Coming Soon... April 2013

BEST PRACTICES
in Undergraduate Teaching and Learning

☑️ A New Website for All Educators!

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
University of Houston Clear Lake
The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) through a grant partnership with UHCL’s Office of Online Programs has supported the creation of a website containing twelve online professional development modules for all educators. The website will become available in April 2013 for full-time and adjunct faculty members to use on demand for face-to-face, web supported, and online courses. The purpose of this project was to create readily available, online professional development opportunities for faculty to learn the most effective strategies and “best practices” for improving both undergraduate teaching and learning in a number of critical areas. This project addresses the need to provide faculty, especially beginning faculty, with on-demand professional development opportunities that address how to best incorporate recent pedagogical theories in teaching and learning into undergraduate general education courses for enhanced learning and increased student engagement, retention, and success.

The twelve modules are:

1. Learning Standards Required by the Accreditation Bodies
2. Course Design and Preparing a Syllabus
3. Preparing a Lesson, Unit or Module Within a Course
4. Promoting Successful Academic Behavior
5. Promoting Peer and Self-Assessment in Students
6. Developing Effective Assignments
7. Increasing Student Engagement
8. Incorporating Technology
9. Incorporating Academic Resources
10. Rubrics
11. Evaluation and Assessment
12. Students at Risk

Look for the link in April 2013 at the THECB website, www.thecb.state.tx.us for the launching of the new website, BEST PRACTICES in Undergraduate Teaching and Learning. Each of the twelve modules will include graphic visuals, faculty expert videos, live Twitter Feeds and additional resources for educators to explore more options and examples for their course design.

Dr. Goswami established a team of subject matter experts from UHCL’s faculty and staff members to design the website. Through her leadership and management of the project with the dedication and expertise of the team members, the final presentation of the BEST PRACTICES website will be successful in helping educators incorporate new ideas effectively in teaching and learning for undergraduate students.

Pictured from left to right are Dr. Jana Willis, SOE, Dr. Shreerekha Subramanian, School of Human Sciences and Humanities, Dylan Maddox, Multimedia Specialist, Dr. Shanta Goswami, PI and Director of Online Programs, Azalea Boehm, Instructional Designer and Web Developer, Stephanie Armstrong, Instructional Designer, Patricia Cuchens, HSH, and Dr. Lee Revere, BUS. Additional development assistance not pictured here are Dr. Jackie Hsu, Quality Assurance Evaluator, Laura Armer, Instructional Designer, Dr. Kathy Schmidt Jackson, External Evaluator, Dr. Tina Farrell, K-12 Specialist. Dr. Anne Coppenhaver, SOE, and Dr. Kelly Moore, SOE, are both helping with the dissemination of the project.
Welcome Our New Staff Member ............

Shanta Goswami

It is my pleasure to introduce Jing Fong Jane Hsu or Jackie Hsu, our new Quality AssuranceEvaluator who joined the office at the end of spring. Jackie will be assisting me with the quality assurance of online courses and communicating information regarding best practice in online teaching and learning.

Jackie served as an instructional designer at Collin College and Dallas Community College for 11 years before joining UHCL. She has also taught face to face, online and hybrid courses for the past ten years in different universities. Her teaching experience includes five years at Collin College (CC), one year at Cedar Valley College (CVC), three years at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Singapore, plus three years at Iowa State University (ISU). At these universities she has taught computer technology and instructional design at both undergraduate and graduate levels. She received both Master and Ph.D. degrees from Iowa State University in Curriculum & Instruction Technology. As an instructional designer, she provided faculty the professional consultation on integration of instructional technology in hybrid and online courses, instructional technology workshops as well as served as an advisory member in the online advisory board.

She would love to meet you if you have a chance to stop by the office of Online Programs (B1402) or give her a call at 281-283-2531.

Upcoming Event - Brown Bag Lunch Series

Shanta Goswami

The Office of Online Programs would like to welcome our UHCL faculty who teach online courses to participate in brown bag luncheons that are being planned for 2012. The topics of discussion will focus on issues related to online learning for students, faculty concerns, tips and tricks, and what works in the distance education environment for students and faculty.

The topics of discussion, the dates, and who will be leading our 2012 Brown Bag Lunch Series are listed as follows:

1. Blackboard tools and updates, Wednesday, September 26th – UHCL Web services Team
2. Embedded Librarians in your online courses, Wednesday, October 24th – UHCL Librarians
3. Course Design and Effective Online Pedagogy – Monday, November 26th – Dr. Bill Pelz, SUNY

If you have other ideas please let us know and we can include them in future brown bag series.

New Course Development Calendar .....
OPALS is a new information system which stands for Online Provisioning & Approvals for Learning Systems. OPALS, is a tool that helps Faculty, Office of Online Programs and Web Services department to manage course development process. OPAL is developed with the intention of replacing the paper work and introducing efficiency in the course development as well as course management process. The Business Learning Application team had the opportunity to work with the Office of Online Programs and the Web service team (UCT) to develop this tool for faculty and staff.

