Collaborative University Teamwork in Designing a Distance Education Course for the Government
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This presentation describes a project to educate a team of college students in designing and developing an online course for the National Security Agency (NSA) utilizing constructivist methods of teaching.

This project involved converting a face-to-face National Security Agency (NSA) course to a multimedia web-based course. The conversion involved a team of undergraduate and graduate students from Instructional Technology, Art Education, Computer Science, Special Education, and Graphic Design. Representation of various cultures was taken into consideration when selecting the students. In addition, two students were already teachers in the public schools and had experience in curriculum development. Two professors directed the project – one from Instructional Technology and the other from Art Education. The focus of the team was on collaborative group work and a constructivist approach to learning. Constructivist approaches served as the basic foundation for organizing and developing the project “...where students develop their knowledge through team collaboration, discuss different interpretations of a problem, and negotiate and synthesize ideas drawing from various disciplines” (Boyer & Semrau, 1995, 14).

The students were trained in new skills and how to research and work collaboratively. Training was provided on html, Photoshop, Premiere, MediaCleaner, Pagemill and the designing of web pages. WebCT was used for managing the website, communication and collaboration, and uploading pages.

A major focus was to keep the web course interactive emphasizing learner control. Useful tools for designing constructivist approaches to learning are hypertext and hypermedia because they allow for a branched instructional design rather than a linear top-down approach. It was also important in the distance education course that there be a balance between the text and the use of graphics, diagrams, video and audio to reinforce the learning.

Through this project the students became constructively involved in their own learning and acquired in-depth experiences in collaborative learning and team approaches. The students became empowered as creators of their own curricular materials and web pages instead of being passive viewers of others’. All of Bloom’s higher level taxonomies were implemented: Students analyzed websites, synthesized criteria they had researched, applied their book readings, compared and contrasted criteria, designed and produced their own web pages, and focused on sound educational practices. As Gibson (1998) noted “…we, as distance educators, need to be learner-centered reflective practitioners” (p. 143).

This presentation identifies the five stages involved in creating a distance education course. With every stage, specific strategies are detailed and actual solutions are illustrated.

1. Planning and Development of the Content
2. Layout and Design of the Website
3. Implementation
4. Editing the Content
5. Assessing Learning and Evaluation