Chapter 3. Strategic, User-Centered Design for a Globally Distributed, Condensed Format, Online Graduate Course

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Abstract: This chapter presents a case study of engaging in strategic, user-centered design for a globally distributed online course that aimed to train first-year writing instructors in hybrid and online pedagogy. The fifteen graduate students in this course represented six time zones, from California to China. Drawing on the Community of Inquiry framework, I analyze my design decisions and demonstrate how I initially designed the course to be responsive to my particular student population, and how I adapted the design in response to student feedback as the course progressed. My goal is to provide an example that can inform how other writing instructors design flexible and responsive online writing courses.

Keywords: online writing instruction, user-centered design, globally distributed learning, community of inquiry, teaching presence

Writing instructors have always been instructional designers, even if they don't use that term. Our task is to create spaces where students learn about writing through talking with peers, reflecting on their practice, and responding to feedback with revision. Writing instructors, then, must not only be subject matter experts, but also community builders. And community building requires more than "throwing students together with their peers with little or no guidance" (Bruffee, 1984, p. 652). Writing instructors must make careful "moves that create an environment of safety and inquiry that allow learning to take place" (Sackey et al., 2015, p. 116). In other words, strategic instructional design is embedded into composition pedagogy.

Online writing instruction (OWI) scholars are particularly attentive to instructional design because, in addition to making decisions about what digital and non-digital tools will facilitate student-student, student-instructor, and student-content interaction, online writing instructors also build the learning environment (Blythe, 2001). Unfortunately, while many instructors are trained in composition pedagogy, few are explicitly trained to be instructional designers, and even fewer are trained in the technical skills required to build virtual learning environments. Consequently, OWI scholars advocate for training instructors as

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instructional designers (Breuch, 2015) and call for purposeful, pedagogy-driven course design (Harris et al., 2019).

Jessie Borgman & Casey McArdle's (2019) emphasis on strategic design in *Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic: Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors* responds to those calls. This chapter applies the PARS approach to a globally distributed online graduate course, particularly focusing on the S in PARS: strategic.

Strategic, User-Centered Design

Borgman & McArdle (2019) advocate for "a strategy focused on the user experience of the students" (p. 71). Too often, they contend, "user feedback is only gathered at the end of the course or upon degree completion" (2019, p. 89), resulting in course designs that are not responsive to the unique needs of the students. Instructional design models that focus primarily on outcome alignment exacerbate this issue. James Porter (2014), for example, argues that course evaluation programs' (e.g., Quality Matters) intense focus on mapping activities to assignments to outcomes often neglects

> the importance of instructional *context*. "The course" is imagined from a formalist frame as a well-made urn, an aesthetic object that can be evaluated, like a well-made essay, apart from its particular context, abstracted from the both rhetor (the instructor) and audience (particular students). (p. 25)

When instructional design neglects context, the course essentially functions as a tightly aligned textbook that does little to facilitate the types of student-student and student-instructor interactions that are required for the socially situated learning that writing studies values. The strategic, user-centered design for which Borgman & McArdle (2019) advocate offers an alternative.

Stuart Blythe (2001) defines user-centered design in contrast to "systems design," arguing that if writing instructors follow a systems approach, they "set specifications (e.g., course goals and technological means for meeting those goals) and then begin creating a Web-based course to meet those goals" (p. 334). To instead follow a user-centered approach, instructors should gather information about their students before determining specifications, such as students' access to and familiarity with course tools and goals for taking the course. Because the digital environments that support online learning are often unfamiliar to students, online instructors might additionally perform formal user-experience testing by observing students as they navigate the course site. Once the course begins, instructors should continually solicit student feedback and be prepared to make adjustments in response. Doing so places "the student experience at the heart of the course" and creates "responsive, flexible, experience-based and reflective online learning" (Greer & Harris, 2018, p. 22). In the language of PARS, being

responsive to students during strategic design facilitates personal and accessible learning (Borgman & McArdle, 2019).

Michael Greer & Heidi Skurat Harris (2018) additionally maintain that user-centered design is more than a set of practices: it is a mindset that instructors must adopt if they wish to uphold the CCCC OWI Principles (cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/owiprinciples). This mindset is particularly important for OWI Principle #1: Access. Jessie Borgman & Jason Dockter (2018) articulate this argument as they advocate for a "definition of access that extends beyond accessible course materials" (p. 95). Definitions of access must also recognize the varied devices students use and the range of factors that influence how they interpret materials such as prompts and instructions. In practice, this means that, in addition to following web accessibility guidelines (i.e., captions for videos, headings in documents, alternative text on images), writing instructors should engage in user-design practices such as: polling students before the course begins, offering frequent opportunities for student reflection, presenting instructional materials through multiple modes, and creating a variety of ways for students to access and interact with the content, their instructor, and their peers.

