

Course Templates for Online Learning

Introduction

Credentials are the currency of opportunity in the 21st century. Canadian postsecondary institutions compete in global markets to attract students on a daily basis, touting their credential as high value and currency for employment. Within Ontario, credentials are awarded through major granting bodies, two of which are colleges and universities. In 2017, 59% of new postsecondary student entries were to Ontario colleges, showcasing the powerful and attractive role that these postsecondary institutions play within the Ontario and Canadian economy (Colleges Ontario, 2018b). Mohawk College, one of the largest of the 24 Ontario colleges, had over 12,000 students enrolled in 2017, demonstrating its' attractive educational and credential capacity (Colleges Ontario, 2018a). This paper will explore how the Centre for Teaching & Learning (CTL) supports Mohawk College's online teaching practice and students' perception of quality course delivery using a course delivery template. Using a mixed methods research study, the CTL's course design template was evaluated and the findings are presented and discussed in this paper.

Problem Statement

To deliver the mandate of Ontario colleges which is, "to offer a comprehensive program of career-oriented, post-secondary education and training to assist individuals in finding and keeping employment" (Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002), colleges rely on a combination of academic and non-academic activities. To ensure success on the academic side, professors and instructors are hired to help achieve this goal. As per the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Academic Employees Collective Agreement, the professor is "responsible for providing academic leadership and for developing an effective learning environment" (p. 128). Similarly, an instructor is "responsible for course design and has the freedom to provide a learning environment which makes effective use of the resources [...and] suitable learning materials [to help students achieve] the educational objectives of the assigned courses" (p.130). Essentially, both the professor and instructor, which will now be referred to as educator, are tasked with the role of teaching, as this term encompasses all of the above requirements. These educators need effective ways to deliver content and achieve their role requirements, one of which is a course development template.

Educators at Mohawk College are hired based on a variety of factors which include but are not limited to relevant teaching/relevant occupational experience and relevant formal qualifications. The description for "relevant teaching/relevant occupational experience" focuses on "full years of experience in a field of work related

to the material to be taught or the job to be done, or to some allied aspect of it” (p. 122) yet does not outline any specific requirement for teacher training. Hiring based on relevant occupation experience is indeed a critical and important factor for student academic success however, knowledge of the art and science of teaching and learning is also of utmost importance. Therefore, Ontario colleges and specifically MC, have an obligation to support their educators in their teaching and learning practice; this support indirectly affects how students perceive their academic experience.

Mohawk College is committed to academic excellence, investing in both educator development and support through the CTL. Employing a variety of education professionals, the CTL’s purpose is “to enhance the quality of teaching and learning at Mohawk College by building connections and providing resources, leadership and expertise” (CTL, 2019). The researchers of the project and authors of this paper, Lauren Griffiths and Amy Cook, are employed by the CTL at Mohawk College and support faculty through their roles of a curriculum development specialist (Griffiths) and an educational technology specialist (Cook). Griffiths and Cook noticed that new educators are often faced with the task of (re)developing courses without the pedagogical knowledge of how to best design a course and often struggle to effectively complete this task. As a common role responsibility, Griffiths and Cook were, and continue to be, assigned to support these educators in the (re)development of their courses and as such, designed a course development template (CDT) to assist educators in this process. The CDT features and effectiveness will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

Literature Review

Pedagogy and Practice

Pedagogy and andragogy are two terms often used when discussing theories of learning. Pedagogy focuses on how children learn and andragogy focuses on how adults learn, while common principles are shared they are often debated, however the underlying message remains the same: the terms define the art and science of helping individuals learn (Merriam, 2001). Knowles, the scholar who coined the term andragogy, later refined the dichotomy of the two terms, recognizing that learners, both adults and children, share similar traits; this shift resulted in a focus on a learning continuum of teacher-directed to student-directed learning, thus removing the dichotomy of pedagogy versus andragogy (Merriam, 2001, p. 6). There is a large body of research that demonstrates having pedagogical knowledge plays a critical role in the teaching and learning process (Gosling, 2009; McAleese et al., 2013; Hubball & Bert, 2006; Pelger & Larsson, 2018). Given this type of knowledge is not required in the field of college teaching, administrators and educators rely heavily on professional development supports, such as the CTL at Mohawk College, for expertise in this field.

Centres for Teaching and Learning exist at nearly 100 institutions nationally (Forgie, Yonge & Luth, 2018), with most Ontario colleges, including Mohawk College, having established CTLs in place (Grabove et al., 2012). Dating back to the 1960s, a core focus of these centres was to provide teaching support, guidance and supporting evidence on best practices in teaching and learning to advance and support teacher development at the postsecondary level. The same can be true about today's centres. For example, Christensen Hughes & Mighty (2010) explain that

[E]ducational developers or teaching centres may have a particularly essential role to play – both directly and indirectly through their support of faculty champions – in helping bring about pedagogical innovation. New-faculty orientation programs, learning groups, courses, workshops, conferences, private consultations, curricular mapping and design exercises, and support for the scholarship of teaching and learning are all important services. (pg #)

As CTLs continue to capacity-build and community-build within their organizations, there is a renewed focus and energy on these centres given that there has been a renewed focus on quality teaching (Forgie, Yonge & Luth, 2018; Grabove et al., 2012). CTL roles are now, more than ever, critical as emerging technologies, changes and promotion of online and blended learning, and strategic plans investing in teaching and learning, keep the educational landscape twisting and turning.

