AT&T FACULTY-STAFF AWARDS IN INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY
2009-2010 Faculty-Staff Competition
FULLY ONLINE Course APPLICATION FORM

Course Identifier: EAD866
Course Name: Teaching in Post Secondary Education
Department: Educational Administration: Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education
College: College of Education

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Faculty and Staff Involved in Developing and Offering the Course: please list full name, position at MSU, email address, and project role for each person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>MSU Affiliation</th>
<th>PROJECT ROLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ann Austin</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Lead instructor, co-creator of overall new environment for EAD courses, co-designer of content, and is teaching EAD866 this semester</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Dirkx</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Co-creator of overall new environment for EAD courses, co-designer of content, and has taught EAD866 in development (2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rhonda Egidio</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Co-creator of course environment</td>
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<td>Brandon Blinkenberg</td>
<td>vuDAT eProducer</td>
<td>Co-creator of course environment, technical and graphical assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christopher Irvin</td>
<td>vuDAT Graphic Designer</td>
<td>Angel theme and layout design</td>
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Semester(s) offered in 2009-2010 and number of students enrolled:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEMESTER</th>
<th># STUDENTS</th>
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<td>Spring Semester 2010</td>
<td>25</td>
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I. Course Description

The purpose of this course (which is fully online) is to support participants in becoming more reflective and effective teachers in postsecondary education. “Teaching” is used here in a broad sense to cover a variety of processes and contexts in which educators are helping adults and young adults to learn. These themes are explored:

1. Various conceptions of teaching;
2. Key factors that relate to teaching, including the characteristics of learners in postsecondary educational settings, the learning process, and learning environments;
3. Instructional design and planning;
4. Strategies to encourage active, involved learning (including strategies involving lecturing, small groups and discussion, experiential learning, and educational technologies);
5. Approaches to assessing learning; and
6. Approaches to improving teaching through assessment and teacher learning and development.

Student performance is assessed through individual and group projects. Additionally, we include various Classroom Assessment opportunities (CATs) at several times throughout the course. These CATs are not graded or assessed formally; however, they are short instruments that guide students in assessing their own progress and also provide formative feedback to the instructors so adjustments can be made to the course, if needed, to support students’ learning.

For individual projects and learning activities the students:

• Conduct a guided observation, interview, and analysis of a postsecondary teacher
• Engage in (face-to-face or on-line) micro-teaching (a 20-30 minute lesson) in a formal or informal setting, and self analyze strengths and weaknesses of the session
• Develop and revise a course syllabus
• Write a paper on their emerging philosophical/theoretical approach to teaching.

Students also work in collaborative teams to teach/facilitate learning for our class (online, of course) on a key topic pertaining to strategies for encouraging effective learning (e.g., using technology; using discussion and collaborative learning; using lectures; using experiential approaches). Within the course online environment, each team determines how to facilitate and guide the class’ consideration of the teaching topic (and its implications in both face-to-face and online environments).

II. Learning and Interaction Goals of the Fully Online Course

EAD 866 has been purposively designed in each detail to support graduate students from across fields to develop as effective teachers in the many environments (face-to-face and online) in which postsecondary education occurs. Within this overall goal of preparing teachers for postsecondary settings, we hope students will achieve several learning and interaction outcomes, supported by the use of technology. We believe the way we are using technology to aid students’ learning makes the course worthy of consideration for the award.
First, we are excited that the course provides an immersive experience for students in the amazing world of technology-enhanced and technology-delivered education. The doctoral and master’s students who take this course come from a variety of disciplines and fields, and environments. Many of them will assume professional responsibilities as educators where they will need to know how learning occurs in online and hybrid environments, as well in face-to-face environments. What better way for future educators in higher and postsecondary settings to learn about the advantages of technology for learning and greater access, and the ways in which technology can enhance, motivate, and foster learning, than for them to have the opportunity to be immersed in an online course experience?

Furthermore, not only are students learning how to learn in an online environment; they are also learning how to teach in online as well as in hybrid and in-person environments. In instructing the course, we often include in our formal and informal interactions with students our comments on why we structure the course and teach/facilitate in the way we do. These comments and interactions all contribute to the learning experiences of the participants who are enhancing their expertise as teachers. The, in the second half of the course, the students work in teams to create and facilitate a learning unit for the rest of the class. They have the opportunity to be the course teachers themselves, experimenting with, creating, and facilitating online learning experiences for their class colleagues.

