

Chapter 21

Teaching a YouTube™ Course Online

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a case study of the author's work developing and teaching an online course called YouTube for Educators, which is offered as an elective in an online graduate program in educational technology. The course was developed in response to the upsurge in online video production and the prominence of YouTube™ among video-sharing services. A number of challenges surfaced when designing and implementing the course. The necessity of frequent curriculum updates to keep content current with advancements in digital video technologies added to instructor workload. Course policies also had to be written for situations where unexpected changes on the YouTube website interfered with planned assignments. The experience of designing, teaching, redesigning, and re-teaching the course led to the discovery of best practice, which may apply to other courses featuring rapidly changing content or Web 2.0 tools.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The *YouTube for Educators* course was created as an elective in an online graduate program in educational technology housed within a brick-and-mortar public university in the northwestern part of the United States. The master's program, which went online in 1999, was created to serve a student population of schoolteachers, instructional designers, and school technology coordinators seeking advanced coursework in the field of educational technology. Many of the students in this program are working adults who fit school into the balance of work, family, and personal lives. Some live too far away from universities to enroll

in face-to-face programs. The flexibility of online education makes it possible for these students to advance their educational and professional goals, while maintaining other life obligations. Currently, the program offers two online master's degrees, three online graduate certificate programs, and an undergraduate course in educational technology that has both face-to-face and online sections. A new online doctoral program in educational technology has been approved with first courses offered in 2012. Courses have been delivered through Blackboard™ and Moodle™ learning management systems, with Moodle currently serving as the primary platform for the program.

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Curriculum for the online educational technology program spans a range of topics including instructional design, instructional theory, educational research, and technology integration in the classroom. Elective courses are designed to give students the opportunity to delve into the educational potential of emergent technologies such as virtual worlds, mobile devices, and Web 2.0 tools. This is the context from which the YouTube for Educators course emerged. The course was first offered in 2008 as a temporary selected topics course, which made it possible to gauge student interest and potential enrollments for future semesters. The YouTube for Educators course was converted to a permanent elective after enrollments approached capacity of 20 students during each of the first two semesters it was offered. At the time of this writing, the course has been offered six times to a total of 116 students (19 to 20 per semester). The majority of students who have taken the course were K-12 classroom teachers, who took the course despite the fact that YouTube was blocked at many of their schools. The rest of the students who took the course worked in a variety of occupations including instructional design, training, technology coordinator, or college instructor.

When the course was first created, the decision was made to include the word “YouTube” in the title. This decision did raise concern during the process of applying for a curriculum change to establish the *YouTube for Educators* as a permanent elective course. A discussion among members of the committee overseeing the curriculum change request posed the question of whether or not “YouTube” was too specific to be included in a course title. After all, what would happen if YouTube later changed its name? It was suggested that a more general title like *Online Video for Educators* would be a better choice. In response, it was argued that although it cannot be known for certain if YouTube will one day change its name, the prominence of the website as a leading video-sharing service makes it seem unlikely.

More importantly, the inclusion of “YouTube” in the title clearly identifies YouTube as the central technology studied in this elective course. This matters because YouTube is blocked at many public schools, educational institutions, and some entire countries such as China. By adding YouTube to the title, the focus is made obvious and students are alerted that choosing this elective may entail making special arrangements to work around Web filtering issues. Alternative elective courses in multimedia or graphic design are available for students to choose instead if this is a prohibitive factor.

ONLINE VIDEO TRENDS

When the YouTube for Educators course was first being discussed as a possible elective in 2008, the Web seemed to be filling with video content and video-sharing services. The course was developed in response to the upsurge in online video production and the prominence of YouTube among video-sharing services. The growth of online video traffic had reached such a high magnitude that concern was expressed about the Internet’s capacity to handle it all. Experts warned that “The Internet could grind to a halt within two years under the pressure of booming demand for online video” (Carter, 2008). Much of the growth in online video traffic was attributed to YouTube, which had attracted 100 million U.S. viewers by October, 2008 (comScore, 2008). YouTube continued to attract more and more users over time. YouTube’s growth, from 2005 through 2010, is evident in the usage stats regularly published on the company blog (<http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/>) or listed in the timeline created during YouTube’s fifth anniversary (YouTube, Inc., 2010). A review of these documents reveals the steady climb in both number of views and video uploads. In December 2005, 8 million videos were watched per day on YouTube. This figure climbed to 2 billion views per day by May 2010.

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