From Spring 2007 through Spring 2008, a sample of both undergraduate and graduate students who were also first-time on-line students from a very diverse student population at Northeastern Illinois University were analyzed on various motivational and performance indices regarding fully on-line course performance (i.e., student expectations at the beginning of the course, receptivity to on-line modules (8-12 learning modules over the coursed of a 16-week semester, based on whether an undergraduate or graduate course), time management skills, need for supplemental face-to-face instructions, and class performance (papers, projects, and testing)). A comparative analysis of the two student samples yielded some interesting “universal” course design issues across education level, as well as by cultural background (e.g., more “social contact” needs comments among certain race/ethnicities) and gender differences (e.g., male students reported more preferences toward independent work).

Specific fully on-line design issues to be discussed are how to create the clearest “face-to-face” representation of the classroom experience via a Blackboard course system. Equally important will be “what I learned” in terms of effective design issues in creating a supportive fully on-line course environment for first-time on-line course students; this will be discussed in terms of ways to create “structure” in the on-line course environment. Student feedback and performance outcomes will be discussed in light of these course design issues.