COURSE GUIDE

FOR

DCTE 730 ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

CLUSTER FORMAT
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Laurie P. Dringus, Ph.D., Professor
Graduate School of Computer and Information Sciences
Nova Southeastern University
Carl DeSantis Building, 4th floor (Room 4073)
3301 College Avenue
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33314
email: laurie@nsu.nova.edu

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Getting Started

Welcome to the Online Learning Environments course! This document provides specific instructions on what you need to do to complete the core course (DCTE 730). This is an intensive, high-level course involving the investigation and application of theory and practice of online learning environments— in general, the study of online learning and education, including distance and blended education. You will research the current literature on relevant topics, issues and trends being addressed in the academic circles (conferences and peer-reviewed publications) devoted to this area of study. You will produce high quality exploratory papers on current topics and trends in the area of online learning. During the term, you will research and share resources, discuss issues with your professor and with professors who may be guest lecturing during cluster meetings, and with fellow students in online discussions.

Getting organized and maintaining organization is important for successful completion of this course. Please read this document carefully and login regularly to WebCT (at least a couple of times weekly) to check for special announcements. For those who may have taken a course with me before (HCI?), the format of this course guide may be familiar to you. Please read through this carefully though, since each course has its own unique objectives and activities.

Online Access to Course Materials and Activities:

Most course activity is managed through WebCT, except for email communication. Additional information resources are available from the professor’s OLE Study Area website at: http://scis.nova.edu/~laurie/index.html. WebCT is being used as the “central course location” to post the most essential electronic course materials such as the course syllabus and course requirements (contained in this course guide.) We will use WebCT for our online asynchronous discussions, course announcements, and for assignment submissions. With the use of WebCT and the OLE Study Area website combined, consider this online environment to be the “classroom” where you go to learn and communicate about this topic area. Please note: WebCT email WILL NOT be used for course correspondence. Students are required to use their NSU SharkLink email accounts to communicate with the professor outside of WebCT. Also, no email attachments of assignment submissions will be accepted, unless pre-approved by the professor.

We will also use a wiki to build a “work-in-progress” resource on effective practices in online and blending learning. The wiki can be accessed here: http://dcte730wiki.pbwiki.com The password to the wiki is dcte730.
Class Participation – About Student Forums and the Wiki

About Student Forums
We will use WebCT’s asynchronous discussions area as an environment in which students and the professor discuss OLE issues throughout the term. I like to refer to this environment as “Student Forums”. Most of our discussions will occur between the first and second cluster meeting weekends. After the second cluster meeting in October, our discussions will shift to using the wiki for sharing best practices and resources in online and blended learning. We will share an abundance of information and resources in the Forums and the wiki.

There will be several threads or mini-conference topics relating to Online Learning Environments (OLEs). The professor will post specific topics throughout the term. Class participation points are earned by maintaining steady effort and meaningful contribution to the discussions throughout the term, requiring students to be active in the current threads. (Current threads generally run for one to two weeks, depending on the momentum of the class discussion. The professor does not establish specific due dates, but prefers the natural flow of discussion to occur.) In terms of length of responses, several short responses are encouraged, but they should be responses that reflect thought and promote further interest in the topic, not just responses for the sake of meeting the participation requirement. The Forum and the wiki will also be used to share resources such as articles, websites, etc. The class participation grade will be based on quality and quantity of contributions, including original contributions and responses to others that add value to the discussion topic, postings that are made during the active period of the current thread(s) being discussed, presentation and grammatical accuracy, postings that are well-written, well-organized, and accurate, and postings that provide appropriate literature citations. Overall, I look for the evidence of steady contributions over the term. A total of 35 points is attributed to class participation, so timely and meaningful participation is important to earn full points.

Of course, it is also important that you provide effective and meaningful responses to your peers. Meaningful interaction is about discussing the issues based on what the research literature is addressing and questions and issues we raise about the topic. This also includes discussing and citing the appropriate literature into postings as often as possible. It’s important that we share the research. Otherwise, our discussions will be limited to personal commentary. I look for a healthy balance of scholarly discussion with personal insight. I believe this practice makes for an interesting discourse.

Please DO NOT establish your own main threads or themes in the discussion forum. If there is a particular topic you would like to discuss as a main thread, write Dr. Dringus an email. From there, the professor will post all main conference threads or themes. Also, the professor is the gatekeeper of the forums and the wiki. The professor reserves the right to delete any student postings that are considered inappropriate or irrelevant to the discussions. High-level scholarly discussions are expected for this class discussion activity.
The professor will post a couple of starter topics early in the term so that you can practice using the asynchronous discussions area in WebCT. The first formal discussion topic will be posted in mid-September. Again, to keep the discussions lively and active, students should plan as part of weekly activity, to review postings and to contribute to the on-going themes. Steady participation throughout the term is required to earn full class participation points. The process works best when everyone participates throughout the term.

