



The process of designing an online course

Catherine College invites scholars and practitioners from all cultures and disciplines to present courses in gender studies. The process for designing an online course goes something like this:

1. A topic is proposed to the Educational Team (abbr: ET) (Moderator@fuse.net).
2. Author creates a preliminary outline.
3. The outline is discussed and the author prepares the first lesson (text only) with a selection of audio interviews or video clips that could be used to enhance the experience of the first two lessons.
4. If needed, the ET discusses ways to strengthen the first lesson with the author (Skype conference call).
5. The author prepares lessons two to eight. Our technician creates a new online classroom and places the lessons in their context. Suitable pics and exploratory experiences are added.

6. The online course is run with a select group of pioneering participants who “test drive” the course. The author and technician collaborate in upgrading all aspects of the learning experience.
7. A scholar in the field vets the entire course. Some additional fine tuning may result.
8. The author finalizes the course description, the learning outcomes anticipated, and the short and long paper required of participants who wish to obtain a Certificate at the end of the course.
9. Success! The course becomes an official part of the syllabus. Ideally, the author moderates the course the first three times and trains an understudy who will become a three to five year, remunerated moderator.

While this is the anticipated flow, in practice, the creation process does not always move in neat consecutive order and, some aspects are expanded and some aspects are contracted.

In any case, the objective is to create (as a team) a dynamic and interactive set of eight lessons that have the character and inspiration of the author solidly visible throughout.

Requesting the preliminary outline

Here are some important questions to think about in the initial stages of the course creation.

1. What would be your course title and a short (100 words or less) course description? See <http://www.catherineofsiena.net/prospectus/academic.asp>
2. What would you project as possible lesson topics for an eight week course?

3. What are the unique, compelling features of the course you intend to plan?
4. What sort of persons would be most likely to benefit from this course? [Keep in mind our international and inter-religious participants.]
5. What time-frame would you anticipate by way of completing your course?
6. Do you have a sample lesson (feature article) that would give us a taste of your approach to the subject?

Sometimes participating in a one of Catherine College courses is helpful for understanding the form and format used. It also helps illustrate the use of various mediums within an online context.

To examine one or two of our courses, such as H14 Role Perceptions of Women in Children's Literature created by Pat Pinsent you can do the following:

Lesson One. We have set up a name=rose and password=1234 for you that can be used as follows:

Login--Open your internet connection and type in or click on www.catherinecollege.net. Once it opens, click on “**Login**” (upper right-hand corner), and the login window will open. Enter your name (rose) and password (1234) into the designated places on the left. (You’ll want to make sure you do not enroll as a guest.)

Once you login, click on the course title: H14 Role Perceptions of Women in Children's Literature (center column). This will take you to the homepage. Once there, click on Lesson One.

This will offer you an illustration of how very complex ideas can be progressively learnt through the use of interactive questions designed (a) to evoke a personal investment in the subject and (b) to

stretch the participant into taking notice of the tacit structures of fairy tales.

Notice that student responses to the probative questions are hidden until one posts. This insures that the participant has the space and freedom to make up her/his own mind before being influenced by the responses of others. I've left a few responses in each case so that you can gain some idea of what others have been saying. To see them, however, you'll have to enter a response of your own.

The art of drafting Exploratory Questions

Within any given course, there are three ways of evaluating progress in acquiring the performance skills that are the foundation for competency in any subject:

1. Exploratory Questions

In our typical course, there are repeated opportunities to express oneself in responding to the Exploratory Questions in each Lesson. These Exploratory Questions enable the participant to make use of personal experience, theoretical understanding, and verified judgments. Consider the following questions posed during the first lesson in Pat Pinsent's course, *Role Perceptions of Women in Children's Literature*:

Exploration 1.2 Consider your own particular experience.

1.2a What fairy tales were dear to you as a child? Among these, what was your favorite?

1.2b What was the most exciting moment in your favorite story? What feelings were evoked?

1.2c How was your imagination carried away into seeing yourself within this story?

1.2d What was happening in your life then or later that might help you account for your own special attachment to this story?

The role of these questions is to allow the participant to begin to see how even fairy tales enable children to enter into a make-believe situation that offers them entertainment and training. Particular ways of acting and thinking are endorsed. Other ways of acting and thinking are discouraged. By beginning with one's own story, one soon discovers the guidance and the ideological presuppositions hidden within every story (e.g., the parables of Jesus, modern films).

After exploring the role of fairy tales in entertaining and training children, the specific case of "Little Red Riding Hood" is considered as a test case. Three different versions are considered in their historical and social settings. Following a hearing and analysis of the Grimm version, these probative questions are considered:

1.5a What appears to you to be the most exciting moment in the Grimm revision of RRH (Red Riding Hood)? What feelings are evoked?

1.5b What does RRH do to save herself? Is this a wise or fooling course of action? Explain.

1.5c Does RRH save herself all by herself or does she necessarily call upon the help of someone more powerful? Is this a calculated part of her action plan or just a happy accident?

