COURSE GUIDE

FOR

MCTE 661 ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

ONLINE FORMAT
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Getting Started

Welcome to the OLE course! This document provides specific instructions on what you need to do to complete the course. As you know, much of your work will be completed in a computer-based format. In this course, we will focus on the study of online learning and education, including distance 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. In this dynamic environment, you will study online learning environments by reviewing articles, researching a topic in this area, and discussing issues using the WebCT asynchronous discussion forums with your professor and fellow students.

Getting organized and maintaining organization is important for successful completion of this course. Please read this document carefully and login regularly to WebCT 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 SCIS email accounts through standard email software to communicate with the professor outside of WebCT. Also, no email attachments of assignment submissions will be accepted, unless pre-approved by the professor.

Information Requested Early in the Course!

When you have access to WebCT asynchronous forums (I like to call this “Student Forums” in the generic sense) and when the professor has established the thread called “Student Bios” in the forum, please post a short “e-bio” about yourself. Do not email the bio to the professor. In your “e-bio,” indicate your full name, what term this is for you, and anything of interest to your fellow students. Have you taken online courses before? Have you taught online courses before? Include this information in your bio.
About Student Forums -- Class Participation
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”. Once you have access to the course in WebCT, you will be given topical areas pertinent to OLEs.

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 on the basis of steady effort and meaningful contribution to the discussions throughout the term. This means that students should 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 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 in the discussion forums is important to earn full points.

You may be the first student to contribute to a theme! Don’t be shy. Special recognition will be given to students who really contribute to the conference activity -- those who contribute first to a theme and those who participate regularly. 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. 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. So, 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 the 2nd or 3rd week of the course. Note that our online discussions will be strictly asynchronous, enabling students to participate AT ANY TIME in the discussions. Participation on a specific
evening, at a specific time is not required by this professor. However, to keep the discussions lively and active, students should plan as part of the 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.

**Important! An Invitation** – All students are invited to join our group wiki.

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

I’ve 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. Since many graduate students have not used a wiki before, I like to use the wiki as a “test” on learning how to use a wiki and for building some interesting resources. I invite students in this course to join us. Please do not hesitate to participate because the wiki is meant to build over time and include students from many course sections. I will be using this wiki for quite a while and would like to invite all of my students studying OLEs to participate. While this is not a requirement for this class, I do hope you will join us!
ASSIGNMENT AND RESEARCH PAPER GUIDELINES

Assignments:
In addition to the online discussion activities (WebCT asynchronous discussion forums), the course requirements consist of three interrelated assignments:

- A research proposal (Assignment #1): Due on or before Sunday, February 1, 2009.
- An article review assignment (Assignment #2): Due on or before Sunday, February 22, 2009.
- A research final paper (Assignment #3): Due on or before Sunday, March 15, 2009.

All work will be submitted online through the assignment submission box in WebCT. Assignments must be submitted according to the specified due dates. Late assignments will result in reduction of points.

IMPORTANT!! Pay close attention to the due dates! Also, follow the guidelines provided for each assignment.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL ASSIGNMENTS
These assignments require outside literature research and activity.

- All assignments must be prepared in double-space format, 12 pt. type (preferably Times Roman), and should include a title page, table of contents, and reference list. All submitted work should contain student name and course number and term.
- APA 5th edition format is used for form and style. Consult the APA Guide for how to prepare papers, and for specific directions on how to properly cite work and references in your papers.
- Use third person narrative consistently throughout your papers. Take a formal approach to presenting your discussion and arguments. Avoid “I, me, we” statements. Instead of, for example, “We think this is important…”, present it in this way, “This is important because…”
- All assignment submissions have to be scholarly and well presented. You are to demonstrate scholarly knowledge of the subject area. Refrain from stating the obvious and generic things, but be clear. Approach your work from a high level of thinking—what are the underlying issues and how can we approach OLEs differently? Synthesizing the literature is very important in this course. Do not simply direct quote authors. Instead, paraphrase and cite important sources that describe the essential aspects of the issues. Compare and contrast what authors are saying about a particular issue.
- When submitting each assignment through WebCT, submit ONE file for all work contained in the assignment. Word documents (not .docx) are the preferred format.
INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING ASSIGNMENT #1 and ASSIGNMENT #3:

Assignment #1: Research Proposal, Due on or before Sunday, February 1, 2009
Assignment #3: Research Final Paper, Due on or before Sunday, March 15, 2009

Please read this carefully as these assignments this is a two part process!

