**Online or Blended Course Proposal Appendix**

One of the hallmarks of online courses at UMW is that they embody the values of the quality liberal arts curriculum. These values are described below.

**Value 1: Community**

Within a liberal arts institution, we believe that learning needs to occur as a social activity and that students should develop a strong sense of belonging to a networked learning community. Learning communities serve many important purposes: They support and sustain the work of individual learners; they help to frame the work of individuals within larger intellectual conversations; and they offer the possibility of building something greater through collaboration.

Learning online necessarily involves students working with greater independence than they would in a face-to-face class. It's important that an online class not let “independence” turn into “isolation.” *Online courses should not feel to students like they are participating in a correspondence course.*  As the instructor, one of your tasks is to determine how you will create opportunities for community-building and build online environments that sustain these communities.

Some approaches you might consider:

* Communities are built through the sharing of ideas and experiences. Online environments offer rich opportunities for students to share their work and provide feedback to one another. Consider requiring students to offer peer feedback on work they have publicly shared as a way to foster a learning community in your class.
* Online courses exist within the larger ecosystem of the open web, which is inhabited by all types of learners and thinkers. Consider inviting colleagues at other institutions (and possibly their students) to participate in the conversations developing in your course.
* As you build activities into your course that are aimed at developing student-student and student-instructor communication, consider having these conversations in the open, where students and faculty can benefit from shared insights, experiences, critiques, and questions.
* If your course involves a great deal of open community-building, consider taking time to discuss or offer advice about how to constructively critique each other’s work. As the instructor, it is also important for you to model these techniques.

**Value 2: Interactivity**

One of the signal characteristics of the quality learning experience is small class size, but what really matters to student learning is not the class size per se, but what the small class size enables: a high degree of interaction between student and instructor, as well as between the student and other students. Sometimes characterized as “high-touch,” this interaction leads to highly personalized instruction, where students are treated as individuals rather than part of a collective who sink or swim largely on their own efforts.

Traditional online courses have sometimes been little more than correspondence courses with little or no interaction. In our view, instructors should create opportunities for regular interaction with students and between students. There are a plethora of online options available for group activities and other interactions from discussion boards, to chat rooms, to blogs, wikis and Google docs.

Some approaches you might consider:

* Offer regular and timely feedback on all student work submitted. Also, don’t rely on yourself to provide the only feedback in the course. Encourage (or require) students to provide feedback to each other; invite colleagues or students in other classes to occasionally drop in and offer feedback, advice, and support.
* Establish online office hours, i.e. regular time slots when you are available to discuss questions with students by telephone, Skype, or chat.
* Create informal opportunities for your students (with or without you) to convene virtually to talk about the class and their work. They could use Skype’s group chat capability or a streaming audio/video service that allows for multiple participants. If you’ve opened your class up to outside voices, you may want to invite those individuals to occasionally drop by. If you’re concerned about students not taking “ownership” of these experiences, you might assign a leader (or two) each time to choose a discussion topic, lead the discussion, invite outside participants, etc.
* Seek leadership roles for your students in the class that will allow them to build opportunities for interaction. These roles could rotate on a regular basis, allowing everyone a chance to “lead” an interactive conversation at some point. The point here is that if your students feel personally vested in the conversations that are emerging and how they are occurring, they’ll be more likely to take them seriously.
* Poll your students at the start of the term about how they prefer to interact online (via chat, Skype, Facebook, etc.). Work with your students to see if there is a way to incorporate these preferences into the class.

**Value 3: Active Learning**

Another characteristic of quality education is an emphasis on active, rather than passive pedagogy, including intensive use of writing and speech, as both tools of analysis and also communication. Active learning pedagogies lead to a focus on critical thinking rather than merely memorization. Another example is activities that engender genuine inquiry by students into real issues/problems, problems that matter to people outside the classroom, as well as exploring and being challenged by diverse perspectives.