1.5d Try to imagine how parents used this narrative to prepare their daughters to face some real dangers that existed. What might these real dangers be? How were their daughters socialized to save themselves from these dangers? What sort of parental messages were being [overtly or covertly] conveyed through this story?

1.5e In view of contemporary circumstances within your own culture, what version would you want to read/tell your own daughter or granddaughter? [Or, alternately, what would you advise parents who asked you?] Explain.

2. Giving and receiving feedback

After posting one's hunches to the Probative Questions, then there is the opportunity to learn from the responses of others. This goes back to the realization that everyone has something to teach in every course. The give and

take that follows the posting offers an opportunity to deepen one's understanding and to correct misleading projections.

3. Mid-term and final essays

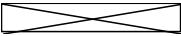
Half way through the course, you have the opportunity to display your learning skills by doing a short independent analysis. This usually takes a few hours. At the end of the course, each one has the opportunity of doing a more extensive research project. This may require anywhere between six and twelve hours. Details for how to do this are supplied to participants after the mid-term. In each instance, the subjects chosen are from a list provided by the course moderator. Gifted participants are permitted to work outside the suggested subjects.

The mid-term essays enable the participants to make use of the analytical skills learned in the first three or four lessons. Here is the description of the mid-term used in the course Violence against Women. For the sake of simplicity, the pics have been omitted.

Lesson 5

What the scholars and poets are saying

Opening ritual: Repeat the opening ritual of visualizing the circle of women that await you. Silently acknowledge, "I am not alone. My co-learners (name each of them slowly, visualizing them as you do so) are out there wondering and waiting to see what I will do and say during this session. I anticipate interacting with them as I go forward." Embellish this ritual and make it your own. If after a few sessions, the ritual seems empty, feel free to drop it. If the impact grows on you, continue it and allow the mysterious presence of your co-learners to diffuse your studies.

Buddhist singing bowl (click to listen)  The learning circle is now open.

Introduction

In the first four sessions, we have had the opportunity to examine two religious texts (Judges and the Mahabharata) and a half-dozen case studies depicting violence against women. This is an apt time to allow you to do some in-depth study/investigating on a topic of your own choosing.

In this Lesson, you will choose to read an article or listen to an interview. Then you will write a letter to its author. Then, when finished, you will email your letter to the author and post it (at the same time) as a kind of discussion teaser on an appropriate discussion board.

Declaring my choice 5.1 <--Click here to post.

5.1 Declare your choice, and say a few words to your learning circle explaining why you have chosen what you did.

What are the scholars and the poets saying? (60 min.)

Having come this far, it's time to find out what the scholars and poets are saying. Decide upon one topic/author that attracts your attention. To do this, check out all nine titles below, and read the full description of those that are contending for your attention. As you get close to making your final choice, check out the bio of the author (by clicking on the name) or run a web search in order to get more background.

After making your final choice, go back to your Posting 5.1 and edit it so that the #_ you have chosen appears first thing in the subject box. Then save it. Then get a comfortable place to read the entire article or get your headphones to listen to an interview. Keep your notepad handy to capture your ideas/feelings as you go. When finished, organize your response into a letter addressed to the author. Click here for [some friendly \(but optional\) suggestions for how to structure your letter](#).

After composing your letter in your favorite word processor, run it through a spell check, and then (a) post a copy below , (b) email/fax a copy to your author, and (c) [post it on a discussion board](#).

Your Letter 5.2 <--Here is where you will post your letter, exchange feedback within your learning circle, and (as the responses come in) post the various responses to your letter.

You will note that clicking on 5.2 will open a blank text box. Paste your letter into the box. Ask for the kind of feedback that you prefer. Put your number (#_) and name into the subject box. Then post it.

Go below and click on #4 Aaron for an example.

#1 Recent dowry studies from the Indian Journal of Gender Studies

For an in-depth view of dowry-related violence in India, chose one or two of the following:

#1a "The Expanding Dimensions of Dowry"

Indu Agnihotri, Vivekananda College, University of Delhi, Delhi E-mail:

kuldipkr@vsnl.com

Indian Journal of Gender Studies, Jun 2003; vol. 10: pp. 307 - 319.

Check item | **Abstract** | **Full Text (PDF)**

#1b "Dowry among Indian Muslims: Ideals and Practices"

Abdul Waheed

Indian Journal of Gender Studies, Feb 2009; vol. 16: pp. 47 - 75.

Check item | **Abstract** | **Full Text (PDF)**

#1c "Bangladeshi Girls Sold as Wives in North India" (When fathers are too poor to pay a dowry, they sometimes resort to selling their daughters across the border.)

[#2-#9 are omitted here.]

Conclusion

In the above, I have endeavored to suggest the typical ten-step process whereby a new course is prepared through the interaction of the author and the ET. I have illustrated some of the more complex aspects of this design process so that potential authors can glimpse what it takes to produce an engaging and successful learning experience. In this, competence, artistry, and educational savvy come together. Those authors who have worked with us have found the process exciting and enlightening. We expect that you will as well. Just begin by sending us (Moderator@fuse.net) your proposal.

Aaron Milavec

Joint Vice-President