Expectations about the Research Paper

A paper on a topic of your choice related to OLEs is required for this course. The paper will be prepared in two sequences. The Research Proposal will be a short version (5-7 pages) that begins to explore the topic and essentially gives an overview of what the final paper (Research Final Paper) will contain. (The Research Final Paper is the final and expanded paper about 20-30 pages.) The purpose of the research proposal is to seek topic approval by the professor AND to begin to demonstrate that you have begun to research the topic. Note: Once the proposal is approved, use the proposal to EXPAND the research final paper.

Overview objective of the project as a whole: The student will prepare a research paper that identifies and explores a significant problem in online learning environments. This is a research paper that will require extensive literature research and synthesis of review.

Topic Area for the Research Paper as a whole:
The issues of online learning, online learning environments, online learning management, etc., are endless so you should be able to easily select a topic that interests you. 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. You need to include literature sources no later than three years (2005-2008 --e.g., some new texts are released in late 2007, but are predated 2008) to bring support to the discussion in the paper. You must synthesize the literature by comparing and contrasting work presented by the experts in the field of study. 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 journals, conference proceedings, and texts should be used as sources. At least 15-20 references should be used for this paper. 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. Papers will be graded for content, organization, references used, language and style, and quality of writing.

IMPORTANT!!! The articles that you select to review for Assignment #2 can be used as literature material to integrate into your research proposal and research final paper!! So, be sure to carefully consider the article selection for Assignment #1 and Assignment #2 so that you can leverage your work in this course!
Possible General Topics for the Research Paper. PLEASE note these are only examples!!!!!!

- Interaction Theory in OLEs
- Synchronous Interaction
- Asynchronous Interaction
- Building Teams in OLEs
- Web 2.0 impacts in collaborative computer-mediated communication
- Groupware for Collaborative OLEs
- Cognitive and Learning Aspects in OLEs
- The Problem of Plagiarism and Cheating in OLEs
- New Frameworks for Defining an OLE
- Standards in OLE Development and Management
- Time Management in OLEs
- Faculty Development
- Student Development
- Innovations in OLE design
- Communities of Practice
- Best Practices in a Specific Aspect of OLE Activity
- Blended Learning
- Accessibility in OLEs

………..the list is endless!!!!!

“General” Format for the Research Proposal: This is to get topic approval and to begin writing the paper. The proposal should be about 5-7 pages, including the Reference List.

Title page: including title of paper, your name, course number.

Beginning on page 2:

Title of paper
   Abstract – a short summary paragraph of what the proposed research paper will be about.
   Keywords
   Introduction and Overview of what the proposed research paper will be about.
       Includes problem statement and research questions
   Overview of Literature Review– begin to demonstrate through a brief literature synthesis what the main issues are being addressed in the literature from what you have found so far in your literature search on the topic. Make sure this in narrative form. Provide section headings as appropriate if several issues are part of the topic.
   Reference List – sources you have cited so far in the paper.

A bit more about the proposal: Once you’ve selected a topic, you need to focus on a specific problem or issue related to the topic. Besides a title for the work, an introduction should contain a clear and compelling problem statement with literature substantiation, a description of the significance of your topic, and what the proposed research paper will cover. Present one or more research questions that will help you organize the conceptual framework for the paper. For example, what is the goal of your paper? Research questions could include questions like, “What are the barriers to lack of interactivity in online learning environments? What are the
positive outcomes of interactivity that are being discussed in the literature? (These questions, of course, pertain to the topic of interactivity.) Be creative with the questions. By giving concrete questions you will achieve two things: you will be able to use these to help you focus on the research final paper, and you will inform the reader (professor) how the paper will be organized.

In the proposal, you will provide a brief list of literature references you plan to use in your research final paper. Of course, the reference list will grow considerably on the final paper level. I’d like to see that you have initially found some sources as a starting point on the proposal level.

Don’t forget to see the section on Basic Requirements for All Assignments. See also the Basic Research Paper Requirements (After “General” Format instructions…)

“General” Format for the Research Final Paper: Based on the proposal, expand the final paper to a total of 20-30 pages, including Reference List.

Title page: including title of paper, author full name, full contact information, course number.

Beginning on page 2:

Title of paper
Abstract – a short summary of what the paper is about
Keywords
Introduction

Includes problem statement and research questions

Review of Literature – since the research final paper is an expanded version of the proposal, this section now has to be complete with a deep synthesis of the literature and deep examination of the issues. Use section headings as appropriate to maintain organization.

Conclusions – What new research lies ahead for this topic?
Reference List
Appendix (as appropriate)

Basic Research Paper Requirements (This is an outline to serve as an initial guide for organizing the Research Proposal and Research Final Paper. Required for Research Proposal (P) and Research Final Paper (RFP) where indicated.