Collin Bjork (2018) takes these arguments a step further, advocating for augmenting theories of user-centered design with theories of digital rhetoric. Through this lens, instructors consider not only how students use and access online courses, but also how they use them rhetorically. This perspective builds upon scholarship that recognizes that interfaces are never ideologically neutral (Arola, 2010; Gallagher, 2015; Hawisher & Selfe, 1991). Accordingly, any analysis of a user's experience must account for "the social, cultural, political, and ideological stakes" of participating (Bjork, 2018, p. 7). User-centered design thus helps us account for the humans involved in education, and digital rhetoric helps us account for the social contexts and power dynamics that inform how those humans approach and interpret the tasks of teaching and learning.

Globally Distributed OWI

Accounting for social context as well as technological access is particularly important in a globally distributed online writing course, such as the one I will describe in this chapter. As the CCCC Statement on Globalization (cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/globalization) notes, writing instructors need to design courses that "take into account students' prior literacy experiences across languages and dialects, valuing students' ways of life, ways of knowing, and ways of making meaning" (2019, p. 685). The statement also recognizes the potential of cross-cultural education for showcasing "differences in language and culture in the teaching and practice of writing" (CCCC Statement on Globalization, 2019, p. 686).

Specific to globally distributed online writing instruction, scholars explore strategies for teaching students to write for global audiences (Rice & St.Amant,

2018; St.Amant & Rice, 2015) and discuss pedagogies for facilitating online courses that consist of globally distributed students (Cleary et al., 2019). These scholars emphasize the importance of thinking about both cultural differences and technological logistics when working with geographically distributed students. They also note the value of exposing students to international audiences and diverse cultural perspectives, as well as the challenges of coordinating interactions across time zones and among students with varied access to course tools. In this chapter, I build upon that scholarship to explore how the PARS approach can guide the strategic, user-centered design of a globally distributed online graduate course.

The Community of Inquiry Framework

In addition to the PARS approach, I draw on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, 2017), which is another instructional design heuristic. Like PARS, CoI situates learning in the context of student-student and student-instructor relationships (Gillam & Wooden, 2013; Stewart, 2017). The CoI framework additionally identifies specific elements of "teaching presence," which has helped me apply strategic (and personal and accessible and responsive) design to specific teaching tasks, like setting up the course site, responding to students, and coordinating group work.

In a CoI, the goal is to facilitate interactive learning and knowledge co-construction, which CoI scholars call "cognitive presence." In order to achieve cognitive presence, instructors need to intentionally establish both "social presence" and "teaching presence." Social presence emerges when students establish sufficient relationships to sense a common purpose in the learning community and thus engage in interactions that lead to collaboration. Teaching presence creates the foundation of a community of inquiry, as the instructor designs the course and facilitates student interactions in ways that support both social and cognitive presence. For example, when an instructor intentionally designs a peer review activity in a way that helps students establish trust and engage in reader response feedback, the teaching presence (activity design) supports social presence (trust) that leads to cognitive presence (revision in response to reader response feedback).

In this chapter, I will focus on teaching presence, which CoI scholars further categorize into three instructor actions: Design & Organization, Direct Instruction, and Facilitating Discourse (see Table 3.1). In what follows, I will describe the ways I applied the PARS approach as I engaged in the three categories of teaching presence. My goal is to provide a detailed example of *strategic*, user-centered design that can help other writing instructors create *personal*, *responsive*, and *accessible* online writing courses that meet the needs of diverse, global learners.

Table 3.1. Categories of teaching presence

Teaching Presence Categories	Example Instructor Actions
Design & Organization typically occurs before the course begins and is what most people refer to when they talk about "instructional design."	Envisioning the course arc Drafting the syllabus Creating major assignments Building the course shell
Direct Instruction occurs when the instructor provides clarifications and resources that deepen students' engagement with the course concepts.	Posting assignment instructions Writing activity prompts Posting announcements Sending emails Providing feedback on student work
Facilitating Discourse occurs when the instructor puts students in situations where they will explore multiple perspectives and engage in negotiation that leads to knowledge co-construction.	Facilitating discussion forums Coordinating peer review workshops Conferencing with small groups Inviting multiple perspectives Posing problems that require negotiation

Designing a Condensed-Format, Globally Distributed, Online Graduate Course

The doctoral program for which I was teaching at the time of this writing aims to train teacher-scholars in composition and applied linguistics, and most students are experienced composition and/or language instructors. Typically, the students come to campus for two months in the summer, taking two four-week courses in June and two four-week courses July. However, in the summer of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic mandated that our courses be offered online. Consequently, in March 2020, I began the task of designing my course, Hybrid & Online Writing Pedagogy, for online delivery.

From a PARS perspective, strategy and access should guide course Design & Organization. Consequently, I began the design process by surveying my students. I asked about: prior experience with online learning, concepts and projects of particular interest, time zone, year in the program, technology access, and preferences for asynchronous or synchronous learning. I also included an open-ended question inviting students to share concerns or challenges they anticipated facing because of the online format.

I learned that the 15 enrolled students represented six time zones, from California to China. Approximately half (46%) reported previous experience with teaching hybrid or online courses, while the other half (54%) explained that their only experience with online learning was emergency remote instruction in Spring 2020. All but one student indicated that they would prefer some syn-

chronous interaction throughout the four-week course, though several noted that their internet connection was not reliable. I also learned that the students were in their second or third summers of the doctorate program, which meant that they had a shared experience as students, including prior experience with negotiating cultural differences among cohort members.

