Considerations in Planning Summer Online Courses

Courses offered in accelerated timelines (i.e., 4, 6 or 8 weeks rather than a traditional 15 week semester) come with a particular set of challenges related to content, instruction, and learning. When these courses are being offered online, there are additional considerations to be made when planning.

- **Content**: Research shows students in accelerated courses prefer depth over breadth. They prefer courses that go deeply into fewer concepts than courses that quickly cover many concepts. With this in mind, consider the following questions:

   How much content do you need to meet your most important learning objectives, without feeling like you are sacrificing key concepts and major points? Does this impact which courses should be offered in a 4-week vs. an 8-week time frame? Are there concepts or skills in a particular course you are concerned students might have difficulty mastering in an online environment?

- **Learners**: If all teaching is a situated act, occurring in a particular context, it is particularly important to think about the different context of students in an accelerated online course. There are likely to be significant differences than with students in a more traditional face-to-face accelerated course. Some questions to consider include:

   Which students are likely to register for an accelerated online course in the summer? Will they be new to the subject, or have a background that might allow you to move more quickly? What else will they be doing while they are taking your course? For example, will they be working full-time and trying to catch up with hometown activities? Are they traveling abroad for the summer? Is this the only course they will be taking, or are they taking another course at a different institution? Will this impact how much you can reasonably expect them to do and when they will do it? Do you expect them to work in the class 4 days a week, 5 days a week, everyday? What kind of work will they have to do everyday? Will you use discussion boards requiring daily postings? Will there be group work? How will you motivate students to do the intensive work required by the accelerated timeline?

- **Instructors**: Instructors contemplating teaching an online accelerated course for the first time need to consider their commitments outside of the course during the period the course is running, in addition to technical and pedagogical concerns. Some questions for consideration include:

Have you taught an accelerated course before? Have you taught an online course before? Do you use Blackboard (or other learning management system) to support your face-to-face courses, or do you need technology training? Do you have the time, resources, and support to construct all or most of the course in Blackboard before it begins? What else will you be doing while you are teaching this course? How much time will you need to devote daily to interacting with students? What kinds of assignments and projects are practical in this timeline, and how much time will you have to grade them and offer students timely feedback?

Resources

Wlodkowski, R. & Ginsberg M. (2010). <u>Teaching Intensive and Accelerated Courses: Instruction that Motivates Learning</u>. Jossey-Bass.

Online and Blended Course Summer Teaching Considerations: <u>http://uwmltc.org/?p=5546</u>