It’s important that this course not be primarily about disseminating content to the students for them to absorb, but rather about engaging students in intellectual inquiry. Writing is easily conducted in online environments, as is online (asynchronous) “discussion.” New media can also be fairly easily created and then distributed via online mechanisms. In addition, online courses take place within the broader ecosystem of the Web that is filled with spaces and opportunities for exploring, sharing, and collaborating around ideas.

Some approaches you might consider:

* Make use of online collaboration tools to build group assignments. For example, students can collaborate on building presentations (using Google Docs or Prezi), writing (with wikis or Google Docs), and making mind maps (with a tool like Creately). Build assignments in these spaces that focus on the development and sharing of new ideas as opposed to “reporting” back what they have read or found.
* Use electronic discussion tools to build spaces for ongoing conversations. The discussion board in Canvas can be used for a fairly traditional asynchronous conversation. Other tools that might be considered are Voice Thread (which allows people to respond to images or other media using audio recordings), Google Moderator (which allows people to suggest questions/ideas, respond to them, and then “vote” on them) and Squabbler (which lets people record 30 second videos about an argument and then invite someone to take a counter position and record their response).
* Consider an assignment you have asked students to do in paper/research format and consider how the citations, sophistication, and points can be conveyed in digital audio and/or video format.
* Take time to think about some of the alternative assignments you might want to do and use DTLT to help train and prepare students for creating in audio/video etc.

**Value 4: Reflection**

Part of the justification for the study of humanities in liberal education is that such study addresses the human yearning for meaning. Such reflection is not limited, though, to the humanities. “What does it mean?” is an important means of transforming learning in the natural and social sciences from passive to active, from memorization to deeper understanding.

Not only do Web-based spaces allow for students to easily author and publish their reflections, they can use new media to convey their ideas. Moreover, unlike traditional journals, blogs can be opened to the world, enabling the author to obtain feedback from others both inside and outside the course.

Some approaches you might consider:

* Consider a course requirement that involves regularly blogging or producing some other kind of reflective content online.
* Encourage students to reflect on their work in your course through non-traditional media (for example, short audio or video reflections.)
* Remember to model this behavior yourself. Take time to regularly share your own reflections on the course and the discussion emerging from it.
* Design assignments that encourage reflection on the work they are doing in the course.

**Value 5: Self-Directed Learning**

The successful learner is expected to take ownership for her learning experiences. While faculty play a critical role in framing, guiding, and, sometimes, directing the path of these experiences, ultimately the learner must be able to rely on herself to make intellectual choices. These skills lay the foundation for life-long, adaptive learning as well as cultivating intellectual curiosity, creativity, flexibility, and self-discipline.

Through online interactions, it is possible for today's learner to frame out an intellectual identity for herself. The Web is less and less about consuming content and more and more about creating content, sharing ideas, and making connections. As the instructor, your task is to build opportunities in your course for students to use the Web as a platform for expressing and exploring their educational experiences.

Some approaches you might consider:

* Online learning differs enough from traditional teaching in enough ways that it is worth your time to be extremely explicit with your students about your expectations with regards to independent learning. Consider starting your class with a clear message to all of your students about what the online experience is likely to be like and how you recommend they approach their own learning experience.
* If your class involves students creating and managing their own Web spaces, consider requiring them to set out a “plan” for their activity in the class and then regularly update their progress on the site.
* As a way of fostering independence, you might let students choose how to fulfill certain assignments, particularly if there are multiple ways of addressing the goals of the assignment (through the use of different media, for example.)
* If your class involves a large group or even individual capstone projects, you could ask your students to draw up a “contract” with you in which they outline their goals, the tools and approaches they’ll be using, and their milestones. Use your course’s online space(s) to track student progress and goals.
* Regularly meet with students (via Skype, Gchat, etc.) over the course of the semester to discuss their work and progress. Make it moment where they take ownership of their own work and progress.