

The One Hour Entrepreneurship Educator

Online Course Design with Purpose

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Transitioning to online learning requires reconsidering your course design, what you are assigning, and how those decisions align with your learning objectives. I learned early from my mentor professors that there is a significant difference between "covering" material that will be committed to short-term memory and "teaching" material that will be transferable to our students' careers. Careful consideration of the difference between covering and teaching is critical. We must resist the urge in the online world to just cover material and instead need to consider how we might teach more purposefully in ways that help students best achieve and retain course learning objectives. This breaks down into three major areas: design, assign, and align.

Design

In design, we need to consider how we will deliver course content and assure learning takes place. Here, we need to make the general design decisions, such as:

- Are we going to be synchronous or asynchronous?
- Are we going to have a hybrid of both?
- Are we going to use lectures?
- Can we still use more active learning approaches such as experiential exercises?

These are basic questions regarding course design that must be considered at the early stage. Are you designing your course with purpose? This stage requires rethinking your course in this new learning environment.

Assign

The next set of decisions focuses on assignments. Do your assignments capture your instructional learning objectives? Can you assess and how are you going to assess student achievement of learning objectives through your assignments? The typical decisions that we have here are similar to what we have with a normal in-person course.

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Assign (continued)

- Regarding case discussions, are we as professors going to lead the discussions or are we going to have the students present individually or as a team?
- What are the technical challenges for students to engage in team-oriented assignments in the online environment?
- Are we going to have case discussions, are we going to have individual and/or case analysis write-ups, are we going to have exams, or are we going to use a variety of assignments to facilitate assessment?

The last part of the assignment decision for me is the rhythm of the assignments. There is some benefit to having frequent assignments, but this may sacrifice deep learning. If you have less frequent assignments you likely will have some students who may not keep up with the work. However, you also can provide more copious feedback on the work that students submit. The fundamental issue, then, is whether you are assigning student work with purpose rather than just busy work.

Align

The final step is going back and making sure that you align your choices with the course learning objectives. Does your course design and assignments align with your learning objectives? If so, then you will be teaching with purpose. It is critical in the online classroom because of the nature of the medium, but these principles apply to the face-to-face learning context as well.