Hand-Me-Downs: Reusing Online Courses and Building Courses for Reuse

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Colleges and universities invest heavily in the production of online courses for their virtual universities and online extensions. However, a growing number of institutions may be jeopardizing their up-front investments unwittingly. That is, in the rush to put degree programs online, too many courses are developed in haste—often by inexperienced or over-committed instructors—or developed in such a highly personal or idiosyncratic fashion that courses can be of little use to future instructors who might inherit such courses or teaching assignments.

At the very heart of a flexible and cost-effective online education system is the inheritability and reusability of course content. Yet colleges and universities with online programs have demonstrated little regard for what makes an online course inheritable and reusable. While many statewide systems, schools and universities have turned to course management systems, such as WebCT and Blackboard, in order to establish some semblance of order and consistency, what they have gained is arguably that—some semblance.

This presentation will position the course management system as a means not a method, and will illustrate the kinds of the problems and restrictions instructors may face when they inherit online courses. It will also address the undermining potential of such problems and restrictions: the time/labor costs involved in necessary course revisions and the ethical dilemmas of authorship and academic freedom. The proposal fits into a number of SITE topic categories, including PT3, Concepts and Procedures, Distance Education, Faculty Development, Instructional Design, and Special Needs.