Modifying Blackboard to Reach Every Learning Style

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Restatement of the Problem

Today's learners do not arrive for class with the same characteristics and they do not all learn in the same way. For example, learners in the course may include students who have been diagnosed with a learning disability and face challenges such as: visual impairment, mental challenges, difficulty reading and writing, or suffer from a hearing loss.

Most institutions utilize a learning management system like Blackboard. Designing a Blackboard course that provides a rich, learning community for the user can be extremely difficult. The course content should provide learning opportunities that will meet the various learning styles and characteristics of the students enrolled in the course. While the designer may not be aware of how to design a course that meets the accessibility requirements, tips and tricks will be shared during the presentation that will enlighten the designer.

Purpose / Objectives

Tools are readily available to course designers so that the content can be modified to meet the needs of their students. The presentation at the United States Distance Learning Associate will address topics that will assist the course designer in meeting the needs of the students. These include:

- accessibility issues so that designers can become aware of how easily a Blackboard can be modified to make it accessible to all.
- introduce various websites that provide assistance in designing an accessible course.

- modifying a Microsoft Word document so that it addresses those who are visually challenged.

- modifying a Microsoft Word document so that it can be easily read by a text-to-speech document.

- using Blackboard Collaborate to provide a meeting 'room' for peer mentoring.

Significance / Need

This fast growing use of a LMS makes it more critical than ever to design a Blackboard course that will accommodate any type of disability the learners may have. Two of the most common disabilities include hearing and/or visual impairments (Lederman, 2005). A review of the literature indicates that those students with a hearing and/or visual impairment are as likely as those students who are nondisabled to complete some postsecondary education.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provides a set of disability guidelines that online courses should meet (Johnson & Rupert, 2002). While this policy doesn't directly impact a LMS course, it still is relevant to course design and a course should include guidelines that are applicable to course development.

This grant will be used to fund travel, hotel accommodations, and conference registration to the United States Distance Learning Association to present a session entitled, "Using Blackboard to Reach Every Learning Style." According to research, 3,595 institutions in the United States utilize a LMS (learning management system) to deliver content and to interact with the learners (LMS Data, 2015). In the United States

alone, 31 percent of students in higher education have been diagnosed with some type of learning disability and that number is growing at an alarming rate (Lederman, 2005).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The presentation was well attended and an engaging question and answer session was held immediately following the presentation. Judging from the reaction and requests for a copy of the presentation, the attendees are seeking ways to modify courses so that they are accessible to an expanding audience. This is a topic that I will continue to explore and research.

The presentation will be modified so that it will be in the correct format to submit to the journal, Distance Learning…For Educators, Trainers, and Leaders.

References

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