Another learning and interaction outcome that we are trying to achieve through our use of technology is to create an effective learning community. Our vision of such a learning community is that all members of the course—students and faculty alike—have a responsibility for the quality of the course. We each have background experiences, perceptions from our reading and thinking, and insightful questions to bring to the learning environment. Each person enriches his or her own learning and, importantly, the learning of the other colleagues in the course, through commitment to preparing for and engaging in the various course experiences.

We have designed the course, and used technology, in explicit ways to enhance the course as a community of learners. Specifically the course is designed to build the capacity of the graduate students as online team learners. For example, throughout every unit of the course, there are occasions for students to work in small groups (using discussion boards) to examine, discuss, and reflect on the readings, on the various activities of the course, and on various questions that the instructors offer to guide the learning. We often ask the small groups to provide summaries of their ideas back to the full group, and then ask students to reflect individually to their colleagues and to the instructors based on their thinking, reading, and group discussions. We are pleased to be receiving explicit feedback from students (both informally and unsolicited, as well as through the formal feedback mechanisms) that they are finding the small group discussions (supported by online discussion forums) to provide excellent opportunities for deep reflection on readings and ideas.

Class participants also have posted pictures and personal and professional information, and, right from the start of the course, we have built in opportunities for students to introduce themselves, and respond and connect with their colleagues. Additionally, the instructor and doctoral teaching intern also are committed to having frequent interaction with students. They send class messages and individual emails to students as well as post thoughts as part of discussion forums. They also write a weekly letter to the class, drawing on the comments students have made in discussions, and connecting students’ thinking and experiences to key themes and issues in the course. These regular electronic letters are well-received by the students, and, written in very accessible and encouraging language, they seem to foster the sense that we are a community learning together and supporting each other in our learning.

Another intended learning outcome of the course, supported by the use of technology, pertains to the individual development of each student in terms of his or her sense of identity as a teacher. An underlying assumption that is explored throughout the course is that the identity, beliefs, and values of a teacher (remember that each student is aspiring to be a teacher) are deeply connected with the process of teaching and therefore with the process and outcomes of the students’ learning. Through the course, we are not seeking to define or advocate a particular way of teaching but rather to explore the assumptions, choices,
theories, and beliefs that should be considered as a teacher makes choices in particular contexts. The use of technology has helped us to support students in exploring their individual identity as teachers. For example, the first unit of the course concerns conceptions of teaching.

As part of that unit, students take a web-based survey that helps them assess their own perspectives, values, and beliefs about teaching (as measured on Daniel Pratt’s Teaching Perspectives Inventory). After using this web-based instrument and understanding more of their individual values, each student spends two weeks in a small discussion group, considering the work and ideas of several major thinkers about teaching and learning. These small groups then engage in cross-group exchange of ideas, which enables the class to recognize and examine the variety of philosophical perspectives that influence teaching practice. The technology aids in the individual assessment and provides the discussion platforms for in-depth discussions. Students have commented that they find these small discussions useful forums for deepening their understanding of their own values, beliefs, and assumptions about teaching and learning.

Also this course experiments with a teaching and learning strategy called Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs). These strategies help students reflect on their experiences and progress as learners while also providing feedback to the instructors about how the course is going from the point of view of the students.

One particular technique that is used is the “Desired Outcomes” Tracker (see figure at right). The 6 course outcomes are tracked using an Angel survey with a Likert scale of 1-6 (regarding how strongly the student agrees that she or he has achieved the desired outcome). The results are then displayed graphically on the main lessons page using Angel actions, variables and custom graphics. As the student progresses through the semester, s/he can return to the Desired Outcomes tracker frequently to see what progress has been made and outcomes that are still not being achieved. This is a novel and useful instrument for students to take ownership of their own progress to develop a sense of identity as a teacher, to expand specific capacities related to teaching, and to achieve the course’s intended outcomes.

Finally, we note that a Doctoral Teaching Intern is working with Dr. Austin this semester. She is a doctoral student in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education and is interested in developing her abilities as a teacher, specifically, in the online environment. The opportunity to apprentice in a fully online course such as this one is enhancing her professional development.

III. Points of Interest and Innovation

As a team, we have worked hard to think through innovative and effective ways to use technology in support of the learning goals of the course. During the first two years of offering the course online, we sought feedback from students about the organization and activities in order to aid us in our on-going process of developing an innovative and effective online learning environment. We list specific points of interest and innovation below.

