Chapter 56
Game On! Teaching Foreign Language Online

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ABSTRACT

This case discusses the development and delivery of a course designed to teach elementary French at the university level in a fully online environment. Included in the discussion are issues related to the problematics of creating an interactive locus where effective communication in the target language can take place both between the instructor and the student and between students. The study examines attitudes about teaching (and learning) language online, how the textbook industry has attempted (or not) to deal with the advent of more online second language instruction, and how advances in tools available to instructors in the Learning Management System can both help and hinder the successful development and deployment of a course in second language instruction. Also examined here are questions of student motivation and retention, and proposed solutions to both problems via innovative quest-based gamification of course lessons and materials.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Boise State University is a public institution located in Boise, Idaho (USA). Nestled at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in Idaho's capitol city (with nearly 635,000 people in the city and its surrounding suburbs), Boise State University, the school with the famous blue football turf, serves over 22,000 students in doctoral, master's, baccalaureate, and associate's programs. ("Boise State University," 2012). In any given semester, approximately 25% of those students are taking courses online through the university's eCampus programs.

SETTING THE STAGE

Prior to her work as a Lecturer in the World Languages Department and through the eCampus Center at Boise State University, Dr. Carter-Cram worked as an Associate Professor of French at Idaho State University in Pocatello, Idaho. Her move to the state's capitol city in 2003 brought her into the world of distance and online education. Since that time, she has worked with various course delivery methods including "traditional" distance education using TV monitors with students in multiple locations, as well as with hybrid

and fully online courses. In addition to her teaching work, she currently serves as one of 2 faculty members on the eCampus instructional team facilitating 6 and 12-week long teacher training and course development seminars for Boise State University faculty. Additionally, she works as a "Master Reviewer" for the QM (Quality Matters) review process for online courses developed by BSU faculty and staff members.

Boise State University has used Blackboard as its Learning Management System (LMS) for over a decade. The university regularly updates their version of Blackboard as those updates become available to the campus community. Because of the increasing interest in online education by parties on all sides of the question (administration and students alike), the university has worked to dramatically expand the eCampus Center, whose goal it is to:

- Support the University's vision to be a metropolitan research university of distinction and the Extended Studies' outreach mission by facilitating flexible course and program delivery.
- Foster innovation in program delivery. Further the development of successful, sustainable distance delivered academic programs in partnership with colleges and departments.
- Consult and collaborate with administrative units to ensure comprehensive and accessible service for distance students. Provide students, faculty, and departments with specialized support services.
- Partner with the Center for Teaching and Learning and Academic Technologies to cultivate excellent online courses through the eCampus Quality Instruction Program (eQIP).
- Facilitate faculty collaboration across institutions and expand student access efforts through multi-institutional programs.

- Envision, promote, and incubate strategic future developments in distance education at Boise State. ("The eCampus Mission," 2012)

The university currently offers the equivalent of several of its "101" (first semester, 4-credit) language courses online. American Sign Language, French, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, and Spanish are all taught online through Boise State University's eCampus programs. Because of the difficulty in learning language, and, in particular, with learning language online, the World Languages Department has elected to break the online courses into 2, 2-credit courses which, taken together, serve as the online equivalent of a face-to-face, 4-credit, "101" course. The project described in this case study is the result of several years of work between the eCampus Center and the instructor to foster innovative program delivery in online language courses in elementary French.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Technology Components

Management and Organizational Concerns

Foreign language instructors are notoriously anti-online education. Don't misunderstand: language instructors love the online dictionaries and games that are available for their students. They love the "pen pal," and the "chat" opportunities that are available online with native speakers of the language(s) they teach. The even love the fact that more and more workbooks are being published with online (self-graded) exercises for their students. But, as a general rule, they don't love online education in language. It is generally believed that the only "good" education for foreign language is done face-to-face, in a traditional classroom setting. Using the online games and exercises

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