Evolution of the Teaching Landscape

Without a doubt, technology has changed the landscape of education, especially with regards to course delivery (Masi, 2013; Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). Technology has enabled the face-to-face class to move into the online world through synchronous and asynchronous learning, as well as, it offers faculty the ability to blend, flip, and/or web support their face-to-face classroom experience. All of these educational practices are characterized by a separation in distance and occasionally time between teachers and students (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009, p. 103). Asynchronous and synchronous learning are two prominent terms which define and represent the online learning environment. Asynchronous learning uses online systems to store information, similar to a database, permitting users to work through content at their own pace. Conversely, synchronous online learning uses a particular technology to enable real-time learning normally through an online platform. For example, this could be completed using a video conferencing system or live chat system. Learning Management Systems (LMS) are used to deliver both types of learning. Most LMS systems have baseline asynchronous technologies and offer costly options to upgrade to include synchronous capabilities. All Ontario colleges use an LMS to facilitate and/or support student learning (OntarioLearn, 2019). For example, in the 2017-2018 academic year, OntarioLearn, an “online consortium of colleges [who] deliver high quality, accessible, student-centred online learning opportunities,” (OntarioLearn, 2018, p. 3) had over 76,000 registrants for over

1,200 online Ontario college courses. This demonstrates the breadth of Ontario colleges' commitment to online learning as well as, the critical role that online learning plays in helping students achieve their academic goals. In addition to participating in program delivery through the OntarioLearn consortium, colleges can also choose to deliver their courses using their own LMS. For example, Mohawk College also delivers online learning, blended courses and web-enhanced face-to-face courses using their LMS which is branded as eLearn for thousands of students.

For many students, the option to learn online enables them to achieve success which without this technology, would not be possible. This delivery modality offers flexibility to the learner to maintain non-curricular obligations such as employment and caregiving (OntarioLearn, 2018; Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). This is supported by the notion that the majority of online college learners are in their mid-20s and not direct-entry students from high school (Colleges Ontario, 2018b; OntarioLearn, 2018). For example, OntarioLearn (2019) indicated that results from their 2017 survey show that 73% of students were employed when studying with one student indicating "I loved the experience this course gave me. I enjoyed being able to take part when I had the time or while my son was asleep and that I was able to work at my own pace" (p. 7). Colleges Ontario (2018b) student profile adds support noting that of the over 500,000 postsecondary students, 21% were employed full-time during their studies and 46% of student were employed part-time during their studies (p. 16). Given this information, it is evident that online learning provides an attractive alternative to face-to-face learning and needs to be of continued interest for postsecondary institutions.

That said, online learning is not without its challenges. Courses need to be set up in a pedagogically sound way to promote and enhance student learning and experience. Student experience with regards to online learning is the most important factor in whether or not a student will continue to learn online (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). As such, institutions must call upon their educators and CTLs to support online learning. This assists in promoting engaging, pedagogically sound, supportive online teaching practices and course design, enabling enhanced online learner experience. Moreover, institutions need to be aware that not all students are equipped with the same digital skills to be successful; students' confidence and feelings of being supported play a critical role in their academic success (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). While each LMS is created specifically to deliver courses, they can be quite different, for example different layouts and designs are used for each platform which is further complicated by the custom branding of LMSs which can exist for each institution. This means that while the technology of the LMS remains the same, institutional branding can change the look, feel, and terminology used on the platform. For example, a popular LMS used in a variety of postsecondary institutions provides a tool for students to digitally submit assignments and homework. At one Ontario postsecondary institution, the tool is called

“Assignments” whereas at another, it is called “Dropbox,” which also differs from the branding of this tool at many Ontario secondary schools. This is only one small example of how a branding change has the potential to directly affect user navigation within an LMS and thus, their experience with the course; students want consistency (Hunn & Hughes, 2014; Burgess, Barth & Mersereau, 2008). In this regard, all users need to be considered beginners on each platform and thus, must be appropriately supported.

Diversity in Postsecondary Education

There are numerous diversity factors which affect student learning in all types of postsecondary college deliveries. For example, Colleges Ontario (2018b) paints a unique picture of postsecondary students. A snap shot of learners includes:

- A mix of domestic and international students, some of which take courses while not residing in the country,
- numerous students with diverse ethnicities (Indigenous learners at 7% and visible minorities at 31%) and special needs/ability services (15% of learners),
- and approximately one third of students as first-generation post-secondary learners (p. 17).

Given the diverse and unique student profiles, it is reasonable to suggest that not all students can or should learn in the same way. Courses should and can be designed to facilitate student learning and success, regardless of background and skills. Doing this reduces the need to retro fit a course or redesign it for increasingly diverse needs.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles offer support for inclusive course design and is defined as “curriculum design, development and a delivery framework used to create accessible and inclusive learning environments” (Benton-Kearney, 2018, p. 1). This perspective supports Pedagogy 2.0 principles, which suggest that content includes diverse perspective, modalities and representations for learners (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008). UDL is an evidence-based approach originating with The Centre for Applied Special Technology (CAST) and is based on three primary brain networks: affective, recognition and strategic (CAST, 2018; Benton-Kearney, 2018; Scott, Temple & Marshall, 2015). Scott, Temple and Marshall (2015) provide an easy to follow explanation of each indicating, “recognition networks refer to fact gathering and categorizing what we see, hear, and read, strategic networks refer to organizing and expressing ideas and affective networks refer to connecting the learning experience to an emotional background, determining engagement and motivation” (p. 101). Educators should be aware and respectful of UDL principles in their course development and design however, given that college educators are not required to have any pedagogical background in teaching and learning, this can be a difficult task to accomplish. The development and use of an online course delivery template that integrates these

principles, such as the one being evaluated in this study, can be effective tools to support student learning.