After the course was complete, I invited the students to participate in an IRB-approved research study that allowed me to analyze the weekly reflections they wrote for the course and that included a demographic survey. Fourteen students consented to participate in the study, and eleven provided demographic information. Of those 11, 82% identified as female and 18% identified as male, 45% identified as domestic (U.S.) and 55% identified as international (primarily Near or Middle Eastern). All but one student identified as multilingual (the majority spoke two languages). At the time of the course, the students' ages ranged from 32–47.

As I began to envision the course, which aimed to immerse face-to-face composition instructors in the theories and practices of OWI, I started with a syllabus designed for a 14-week version of the course. Were I to teach the four-week version face-to-face, I would have had assigned readings followed by in-class discussion four days a week (Monday–Thursday). The global distribution of my students, and the concerns about internet connectivity, meant that this design could not be replicated via video chat. Instead, I decided to limit synchronous interactions to once a week, on Fridays. To accommodate multiple time zones, I hosted two (recommended, but not required) chats every Friday, one at 8 a.m. ET and one at 12 p.m. ET. Students were welcome to attend either chat, and they had the option to watch the recording if they were unable to attend.

I also re-imagined the course as four units rather than fourteen weeks, ultimately designing weekly modules that included four types of tasks: Projects, Reading Responses, Group Activities, Video Chats, and Reflections. In the LMS, I organized these into Reading Responses and Activities/Projects (see Figure 3.2).

Table 3.2. Interaction in and modality of activities

	Interaction	Modality
Projects	1:1, instructor-student, student-content	asynchronous, multimodal
Reading Responses	1:many, instructor-students, student-students, student-content	asynchronous, textual
Group Activities	1:group, student-students, instructor-students, student-content	synchronous, multimodal
Video Chats	1:many, instructor-students, student-students	synchronous, multimodal
Reflections	1:1, instructor-student	asynchronous, textual

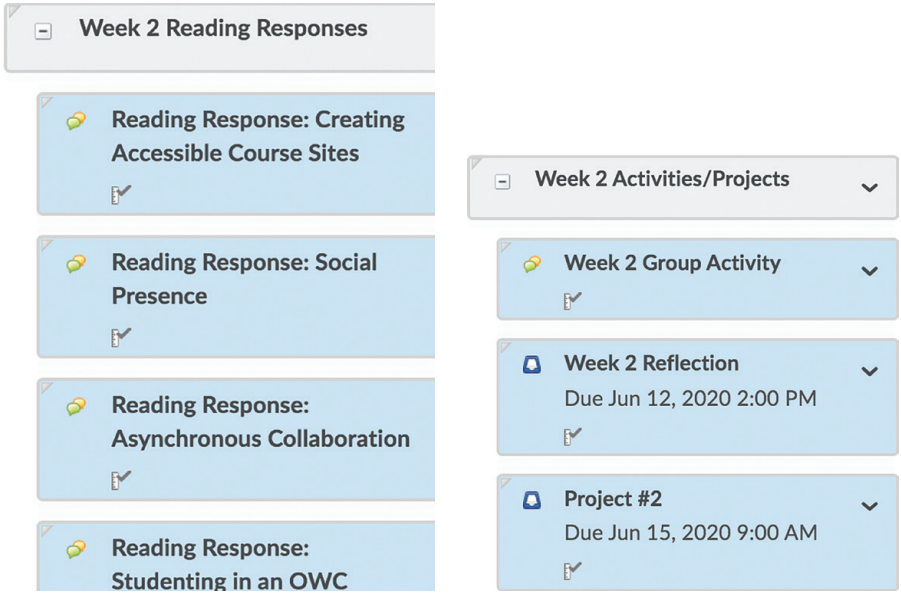

Figure 3.1. Weekly modules.

As I envisioned each element of the course, I followed recommendations in the literature to create a set of activities that balanced one-to-one and one-to-many student-student, student-instructor, and student-content interactions (Moore, 1989), as well as a combination of asynchronous/synchronous (Mick & Middlebrook, 2015) and textual/multimodal (Rankins-Robertson et al., 2014) components (see Table 3.2).

The remainder of this chapter analyzes my application of the PARS approach to strategically design and facilitate each of the five course components.

Projects

The course Design & Organization gave students a choice between two final projects: a pedagogical portfolio or a scholarly article. Regardless of the final, Projects 1 and 2 involved designing instructional materials and interactive activities for an online course. Project 3 was either a revision of those materials or a proposal for the scholarly article. All of my Summer 2020 students opted for the pedagogical portfolio, which included a critical analysis of the materials they created throughout Projects 1-3. The Projects were due on Mondays at 9 a.m. ET because that is when I intended to begin reading student work. In the spirit of being personal and responsive, I was transparent about this reasoning and frequently discussed both instructor and student workload throughout the course. See Appendix A for project descriptions.

My Direct Instruction for the projects included assignment instructions and feedback. Following the PARS emphasis on being responsive, my feedback was primarily formative, making recommendations for how students could revise their materials from project to project, or commenting on how students might re-imagine their final projects for publication.

