A GUIDE FOR BUILDING COURSES IN WEBSTUDY

Peter Margolis, Director, Distance Education
pmargolis@ccp.edu
(215) 751-8702

Below are some concrete and proven guidelines for building courses in WebStudy. These guidelines cover the initial course design and creation process; teaching tips, aesthetics, testing, and “fine-tuning” take place from the time the course is built until it is actually taught. I will address them separately.

Creating an online or hybrid course involves only three types of activities:

- Organization and Planning
- Analysis
- Nuts and Bolts

Organization and Planning

It is something of a paradox that the greatest part of the work in creating your online course does not involve WebStudy. Before the first content item is loaded into WebStudy you need to:

1. Choose the course you want to teach and obtain the required approval signatures on the Online and Hybrid Course Approval Form. If you are a novice to online learning, this should be a course you have already taught in the classroom. If circumstances permit, choose your favorite course.

2. List the goals and objectives of the course.

3. In outline form in your word processor, create the following list of teaching tools that you use for each lesson of the course as you have taught it (naturally, not all will apply to all courses, and I have surely overlooked others):
   - lesson objective
   - lesson introduction
   - readings
   - lectures
   - examples
   - discussion topics
• assignments
• quizzes and exams
• activities (labs, small group work, student presentations, even work on the chalkboard)
• enrichments (overheads, videos, material from CDs or websites associated with the textbook)
• relevant web resources

4. On your computer, create a folder for the course, and a sub-folder for each lesson. If you desire, do the same in individual physical folders.

5. Locate every content item associated with your course, starting with the syllabus, and including each teaching tool and content item for each of your lessons. You may also need to:
   • divide large files into multiple smaller files.
   • create PowerPoint slideshows from appropriate files.
   • locate graphic images, animations or other electronic materials.
   • write lesson introductions in separate Word files.
   • write class policies in a separate Word file.
   • write discussion questions in a separate Word file.
   • write or obtain exam questions.
   • locate related websites.

Note these items on the outline you made in #3 above. Include a few words of explanation, a filename, a web address, or other identifying comment for each one. This is the “blueprint” or design plan of your course.

6. For content items that are in electronic format (word processed documents, lecture notes, etc.), place an electronic copy in the appropriate folder on your computer. If possible, print a copy and place it in the appropriate physical folder if you are using folders.

7. Dream! If you could do anything you want in your course, what would that be? Make a list: a field trip to a museum, a visit to another country, ethnic community, factory, or construction site, perhaps a guest lecture by a world-renowned expert in your field.

Steps 1-7 above are the most difficult part of creating your online course. I am available to assist at any time.

**Analysis**

Online learning is both an art and a science. Fortunately, the “science” part – computers, WebStudy, and various software tools – is robust and dependable. The “art” of online learning lies in creatively applying them to produce an engaging and successful educational experience. This is done in the “analysis” part of creating your online course.
Analysis involves examining the design plan of your course (explained in #3 above) and “interpreting” the teaching tools into the idiom of WebStudy. We will do this in a series of meetings with the Director of Distance Education to:

- review online learning capabilities and look at examples of existing courses
- choose the appropriate WebStudy function - or blend of functions - to deliver your teaching experience
- select the set of WebStudy functions you need to master in order to create your course
- identify problematic areas (more on this below)

In many cases, this is a very straightforward process. For example, class discussions translate readily into online discussions using WebStudy discussion forums; readings involve a written reference to pages in the textbook; assignments can easily be submitted in WebStudy; graphic images are easy to place wherever you want them. With this basic list of WebStudy functions, you will know exactly what training you need to build your course.

Some parts of your vision of your online course may require a combination of WebStudy tools that might not be immediately obvious to you. For example, delivering a seminar experience or guest lecture may involve using a combination of discussion forum, video, and e-mail. Don’t worry - your job is to enunciate your vision for your course; the Internet service provider has the resources to apply the available technology to deliver the educational experience you have in mind.

We will also discuss strategies for integrating field trips, labs, small group work, and projects into your course.

You are now ready to receive your empty WebStudy course “shell,” to receive training on the WebStudy functions you identified in the analysis of your course, and to begin building your course - the “Nuts and Bolts” phase.

**Nuts and Bolts**

With your new WebStudy course shell, you must now obtain comprehensive training from the Distance Education department. You should be prepared to invest several hours of effort to master the WebStudy functions you identified as being essential to your course. Remember: No one is born knowing WebStudy. It must be learned systematically, like any other skill.

Much of the process of building your course involves uploading content materials into WebStudy and then linking them into the appropriate lesson. These are not difficult tasks to master, and I am always ready to assist.

In addition, this is the phase where we apply some of the more impressive technological wizardry. Feel free to throw challenges at me (remember the list of dreams you created above) and we will find a solution that is both pedagogically and technologically sound.
This could be a matter of placing a video in your course, structuring an online guest lecture, building exams from lists of questions on the CD that came with the textbook, or adding voice narration to a PowerPoint presentation, to list just a few.

**Conclusion**

The process of building your online course is a collaborative consultation between you and me. It is an ongoing creative conversation that combines your expertise in your subject with judicious and manageable use of educational technology. WebStudy exists to serve you, just like the overhead projector or the dry erase board. The largest part of creating your online course involves the things you have always done: creating lessons and using teaching materials. Educational technology gives you some wonderful new tools, but ultimately it is your enthusiasm and passion that make your course successful.