

### **Design Dilemmas: One Program, Two Universities Two Continents . . . and One Designer!**

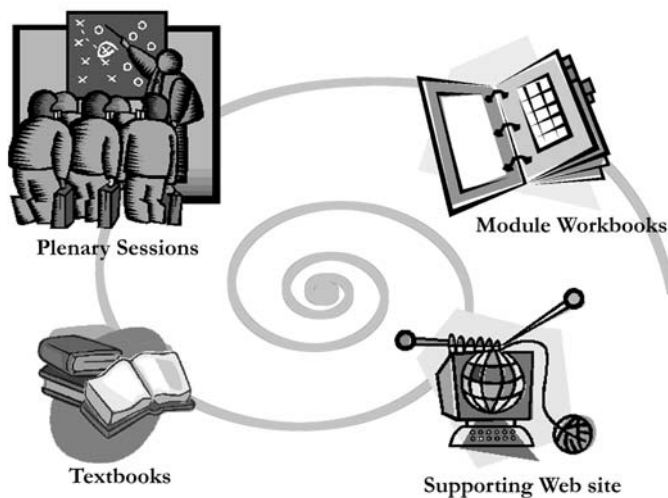
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Instructional design systems and procedures are called into question when cultural and systemic differences come into play. In October of 2001, Penn State was approached by the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) to work together on a program for delivery to several corporate partners. The challenge in this project was to successfully bridge differences between American and European cultures, academic and corporate worlds, and two very different universities. This paper will describe the ongoing process within the U.S. institution to both deliver corporate offerings and to also design a collaborative program that could be used by both Penn State and UMIST. It will also highlight cultural issues and challenges faced by the design team in developing quality courses for U.S. and European audiences at two different universities that use two different course management systems.

#### **The Project Management Program**

In October of 2001, Penn State (PSU) was brought into a partnership with the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) and three corporate entities in order to deliver a Project Management Professional Development Program for employees within those three corporations. As a result of this partnership, several issues that substantially affect collaborative course design and delivery were resolved. The methods used to resolve these issues are important to the field of distance education in helping others to resolve similar issues affordably and efficiently, while protecting important partnerships.

The original model for existing courses in the program involved a two-hour residential plenary session where instructors introduced course concepts and distributed texts and course workbooks, which contained the course content information. Students then studied independently for a period of time, and came together again for an optional midterm session to take sample exams and further discuss course content. At the end of each 26-week course, students attended a third residential session to take their exams and begin a new set of lessons in the program. See Figure 1, below.



*Figure 1: Elements of a PMP Course*

This modality was highly independent and self-directed. Students would attend the initial plenary, pick up their textbook and workbook, and receive training on the course Web site, which contained a discussion board and mail client, as well as an overall course syllabus. The students also attended a two-hour lecture with their instructor during the plenary session. Because the instructor gave an overview of the course requirements, the students felt little need to utilize the course Web site. Therefore, there was little interaction between students and instructors between plenaries. In addition, there were no between-plenary activities in which students engaged as a cohort, and no set schedule for reading or assignments. Most students in the U.S. program did not attend the optional midterm residential session due to travel distance and required time away from work. Assessment of student performance incorporated only a midterm assignment and a final exam, so there was no way to be sure students were consistently meeting course objectives. There was also some disagreement between the faculties of the two institutions regarding the topics covered in the workbooks. Finally, Penn State's interpretation of copyright law differed from that of UMIST, leading to questions about copyright clearance within the existing course content.

### **Modifications to the Program**

The original courses were very European in flavor. They were highly independent and self-directed, and depended on a self-regulating relationship between instructor and student for learning and feedback. The courses were actually shorter than the typical nine-month U.K. residence course (British Council, 2004), but far longer than one in the U.S., which averages between 14 and 16 weeks on a semester system. The model did not meet the needs of a U.S. audience, which was used to a variety of assignments during a course as well as regular communication and feedback from their instructor. As the program continued, modifications were made to accommodate this audience.

To deal with issues of student participation, U.S. instructors added a more detailed student schedule to their course syllabi. This schedule enabled students to understand where they needed to be throughout the six-month course, and helped to keep them on track with their studies. Since the original courses only required a paper and a final exam as assessment tools, several instructors also added homework and other activities to the existing course, which gave students more of an indication of where they stood in the course as it progressed, as well as making the final exam less stressful.

There was also a need to address issues of copyright in the courses, because European and U.S. copyright law differs. Items in the UMIST materials were legal according to the law in the U.K., but may not have been legal in the U.S. Copyright issues were addressed by offering the UMIST module workbook material as it was, with a copyright statement from UMIST, on the course Web sites. This system freed Penn State from the need to request copyright permission for elements in the workbooks. Additionally, UMIST provided a statement through a licensing agreement that all material in the workbooks had been cleared.