Follow the form and style rules of the APA Style Manual 5th Edition. (P, RFP)

Write in third person narrative. (P, RFP)

Title page: The title of your paper, your name and username, the course number, and date. (P, RFP)

Table of Contents: (P, RFP)

Keywords: Key terms searchable in online databases that are related to your paper. (P, RFP).
Chapter 1: Introduction. Includes a clear and compelling problem statement with literature substantiation, a description of the significance of your project to the OLE area of study. Present one or more research questions that will help you organize the conceptual framework for the paper. (P, RFP).

Chapter 2: Literature Review. A discussion of the current literature relating to your topic. Note: In the Proposal, you will provide a brief start of the literature review, therefore your Reference List should begin to grow here. The Final Paper should include at least 15-20 references in your literature review and Reference List. Preferably, these references should come from peer-reviewed academic journals and academic texts. Limit your use of magazine articles or web site sources as they are often non-referred and contain low-level information. Such Web site citations should be kept to a minimum, unless cites come from respected journal sources. (P, RFP).

Chapter 3: Conclusions. This chapter presents conclusions of the research final paper and relates conclusions on or reflections on the research questions to findings in the literature. Recommendations should be made that clearly describe areas that appear promising for future research. (RFP).

Reference List: All sources used in researching and writing your paper. (P, RFP).

Back Matter: Appendices, example screens, other, as appropriate (P, RFP as appropriate).
INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING ASSIGNMENT #2: OLE Article Reviews

Assignment #2: Article Reviews, Due on or before Sunday, February 22, 2009

Objective: A literature survey of current professional journals related to a specific topic of this course.

Article Review Guidelines
Choose five (5) articles (from research journals, not industry magazines) that are related to the theory and practice of online learning environments. The types of articles you need to select for the reviews can ultimately be used for Assignments #1 and #3, when you synthesize literature in your paper to support your discussions. So be smart as to what articles you select for this assignment.

IMPORTANT!! DO NOT review articles that are part of the required reading schedule. You need to find 5 NEW articles. Again, it is highly suggested that you consider finding articles that will pertain to your research paper topic, if possible! Also, make sure your articles come from a mix of journals and not all from the same journal (no more than two from the same journal).

Only high-level articles are acceptable for this assignment, so be sure that you choose your articles from sources like these examples:

American Journal of Distance Education
Australian Journal of Educational Technology
British Journal of Educational Technology
Communications of the ACM
Computers & Education
Computers in Human Behavior
Distance Education
Educational Technology Research and Development
European Journal of Open and Distance Learning
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 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
Proceedings of the ASEE/IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference
Proceedings of the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS)
Quarterly Review of Distance Education
Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education

Many of these publications are accessible through NSU’s Electronic Library in various databases. It’s good to do a full text search to determine what database the specific journal is available from.

Articles should be current (no earlier than year 2006). Articles will be judged by their relevance to the course, their technical and/or educational orientation, new material not covered by the course text or required article readings, a clear statement of the problem, and potential interest for research.

Each article review should be no more than two pages in length (double-spaced). Each article review should contain the following:

Provide a full citation of the article. Present this first. (Author, year, article title, journal name, volume number, issue number, page numbers.) Be sure this is in correct APA format!

Describe the problem presented in the article in your own words.

Summarize the article, identifying the major issues and conclusions.

Describe your reactions. State whether you agree or disagree with the author(s) findings and/or conclusions, and explain why. Make sure you write your entire paper in third persona narrative, (I, me, we, our, us should not be used to refer to the author.)

Provide a list of references (Reference List) at the end of each article that are of interest to you and that you may want to read to gain better perspective on the ideas presented in the article. (These sources are normally generated from the Reference List of the article you are reviewing, although they also may be attained through your own literature search.)

Note: Please be sure that all 5 article reviews are contained in ONE file to be submitted through WebCT!
ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
ADDENDUM TO THE COURSE SCHEDULE IN SYLLABUS
READING ASSIGNMENTS -- SELECTED ARTICLES

Note: Articles from publications that are accessible from various databases available in NSU’s Electronic Library have been selected for reading during the term. This reading schedule is to be used in conjunction with the reading schedule in the syllabus. It is also to be used as reference material for assignments.

IMPORTANT! READ ME! -- While full citations are given below on all required articles to read, you must first access the NSU Electronic Library, then go to the appropriate online database. For example, several of the articles are available in ScienceDirect, but there are other databases from which to access different journals. This requires NSU login and password from the NSU E-Library to enable you to search for these articles in the online database. Sorry, I can’t link the articles directly on the course web site because copyright laws limit this.

Please note that I’ve selected some of the “early” works so that you can discover how the field has advanced. Your assignments should have more current works blended with the early works.

Week #1 & 2:


Week #3:


Week #4:

**Week #5:**

**Week #6:**

**Week #7**


**Week #8:**


**Week #9:**


**Week #10:**


**End of article reading schedule**