Templates for Learning

For all educators, the content and pedagogical approach is key to ensuring student success in online learning environments. Educators need to be aware of the content, the multiple modalities in which it should be provided, as per UDL guidelines, how the content is explained, and the layout/delivery of the content. This directly refers to the curricular content knowledge of the educator and their instructional pedagogy (assessment, instructional planning and strategies), which are critical for student success (Scott & Temple, 2017, p. 3). Over the years, students have expressed the need for consistent approaches to learning in an online environment (Hunn & Hughes, 2014; Burgess, Barth & Mersereau, 2008). For example, frustrations include “inconsistent delivery between courses within the same program, unclear assignments which include due dates and instructions thus impacting abilities to plan ahead and illogical navigation” (Hunn & Hughes, 2014, p. 6). The use of a template which promotes all of these principles and one that integrates UDL principles could promote most positive learning experiences and environments for all students. Burgess, Barth & Mersereau (2008) explain that templates enable,

Educators to focus their creativity on producing high-quality course content instead of worrying about online course design [and] supports students by providing a consistent and coherent learning environment that includes specific aspects and resources that help reduce anxiety and feelings of isolation of online learners. (p. 2)

This perception is echoed in multiple studies, which highlight and call on the need for institutions to support educators and students in their online learning endeavours (Hughes, 2014; Cutri & Whiting, 2018). Moreover, such templates act as indirect educational tools for educators, equipping them with instructional design pedagogy as they complete and use the template in their practice.

The aforementioned literature on educator and student engagement in online learning environments, in addition to the prevalence and increasing diversity of student enrollments, led to the creation of an online course development template by the authors of this paper as a means to enhance and support the online learning environment for its users.

The Study

Mohawk College prides itself on educating and preparing students for career success and community engagement. With vision, mission, and value statements identifying the

college as student-focused and committed to highly skilled graduates and excellence, it is imperative that faculty are supported in course design and course (re)development, as it contributes to student success (Mohawk College, 2016, p. 3). This is of the utmost importance, especially for online learning as Mohawk College has over 12,000 online learning registrants (OntarioLearn, 2018, p. 9) and offers over 49 credentials via the LMS (OntarioLearn, 2018, p. 16), this does not include online courses that are offered directly through Mohawk College's own LMS eLearn.

To support Mohawk's mandate, the CTL at Mohawk College is committed to supporting new and existing faculty and instructors in their teaching endeavours. The CTL supports teaching excellence through curriculum development and design support, teaching and learning professional development opportunities, and support and best practices for online and blended learning. Support and services are available to all academic areas, including Continuing Education (CE), and can be accessed in person and remotely using various synchronous and asynchronous technologies. CTL has various staff to support these processes however, Mohawk College and the CTL had not developed a standardized course development and redevelopment process or template.

In response to an influx of requests for course redevelopment during the summer 2017 semester, Griffiths and Cook developed and implemented a course development template (CDT) to scaffold the course (re)development process and to ensure quality course design, while keeping in mind that students needed to have a positive user experience. With explicit studies and teaching in the field of teaching and learning, Griffiths and Cook applied their extensive knowledge to ensure the tool was developed using pedagogically sound principles. It is important to note that while there are numerous resources available to guide course (re)development, the CDT is built with considerations of eLearn user ability and eLearn platform limitations. The CDT needed to be transferable to eLearn and therefore, was custom built. The intent of the CDT was and is to encourage courses to meet a minimum educational standard thus ensuring that quality education is being delivered across college courses. Moreover, it would ease student navigation struggles of course content in an online setting as all courses in a program would be structured in a similar way and share same visuals. The study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of this tool.

Alignment with Mohawk College Strategic Plan Student Success and Graduate Success

The development of the CDT was in response to a variety of course redevelopment requests from CE that needed to be completed within a very short amount of time. Those contracted to develop and teach the identified courses had limited knowledge, if any, of course (re)development. Therefore, it was crucial to develop tool that was easy

to understand, user-friendly, and pedagogically sound to appropriately guide the educator in the course (re)design process.

The College Strategic Plan identified investment in CE as a pathway to foster and enhance student success. Specifically, the college continues to create more entry points for non-traditional learners (Mohawk College, 2016, p. 8) through CE as well as, has dedicated resources for a renewed and revitalized CE delivery model (Mohawk College, 2016, p. 12). With investments in CE, the College can expect more students to enroll in online programs while positively impacting CE's contribution margin to the College. With a focus on CE course and student enrollment, the College needs to ensure that courses are up-to-date and pedagogically sound. The CDT supports this investment as well as any other course redevelopment that comes through the CTL.

Additionally, Mohawk College seeks to “deliver programs that meet market expectations, with the intent of having number one employer satisfaction in the greater Toronto Hamilton area when hiring Mohawk graduates” (Mohawk College, 2016, p. 26). Given that there is a focus on increasing student numbers and pathways in CE programming, it makes sense to ensure CE courses are pedagogically sound so that students can learn in the best way possible. This would directly contribute to producing high quality graduates and therefore, contribute to employer satisfaction with Mohawk graduates.

