are responding to the course. With these considerations in mind, we were able to successfully synchronize our course content across both modalities.

OER Textbook Selection and Course Materials

We chose to select a common textbook for all INFO 101 modalities. The textbook selection process included looking for open educational resources and library-owned resources that could be used by students for free. We felt that it was important to incorporate affordable course materials for students in this course. A number of open educational resources were reviewed. We selected the *Introduction to College Research* by Walter D. Butler, Aloha Sargent, and Kelsey Smith. The textbook we adopted for this course included not only course readings, but also supplemental materials such as discussion prompts, activities, and assessments. The textbook is published through Pressbooks, which is a platform for open educational publishing programs.

Create a Librarian Sandbox for Materials and Activities

Once an 8-week model was selected as our preferred format, the decision was made to synchronize all modalities, and an open educational resources textbook was adopted, we began building a sandbox for materials and activities that could be used across all sections and modalities. The sandbox was built within our learning management system, Blackboard. A sandbox is a blank course space where you can work on designing a course that is not visible to students and then can be copied over into

another course. Creating a sandbox in Blackboard allowed us to all work from the same space and for us to collaboratively design the course modules and layout. With support from our Information Technology Services (ITS) colleagues, we adopted a standardized online course template to build our INFO 101 course. This template is being used across Lander's Online Programs. Once the template was applied to the sandbox, we customized the branding for INFO 101 and broke the course materials into modules. Although the course is being offered in two modalities, we chose to cover each topic in modules that would transfer to class sessions in the face-to-face sections. The online section utilized the discussion board feature within Blackboard to facilitate the discussion element of the course. The face-to-face sections built the discussion into class time and hid the discussion board prompts that were built into the template. A number of pages were included in the modules in the sandbox as a resource point for the instructor to include as they saw fit in their modality.

Before adding the course materials into the sandbox, we built a shared folder within Microsoft Teams to allow each librarian to add videos, readings, activities, and assessments previously used in their course sections, workshops, or information literacy sessions. The materials in this shared folder covered the topics that we had decided were most important to cover in the course and were based on the open educational textbook, *Introduction to College Research*, that we selected. The supplemental materials provided by the authors were also added into the shared folder for consideration in the final course materials. The shared folder was organized by course module topic with folders for discussions, activities, and assessments. Throughout the summer, we met regularly to work through each module, identifying course materials, discussion prompts, and assessments. We finalized each module's content then moved it over into the sandbox in Blackboard. With the modules completed in the sandbox, another librarian provided his proofreading skills to make sure that the modules were grammatically correct and had a natural flow.

Once we got the all-clear and minor edits were made, we were able to copy the course into each section with a simple flip of a switch by our ITS colleagues. Building the course this way allowed us to easily flip between modalities if needed in circumstances like the coronavirus pandemic or the simple need to teach a different modality in a given semester. Building a template within a sandbox has a few benefits. Not only does it allow us to flip between modalities quickly if needed, it also allows us to make a simple fix within the sandbox as we need to update and tweak the modules in coming semesters. We can make the update and then push it out with the next course offering.

Comparison of Results

We analyzed the impact of the course redesign using two metrics: final course grades and attendance. We compared final course grades from Spring 2021 (the last semester we taught the previous course format) against final course grades from Fall 2021 Sessions 1 and 2 (taught in the new course format). We also compared attendance from Spring 2021 face-to-face sections against the Fall 2021 Sessions 1 and 2 face-to-face sections.

Final grades

Semester	Format	Class size	A	B	C	D	F	Average GPA
Fall 2021 - 2 A	F2F	14	43% (6)	29% (4)	21% (3)	0% (0)	7% (1)	3.0
Fall 2021 – 2 B	F2F	10	30% (3)	30% (3)	20% (2)	10% (1)	10% (1)	2.6
Fall 2021 – 1 A	F2F	13	77% (10)	15% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)	8% (1)	3.5
Fall 2021 - 1 OL	Online	19	68% (13)	11% (2)	16% (3)	0% (0)	5% (1)	3.4
Spring 2021 A	F2F	10	30% (3)	40% (4)	20% (2)	10% (1)	0% (0)	2.9
Spring 2021 OL	Online	24	67% (16)	17% (4)	12% (3)	0% (0)	4% (1)	3.4
Spring 2021 B	F2F	2	100% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	4.0

Average course GPA is calculated on a scale of A = 4.0, B = 3.0, C = 2.0, D = 1.0, and F = 0.

