

# Active Learning in Online, Self-Paced Courses



The history of Guided Individual Study (GIS) mirrors that of online course development in the past 2 decades, from print-based “copies” of classroom-based courses, to online courses that emphasize active learning and allow interaction between students and faculty who will never meet face to face. This history can be outlined as follows:

## Print-based Correspondence Courses:

Similar to classroom courses, but some aspects had to be eliminated (e.g. group work, discussion).

However, the very nature of these self-paced courses demanded from students a different set of skills than those required in the classroom:

1. Students created their own due dates, requiring a level of organization and self-motivation that had not been required of them throughout their education.
2. Because of the print-based format, lecture was de-emphasized as students were called upon to be actively engaged in the discovery of knowledge.

## Online Courses 1.0

Print-based correspondence courses were put online, using the same content, but transmitting the information via a course management system.

## Online Courses 2.0

With evolving technology, online courses are now able to take advantage of multiple ways of transmitting information to encourage interaction and engagement. Online courses are no longer identical to print-based courses, or even classroom-based courses, but communicate content and encourage interaction in multiple formats.

### Multiple formats for the transmission of course content:

- Video
- Audio
- Text
- Video clips from publishers and other sources are legally accessible.
- Emphasis is on a shorter lecture so that the student's time is spent in active learning.

### Multiple ways to assess that the student comprehends and has analyzed and applied course material:

- Automatically graded quizzes test for basic comprehension
- Essay questions probe whether the student understands the material and encourages higher-order thinking
- Assignment questions challenge students to apply the material to their lives or the world around them
- Students can then bring that experience back to the course by posting responses and results for other students and the instructor's response

### Interaction is encouraged:

- A sense of community is encouraged among dispersed students who are at different points in their coursework. This is currently being done with the use of discussion boards and collaborative exercises.

## Online courses 3.0.

New resources are now available that will encourage interaction and active learning. These resources include:

- Blogs
- Podcasts
- Wikis for collaborative group projects
- Videos submitted by students,
- Students contributing to the knowledge base (e-learning 2.0)

## Guided Individual Study (GIS)

- Self-paced, continuous enrollment undergraduate courses
- Wide range of subject areas
- Designed for both U of I students as well as students around the world, meeting the needs of both traditional and nontraditional students
- Academic departments maintain control of curriculum development and instruction
- Academic Outreach is responsible for course design and development, faculty training, registration, marketing, and instruction costs

### Analysis and Synthesis

#### From BA 310

In this course, we have discussed many theories of motivation, each of which have significant implications for the design of organizational compensation, promotion, performance evaluation, and feedback systems. Imagine that you were to found a new organization today. How would you design these compensation, promotion, performance evaluation, and feedback systems, given your knowledge of these motivation theories? A complete answer would include a description of the organization, your general approach to motivation, and the specific systems that you would introduce using *at least 3* motivation theories (reinforcement theory, intrinsic v. extrinsic motivation, expectancy theory, equity theory).

#### From PS 101

Why do parties matter in the American political system? What functions do they serve? If they are as evil as some of the founding fathers argued, why did these same people start the first political parties? This question is still relevant today—many Americans think of the political parties as corrupt, evil organizations. Yet, parties are indispensable in the U.S. democratic system. Why?

### Application

#### From BA 310

1. In order to find out how empowerment works in the “real world,” interview a manager about **empowerment**. Develop your own list of questions that reflect what you want to find out about the subject. Be specific about who you are interviewing. Write down the questions asked, the answers, as well as what you learned from the interview.
2. Select an organization that you know well. It can be a place where you have worked or an organization you have participated in (e.g. student organization, fraternity/sorority, church or religious organization, community service organization).
  - a. Describe the Structure of this Organization. Include any information from the chapter that applies to this organization. Specifically:
    - I. Looking at the 6 elements of organizational structure discussed in the text, what does this organization look like?
    - II. Is it a mechanistic or organic organization?
    - III. Do you see elements of any of the traditional or contemporary organizational designs discussed in the text?
    - IV. Are there any changes in structure, decision-making, and/or design that your organization could implement in order to better achieve organizational goals? Explain.

### Discussion Boards

#### From BA 310

Before you take the Mid-Course exam, post 2 problems that you are dealing with currently or have dealt with in the past. This problem should involve one of the concepts we are studying: conflict, communication, motivation, decision-making, ethics, leadership, etc. Each of these postings is worth 10 points.

In the second half of the course, after you have absorbed the material, you will become a consultant or advisor to the other students. You will post 2 responses to the problems that the other students have posted. These postings should include information you have learned in the course, as well as wisdom you have gained from similar experiences. You may respond to a post even if someone else has already responded—but do not just repeat another's post. Add new information and insights—and feel free to continue the conversation beyond the required number of postings. Each of these postings will be worth 20 points.

#### From PS 101:

Scholars this year are talking about a new term—“campaign fatigue.” Since the campaign season is heating up this year, not next February, the concern is that voters will be burned out from the campaigning and debates by the time the primaries actually start in January of 2008, much less the real election in November a year and a half from now. What do you think? Is the election season getting too long?

### Collaborative Exercises

#### From PS 101

The collaborative exercises in PS101 are an attempt to foster interaction and discussion among the students. The collaborative exercises in PS101 include activities such as contacting your local political party organizations, researching state voter registration laws, viewing and commenting on political advertisements, and reviewing movies about politics. The following examples demonstrate such interaction.

This example deals with political advertisements. Student 1 posts about his views concerning the current Democratic primary election. In response, Student 2 concurs and elaborates on the main point from the original post.

**Student 1:** There appears to be a difference in the way the top three candidates are approaching their ad campaigns. In reviewing their sites on youtube.com it is easy to see that Hillary is attempting to soften her image. She has a humorous ad about how simple it is to caucus, while Edwards has an attack ad on how Hillary is wavering on some issues. Obama then chooses a third route in putting a passionate speech to show he is ready, and he is the next president. The different styles seem to cater to how the candidates are being viewed by the public...

**Student 2:** It is so true that candidates try to improve their image in the eyes of potential voters. I do know if you watched Hillary's ad entitled “Invisible,” which is more or less an issue ad against George Bush's lack of sympathy for the socially marginalized and lack of interest in social programs. Here too, the ad conveys a softer and kinder Hillary, but ironically she still seems fairly rigid due to her posture. In any case, there are many, many negative political ads about Hillary on the web and on candidates' political website. ... It will be interesting to see what happens during the big primary week, when about twenty states will be choosing their democratic and republican nominees.