**About the Wiki – [http://dcte730wiki.pbworks.com](http://dcte730wiki.pbworks.com); password is dcte730)**

The professor has created a wiki to use with several of my graduate students to develop a work-in-progress resource for faculty and students on effective practices in online and blended learning. Using the wiki, we share resources -- links, references, effective practices (both professional experience and that those being shared in the field), and recommend ways to use online discussion forums and Web 2.0 technologies to enhance student and faculty engagement in the learning process. Our work focuses on online and blended learning in particular – what effective practices (i.e., pearls of engagement) exist and what resources exist to help us explore ways to improve learning and engagement in these environments. Participation in the wiki is expected, so be prepared to share interesting resources in the wiki. Hopefully, together, we’ll seek a balance between the use of the wiki and the WebCT discussion forum throughout the term.
DETAILS ON COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENTS: These assignments require extensive and independent literature research and activity:

Assignment #1: Due date to submit through WebCT is on or before: Sunday, October 11, 2009. You will write an exploratory research paper (about 15-20 manuscript pages of content) on a topic from pre-selected topic areas related to OLEs. Substantial literature integration/synthesis is required. Be prepared to discuss/present your paper/topic at the second cluster meeting. Details for completing this assignment are presented in this course guide.

Assignment #2: Due date to submit through WebCT is on or before: Tuesday, December 01, 2009. (This is a couple of days after the Thanksgiving holiday weekend.) You will write an exploratory research paper (about 15-20 manuscript pages of content) on an evaluative/assessment aspect related to OLEs. Substantial literature integration/synthesis is required. Details for completing this assignment are presented in this course guide.
Instructions for Completing Assignment #1

Assignment #1: Due on or before October 11, 2009. Be prepared to informally discuss/present your paper at the second cluster meeting.

Exploratory Paper #1

You will write an exploratory research paper (about 15-20 manuscript pages of content) on a topic selected from topic areas listed below. Select one main topic area and identify a relevant and specific problem that serves as the conceptual basis for the paper. The topic areas listed below are general in scope, but you will need to bring a strong and tight focus to your paper by narrowing the scope of the paper to one or a few select important issues. The paper will address specific issues from the topic in context of the impacts on online and/or blended learning.

Topic Areas in Foundations in Theory and Practice in Online and Blended Learning
(Select One Area, 1-5):

1. *Online communication in online learning*; which may focus on or extend to the areas of interaction theory, engagement theory, computer-mediated communication, immediacy, and specific aspects and constructs within these
2. *Social computing in online learning*; engagement; privacy; information provision; other constructs
3. *Online communities*; Communities of Practice (CoPs) in online learning; sustainability; engagement; responsibility other constructs
4. *Community of Inquiry Model*; critical thinking; teacher presence; social presence; cognitive presence, interaction; learning.
5. *Collaborative learning*; teams; groups; groupware; group and team processes in online and/or blended learning

Requirements for the exploratory papers: An exploratory paper is a paper grounded in theory and concept, in that the writer describes a problem or an issue (or few issues), explores that problem and issue(s) through an extensive synthesis of research literature, with the added goal of suggesting direction(s) for future research. An exploratory paper is non-empirical work that substantially addresses major issues of importance to the topic. The objective of “exploring” the topic is to understand key issues in relation to theory and practice, to find the frontier of research on a problem, to relate a problem to previous or existing theory, and to bring forward a logical argument for addressing the problem and issues related to the topic. Future research must be addressed substantially.

Organization: Substantial literature integration is required for this paper. The paper must be scholarly and grounded in theory. You must dig deep into the literature to address an identified problem area -- a relevant problem that serves as the conceptual basis for the paper. Present one or more research questions related to the problem to provide organization to the flow of the paper. To show the trends in “current” research, the majority of literature sources should
be between 2007-2010 —e.g., some new texts are released in late 2009, but are predated 2010) to bring support to the discussion in the paper. (Early works may be presented, but this has to be balanced with current material.) You must synthesize the literature by comparing and contrasting work presented by the experts in the field of study.

**Form and style:** The paper should conform to the format guidelines established in the SCIS Dissertation Guide (margins, text, references, etc.) and the APA Manual 5th edition. Peer-reviewed research journals, conference proceedings, and texts should be used as sources. At least 10 references should be used for this paper, but it is likely there will be more. Web sites that are only highly professional and peer-reviewed (such as those articles contained in formal online journals and organizational websites) may be cited such as MERLOT and Sloan-C. Papers will be reviewed for content, effective description of problem(s) explored relative to the topic, clear research questions (what will be explored in question form), depth of topic, clarity, originality of thinking in approaching the problem statement, organization, quality of references used, language and style, and overall quality of the paper.

“General” Format for Exploratory Papers #1 and #2:
First Page is the Title page: including title of paper, author (your full name, full contact information, course number).
Beginning on page 2:  
Title of paper  
Abstract  
Keywords  
Introduction  
Includes background, problem statement, and research questions  
Section headings as appropriate to cover the depth of the topic in an organized way  
Conclusions/Future Research  
Reference List  
Appendix (as appropriate)

Use 12 pt type, Times Roman, double space entire document. (Read section “Other Tips…..”)

**Please refer to the syllabus for specific course requirements and policies!**
Instructions for Completing Assignment #2

Assignment #2-- Due on or before Tuesday, December 1, 2009.