Description of the CDT

As previously stated, “inconsistent delivery between courses within the same program, unclear assignments which include due dates and instructions thus impacting inability to plan ahead and illogical navigation” are some of the most common frustrations for students in online courses (Hunn & Hughes, 2014, p. 6). The CDT sought to address consistency of course design as well as, additional student frustrations, which were identified by Hun & Hughes (2014). Key features of the CDT (see Appendix A) include:

- Instructions for how to use and complete the CDT;
- Fillable weekly module structure that includes the following features: a weekly modules overview, a read section, a watch section and a complete section (note: appropriate citation methodologies are promoted and encouraged followed by descriptions and significance explanations for each curricular content item);
- A weekly overview section which provides a brief description of the module, the topics covered including explicit connections to course learning outcomes and elements of performance for the week, and approximate time of task for weekly activities including the lecture, readings, watching materials, and activities, followed by a cumulative total;
- Complete sections are encouraged for each week, promoting formative and summative assessment practices and;

- Fillable assignment templates which include assignment instructions, due dates and submission options;
- Inclusion of a variety of content types (i.e., Video, text, documents, links) and course activities (i.e., Discussions, quizzes, assignments) are encouraged;
- A personalized welcome which includes: a welcome message from the instructor in narrative form (video message was strongly encouraged to support narrative, although not necessary);
- Instructional “how-to” student videos to further guide students who may be new to the online environment or who have not used specific tools in the past; and
- A modular layout for the course with the following sections: course information, how-to videos, assignments and modules for weekly content (one module per week).

Description of Research Question

This project sought to address the following overarching research question:

- What are the effects of the course development template (CDT) on course (re)development and student learning?

The overarching research question were guided through two sub-questions:

- In what ways does the online template impact student navigation and interaction with content?
- In what ways does the CDT impact student learning?

Research Design and Data analysis

The methodology employed in this case-study follow mixed-methods explanatory design. A case-study is defined as “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p. 18) and its given situation (Farquhar, 2012). This approach also uses surveys and interviews to gain insight into the particular phenomenon. For this particular study, given that the tool was created and used only in Mohawk College courses, a case-study approach needed to be employed. The explanatory mixed-methods design offered support and a method to achieve the goals of a case-study. This method collects quantitative and qualitative data; priority is given to the qualitative data to make sense of the quantitative data during the analysis period. Using digital surveys and semi-structured interviews, findings from the interviews were used to provide insights and context for the survey data. Using a thematic analysis, key words and phrases were flagged as representative of certain perspectives; the results were used to provide recommendations and subsequent modifications to improve the CDT.

Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity refers to the involvement of the researcher(s) of the study, including study design, data collection and analysis and as such, how the researcher accounts for their epistemologies during this process and makes an effort to increase objectivity (Palaganas et al., 2017; Forgie, Yonge & Luth, 2018). This research was conducted by the designers and developers of the CDT however, the thematic analysis and findings were returned to the participants to ensure their voices and thoughts were captured and represented appropriately; this is known as confirmability.

Sample Selection, Size and Data Collection

Educators who used the CDT, and students who participated in courses that had been redesigned using the CDT, were invited to participate in online surveys and semi-structure interviews. However, only two educators completed the survey and one completed the interview which resulted in a data set that was too small to be used.

To investigate student user experience, two courses were used as sites for data collection and there were no limitations to the sample size. Seven students completed the online survey and three students participated in follow-up one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

Ethics and Rigour

This project received ethical clearance from Mohawk College's Research Ethics Board as well as, both researchers have the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, 2nd Edition (TCPS2) certificate. Digital, informed consent was received from all study participants and identifying features were removed to protect the identity of all participants. Questions included in the surveys and interview were not mandatory and participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Digital files are password protected, encrypted and will be digitally stored for five years based on Mohawk College policy. Researchers used approved surveys and interview guides to ensure appropriate and similar processes were followed for all interviewees. Analyzed data was sent to participants for confirmation.

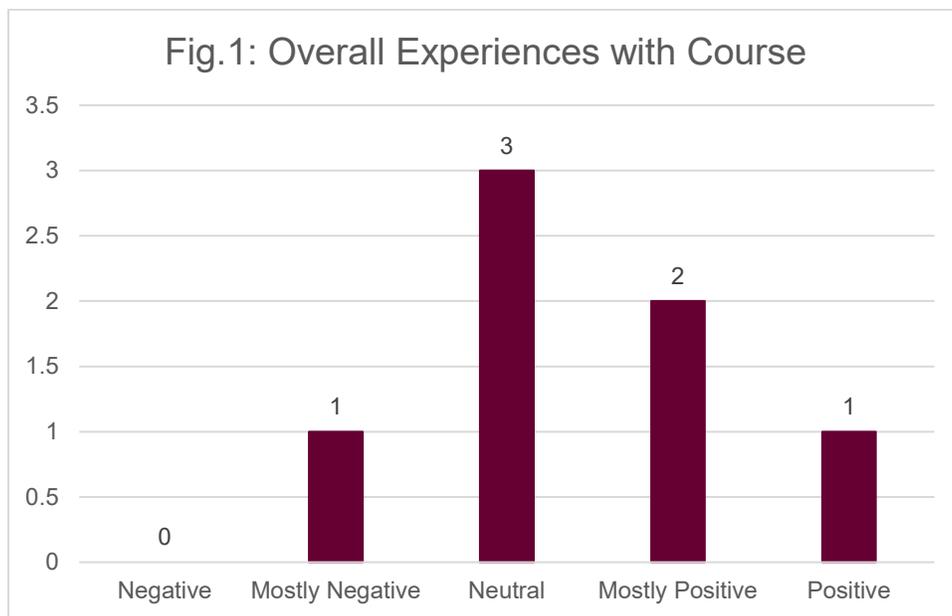
Limitations

As with any study, limitations have the potential to affect the validity of the study. Of concern for this study, the data sets are limited to a small number of students. While the data set is small, it still produced interesting findings. That said, future research is still recommended in this area. Also, there is potential for researcher bias. In an effort to address this, data was triangulated providing the results back to the students to ensure accurate portrayal of their experience; this helped to ensure the findings were reflective of student experience.

