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Course Development Grant (Summer, 2010): Public Financial Management Online

Project Goal: The project transforms a required graduate course to an online format. It improves student learning by offering multimedia material that addresses diverse learning styles while utilizing several Blackboard features. Through experimental strategies for online discussion groups, students engage and deal with course material through interactive asynchronous discussions. Individual website research reports contribute to a class constructed data base for access and future career reference. The ethics essay assignment leads students to consider deeply issues involving ethics and public financial management. The fiscal policy analysis assignment provides an important opportunity for students to apply their knowledge and hone their budding skills in a practical exercise. Critical thinking skills are promoted through the exercises themselves as well as the requirements to respond constructively to the remarks of others. Much of public financial management includes sharing best practices, experiential reflective learning, and promoting innovative thinking. These assignments and the discussion groups are designed to bridge theory and practice through the shared wisdom of others in the practical application of course learning. Additionally, the online format facilitates student access through distance learning in our Inland Empire service area. This especially helps many in-service MPA students to minimize employment versus education schedule conflicts and advance their degree completion goals more quickly.

Implemented: Winter, 2011 and scheduled for Fall, 2011

Brief Description of the Project: Planned innovations include the following:

- ✓ Conversion of lectures into a multimedia format with transcripts, selected pod casts and/or voice enhanced PowerPoint slides, selected graphics, and multimedia Internet artifacts, as appropriate, to engage and to support student learning.
- ✓ Utilization of Discussion Board with some experimental strategies for discussion groups within selected modules to supplement, enrich, and extend learning. Discussion groups will apply and share experiential learning from their respective worksites. The strategies will include the development of a grading rubric that establishes parameters for “Substantive” and “Response” comments, discussion leaders, and participation timelines.
- ✓ Creation of a chat room for informal interaction, advice, and discussion about on the job public agency financial management issues that students are facing. This capitalizes on my 30 years of public financial management practitioner experience to brainstorm and to suggest approaches for students to employ course learning in their workplace. It supports the applied use of course material and offers opportunities for teachable moments beyond the classroom.

- ✓ Establishment of a resource base to support public financial management student learning. This will include links to selected journal articles, a host of government documents, and a variety of Internet resources to supplement the course textbook with cutting edge material.
- ✓ Develop a student centered website research assignment that reports on a public financial management Internet resource. Such reports will be in a standardize Word template format for posting on Blackboard for student leaning, sharing, and interactive group discussion.
- ✓ Construct a student centered fiscal policy analysis exercise. After reviewing a student selected public financial outlook report, students are challenged with developing a concise proposal to address one of the identified implications affecting government. Such analyses will be in a standardize Word template format for posting on Blackboard for student leaning, sharing, development of critical thinking skills, and interactive group discussion.
- ✓ Convert the existing midterm and final exam to online using Test Manager.
- ✓ Ensure that the course transformation meets all requirements for students with disabilities.

How the Project was Implemented (including how it differed from original plan):

- ✓ Converted 30 lectures into a multimedia format with transcripts, selected pod casts and outline slides, selected graphics, and multimedia Internet artifacts, as appropriate, to engage and to support student learning. This fall's version of the course includes the ability to download the audio clips to MP3 players.
- ✓ Developed Discussion Board material with some experimental strategies using groups within selected modules to supplement, enrich, and extend learning. Discussion groups apply and share experiential learning from their respective worksites. An extensive rubric was developed and installed to assess student work in discussion groups.
- ✓ A chat room for informal interaction, advice, and discussion about on the job public agency financial management issues that students are facing was not created. I found that as I designed discussion questions that this interchange would occur more naturally in the group discussions. On the couple of occasions where students wanted to discuss financial management issues related to their work in a more confidential manner, telephone conversations were scheduled.
- ✓ Established a resource base to support public financial management student learning. This included links to 10 selected journal articles, over a dozen extensive government documents, and a variety of Internet resources to supplement the course textbook with cutting edge material.
- ✓ Developed a student centered website research assignment that reports on a public financial management Internet resource. Such reports will be in a standardize Word template format for posting on Blackboard for student leaning, sharing, and reference.
- ✓ Constructed a student centered fiscal policy analysis exercise. After reviewing a student selected public financial outlook report, students were challenged with developing a concise proposal to address one of the identified implications affecting government. Such analyses were in a standardize Word template format.

- ✓ Converted the existing midterm and final exams to online using Test Manager. The exams were comprised of both multiple choice and essay questions.
- ✓ The course transformation addressed student disability requirements with transcripts and audio clips of 30 lectures.
- ✓ Connected students to the Governmental Finance Officers Association (GFOA) as a resource and acquainted them with 24 recommend practices in financial management.
- ✓ Acquainted students with the Governmental Accounting Standards Board website and Standard and Poor's (this was before Standard and Poor's was a household name).
- ✓ Linked students to several online documents of note in the Inland Empire to illustrate various topics.

Results of the Project: The effort resulted in a high caliber graduate seminar being converted to an online course. The course is planned to be taught, not exclusively, but primarily online in the future approximately two times annually. My experience with the discussion group design, rubric development, and assessment tracking in particular were used as a basis to launch research into the design and management of online discussions. This effort has resulted in three conference presentations and publication of an article this fall in the *Journal of Learning and Teaching*. Other articles are planned as I continue my research into the pedagogy of online discussion.

Additional Comments (Lessons Learned, Insights, Future Plans, etc.): The course is planned to be taught, not exclusively, but primarily online in the future. The online offering was taught in Winter 2010 and is scheduled for Fall 2011 and Winter 2012. The Fall 2011 offering of the course is 90% converted to the "new" Blackboard as of September 17, 2011. The Fall 2011 version of the course includes the ability to download audio clips to MP3 players. Experience with the discussion group design, rubric development, and assessment tracking launched research into the design and management of online discussions. This effort has resulted in three conference presentations and publication of an article this fall in the *Journal of Learning and Teaching*. Other articles are planned as I continue my research into the pedagogy of online discussion. New exams will be created that include an extensive question bank by topic to ensure different test questions in random order are offered to students. (Both multiple choice and essay questions are used.) This year a new textbook searched for and incorporated into the course with adjustments, as needed.