In terms of Facilitating Discourse, some knowledge co-construction was intended as students responded to feedback during revision. I also created moments for peer interaction during a final project workshop, but designing and facilitating this component of the course primarily involved Design & Organization and Direct Instruction.

Reading Response Discussion Forums

This summers-only doctoral program aims to offer the same content in the condensed format that students would encounter in an academic-year course. Consequently, I opted to maintain the 12 sets of assigned readings from the semester-long course. These were transformed into reading response forums, where students posted an initial response every Monday–Thursday by 2 p.m. ET and then responded to two peers by 5 p.m. ET. I selected 2 p.m. ET as the due date to give myself time to read and respond to the forums each day. See Appendix B for an example prompt.

Figure 3.2. Video announcement synthesizing reading response forums.

I initially intended to achieve Direct Instruction through responding in writing to each post. In practice, the literacy load proved unsustainable—in the first forum, 108 posts were created within 24 hours. I felt overwhelmed as I waded through the responses, and several students noted that they were struggling to keep up with the ideas dispersed across so many threads. Consequently, I made two changes to the design. I made the requirement for students to respond to peers optional. Then, instead of responding to each student individually, I read through the posts, took notes, and created a video that synthesized the students' contributions, taking care to directly quote or paraphrase each student in my verbal response. To account for the internet connectivity difficulties that I knew many students were encountering, I posted a PDF script for each video. This revision was responsive to student and instructor workload, made the assignment more personal because the students received a multimodal message from me every day that directly acknowledged their individual contributions to our learning community, and accounted for accessibility via the script. Figure 3.2 is a screenshot of the first video response.

This decision had a major impact on both Direct Instruction and Discourse Facilitation. Had I responded individually to each student, the Direct Instruction would have been primarily one-to-one, as my response would address the individual author, and perhaps the peers who responded to that author. Shifting to a video response changed my Direct Instruction to one-to-many; I was now creating one holistic response instead of 15 individual responses. My students' reflections indicate that this shift increased our collective sense of the course as a community. As one student wrote, the videos "tricked" her brain into thinking we'd met as a class; as another student put it, "the video posts provide a sense of community and connectedness to the course." On the other hand, this decision meant that students were not responding to each other's posts. Some students regretted this, noting that the lack of responses lessoned the opportunity for Discourse. Other students indicated that they were benefiting from reading their peers' posts, suggesting that the bulletin-board forum still facilitated knowledge co-construction even if there was not written evidence of it. Of course, my context is important—I'm working with highly motivated graduate students who are likely to read each other's posts even if responses are not required. That might not be the case in first-year composition.

Weekly Group Activities

Unlike the reading response forums, the group activities were intentionally designed to facilitate back-and-forth negotiation and conversation. In week 1, I divided the students into five groups of three, based on time zone; each group met to discuss a particular concept from the week's readings and then collaboratively created a multimodal presentation. I also created Google Documents for each group that included graphic organizers with spaces for individual and group

notes, and I asked the groups to email me early in the week with a description of their plan for approaching the project and distributing the work.

My hope was that students would meet synchronously and benefit from talking with their peers, both for the purposes of knowledge co-construction and for gaining a sense of connection with classmates (Aragon, 2003). In practice, this activity became a stressful exercise in logistics as the groups struggled to find time to meet. Context is again important—I learned that most of my students were simultaneously enrolled in a research methods course that required them to interview and be interviewed several times (one student had nine interviews that week). This understandably increased their anxiety around scheduling the group meetings for my course. The multiple time zones were also complicated to navigate. I attempted to mitigate this by grouping students who were in similar time zones, but, as one student wrote, it remained "time-consuming to collaborate online with everyone's differing schedules, responsibilities, and time zones." Furthermore, as another student explained, "my group members who live in the same time zone as me work on completely different schedules than I do, so I might as well have been in another time zone."

When the groups did meet, they were more focused on producing the required presentation than on negotiating or connecting. As one student explained,

> I knew that our goal as a group was to engage in a conversation about what we found and build on each other's ideas. However, due to time constraints and the need to produce a deliverable, it just ended up being a narration of what each person found and the rest was planning what we needed to do next.

I wanted students to connect and negotiate, but I also required proof of their collaboration via a graded product. This product became their sole focus, and they unanimously reported in their reflections that the activity did not lead them to connect with their peers or with the content in the way I intended.

In response, I revised the Week 2 group activity. My original plan was to have five groups of three who each identified an online academic community and then analyzed their community through a unique lens. I re-grouped the students into three groups of five, and, instead of each group focusing on one lens, one person within the group represented a lens. The students posted their unique analysis to the forum and then responded to their peers, bringing back the asynchronous responses that some students missed from the reading response forums, and also creating a more manageable literacy load since the students only saw the responses from their small groups.

Figures 3.3 and 3.4 present the initial and revised group activity instructions for Week 2. You'll notice that the instructions use bullet points, indentation, bold font, and purple font; this visual design, and the writing style, aims to enact Beth Hewett's (2015) recommendations for writing readable instructional materials. The Initial Week 2 Group Activity Instructions are found below.

