12-2014

Book Review: Online by design: the essentials of creating information literacy courses.

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Recommended Citation

Gruwell, C. 2014. Book review of Mery, Y. and Newby, J. 2014. Online by design: the essentials of creating information literacy courses. Lahnam: Rowman & Littlefield. Journal of Information Literacy, 8(2), pp. 171-172. http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/8.2.1951

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Mery, Y. and Newby, J. 2014. Online by design: the essentials of creating information literacy courses. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 179 pp. 978-0-8108-9111-1. £27.95. Pbk.

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While credit bearing information literacy (IL) courses for students have existed for some time, the shift to coursework specifically developed for online delivery is a much newer phenomenon. Many universities and colleges maintain some type of presence on the web, usually in the form of subject guides, short videos, and well-developed interactive tutorials. Yet even when combined with face-to-face library instruction it is often not enough and it has become apparent that many academic institutions are going one step further with the creation of credit-bearing IL courses. Such was the task set forth by Mery and Newby in the development of their three credit online course which is documented and the guiding force behind their monograph, *Online by Design: the essentials of creating information literacy courses.* The principles they set forth are both stimulating and practical for novice and experienced librarians. This holds true for those who teach or are designing credit-bearing IL courses currently under consideration or construction in an online environment. As stated in the opening pages: "Developing an online course is not a simple digitization of face-to-face classroom materials, lecture, and activities. Rather it is a *transformation*…that maximises engagement and learning for students" (p. xvi). Their focus on pedagogy provides readers with their own learning experience as well as some important guidelines for developing online coursework.

Divided into two sections Mery and Newby have created a well-organised and informative text which allows readers to selectively read or complete the entire book in a short amount of time. Beginning with the preface, which provides a descriptive summary of all content, each chapter builds upon the previous one and comes complete with relevant examples of syllabi, tutorials, assignments, and modes of assessment. The first section focuses on early course development considerations and principles while specifically addressing topics such as perceptions, challenges, and the effectiveness of online courses. IL librarians and instructors may find these experiences not too dissimilar from their own and as a result, online courses may lose some of their mystique and the personal hesitancy often experienced by their novice designers. An added bonus is the presence of the unique 'Know This' segments which highlight important takeaways along with extensive notes and suggested readings.

The first section ends with the chapter titled, 'Creating a Student-Centered Syllabus' which provides an excellent transition to the second section where the emphasis is on the development of appropriate content for online coursework. Many, if not most readers, would consider this the most important part of the book. Not only do Mery and Newby share their thoughts and experiences regarding teaching strategies, but also on assessments and they give thoughtful recommendations regarding a wide variety of pedagogical tools including lectures, screencasts, web-conferencing and the role of social media. Although brief, their summaries provide just enough detail to help readers understand their nuances and thus consideration for inclusion or exclusion during content development. Though at times it seems like certain topics, such as learning styles, are given a lighter touch, the suggested readings contained in each chapter provides ample resources and support for further exploration.

It is a forgone conclusion that no course or programme would be complete without well-developed assessment tools. So it comes as no surprise that Mery and Newby dedicate a complete chapter on the topic. Their focus on an assessment cycle shares their insight into what they (and many others) see as a "continuous, cyclical process with the goal of improving student learning and

revising the course to enhance the learning experience" (p. 144). They stress the importance of including assessment both during and at the end of coursework while noting that assessment should not only measure student learning, but also instructor effectiveness. With a rich assortment of suggestions and examples ranging from pre and post test questions to proposed portfolio structure, Mery and Newby remind us that there are numerous avenues for assessment and that what might work in one given situation may not in another.

The last chapter of the book takes a very brief look at new models for teaching and student learning. While the authors only provide the quickest of glimpses, they are spot on in identifying where online courses, and in fact the role of instruction librarians, are headed. The skills needed to develop online courses and for that matter provide general library instruction are driven by thoughtful pedagogy and the need to "…thrive in a digital world" (p. 173).

Though only 179 pages in length, *Online by Design* provides a clear window into the making of a successful online course. Mery and Newby do an excellent job of sharing their experiences and approach to designing the content needed to actualise their teaching of IL in a technology-rich environment. By taking a no nonsense approach to their writing they focus on the subject at hand and as a result provide a substantial quantity of pedagogical ideas and principles useful in the development of online courses and even face-to-face classes. The subtitle of this book: t*he essentials of creating information literacy courses*, should not be lost on the readers for the suggested guidelines are indeed essential. While a variety of like-minded monographs have come and gone, and will persist into the future, *Online By Design* is an important read for both novices and experienced librarians who have a desire or need to develop and design successful online IL courses.