To increase the communication between students and instructors, instructors added a "participation" component to the courses. The instructors used the course Web site to both interact with their students via the message boards as well as assess student learning as the course progressed. In conjunction with homework and activities that required students to use the message boards, the participation grade encouraged students to use the Web component of the courses. In addition, the module workbooks were offered on the course Web sites as PDF documents instead of being handed out at the opening plenary, which required students to utilize the Web site in order to retrieve their course content.

### A Collaborative Venture

In spring of 2004, PSU began a revision of some of the courses in order to make it a truly collaborative program. One significant change is that the course content will be offered on CD-ROM rather than as print or PDF, which increases portability for traveling students and supports the use of Flash files and other media elements.

In developing the CD-ROM versions of the courses, several cultural issues emerged. UMIST calls their courses *modules*, while Penn State refers to them as *courses*. In the UMIST module content, each element was not called a *lesson*, but a *chapter*. These are more than just linguistic issues. The connotation of the word *module* is defined as “an educational unit which covers a single subject or topic” (*module*, n.d.). In the U.S., that generally means that a module is part of a course, not an entire course in and of itself. Also, the term *chapter* is problematic, in that it connotes passivity on the part of the learner. A chapter is something found in a book, it is read by the student, but its tone is highly formal and distant from its audience. Course lessons, on the other hand, must be dealt with more actively. The tone is more personal and inclusive of the student experience, and it contains relevant activities in order to facilitate student learning. The U.K. model of course content was similar to textbook material. There were some self-questioning activities, but they weren't integrated across chapters.

To address these issues, the instructional designer and the UMIST Programme Manager had several informal conversations in which it was decided that the collaborative model would utilize the words *course* and *lesson*. References to activities would be general, and refer students to their online course syllabus for further information. Course experiences could therefore be customized by the particular university offering the course in order to meet the needs of its students. Extra activities were included to give the instructors at each location a wide array from which to choose.

There were also a number of linguistic issues. Was it a *programme* or *program* of study? Should students receive *marks* or *grades*? In the end, spelling conventions were left to the individual authors of the course—while this will include an array of spellings across courses, spelling will be finalized within each course. All courses will be marked with both the Penn State and UMIST titles, as well. Regarding which monetary standard should be used, it was decided that dollars, pounds, and Euros should be given for any course referring to money. Also, because UMIST uses WebCT and PSU uses ANGEL as course management systems, language issues arose in the struggle to cover the terminology of both course management systems. WebCT has discussion forums (or fora), and ANGEL has message boards. In the CD, therefore, we decided to use the term *threaded discussion* to refer to all such activities. Finally, each CD will come with a “road map” that is specific to each university. For both Penn State and UMIST students, this map will tell them not only how to use the CD, but also what a *threaded discussion* is and how to use their CD with the specific course management system. This map will also detail where students at each university will go for technical and learner support help.

### Tools to Collaborate

We are using several tools to enable the faculty to communicate with each other. First, we conduct meetings, where possible, during plenary events so that faculty can meet each other and get “face time.” Video teleconferencing and voice-over IP systems such as Elluminate *Live!*<sup>TM</sup> enable the faculty to work in real-time. In addition, an area has been set up using Penn State's course management system (ANGEL) as a document repository for working documents during course development. UMIST instructors can get access to ANGEL through use of a Friends of Penn State (FPS) account. This account allows them access to Penn State services such as ANGEL for purposes of course development.

The process of collaboration is a bit more complex. Faculty begin by working together on a detailed course outline that contains an overview of the course objectives and activities as well as the weight given to each assessment activity. To allow for modularization, they also develop extra assessment activities so that instructors at each university have a choice in what they can use. During this stage, faculty also decide upon the topics to be contained in the course—this list of topics will serve as the outline for the writing of course content. Once the design document is finalized, the instructors meet with the programme manager and instructional designer to identify which faculty will write about what topics. They may use ANGEL as a document repository while working on course development, and have regular meetings with each other and with the programme manager and instructional designer to review and discuss course content as it's being written. An extra semester is added to course development time in order to allow for collaboration time, differences in university calendars, and time to discuss cultural issues as they emerge.

### A Work in Progress . . .

As Penn State and UMIST continue to work together, design models continue to shift. Because of the need to consult the corporate partners, for example, the CD offerings of the courses were delayed until May of 2005. Additionally, UMIST is preparing to merge with the University of Manchester and will become a new university as of this fall. Not only will this change affect the logo and title of the university, it has repercussions for course titles, course content, and the manner in which courses will be taught. UMIST is, in essence, going to become more like a U.S. research I institution, where grant money and research often takes precedence over teaching/learning activities. It will be interesting to see how the final program looks compared to our initial thinking and attempts to create a multi-university program across continents.

### References

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### Biographical Sketch

**Ms. Stevie Rocco** is an instructional designer for Penn State's Department of Distance Education and World Campus. She is responsible for the design and development of a wide range of distance education courses offered online and via CD-ROM. Ms. Rocco's research interests include the use and review of simulation software for online delivery of visual constructs, and systems theory as it relates to organizational structures. Ms. Rocco has presented workshops, information sessions, and a course showcase at the Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning.

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