1. Overall Course Layout/Design - keenly visual and intuitive

The visual environment for EAD 866 is a key feature of the course. The layout is colorful, intuitive, and student tested (see below). We reviewed various online course environments to arrive at our tentative design. We then used focus groups of students who were enrolled in earlier offerings of the
class to give us feedback on such areas as what worked, what didn’t, and what they would like to see in the environment that was not there. From that feedback, we arrived at this layout and design, which is working well.

Each Section includes an opening page with: an “Essentials” box (blue panel on the left side of the opening page of each unit with all essential links, such as to learning activities, the syllabus, a place for questions to the instructor, discussion forums, and drop boxes as needed); a text overview of the section; and an audio introduction that reminds students what has been accomplished in the course so far and where we are going.

Below is a screenshot of the opening web for Section I:
2. Essentials Box - *everything important right in one spot*

For each section in the course there is an “Essentials Box” that holds icon links to everything that the student needs to access to actively participate in the section.

The goal here is to reduce the amount of time students spend searching for “to-do” items in each section. A portion of the Section 3 “Essentials Box” can be seen to the left.

3. Audio Presentations - *instructor presence*

The instructors have created audio introductions (connected to PowerPoint slides) for each of the seven sections of the course. The purpose of these audio introductions to each section is to provide an overall organizing framework to the students as they begin the work of the section. (We know as educators that learners benefit from having frameworks to organize their approach to a learning experience and within which to situate new knowledge.) The audio introductions situate the new section within the broader structure of the course, highlight the learning goals to be addressed in the section, explain the organization of the section, and draw students’ attention to particular readings, discussions, and activities that will occur as they move through the section. In addition to providing a framework for learning, our hope is to share our excitement as instructors about the ideas with which we all, as a learning community, are going to engage. We also find that the audio introductions add a personal touch. We try to make them friendly, encouraging, and natural; students sometimes comment that the audio presentations help them get to know us as people.

In addition to the section introductions, we also sometimes have additional audio presentations, linked to PowerPoint slides, to introduce or explain specific topics. We are using these when we feel it is helpful. As we continue to teach this course in subsequent semesters, we expect to add more short audio comments to highlight particular topics.

[Note that the audio presentations introducing the sections in the first part of the course are presented by Ann Austin, who taught the course online in Year 1 and now again in Year 3. The audio presentations in the latter part of the course are presented by John Dirkx, who taught the course in Year 2. As we move through this semester and open later sections of the course, the presentations by John will be replaced with presentations by Ann. Please note also that a few of the audio presentations this semester are prepared by Pam Roy, who is working with Ann Austin as the Doctoral Teaching Intern.]
4. Graphic Concept Organizers – seeing the big picture

Throughout the course there are graphic organizers to show major course concepts. The primary graphic organizer for the overall course is shown at right. As the major organizer for the course, this graphic is built over time with various stages of the graphic appearing in sections until it is finally completed in the last section.

This graphic organizer addresses a key learning principle that is well-supported by research. That is, learning is enhanced when students understand the “big picture” and can see where and how parts that they are studying relate to prior learning and subsequent concepts and ideas they will learn. The use of the graphic organizer also helps students develop a conceptual understanding of teaching. It especially helps to emphasize that effective teaching involves more than simply techniques (although they are certainly one important element of effective teaching).

5. Learning Activities – interactive checklist

This is a very novel feature of the course and responds to the need for students to be clear about what they have to do—and when—as they progress through the course. Certainly in online environments there are various ways to get to information. Our student focus groups last year let us know that they were worried that they would miss something. Thus, we used vuDAT’s “CheckDAT” tool to help construct the Learning Activities checklist. The icon is in the Essentials box for each section and the Learning Activities tool lists each item that the student must complete for the section. Each activity is also linked to relevant discussion boards, drop boxes, website inventories, or instructions pertaining to the activity. When complete, the student checks a box for that item. The next time the student returns, the system recalls the student’s completions so they know right where they are. This has been a hallmark innovation designed for this course, and students report that it is very useful to them.
6. Classroom Assessment Techniques - CATs

CATs are used throughout the course to inform the student and the instructor of progress toward course outcomes. CATs were first introduced in the postsecondary teaching literature in the 1980s, and are well-recognized as an effective way to help students to reflect on their learning (reflection is a meta-analytical thinking process that is very important to helping students consider how to improve as learners). At the same time, they are a quick, rather easy, but very effective way to provide student feedback about the course and students’ learning experiences to the instructors in a sufficiently timely way that improvements can be made to the course as it goes along.