Week 2 Group Activity (Initial)

Discussion Topic

Due June 12 at 2:00pm

The activity for this week will involve each group conducting a rhetorical analysis of two digital communities: one academic (a D2L course you are currently taking or another formal learning environment you can find online, such as a MOOC) and one non-academic (any interface that everyone in your group has access to, such as a social media platform). Here are you group assignments and associated Google Docs:

- Group 1 (tbd after week 1)
- Group 2 (tbd after week 1)
- Group 3 (tbd after week 1)
- Group 4 (tbd after week 1)
- Group 5 (tbd after week 1)

Step 1: Reach out to your group and create a plan for how you will complete the work this week. Email Mary with a summary of your plan. I recommend reaching out to your group on Monday and emailing Mary on Tuesday.

You are welcome to request a group meeting with Mary at this point. to discuss your plans and clarify expectations. However, this is not required; we can just as easily talk over email.

Step 2: Determine what academic and non-academic digital communities your group will analyze, and then individually access the two interfaces from multiple devices, including at least one mobile device.

Step 3: Meet with your group to discuss your experiences, using the information in the Group Google Document to guide your discussion. How you meet is completely up to you, and it can be synchronous or asynchronous.

Step 4: As a group, create a multimodal presentation that summarizes what you and your group learned. This could be an infographic, a PowerPoint or Prezi with voice-over, a podcast or recorded video of you interviewing group members about their experience with online learning, etc. Your primary goal is to teach the other groups about your assigned principle.

Your multimodal presentation should be posted to D2L by Friday, June 12 at 2 p.m. ET. Then, by Friday at 5 p.m. ET, please review

the other groups' presentations and post a response to at least one group.

The Revised Week 2 Group Activity Instructions are found below.

Week 2 Group Activity (Revised)

Discussion Topic

Due June 12 at 2:00pm

We're going to try a new strategy for the group assignment this week. Week 1 was primarily designed to be synchronous group work because you needed to negotiate and co-author. This week is designed to be more asynchronous, where each group member is in charge of bringing a particular piece of knowledge to the group, and then you co-construct knowledge as you read, reflect on, and respond to the individual contributions.

Instead of five groups of three, we'll have three groups of five (larger groups are typically better for asynchronous knowledge construction, while smaller groups are important for managing the logistics of synchronous co-authoring):

Group 1: [student names]

Group 2: [student names]

Group 3: [student names]

I've set this up using the Groups feature in D2L, which means that you will only see your small group's posts to the discussion forum. The deadlines are set up as the same as last week: post due Friday at 2 p.m. ET and replies due Friday at 5 p.m. ET; however, you and your group can set different deadlines, if you'd like.

The activity for this week will involve each group conducting a rhetorical analysis of an online, academic communities. This could be a D2L course from IUP or another formal learning environment you can find online, such as a MOOC or a Kahn Academy class. Each group member will be assigned to analyze that community through a particular lens: (1) social presence, (2) accessibility, (3) asynchronous interaction, (4) literacy load, and (5) usability.

Step 1: Reach out to your group and decide: (a) what academic community you will analyze, (b) who will be assigned to what lens, and (c) if you want to stick with the Friday deadlines or propose something else. Email Mary by 5 p.m. ET on Tuesday with a summary of your plan.

Step 2: Individually access the interface from multiple devices, including at least one mobile device, and draft a 500–600 word discussion forum post or a 5–7 minute video that analyzes the community through your assigned lens. Your initial post is due by Friday at 2 p.m. ET.

Below you'll find some guidance for each lens. You do not have to account for every question I'm posing; this is just meant to get you started. If you'd like to be put in contact with the people from other groups who are also assigned to your lens, let me know.

Lens #1: Social Presence. Referring to the readings by Rourke et al., Aragon, and Rendahl & Breuch, consider: Did you see evidence of the three categories of social presence in the academic community? Did you see evidence of social presence in support of satisfaction and/or in support of learning? Was the social presence you observed hindered or supported by the type of interaction (asynchronous or synchronous; textual or multimodal)?

Lens #2: Accessibility. Referring to the readings by Oswal and Rodrigo, consider: How was your experience in the community impacted by the device(s) you are using and your internet connection? How are your experiences impacted by your previous experiences with the online communities or your assumptions about what constitutes "successful" communication or participation in this community? How are your experiences influenced by larger sociocultural factors, e.g., the relationship between your individual identity and the community?

Lens #3: Asynchronous Interaction. Referring to Warnock & Gasiewski, consider the asynchronous interactions you observed. What tools are people using to communicate in the community? Is the communication all textual or multimodal? What makes a particular type of communication effective in this space?

Lens #4: Literacy Load. Referring to Warnock & Gasiewski, consider: How do people participate in the academic community? How is this participation different from "attendance" in a face-to-face class or from being physically present at a non-academic event? What literacies (reading, writing, multimodal communication, multitasking . . .) are required to support that participation? How does that literacy load compare to what you would expect from equivalent face-to-face interactions? Beyond technical access, what factors influence who is invited to participate and who has a voice/authority in the community?