Results

The research questions sought to provide insight into student perspectives and user experience with newly designed courses that were designed using the CDT. It was expected that results would yield information pertaining only to the course design and layout however, upon completion of the survey and interviews; it became clear that students had a difficult time separately course design and layout with their instructor experience. As such, the findings presented include commentary and feedback with respect to both design and layout and instructor ability. This important finding will be discussed later in this section.

Students were asked to rank their overall experience with the course, which resulted in a range of results (see Figure 1).



Students offered commentary on what contributed to their experiences. For example, students whom had a mostly positive or positive experience provided qualitative feedback suggesting that it was connected to course layout and design:

“The online format was reasonably intuitive to navigate. I liked the flexibility to move through the material at a pace which suited me and could accommodate my work schedule.” (Student A)

“I am impressed with the online learning platform, it is the best one I have interacted with or seen so far. Navigating it and the menus and content is quite easy.” (Student B)

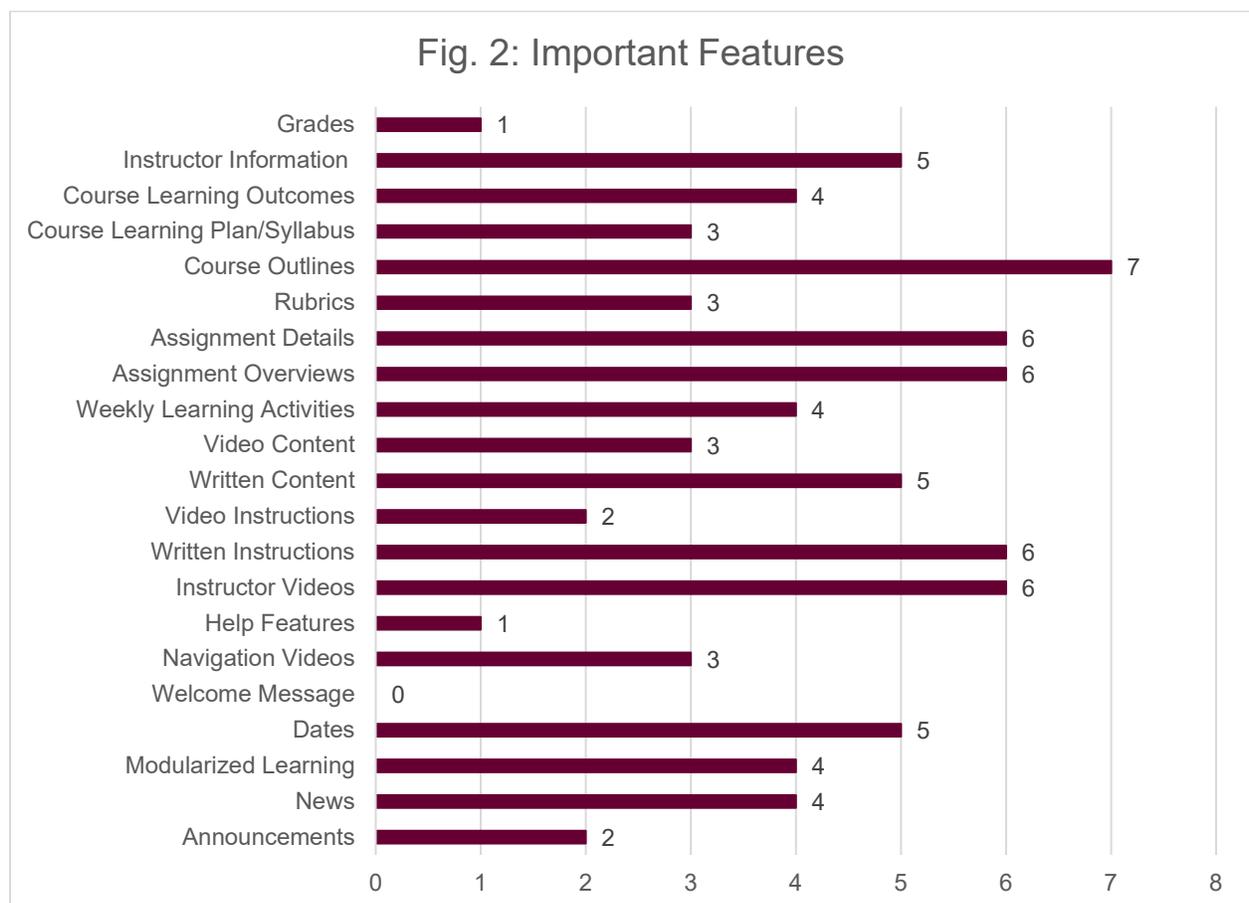
Contrary, students who had a mostly negative or neutral experience with the course provided qualitative feedback suggesting it seemed to be instructor-related rather than layout and design, indicating:

“Expectations were not clearly identified. For example, was asked to read a 75 page document, when asked instructor what to focus on for the exam, she said all of it. Unrealistic. [...] I would avoid any courses these two instructors were teaching as they were so unorganized.” (Student E)

“Course outline, topics, and due dates did not always match up.” (Student C)

“[There is] inconsistent delivery between courses within the same program” (Student D)

When considering design and layout, the findings on the features that students found to be important for course navigation are displayed in Figure 2, helping provide some context to these results. The most important feature for students is the course outline, followed by assignment details and overviews, and written instructions and instructor videos.



