

Evaluation of the Illinois Virtual High School Course Development Process

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Why are you here?

- Project-based Online Learning
- Sustaining an Online Program
- Effective Teacher Communication Styles
- Tips for Building Online Communities
- Standardized Curriculum that Improves Achievement

Who am I?

- I am...
 - a third year doctoral student at UGA
 - a researcher on virtual schools (e.g., effective virtual course design, rural-urban & virtual-traditional achievement differences, participation in CMC and its effects on learning, learning styles and achievement, perceived sources of student success)
- I have been...
 - a secondary school and virtual school social studies teacher
 - a course developer for four virtual schools
 - an administrator in two virtual high schools

IVHS Evaluation

- Course requirement
- Began in October 2004
- Data Collected from November 2004 to May 2005
- Submitted October 2005

Purpose

- to collect information for comparing the IVHS course development process to that of other virtual high schools;
- to collect information for improving the IVHS course development process; and
- to collect information for determining how the IVHS course development has contributed to the stated goals and objectives of the IVHS.

Background

- External Vendors
- Course Development
- Syllabuild

Methods

- Document Analysis
 - another VHS
 - IVHS courses
- Web-based Survey
- Interviews

Sample

- Document Analysis
 - Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation
 - 2 courses
- Web-based Survey
 - 17 of 29 for part one / 15 of 29 for part two
 - 4 developers were not reachable
- Interviews
 - 4 developers

Overall, course developers are pleased with their experience in developing courses for the IVHS.

- *Would you develop another course for the IVHS? (82%)*
- *Would you recommend to other teachers that they develop a course for the IVHS? (76%)*
- *"It was a great experience, one that I would like to repeat some time."*
- *"I would like to participate in the creation of another course in the technical field. I enjoyed."*
- *"It was intense, but an experience I would recommend to anyone interested in teaching in the online world."*

The IVHS course development process is fairly open-ended with a lot of room for developers to create the kind of course that they want to create, which is good and bad.

- In the likert response items from the web-based survey, six of the fifteen comments specifically referenced the IVHS and five of these six items were ranked as the five lowest mean scores of the fifteen items.
- *"... slightly disappointed not by working with IVHS, but working with the tech team from Denver..."*
- *"... I could already expect that the tech team was going to contact me at the last minute..."*
- *"when I had lots of time, eCollege wasn't ready for... Then when I got really busy at school, it was also crunch time for eCollege..."*

- *"For about \$5,000 I gave up most of an entire winter to put together a course with the quality I felt it should have... I figure I earned about \$5.00 an hour"*
- *"The timeline was short and strenuous..."*
- *"But what could I do without proper technical skills and caught in such tight time frame?"*
- *"... but doesn't pay enough for the hours of work needed to do a good job."*
- *"The one problem was the timeline."*

Approximately half of the IVHS courses were developed by a team of two or more developers and this has worked well in some instances and not so well in others.

- *"My support group was excellent..."*
- *"It is very helpful to have a coworker look over the logic, the content of ones created segments."*
- *"I did work with a partner, especially at the beginning because I thought that was very important, and we divided up the responsibilities which helped an awful lot and of course we were able to review each other's information and so on, and that was very, very helpful, and I won't say necessary, but certainly someone has to be there to be that second head to say oh this sounds fine or no..."*
- *"... we could talk back and forth and find solutions to particular problems that arose that would be relevant to the student and still maintain alignment with the curriculum."*

- *“we had a trio to start with as far as three people in this process and somehow we didn’t agree on what was to be done and how, and so on, and that sort of took away our time frame...”*
- *“Well we had a, partnerships or I had people who I cooperated with on those projects that basically I did the first semester and the other person did the second semester, and we kind of proof read each others work and edited but for the most part I developed one semester, they developed one semester then we just said that we developed the year long course.”*

The course developers for the IVHS were trained as teachers and unable to utilize the technology of the web to its fullest capacity.

- In the web-based survey, fourteen of the seventeen respondents indicated that they would have liked some training on the use of particular pieces of software, specifically:
 - Dreamweaver/Frontpage - 64.3%
 - Fireworks/Photoshop - 50%
 - Flash - 71.4%
 - Java - 57.1%
 - Audio Programs - 42.9%
 - Video Programs - 57.1%

- *“... what to hide, what to make mouse over, where to put a link...”*
- *“this could be audio as well, which makes it more user friendly.”*
- *“... recognize the fonts of the language I teach as FONTS and not as images”*
- *“... provide automatic feedback to students on the course tasks that would be different from just the feedback one gets from multiple choice type tasks.”*
- *“... allow the course designer to put at least audio files on line on her own would be welcome.”*

As the IVHS begins to use the Syllabuild Tool to standardize their course development process, the freedom to design the look and feel of their courses was one of the things that the course developers enjoyed.

- *Did you enjoy the freedom to design the look and feel of your course? (82%)*
- *Would you have preferred that the IVHS provide a course template into which you could have written your content? (No – 70.6%)*

- *“The directions to the team (what to hide, what to make mouse over, where to put a link) the basic outline the vocab sections and how to arrange them. an answer key to the tests, assignments when not graded by the system, especially fill ins that the teacher of the course can use for quick grading. Perhaps a set of expectations to check off so that the student knows what is expected for each assignment. For example: write in complete sentences. This could be audio as well, which makes it more user friendly.”*
- *“First of all I would like to have had a template that would recognize the fonts of the language I teach as FONTS and not as images, a template that would enable the course designer to provide automatic feedback to students on the course tasks that would be different from just the feedback one gets from multiple choice type tasks. A template that would allow the course designer to put at least audio files on line on her own would be welcome.”*
- *“It could have been very open but it would have been helpful to have an open shell of chapters. Something so that the students would have an exact outline to how much to finish in a semester.”*

Recommendations

1. Create structure for the course development process so that the IVHS, eCollege, and the developer are under the same impressions when it comes to the nature of the assistance that can be provided and the expectations of all parties within the specific deadlines of the course development process.

Recommendations

2. Divide the course development process into timed segments that describe the nature of the deliverable due at the end of each period, with partial payment for the successful delivery of each of the segments.

Recommendations

3. If the IVHS continues to use a team of developers for a single course, determine a method of select team members that will work well together.

Recommendations

4. Provide training in multimedia software for course developers or split the course development process so that technical developers can add multimedia components to courses after the content has been developed.

Recommendations

5. Any tool used to guide the development of course developers needs to be open enough to allow for the creativity of the developer.

Questions

- Questions?
- Comments?
- Jokes?

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