> Lens #5: Usability. Referring to Bjork, consider: What was your user experience with the platform? How was your experience impacted by your access to technology or cultural identity? What evidence of user design do you see in the platforms? Who seems to be the intended user? How does the interface invite particular uses?
>
> **Step 3**: Respond to each of your group members, contributing at least one reply to each member's thread. Your responses should reflect on how their lens relates to or departs from or deepens your understanding of your own lens or other group members' lenses. Your responses to peers are due by Friday at 5 p.m. ET.

The students responded far more positively to this design, and some groups reported in their reflections that they engaged in negotiation of multiple perspectives and achieved a sense of connection with peers. For example:

> This updated design does not require having to go through too many organizational steps and gave us the chance to focus on engaging with the content itself. We still had highly useful conversations through Whatsapp while the forum replies to each other deepened our understanding of the various lenses.

However, other students reported that the intended social learning was not achieved: "My group interacted via WhatsApp to try and coordinate things. Since everything is asynchronous, it's not really feeling like a group work project, and I think it might have worked equally as well as a discussion post."

Consequently, I once again revised the group activity. In Week 3, I asked my students to meet for half an hour in small groups for what I called a "Non-Deliverable Synchronous Activity." They emailed me early in the week explaining when and how they planned to meet, and they reflected on the experience in their Weekly Reflections. The Week 3 Group Activity instructions follow.

> **Week 3 Group Activity**
>
> Discussion Topic
>
> Due June 19 at 2:00pm
>
> This week, we're going to try what I call a Non-Deliverable Synchronous activity. Each group will meet for 30 minutes and discuss the teaching presence within an online course (you can discuss our course, another IUP course you are currently taking, or one of the Coursera, Kahn Academy, or Facebook environments you looked at last week). There will be no deliverable--you are just on your honor system to get together and talk for 30 minutes.
>
> I've sorted you into the same groups that you worked with in

Week 1:

Group 1: [student names]

Group 2: [student names]

Group 3: [student names]

Group 4: [student names]

Group 5: [student names]

Step 1: Reach out to your group and determine (a) what online course you will focus on and (b) when you will meet. Email Mary with an update on your plans.

Step 2: Prior to meeting with your group, explore the online course and look for examples of the three elements of teaching presence: Design & Organization, Facilitating Discourse, and Direct Instruction.

Step 3: Meet with your group and discuss the course. The goal is to deepen your understanding of teaching presence through applying the theory to concrete examples. If you want to dig a little deeper, consider reflecting on one or more of the following:

- **Response to writing**. What evidence did you see of formative v. summative or group v. individual feedback in the course? Which of the teaching presence categories (design & organization, direct instruction, and facilitating discourse) inform, or should inform, response to writing? How does the key role of response in writing pedagogy inform your definition of teaching presence?
- **The student's role in teaching presence**. What evidence did you see of students participating in the facilitation of teaching presence in the course? How can you imagine students contributing to each of the three teaching presence categories (design & organization, direct instruction, and facilitating discourse)? What about writing or language instruction makes the student role in teaching presence particularly important (or not important)?
- **Accessibility**. To what extent do the Quality Matters Rubric and the Community of Inquiry Framework account for teaching presence? If you were using these instruments to analyze the course that you toured, how do you think you'd describe the level of design & organization, direct instruction, and facilitating discourse in the course? To what extent do you believe using teaching presence as a design heuristic

would contribute to or detract from creating an accessible and high-quality online course? What other elements would you recommend designers take into account?

- **Multimodal instruction**. What evidence did you see of multimodal teaching presence in the course site? How can you imagine using multimodal instruction to facilitate each of the three teaching presence categories (design & organization, direct instruction, and facilitating discourse)? One argument for online writing courses is that the form of the course reinforces the content as students have to write and read in order to participate in the course. A similar argument argues for multimodality in online courses because it can reinforce digital literacy as a learning outcome. Did you see any evidence of this in the course you toured? Do you agree or disagree that multimodal instructional materials can facilitate digital literacy in an online writing course?

You are not required to submit any kind of deliverable as a result of this activity. However, if your group runs into questions or ideas that you want to discuss with Mary, feel free to email her. You might engage in an email exchange with Mary, or ask her to add something that came up in your group to the Friday chat agendas, or ask her to schedule a separate meeting with you and/or your group.

The students responded well to this task. Most reported that they had engaging conversations and expressed relief at the lack of deliverable, noting that they were able to focus on each other instead of on a graded product. As one student wrote,

> I believe that I have learned the most from this week's group activity compared to the past two weeks. I feel like when there was a deliverable, we were too tense and too much focused on the deliverable itself and the "task distribution" rather than on discussing our understandings of the readings and the concepts in them. This week, we discussed the theories we struggled with. We compared our understandings of the same theory or text.

Another student noted, "the discussion we had this afternoon, not tied to an assignment, was the type of interaction I and my group members wish we could have engaged in more frequently over the past few weeks."