Students in the interviews echoed similar information. All interviewees indicated they look for a copy of a course outline within their first few clicks of course navigation. Of almost equal importance to the students are locating assignment details, including dates, very nearly immediately. For example, when the interviewees were asked about their initial clicks in the course when logging into the course for the first time, they indicated:

"I'm usually trying to look for something that gives a summary of week by week that lets me know with dates, appropriate dates that have been updated from the previous year." (Student C)

"I go to the dropdown menu, click on content and look for the assignment schedule. After, I look to access the course material, the how-to module, the introduction and the deliverables. I want to know how I am submitting my work and how I will be assessed" (Student A)

All interviewees indicated this information was pertinent so they could schedule their time; each had commitments outside of work (e.g., caregiving, full-time employment). The modular content layout was seen as helpful for some to navigate easily. For example,

"Anything that helps me get through the material efficiently and effectively. [...] The course provided] the flexibility to work through the material as my schedule allowed" (Student A)

However, in one of the courses studied, the instructor made a change to have the weeks changed into modules, with some modules spanning two weeks. Two students indicated this choice made it difficult to follow the material and recommended the breakdown remain in weekly sections. For example,

"It's just so much easier to follow." (Student C)

"When you opened [module] one, it ran for two weeks. [...] That's a bad thing. Do 'week 1, this is what you do,' 'week 2', even if its part of the same thing, say 'continuation or whatever.'" (Student E)

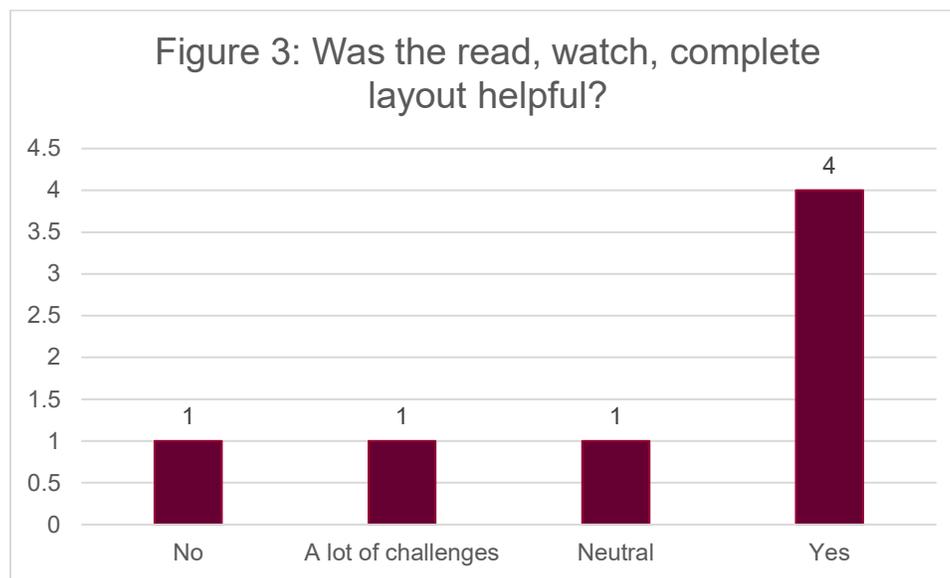
Thus, the weekly layout that was originally proposed in the template was something that students indicated as a layout preference. The weekly overview which included the objectives and time was viewed as positive however, one interviewee indicated that the approximate times needed to be more realistic and should be provided in a range format due to non-academic commitments.

"You know, [it's difficult] to read it and understand the concept that this is all new to you. Um, it's hard to absorb some of it, especially if you're doing this at night after work." (Student C)

Overall, the weekly layouts in a read, watch, complete design was well received (Figure 3 and 4). For example,

“The read, watch, complete was a logical progression. The overview provided you with a frame of reference as you moved through. Instead of getting wrapped up in a rabbit hole, [the approximate timing], helped me plan my week” (Student A)

“The outline of the content, its breakdown and how it would recognize and count down the tasks completed versus to be completed” (Student B)



Students also had the opportunity to indicate if the certain features should be deleted, changed or kept in future design (Figure 4). While most features were viewed positively, students indicated a need to change the video instructions. This is supported by the results presented in Figure 2, as only two students indicated that the video instructions were an important feature. That said, students did indicate that instructor presence in the course and connection to the instructor was important. A feature that three of the interviewees indicated they would like to see was the opportunity for synchronous communication. For example,