For Office of Online Programs, OPALS helps to monitor the course approval process as well as the course development process. OPALS, also helps to manage the quality assurance process for the fully online courses to maintain the SACS and the THECB standards.

For Web Services team, OPALS helps to manage their resources by monitoring the instructional designer workloads. OPALS also helps to LTA’s to manage provisioning and un-provisioning. OPALS saves LTA’s time by loading enrollments as well as migrating courses between the environments.

For Faculty, OPALS is an information system that bridges PeopleSoft and our current Learning Management System (LMS), Blackboard. OPALS was designed to be a one-stop-shop for faculty. It provides a dashboard that allows faculty to quickly determine the provisioning status of their scheduled classes, review their Blackboard inventory, monitor the status of submitted course requests, and approve requests for their course content. “OPALS” allows a faculty member to provision their classes for online instruction using Master Course templates. These Master Course templates are requested, and created, through the “OPALS” Course Request system, and are unique to each instructor.

Behind the scenes, OPALS implements a dynamic work-flow engine for course approvals and quality assurance. This allows OPALS to fast-track the approval of course requests while keeping faculty informed of the progress. The end result is faculty can spend less time getting their course approved, and more time developing high quality content for their students.

Please take a couple of minutes to take the following survey and help us improve your experience with OPALS. Click here for the survey.

Building Upon Blackboard Learn ..........  
Laura Reeves - Associate Director, Instructional Technology Services

Since implementing Blackboard Learn on our campus, we have been learning so much about the power of this Learning Management System (LMS). An area we are able to broaden the use of Blackboard based on our stakeholder’s needs is in “plug-ins”, also known as Building Blocks.

Building Blocks are small applications added to the Blackboard LMS that expand certain functionality for the users. Many times the applications are written by third party vendors. However, some Building Blocks are written and maintained by our own in-house developers.

In order for UHCL to implement a Building Block, we first must do research and testing to see how this new tool will impact the implementation of our current version of Blackboard. Once we have done this, we announce the Building Block to the campus before implementing into our production environment. As we upgrade to new versions of Blackboard, we must take the time to re-test all of the Building Blocks that we have installed to our production environment. This process helps us to ensure that we maintain a stable learning environment.

The number of installed Building Blocks at UHCL con-
continues to grow with more being considered and evaluated. Here are six of the most widely used building blocks:

- Bb Mobile – free version
- Peer Evaluation
- PLT/WILD
- Library Guides
- McGraw-Hill
- Paste from Word

If you are interested in a particular building block, please contact Laura Reeves for more information.

2. Find out what institutional supports are available to you. UHCL has provided many supports to any instructor who teaches online course. These supports range from instructional design assistance and multimedia production to faculty development programs and tech support. With these supports, you know where to get help when you most need it. You can access this institutional support information at the Office of Online Programs website.

3. Organize course contents in modules – It is relatively easy for students to get lost in cyberspace. You should organize your online course contents in weekly modules or learning units with specific topics. By utilizing this method, students can orient themselves with relative ease and reduce the amount of confusion and frustration. In each module or unit, you can include learning objectives, reading materials, assignments, assessments, activities, etc.

4. Revise Syllabus. Most of you have had experience in teaching a face-to-face course before having to teach an online one. It is advised for you to revise the tradition syllabus to fit that of an online course especially in course delivery, assignments submission, lectures, attending policy, late work policy, student expectations, communication, and any chat sessions required. The syllabus for online courses when compared to that of a tradition course must be superior in clarity. For assignments and activities, you should write in clear and concise instructions. You can make the syllabus interactive by using a picture of the required text, links to free software or required readings. More tips on how to create a good syllabus for online course is provided in the Online Faculty Forum course in Blackboard.

5. Show presence even when you aren’t present. Stu-
dents in online courses have a tendency to feel anxious, whether or not they are doing something right, because of the physical separation from the instructor. You need to have an effective means of communications with students, so they know that you are actively present in this online course. You can do this by setting aside time daily to communicate with your students via email, answering or commenting on discussion forums, and providing assignment feedback, etc. In addition to these things, you can setup regular live lectures or virtual office hours in Wimba or Skype to meet with students. Be sure to set the clear expectation that you expect your students to be present as well. Your goal is to model behavior that stresses robust communication.

6. Get students engaged. Students in online courses have tendencies of not being engaged. To combat this, you can design learning activities which help students to connect with their peers and feel like a part of the online learning community. One example, in discussion forums, require an icebreaker activity to allow students to know each other; also implement a help forum for students to request assistance from each other. Having students work on team projects or doing peer reviews is another way to get students engaged in the online environment.

7. Utilize time-saving tips. You may feel overwhelmed with online teaching when you start receiving multiple daily emails from students or realize that there is just so much to do. Explore and try these time-saving tips:

   • Set up a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page when you have received students’ mails that ask the same question.
   • Have the students take a syllabus quiz to make sure they have read the syllabus. Provide students the contact information of UHCL technical support, so they can get help immediately when they run into technical issues.

   • It takes time to develop a new online course. Feel free to use free online materials instead of creating them from scratch. First, check with the textbook publisher and see if they already have online homework, test banks, video, or other interactive activities.

