

Chapter X

Design Considerations in the Development of an Online Course in E-Business

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Abstract

This chapter describes how U21 Global (U21G), an e-university formed by a consortium of traditional brick-and-mortar universities, approached the design of MBA650, its online course in e-business. MBA650 is a core course in U21G's MBA program. Gagne's theory (Little, 2001), a pedagogical framework taken from the literature, is used to frame and explain the rationale for the design of MBA650. Gagne's theory identifies a number of instructional events including the identification of learning objectives, presentation of content, provision of learner guidance, feedback, and performance assessment. An evaluation of MBA650 based on student feedback is presented. Finally, several key design considerations in the development of e-business courses are discussed such as including attention to learning outcomes, the student audience, syllabus, key messages, theory vs. practice, team working, and the use of case studies.

Introduction

Over the last few years, electronic business (e-business) has fundamentally changed the way in which many organisations conduct business. Universities realise this, and courses in e-business are now commonly found in the curriculum of both business and technology programs (Etheridge, Hsu, & Wilson, 2001; Ngai, Gunaskaran, & Harris, 2005). Despite the interest paid to e-business by academics, however, the design of courses in e-business remains challenging for a number of reasons:

- The relatively recent emergence of e-business and the lack of an established e-business curriculum or agreed “body of knowledge” (Dunning, Vijayaraman, Krovi, & Kahai, 2001; King, Frank, & Platt, 2001).
- Rapid change within the field of e-business and the rate at which concepts become quickly outdated (Davis, Siau, & Dhenuvakonda, 2003; Petrova & Claxton, 2005).
- The close attention to e-business paid by media and marketing interests, accompanied by inevitable distortions of data (Drew, 2002)
- The multi-disciplinary nature of e-business, which requires academics to understand both business and technology concepts.

At the same time, online academic programs are becoming increasingly commonplace (Castro et al., 2001; Evans & Haase, 2001). Not only are campus-based universities offering online programs, e-universities which deliver programs wholly online have emerged onto the education scene (Schooley, 2001). U21G is one such e-university. Established in 2001, U21G is owned by the 19 research-intensive universities in the Universitas 21 network which includes the National University of Singapore, Edinburgh University, University of Hong Kong, Melbourne University, and the University of Virginia. U21G launched its first program, the MBA, in August 2003, which currently has approximately 650 registered students. A second major program, the Master of Science in Information Systems Management, was launched in late 2005. Degrees offered by U21G are accredited by U21 Pedagogica, a quality assurance body established by U21 that independently reviews all of U21G’s programs.

This chapter describes how U21G faced the dual challenge of not only designing a course in e-business as part of its MBA program, but designing one that could be successfully delivered online. The structure of the chapter is as follows. Section 2 of the chapter gives a brief introduction to U21G’s pedagogy and presents the pedagogical framework for examining MBA650, U21G’s online course in e-Business. Section 3 describes, in detail, the design rationale of MBA650. Section 4 reflects upon some of the design considerations involved in the development of a course in e-Business. Finally, Section 5 concludes with a summary of key points.

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