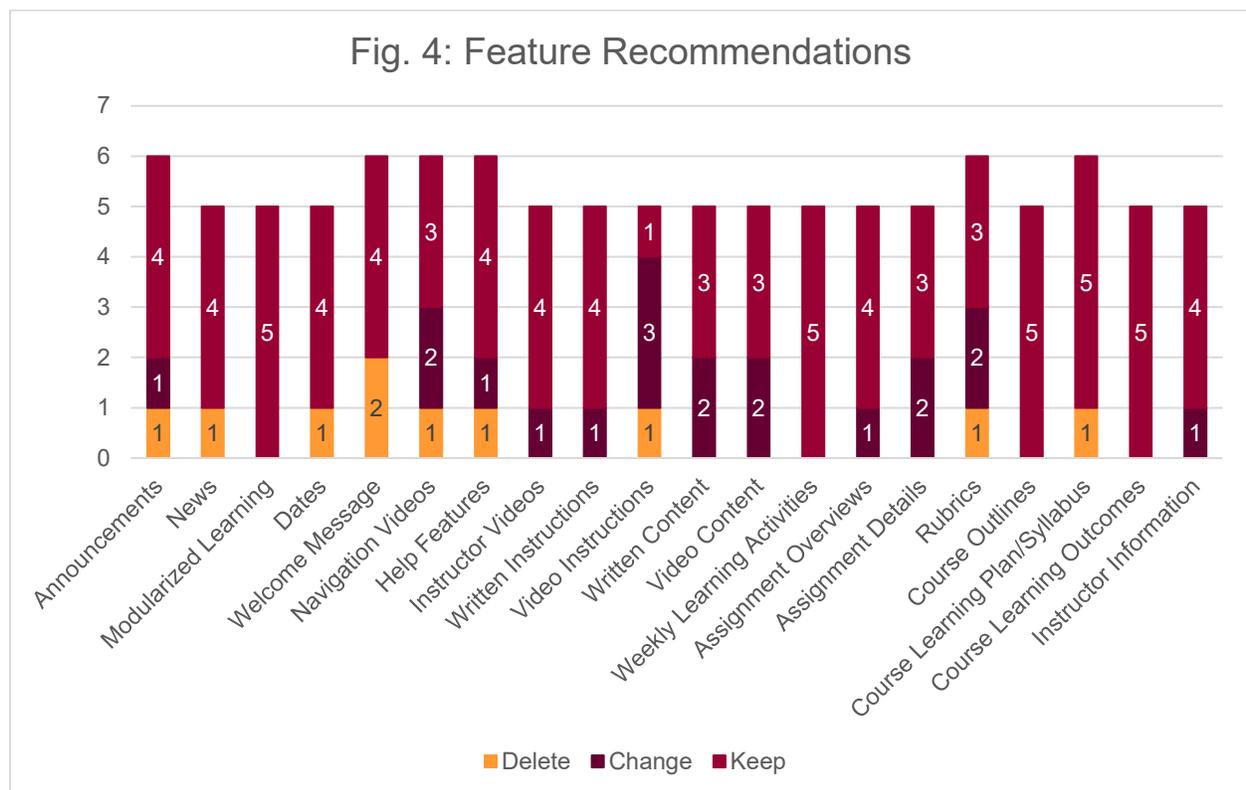
“I would prefer if we had like a zoom¹ seminar. [...] And then if you couldn't have that live component having video and voice over resources that would that be helpful. [...] Personal connection is really important.” (Student E)

¹ Zoom (2019) is a cloud-based company that offers “video communications for video and audio conferencing, collaboration, chat, and webinars across mobile devices, desktops, telephones, and room systems” (p.1).

*“Zoom is a good idea in case face-to-face is not an option. It can be recorded and posted after. Videos provide depth and exemplars, which are important”
(Student A)*

*“Live video would be helpful so you’re not off in the twilight zone by yourself”
(Student C)*

This suggests, then, that instructors should consider ensuring their video instructions and messaging is of a professional nature; students find it enhances the personability of the course and supports the written instructions.



Discussion and Recommendations

The survey results and information retrieved in the semi-structured interviews provided valuable insight into how a pre-designed course CDT can impact student user experience in courses. The evidence confirms that online learners often have non-academic commitments and as such, need to be able to work through content logically at their own speed and pace. Using a template provides a logical and consistent sequence for learners to follow in their learning journey.

Frustrations that students experienced seemed to be related more to instructor error or availability rather than the course design and layout itself. This is a significant and unexpected finding. As evidenced in the literature review, having awareness of curricular content, appropriate length of curricular content (how much is too much or just enough), appropriate instructional pedagogy (assessment submission practices and feedback time, instructional planning and strategies, and communication styles), are critical for student success. The literature review also provided evidence that using online course delivery templates, which provide consistency, have a positive effect on student user experience. This was echoed in our results. What was not discussed however, became evident, is that while a pedagogically sound template can guide educators, the template is only as good as the educator and their instructional pedagogy. This means that if the educator does not employ sound pedagogical practice such as ensuring provision of appropriate, consistent and current dates, or if assignment feedback is not provided in a timely manner, student experience and subsequently, academic performance, can be impacted. This experience is extremely important as the research presented indicates that user experience is the number one determinant for future enrollments. For Mohawk College, given the number of students enrolled in online courses, being aware of this experience is extremely important.

In an effort to continuously improve student experience, we recommend the following updates be considered for future online deliveries at Mohawk College:

- Encourage pedagogical support for new educators, regardless of their employment status (i.e., part-time, full-time, sessional, contract, or CE) before teaching begins;
- Ensure course activity dates are always updated and correct;
- Instructors should provide an option for a non-mandatory synchronous session (if the class is scheduled as asynchronous only). This will provide students with the option to have a live discussion with the instructor and receive the personal connection that the interviewees suggested. Non-mandatory sessions enable users to maintain their non-academic commitments without penalty. Additionally, the completed sessions can be recorded and posted online for those unable to attend the session;
- Provide instructor training on video creation. For example, encourage certain recording technologies, script creation and considerations for video lengths;
- Encourage faculty to utilize using a week-by-week layout instead of a modular layout (i.e., multiple weeks within one module). This will ensure students are aware of time commitments one week at a time;
- Ensure a clear assessment schedule is provided to students at the start of a course; and

- Provide a consistent online delivery structure for courses that belong to the same program.