These students are motivated learners who had a tangible sense of community with their peers based on our time together in the course and their prior knowledge of one another. I do not know how a non-deliverable activity would work

in another learning context, but the experience has caused me to seriously rethink the role of deliverables that accompany synchronous interactions. Moving forward, I plan to integrate a combination of asynchronous and non-deliverable synchronous collaborative activities in my courses.

The evolving Design & Organization of the group activities was responsive to information I was gaining from student reflections, and strategically sought to make the activities more accessible given students' personal contexts. At the same time, the learning outcomes remained consistent, and the content of the activities (essentially discussion prompts) were largely unchanged. My approach to Direct Instruction was similarly consistent—it occurred via assignment instructions, email exchanges with the groups, and responses to the work they posted in the forums—but the deliverables I was expecting (or not expecting) were substantially revised. The most interesting element of this experience was the quest for Discourse Facilitation. Ultimately, the students found ways to connect and negotiate with each other, but it was critical for me to understand the course from their perspectives before I was able to design an activity that effectively facilitated that discourse. The PARS approach put me in a situation where I was soliciting sufficient student feedback to engage in those adaptations.

Synchronous Video Chats

I held two synchronous video chats every Friday, 8–9 a.m. ET and 12–1 p.m. ET. Students could choose which chat to attend and if they were unable to attend, they could watch the recording and email me with questions or schedule a one-on-one meeting. Most students attended a chat every week, and the two students who did skip a chat only missed one week each.

The goal of these chats was threefold: (1) to reinforce our sense of community and the personal nature of online learning, (2) to give students the opportunity to ask questions and thus make the course more accessible, and (3) to discuss concepts from the forums and activities that week. These chats proved effective for Facilitating Discourse; the students were lively participants and much of our time was spent reflecting on how their experiences as online students illuminated or departed from concepts in the readings. We also engaged in "off topic" conversations about the impact of current events on their personal lives. My Direct Instruction primarily took the form of offering clarifications or insights from OWI scholarship based on questions and comments from students. This responsive instruction style was supported by the Design & Organization of the chats. I opened the chat with a full group discussion of the course logistics and invited questions about projects or assignments. I then moved students into break out rooms where they generated a list of topics that they wanted to explore in more depth, which guided our subsequent full group discussion.

Reflections

The final and perhaps most critical component of this course was an individual reflection that students submitted every Friday by 2 p.m. ET. I relied on these reflections to revise the course as it progressed, thus strategically working to make the course both responsive and accessible. See Appendix C for an example prompt.

My Direct Instruction for the individual reflections was one-to-one. The feedback was conversational, enacting the PARS emphasis on personal as I empathized with students who reported struggling with the realities of a condensed format online course. If the student chose to reflect on what they learned, then I provided more content-specific feedback as I shared my own interpretations of the course concepts. The individual reflections created important opportunities for student-instructor dialogue, which may have led to some knowledge co-construction, but these activities were not intentionally designed to Facilitate Discourse.

Final Thoughts & Application

The goal of this chapter is to offer an example of how I applied the PARS approach to engage in strategic, user-centered design for a condensed format, online graduate course. My hope is that the level of detail will provide other instructors with a starting point for what things to consider and what questions to ask when engaging in strategic design. Ideally, we are designing courses that offer a balance of one-to-one and one-to-many student-student, student-instructor, and student-content interactions that guide students towards co-constructing knowledge within a cohesive course community. The PARS approach facilitates a design that includes both structure and flexibility, so that students have a clear sense of the course goals and expectations, and also have the opportunity to express when the design is misaligned with their needs and contexts. More specifically, I recommend the following steps to implement strategic, user-centered design in online courses:

1. Survey students before the course to learn about their technological access and any issues that may hinder their ability to participate in the course.
2. Integrate frequent opportunities for student reflection on what they are learning and how the course is (or is not) facilitating that learning.
3. Modify course logistics (due dates, required interactions, assignment details) in response to student feedback.
4. Critically examine the required deliverables and question if that those deliverables are necessary to support student learning.

The PARS approach illustrates that there is not one "right" or "best" way to design a course; instead, successful course design accounts for the social context of both students and the instructor, including their workload, technological access and familiarity, and lives beyond the course. This requires the instructor to invest time into the course design, and also be willing to adapt the plan as the

course proceeds. In the language of PARS, strategically designing accessible and personal learning environments requires that we are responsive to our students.

In closing, I must acknowledge that I am in a privileged position as a tenure-track faculty member trained in both instructional design and theories of learning, and those privileges influence the time I have to dedicate to course design and facilitation, as well as my approach to those tasks. In other contexts, the "mandated use of LMS platforms and out-of-the-box design principles like Quality Matters," alongside administrative mandates for quickly-built online courses staffed primarily by contingent faculty, and academic assumptions that online learning is necessarily inferior to face-to-face, create institutional, economic, and cultural barriers to strategic, user-centered design (Greer & Harris, p. 22, 2018). It is imperative that institutions intentionally and ethically account for the social contexts of both their students and their teachers if they intend to offer high-quality online courses that rely on strategic, user-centered design.