   • When you plan to teach the online course more than once, don’t name objects with specific dates, for example “Module for August 23 – 29” or “Quiz for Sept 20th.” The smarter way to do it is to name it as Module 1 2, 3, (Quiz 1, 2, 3), so you don’t need to change the dates every semester. Also by doing it this way, you can switch the order of the modules quickly without changing the names.

8. Plan for next semester. An excellent online course is achieved by continuous course improvement. There are several successful approaches for course improvement. First, you can get feedback from students regarding your teaching and course content. You will feel satisfied when you receive comments of a well-done job and students will feel empowered if you can get their feedback during the midterm and actually respond to their comments. Secondly, you can keep a log that records items that students’ struggled with or were confused about throughout the course, revise these before the course is taught again.

9. Join the online learning community – You are not alone while going through this journey. Many outside eLearning organizations and associations have offered webinars, publications, resources, and social networking tools for you to meet other online in-
At UHCL, you can find a list of eLearning organizations and associations in the Office of Online Programs website. You also can join discussion forums where instructors share online teaching experience, tips, resources, conferences, articles, or feel free to post any questions in the Online Faculty Forum course.

Here is what one of our pilot faculty from HSH, Charlotte Haney had to say about her experience with the “Embedded Librarian Project” -

This experiment began with a challenge that is common to many professors: how do we take what is successful about our teaching to the online platform? In my case, I was re-creating ANTH 3632 Medicine, Bodies and Culture for the digital environment. Face to face, this course included numerous opportunities for students to think critically about cross-cultural research into health and illness and consider the ways in which culture shapes our embodied experience, here in the U.S. and around the world. In a face-to-face class, it’s possible to engage a number of students in discussions and activities that drive this sort of higher order thinking but recreating the motivating learning environment of a classroom in the digital space can be a time-consuming endeavor that requires many back and forth individual emails. So, when the office of online programs introduced the “Embedded Librarian Program, I decided to join the pilot study in the hopes that developing this resource would enrich my course.

I invited research librarian Chloris Yue to work with me on my course. We met to identify the obstacles that keep some of our students from using the library effectively. Librarians would then subscribe to these Discussion Forums so they can easily monitor multiple courses at once, receiving direct emails whenever someone posts in any of their subscribed Discussion Forums. For more information on the “Embedded Librarian Project”, Please visit www.onlineprograms@uhcl.edu

The Embedded Librarian Project .......

Charlotte Haney

Last year the Office of Online Programs, in its role as the liaison between the faculty, UCT, and other constituencies for enhancing the quality of online courses offered at UHCL, brought faculty and librarians together for a pilot program of Embedded Librarians. This concept has been very successful at many universities around the country, and we felt that UHCL students, faculty, and librarians could also benefit from this type of program.

The program gave an opportunity to UHCL librarians to collaborate with faculty by providing library assistance to the UHCL online students directly inside a Blackboard course. The embedded librarians were enrolled in courses after coordinating with faculty, UCT, and library administration. The librarians facilitated a “Discussion Forum” they created inside the faculty’s online courses, in which they could post introduction messages, links to resources, answer questions, and assist students with their research related assignments or any other assignment that the faculty chose to use the “Embedded Librarian” for. Librarians would then subscribe to these Discussion Forums so they can easily monitor multiple courses at once, receiving direct emails whenever someone posts in any of their subscribed Discussion Forums. For more information on the “Embedded Librarian Project”, Please visit www.onlineprograms@uhcl.edu
We found that after we overcame students’ initial reluctance to use the embedded librarian they, myself and Ms. Yue found the program to be a rewarding experience with ongoing benefits. Ms. Yue said, “It is a great opportunity for us as librarians to be on the same page with students and offer them research assistance just at the point when they need it most. Since the embedded librarian follows the students for the whole course, students can relate to a designated librarian better and a relationship can be fostered for the rest of their academic pursuit at UHCL. I have quite a few students from your class who continue to find me for research consultations for their other courses. It is indeed a pleasure working with you on this project!” Students in response were equally enthusiastic. Kelley Freirson remarked, “Having embedded access to a UHCL reference librarian was extremely helpful in an online class for many reasons. I felt the response time to my questions was even quicker than usual. The reference librarian’s responses included tips on how to do an advance search on topics, downloading/using EndNote, and information on requesting additional documents from other local university libraries. It was like having a personal librarian at my fingertips!” I was very pleased as well. By including the embedded librarian I was able to turn many research questions about over to Ms. Yue which enabled me to include a rigorous research paper and still have time to enrich the course with discussions groups and projects.

Online courses serve the mission of this university to make education more broadly accessible in the Gulf Coast region. Without this platform, many of our students would simply not have this access. However, as we strive to expand educational opportunities, we need to maintain the value of a university education. We need to find ways to make the online environment a space that fosters critical thinking and academic skills. Finding ways to embed the resources that already exist at this universi-

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Want to contribute?
Send us your input and resources for the next newsletter: Articles, videos, presentations, suggestions for the Brown Bag Lunch Series, or any new ideas you may have!

Coming soon!
• Best Practices Website
• Brown Bag Lunch Series