We mentioned already that we provide a CAT (called the Desired Outcomes CAT) at the start of the course. This CAT provides students with the chance to assess themselves in terms of key learning goals of the course. We then offer opportunities throughout the course when they can return to this self-assessment process in order to assess and reflect on their individual progress. Such assessment helps each student recognize progress being made, and also determine whether there are areas in which he or she wishes to direct more attention. It also helps the instructors identify topics or areas where they may want to put more emphasis.

Other CATs are also sprinkled throughout the course. (However, they do not occur every week since the literatures suggests that “overdoing it” may make them less valuable as tools for encouraging reflection.) Here is an example of a few CATs:

Sample CATs

- What's going well for you in this class? Do you have any suggestions for the instructors on how to make this a better learning experience for you?
- What is the “muddiest point” to you in our learning this week? That is, concerning what topic or idea would you like further clarification, guidance, or information?

7. Students as Course Co-Teachers - learning through immersive experience

Students work in small groups to teach one of the topics concerning teaching strategies and approaches included in our syllabus (e.g., explicit ways to use technology; using discussion and
collaborative learning; using lectures; using experiential approaches). Each team determines how to facilitate and guide the class’s consideration of the teaching topic in our online environment. The approaches used by the teams are to incorporate some of the strategies and ideas we have considered in the course, as appropriate for an online environment. In addition to developing the learning plan for the week of their topic, each team prepares a resource list relevant to the topic (which might include websites, articles, etc.). After each team’s unit, class participants are asked to provide feedback to the group that led/facilitated that unit. Then, each member of the team submits a short paper (3-4 pages) describing his or her role in developing and facilitating the session, his or her critique of the strengths or areas for improvement in the class unit, and insights gained from planning and facilitating the unit. {Note: The instructors interact with and provide guidance to the teams as they develop and facilitate their respective units.)

8. Regular Letters from the Instructors to the Students

The instructors have found that writing a letter to students as each section (or each unit within a multiple-week section) concludes has provided a good way to support student learning. The letters highlight key ideas that we hope students will think about as the unit or section is wrapping up, and we especially use it as a way to acknowledge, honor, and build on the ideas that students have offered in small group or whole class discussion forums. We often will mention students by name as we highlight particular ideas that students have added to the discussions. We also use the letter as a way to help students feel well-connected with us as instructors. A casual tone, as well as occasional references to the daily events in all of our lives (snow storms, the busy demands everyone has in their daily lives, family needs), help remind us all that we are part of a learning community of adults, all of whom are balancing many responsibilities along with the course. Students often mention, unsolicited, how much they appreciate these letters, including the substantial ideas we highlight in the letters as well as the personal touches that help connect us all as a community.

IV. Accessibility

The course designers were very conscientious about implementing simple accessibility features such as “alt” tags and appropriate use of HTML markup (headings, paragraphs and lists where appropriate). In addition, for the more graphical elements such as the “Essentials Boxes,” CSS was implemented to add visual interest, yet keep the raw content accessible.

V. Evidence of Effectiveness with Students

This course has been regularly taught as a face-to-face course in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education for many years, and both instructors (Ann Austin and John Dirkx) have much experience teaching it in a face-to-face environment. It is a course that consistently has received high SIRs scores in the face-to-face context, based on students’ interest in the content, how they grow as teachers, the quality of student interaction, and the quality of student-faculty interaction and feedback. Students consistently find that this course opens new understandings for them about teaching and learning, and, for many students over the years, it has helped them identify their professional interest in pursuing teaching and their passion for helping others to learn. In spring, 2008, Dr. Austin adapted it and taught it for the first time in a fully online environment, and then in spring, 2009, Dr. Dirkx also taught it in a fully online environment. Rhonda Egidio provided some guidance in 2008. Then, in 2009, we began working closely as a team (Ann Austin, John DIrkk, Rhonda Egidio, and Brandon Blinkenberg) to build on the content and activities that we were using in EAD 866, but now to develop it into a very innovative, engaging, and interactive online course. The version that Ann. Austin is teaching now in spring, 2010 is the product of both the years of work with this course that Drs. Austin and Dirkx have put into the content design and the innovative ideas.
and work of Dr. Egidio and Brandon Blinkenberg. Thus, the 2010 version, currently being taught, is the innovation that we offer for review.

