

C7: Experiences and Advice in Designing an Online Course

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Transforming a course to be delivered online is not a simple feat. While the pandemic gave many instructors a jumping board to think about how a course can be delivered remotely, some faculty are taking it a step further and are now thinking about how to redesign their courses to be offered fully online. A full online course redesign can ensure that the online learning experience for students is just as good as, if not better than, the in-person experience.

For my first faculty spotlight, I would like to highlight Valerie (Val) Jenness, a distinguished professor in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society in the School of Social Ecology at UCI and Jordan Grasso, a third-year Ph.D. student in the Criminology, Law and Society department at UCI, a CSU Chancellor's Fellow, and part-time lecturer. This past summer (2021), Val reached out to the Division of Teaching Excellence and Innovation (DTEI) to enlist the help of the instructional design team to assist in the redesign of the course "Introduction to Criminology, Law and Society," AKA: C7. C7 is an introductory core course in the UCI School of



Valerie Jenness, Distinguished Professor, Department of Criminology, Law and Society



Jordan Grasso, Part-time Lecturer, Department of Criminology, Law and Society

Social Ecology that is delivered to roughly 400 students at a time. During the pandemic, the course was quickly converted online and was highly praised by students, but Val wanted to do more in ensuring that she was leveraging all the tools and resources available to create a high-quality online learning experience for her students. In the following interview with Val and Jordan,

they detail their experiences in working with DTEI to transform a course that was heavily based on read-write assignments to one that incorporates the use of digital productivity and authoring tools to encourage their students to create engaging and exciting digital assignments while demonstrating mastery of course content.

Q: What prompted you to reach out to DTEI about your course?

Val: I've taught a master's level course online for about two decades and this historic time in which we're living seems like a good time to create a fully online high-quality course to serve undergraduates. I've taught this intro course many times, including last year when we all had to pivot to remote teaching. Now I'm trying to take what I learned by necessity last year, collaborate with Jordan (who TAed the course last year and has taught it on their own since then) and Jennifer (a fabulous Instructional Designer), and do all we can to create an informative and engaging, as well as accessible and inclusive, online course for students interested in the basics of criminology and law & society.

Jordan: Leading up to Summer 2021, I applied to be a DTEI Graduate Fellow and requested to collaborate with Val. Since I had previous TA experience in CRM/LAW C7 and would be teaching it in the Summer, we thought that this would be an excellent opportunity to work together to develop a fully online version of the course. Even though we had been online since the start of the pandemic, we wanted to take the time to more thoroughly consider our transition from emergency remote learning to a fully online course. To best design the course and draw from as much knowledge as possible, Val initiated the connection with the instructional designers at DTEI.

Q: Can you describe at least one thing that you've learned or feel really proud about in this course redesign process?

Val: Sure. I've learned that I have a lot to learn. And, that's what is so great about doing what I do and getting to work with the people I get to work with—it requires that I constantly learn and “up my game” (as it were) in the classroom—online and in person. As I learn about the range of options for designing high-quality, fully-online courses, I am impressed with how many tools we have at our disposal to make courses engaging, provide systematic feedback in a productive and efficient way, and how much fun it can be to try to figure out how to get it right. I'm reminded of something I communicated in writing a few years ago:

I have come to understand that teaching is in fact all about the students, each of whom is someone's child and a member of our community. They deserve our best, most informed, innovative and proven effort. It is this deservedness that has led me to appreciate a comment on teaching from Benjamin Franklin: “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” For me, it is this sort of best effort that requires thinking about research on pedagogy, cultivating a willingness to try new things and occasionally fail (sometimes in public!), routinely assessing my method and approach, and then starting the process again.

So, developing this new online version of Introduction to Criminology, Law and Society has taught me that it is an iterative process—try new things, assess, adjust, etc. I've learned that I like that process, especially when working with people like Jordan and Jennifer—who are teaching me lots as we go along.

Jordan: I'm proud of how much we have incorporated engaging and thoughtful assignments in our collaboration. Through our partnership with Jennifer, we transformed many of our "read this, then write about this" assignments to be more creative and reflective. For example, we incorporated mini-interviews, mind maps, and journaling assignments throughout our course. Perhaps my favorite assignment we created was a reflection assignment where students have the opportunity to design public-facing TikTok videos or Instagram posts that convey key concepts, research findings, and theoretical ideas from the course in an intelligible way to a general audience. Another aspect of our course that I am proud of is the design and layout. An organized and carefully designed course can enhance students' first impressions, and Jennifer has been an essential player in making sure that students know from the first time they log into Canvas that the course was created with lots of thought and care.

Q: What's one piece of advice you would give your fellow colleagues about designing an online course?

Val: See my comments above. Why? Because, in a nutshell, they say "be open to trying things" and "enjoy the iterative process." I guess I'd also add: be patient when things don't work—technologically, substantively and pedagogically. If all else fails, log off and start over. And, look forward to the moments when it is so clearly going well and the students are so clearly benefiting as a result!

Jordan: Collaborate! We all have different skills when it comes to technology, content, and pedagogy. To best design an engaging online course – or any course for that matter – it's essential to draw from as many ideas as possible. In developing our course, Val and I hit a few obstacles in creating engaging and practical assignments. Without missing a beat, Jennifer would suggest a variety of platforms to utilize that we wouldn't have thought of otherwise. Sometimes we didn't even know that these platforms existed, much less how they worked and what they can accomplish on behalf of student learning! Working together is not just beneficial to the instructor(s); it also makes a class more exciting for the students.

Also, to echo what Val said previously, we all have the opportunity to learn and grow whether we are brand new to teaching or thirty years in. I strongly recommend always asking, "How can

I improve here?” We should never stop learning when it comes to content, engaging with new tech platforms, or practicing teaching strategies supported by recent research. In continuously growing, we also model that there is always an opportunity for further development for our students.

I'd like to end by thanking Val and Jordan for their dedication to their students and for their eagerness to experiment, innovate, and continuously improve, all to make the online learning experience that much more exciting and engaging for their students!

About the Author:



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Jennifer Foug is an instructional designer at the Division of Teaching Excellence and Innovation at UC Irvine. She received her Masters in Library and Information Science at Rutgers University in 2010 and her Masters in Communication, Media & Learning Technologies Design at Columbia University in 2017. Jennifer worked as a K-12 media specialist from 2010-2020. In 2017, she joined the DTEI team as an instructional designer. Jennifer has extensive experience in faculty training; particularly teaching faculty how to integrate educational technologies into their courses to engage students and encourage collaborative learning. Jennifer is an advocate of informal learning practices and believes the best type of learning occurs when students are given unstructured opportunities to think, discuss and apply. Jennifer also has experience in graphic and web design which she uses to enhance the usability, function and design of online courses. Jennifer values continual professional growth and is always on the lookout for innovative tools and ideas that can be used to motivate and engage learners.

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