Exploratory Paper #2 Evaluation and Assessment of Online and Blended Learning

You will write an exploratory research paper (about 15-20 manuscript pages of content) on a topic of your choice related to the evaluation or assessment of OLEs. You may focus on evaluation/assessment aspects of online courses, or OLEs as a whole, or of resources (human and technical), or OLE designs. You may even wish to evaluate all of these aspects as contiguous elements of online delivery. (See the list of possible topics below.) Select one main topic area and identify a relevant and specific problem that serves as the conceptual basis for the paper. The topic areas listed below are general in scope, but you will need to bring a strong and tight focus to your paper by narrowing the scope of the paper to one or a few select important issues. The paper will address specific issues from the topic in context of the impacts on online and/or blended learning. The requirements, organization, and form and style for this paper are the same for those requirements given above for Exploratory Paper #1.

Possible topics for Exploratory Paper #2 Evaluation and Assessment of Online and Blended Learning

You may select a topic of your choice. PLEASE note these are only examples!!!!!!

- Accessibility
- Authentication, Integrity, and Security in OLEs
- Effectiveness of Web 2.0 technologies on collaborative work
- Effectiveness of mobile technologies and learning
- Assessment of engagement in online and blended learning environments
- Qualitative research in online learning
- Quantitative research in online learning
- Learning Effectiveness: Assessing Students Online
- Teaching Effectiveness: Assessing Teachers Online
- Blended Learning Effectiveness (hybrid: face-to-face and online)
- Evaluating the OLE as a whole or entity
- Criteria for Evaluating OLE design
- Evaluating Online Group Projects
- Evaluating Virtual Secondary Education
- Criteria for Evaluating Quality Interaction in OLEs
- Evaluating an Institutional OLE Portal
- Validating Online Standards of Practice
- Faculty Satisfaction and Faculty Workload Concepts
- Metrics for Assessing Progress in online education
- Workflow Activity in OLEs

…..this list is endless!!!!!!
Important Tips to Providing Quality Submissions in DCTE 730

It seems no matter how hard the professor tries to give explicit directions for completing assignments and research project work, students often miss basic details in preparing their written work. I offer some “additional” tips to providing quality submissions in this course.

1. Remember that everything you submit to your professor should be of the highest quality work. You are to demonstrate scholarly knowledge of the subject area. Refrain from stating the obvious and generic things. Approach your work from a high-level of thinking – what are the underlying issues and how we can approach OLEs differently. Synthesizing the literature is very important in this course. Do not simply quote authors, instead paraphrase and cite important sources that describe the essential aspects of the issues. Do not merely point to sources (e.g., Dringus, 1999; Dringus 2001; Dringus, 2004). Compare and contrast what authors are saying about a particular issue.

2. Use strict third person narrative throughout your papers. Take a formal approach to presenting your discussion and arguments. Avoid “I, me, we, you, our” statements. If you have to refer to yourself, use “the author discovered……”

3. There should be ample literature citation in the body of the report and a correctly formatted Reference List at the end of the paper. Anything that is not of general knowledge to the reader should be cited in the body of the paper.

4. Use 12 pt type in all papers, including figures or tables. However, it is best to follow the GSCIS Dissertation Guide for form and style. Also, all submissions should have a proper title page, etc.

5. Use current literature – 3 years to present will probably produce the most insightful information. Points will be reduced for extensive use of required reading and the use of sources that are not current. You must demonstrate that you have researched the topic beyond what the professor has already given you.

6. Limit the number of Web-based sources, UNLESS they are refereed-type OLE articles available on the Web. Only use high quality and reputable Web-based sources.

7. You should have at least 10 sources for each paper, but it is likely you will have 20-30 references for each assignment. Again, demonstrate that you have researched the topic.

8. Related to #7: Do your homework! Do not expect the professor to give all needed resources for this course. As a doctoral student, you are expected to demonstrate to me you have the ability to research a topic on the highest level.

9. Want to learn how to write a publishable paper???? Read, read, read, high-level peer reviewed journal articles!!!! Model after them!

10. Contact the professor if you have any questions!
Acceptable Journals and Publications in Online and Blended Learning Research

These are acceptable journals and publications to use in your papers. Go to the NSU Digital Library to access these publications. Seek permission to use other journals/publications not listed here.

AACE Journal
American Journal of Distance Education
Australian Journal of Educational Technology
British Journal of Educational Technology
Communications of the ACM
Computer-Supported Cooperative Learning
Computers & Education
Computers in Human Behavior
Distance Education
Educational Researcher (AERA)
Educational Technology, Research and Development
European Journal of Open and Distance Learning
Information Systems Research (Linthicum)
International Journal on E-Learning
International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction
International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning
Internet and Higher Education
Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks (JALN) -- online
Journal of Distance Education
Journal of Distance Learning Administration
Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia
Journal of Educational Computing Research
Journal of Educational Technology Systems
Journal of Interactive Online Learning Research
Journal of Interactive Media in Education
Journal of Learning Sciences
Journal of Research and Development in Education
MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching
Proceedings of the ASEE/IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference
Proceedings of the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS)
Quarterly Review of Distance Education
Weekly Qualitative Report, [http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/WQR/](http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/WQR/)