We are very excited to be receiving very positive feedback from students about the course content, the design, and the process of the course in its current fully online, innovative form. As we have noted earlier, the design features have been informed not only by the ideas of the collaborating team (Austin, Blinkenberg, Dirkx, and Egidio) but also the input we sought from students in the first two online versions of the course (including specific efforts to gather focus group feedback from last spring’s class). We have just completed a Classroom Assessment feedback opportunity with this semester’s class. The comments indicate considerable enthusiasm about the quality of the readings and ideas that we are addressing, appreciation for the efforts to make the course activities and assignments very organized and easy to find and follow, and, on the part of a number of students, a sense that the interactions provided within the class structure are enhancing their learning. We also appreciate comments provided by several students that they would like their classmates to be encouraged to participate more actively in the small group discussions. Overall, though, our observation is that there has been considerable involvement on the part of most students in the discussions. A few students have noted informally that they have participated more in this course than in any others they have taken before.

We learned a lot from the first two semesters of teaching this course about ways to help students stay on track in terms of due dates, assignments, and class activities. As explained above, our team has designed various strategies (such as the Essentials Box and the Learning Activities checklist) to help students stay organized. Since a large majority of the students currently in the course have never taken an online course before, a few are still finding their level of comfort in an online environment. We have a few more ideas after completing the first two sections this semester of some small adjustments that will make it even easier for students to stay on track (e.g., numbering discussion boards and drop boxes). Overall, however, we are very pleased with the very positive feedback we are receiving from students this semester. Here is a sampling of recent comments they have written in a CATs exercise that speak to the effectiveness of the course:

- “The assignment checklist is possibly the greatest thing ever.”
- “I’m enjoying the class so far. I think you’ve done a great job of promoting discussions and interactivity in this inherently individualistic kind of class given it’s all online. I still prefer face to face, but this is by far the most interactive I’ve ever been in an online class. I have enjoyed the readings a lot and have learned from them all, especially the ones that were quite challenging to my way of thinking.”
- “Overall, I think it is well-organized, easy to follow, and expects just the right amount of time.”
- “I am enjoying the “self-paced” but still organized fashion of this class. I definitely enjoy the readings and exercises which allow me an opportunity to further my thinking and thoughts on teaching in postsecondary education.”
- “What is going well is the independent nature of the course, by that I mean we are treated like adults—expected to participate, do the readings, and contribute. The readings have been productive and interesting thus far and the group work has been successful.”
- “Things that are going well is that the Learning Activities schedule really helps me stay organized in the course. I always tend to know what is going on and where I should be in the course. Other things that are going well is the knowledge I am gaining from the course. As a current instructor, I have found the materials to be really helpful in developing myself as an instructor.”
- “I really am enjoying the format of this course. As a major “J” (Myers-Briggs), the organization and learning activities allow me to know if I am doing everything in the course. It is very helpful. I
have been enjoying the conversation with the groups. Since this is an online course, it is harder to talk about and synthesize the readings at times. The groups make this course much more personal.”

- “I appreciate that each week has an overview and objectives for the material. It helps me to focus on what I should be gaining from each section and provides starting points for me to connect the material with my professional and personal experiences in teaching. I also really appreciate both Ann and Pam taking the time to summarize the class discussions in the letters emailed to us. It provides a wholeness or synthesis of where the class is in our exploration of teaching.”

- “The readings have been informative and thought provoking. I have enjoyed them very much. Reading people’s posts and their replies to my posts have been good. I do not speak much during class and this insures that my voice is added to the conversation.”

VI. Plans for Sustainability

Our program in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education (HALE) has been purposeful in offering this course fully online as an important part of the array of learning experiences available to support the development of our master’s and doctoral students, as well as others seeking to be prepared as effective twenty-first century educators. In addition to doctoral and master’s students in the HALE program, the course also attracts students pursuing the College of Education online Master’s degree as well as students from graduate programs in other parts of the university who are preparing for higher education faculty positions or other postsecondary teaching responsibilities.

This course is a regular spring offering in HALE, and will continue to be so. In fact, intensive development has gone into this course to provide a template for other online courses in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program. We expect that other courses (some already online and others to be developed for the online environment) will follow this same template over the next several years. We are planning that several of these courses will be bundled into a Certificate Program in Postsecondary Teaching, and they will all utilize this highly interactive, visually appealing, student-responsive environment.