Semester	Sections	Total enrollment	Average GPA per student
Fall 2021 - 2	2	24	2.8
Fall 2021 - 1	2	32	3.4
Spring 2021	3	36	3.3

Average final grades rose slightly from Spring 2021 (original model) to Fall 2021 Session 1 (new model), from 3.3 to 3.4. In Fall 2021 Session 2, average final grades dropped significantly, all the way down to 2.8.

Attendance

Numbers do not include excused absences. The attendance policy for all sections allowed for one free absence (excused or unexcused) without penalty.

Semester	Class meetings	Class size	0 absences	1 absence	2 absences	3 absences	4 absences	Average absences
Fall 2021 - 2 A	13	14	29% (4)	43% (6)	21% (3)	0% (0)	7% (1)	1.1
Fall 2021 - 2 B	13	10	0% (0)	30% (3)	20% (2)	20% (2)	30% (3)	2.5
Fall 2021 - 1	14	13	46% (6)	38% (5)	8% (1)	8% (1)	0% (0)	0.8
Spring 2021 A	10	10	40% (4)	30% (3)	30% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0.9
Spring 2021 B	13	2	0% (0)	50% (1)	50% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	1.5

Semester	F2F sections	Total enrollment	Average unexcused absences per student
Fall 2021 - 2	2	24	1.7
Fall 2021 - 1	1	13	0.8
Spring 2021	2	12	1

Attendance improved slightly from Spring 2021 to Fall 2021 Session 1, from 1 average unexcused

absence per student down to 0.8. In Fall 2021 Session 2, average unexcused absences rose significantly, up to 1.7 per student.

Student Evaluations: Qualitative Feedback

Fall 2021 student evaluations included many positive comments about the value of skills learned during the course, calling them “very important,” “extremely helpful,” and “very useful in college.” Criticisms of the course were that it was “boring,” “mostly common sense,” and only beneficial to students “with majors directly relating to research, or those uncomfortable with the research process.”

Fall 2021 Session 1

“I enjoyed the class and I learned new things.”

“This course is extremely helpful and I would highly recommend it to other students.” (OL)

“This course provides useful information, however I do not see this as being beneficial to most majors/students. The information is mostly common sense and I could see the course being shorter than its already shortened class time. I personally would not recommend this class to anyone other than those with majors directly relating to research, or those uncomfortable with the research process.”

Fall 2021 Session 2

“I really like the class as it teaches very important skills to have especially in today's technological world.”

“This class is boring but very useful in college.”

Conclusions

Overall, compared against the original course model last taught in Spring 2021, both final grades and attendance improved slightly in the Fall 2021 Session 1, taught in the first half of the semester. In

the Fall 2021 Session 2, taught in the second half, both final grades and attendance worsened significantly, with final grades dropping lower and unexcused absences rising higher than either of the previous two semesters.

The differences in attendance among sections were likely due, at least in part, to differences in attendance policies. Some sections had an attendance policy in place with significantly higher penalties for unexcused absences.

After comparing the Spring 2021 and Fall 2021 data, we are encouraged to continue with the synchronized 8-week course model redesign. Between the two fall sessions, we did make a few minor modifications to several of the assessments which we found students needing clarification or further explanations to successfully complete. Having the ability to make the updates to the sandbox before pushing it out for the second session saved us time and ensured the continuity of the two sections in the second session.

Looking forward

Going forward, we will continue to make modifications as needed to course assessments, and update content as appropriate while maintaining the synchronized 8-week course model. We do have a few logistical changes we will be making in the future iterations of the course to sync up all sections and support positive student performance. First, we plan to synchronize attendance policies for the face-to-face sections, to further ensure equity across all sections in terms of grading and students' time commitment. Second, we plan to only offer sections in Session 1 of each semester. This will link back to our original motive of teaching this on a condensed schedule at the beginning of the semester, so students are able to apply the knowledge learned through the course in their major projects and research assignments that typically appear in the second half of the semester. Although we have not

offered an online section in the second session yet, we think we would see the same performance concerns as the face-to-face sections.

References

Butler, W.D., Sargent, A., & Smith, K. (2021). *Introduction to college research*.

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