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Appendix A. Project Descriptions

3. Projects

Throughout the semester, you will submit three projects.

Project #1: Design a Unit: Create a draft of a syllabus that includes a lesson plan

for one unit of an online course (3–4 weeks). Your design should include the *weekly topics* and the *assignment sheet* for the culminating project. Compose a reflective cover letter that introduces the materials, explaining what they are and how they enact the theories we've been reading. See the assignment sheet for more details.

Project #2: Interactive Activities: Design the interactive student-student activities associated with the unit you designed for Project #1. This might involve discussion, peer review, group work, collaborative writing, etc. The interaction could take place within an LMS (i.e., discussion forums, synchronous chat) or outside of the LMS (i.e., social media, other online tools or apps). At minimum, you will need to include *one asynchronous activity and one synchronous activity*. Compose a reflective cover letter that introduces the materials, explaining what they are and how they enact the theories we've been reading. See the assignment sheet for more details.

Project #3: Preparing for the Final Project: The goal of Project #3 is to prepare you for the Final Project, so you will have options of how you approach it. If you are creating a pedagogical portfolio for your final project, then Project #3 will involve *creating instructional materials* to introduce and evaluate the activities you designed for Project 2, and also composing a reflective cover letter that introduces the materials, explaining what they are and how they enact the theories we've been reading. If you are writing a scholarly article or creating a response to the covid-19 pandemic, then you will *draft a project proposal*, which will include a reflective element. See the assignment sheet for more details.

4. Final Project

Option #1 = Pedagogy Project: You will submit a final portfolio that includes revised elements from Projects #1, #2, and #3. The final product should include: (a) a syllabus with the course schedule fully developed for one unit and (b) a collection of the activities, instructional materials, and assessment artifacts presented in an LMS or a course website that you design (see Projects 1–3 for more details on what's expected). You will additionally submit a 4–5 page critical analysis essay that analyzes how your materials reflect current theories and best practices for hybrid and online writing instruction. This paper should engage with at least one major theory/concept from this course (i.e., social presence, accessibility, multimodal instruction, etc.), and should build an argument for why others should also consider this concept/theory when designing their own courses.

Note: You will receive instructor feedback on Projects 1, 2, & 3, and it is expected that you use this feedback to inform your final portfolio, if you choose this option.

Option #2 = Scholarly Article or Pandemic Response: Draft a scholarly article that responds to the some of ideas we've talked about this semester, and/or responds to higher education's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This could be a theoretical article, an empirical article (if you already have data to work with), a teaching article, or a more creative project (i.e., a webtext or an autoethnography

or an artistic response). As long as you are engaging with the theories of online and hybrid pedagogy, or pandemic pedagogy, then the project will be accepted. You'll write a proposal for Project #3 and receive instructor approval.

Please also identify a journal in which you wish to publish this article, and use the author guidelines to inform the article parameters (word count, genre, etc.). You might consider journals such as: Computers & Composition, Research in Online Literacy Education, Journal of Online Learning, The Internet and Higher Education, or British Journal of Educational Technology.

Appendix B. Social Presence Reading Response Prompt

Discussion Topic

Due June 9 at 2:00pm

After you've done the reading, compose a response. Your initial post (due Tuesday at 2 p.m. ET) should be 300–400 words, or a 3–5 minute audio/video, and it should respond to one of the discussion prompts below:

- Option #1: Social Presence. In response to Rourke et al., which is a seminal article that introduced social presence as an element of the Community of Inquiry Framework, define "social presence" and "immediacy," and reflect on why these elements are important for learning. Please also differentiate between the three elements of social presence: interpersonal/affective communication, open communication, and group cohesion, offering examples of when you have experienced these phenomena, and in what educational context. You might also reflect on how things have changed since this article was published in 1999.
- Option #2: Social Presence for Satisfaction v. Learning. In response to Aragon, differentiate between social presence that supports student satisfaction and social presence that supports student learning. Please also reflect on his recommended strategies and consider how you could apply them in Project #2. In that consideration, discuss why you might use different modalities (asynchronous/synchronous) to facilitate a particular type of social presence at a particular moment in your course.
- Option #3: Social Presence in OWI. Rendahl & Breuch's literature review summarizes an important concern in OWI: can students engage in the collaboration and interaction that composition theory says is critical for learning? In other words, the field has been asking, can we establish sufficient social presence in an OWC? Should we? With this in mind, define "engagement" and "participation" and reflect on how these behaviors might look in a regular online course and/or in a pandemic pedagogy course.

Appendix C. Individual Reflection Prompt

Week 2 Reflection Assignment

Due June 12 at 2:00pm

Please write a 400–500 word individual reflection on your experience with the activities this week and submit it to this Assignment Folder by Friday at 2pm.

Your response should:

- Offer a general reflection on your experience this week. How are you handling the workload of a summer [program] course while living at home?
- What's the number one takeaway you have from the readings and activities?
- How was the group work? What did you notice about the different designs from last week to this week? What are the benefits and drawback to each approach?
- What's your plan for Project #2? Any questions or things you want to run by me?

This is an appropriate place to ask me questions or express any concerns about the course.