These updates were provided based on a combination of literature and student feedback during the research process. In addition, the CDT should be reviewed and updated regularly in order to ensure course development practices remain current and continue to meet the needs of today's diverse learner population and Mohawk College educators. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) elements have been added to the online course template so that subsequent course designs could automatically incorporate specific UDL guidelines. These UDL elements are listed below:

- An accessible learning plan (i.e., screen reader usability) template with UDL statement;
- Course navigation instructions and UDL statement outlining all of the UDL principles used in the course with information on what UDL is;
- Inclusion of multiple means of representation (i.e., Content available in html text and downloadable Microsoft Word document);
- Inclusion of a note advising students to speak with their instructor if the estimated time of completion on weekly activities was too short; and
- Written and video instructions/resources are encouraged for all modules to ensure UDL guidelines are adhered to.

The courses surveyed in this study were designed and developed using the first iteration of the CDT and as such the above UDL elements were not included in this study.

Conclusion

The CDT provides a minimum quality standard for online course delivery at Mohawk College. The evidence presented from the studies indicates that the features of this template are associated with positive user experience, thus supporting existing literature. Using this template for future online deliveries at Mohawk College would maintain a status quo of positive user-experience for online learning and would encourage educators to incorporate UDL principles into their teaching practice. While the template does not provide a solution to a lack of educator pedagogical knowledge, it does provide support for educators in their development process and subsequently, a more positive user experience. Therefore, using templates such as the CDT, offers the ability for Mohawk College to continuously deliver quality online education.

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Appendix A - Images of Course Design Template

Welcome News Post

Educators are provided with a standard welcome message that they can customize to their liking. They are encouraged to add in a personal welcome video, too and hyper link to their course outline, learning plan and instructor contact information.

News ▾

Welcome! ▾ ×

Welcome Lauren

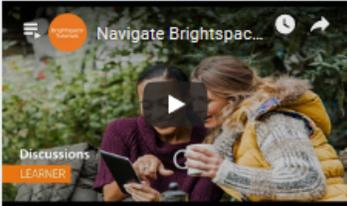
My name is xxx xxx, I can be reached by email at xxx.xxx@mohawkcollege.ca

Before beginning the course please review the course outline and learning plan for detailed course information and instructor contact.

I will use the *News* feature regularly to send any non time sensitive announcements and course updates. It is recommended that you login to the course regularly to stay informed of course news. Anything time sensitive, I will email to you. Ensure that you have access to your Mohawk email and check it regularly.

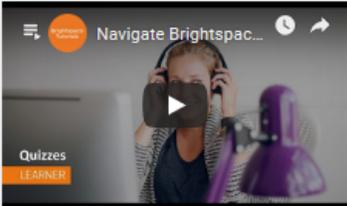
Using the Discussion Board

In this course, you will be asked to used the discussion board. For step by step instructions on how to participate in discussions, please watch this brief tutorial video, found below or [Brightspace Discussions - Tutorial](#).



Using the Quiz Feature

In this course, we will be using the quiz feature. For more information on how to complete a quiz, please watch the short video shown below of found at [Brightspace Quizzes - Tutorial](#).



Using the Dropbox Feature

In this course, we will be using the Dropbox feature. For more information on how to submit a document to the Dropbox, please watch the short video shown below of found at [Brightspace Dropbox - Tutorial](#).

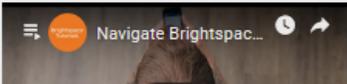


Table of Contents

This is a screenshot of the table of contents, providing an overview of how the modules are structured in the template.

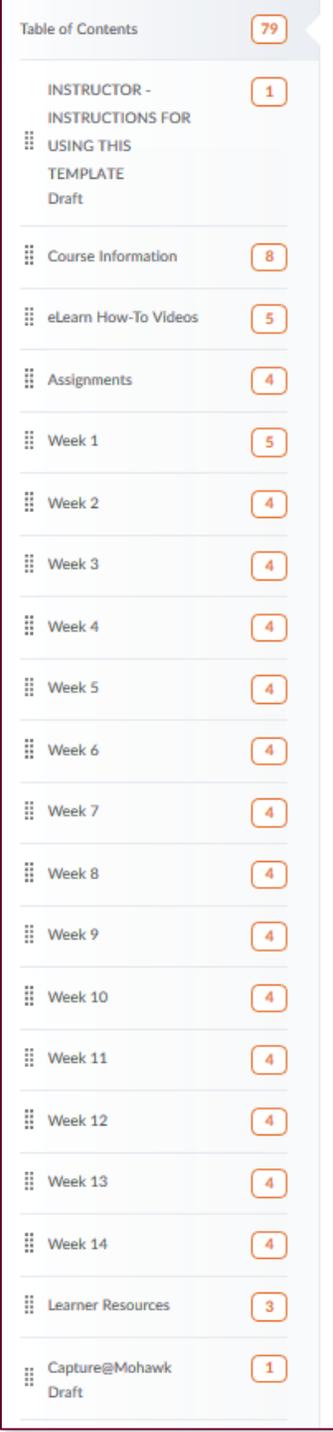


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Sample Fillable Templates

Weekly overview. This is a sample of the week overview template. Educators are provided with various templates to complete depending on the module they are filling out.

Week 1 Overview ▾
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Week 1 Overview

Module Introduction and Topics

Provide a brief introduction to the module and list the topics covered.

This module will cover the following topics / concepts:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Learning Outcomes

Elements of Performance	Related Course Learning Outcomes
[EoPX]	CLO[#]
[EoPX]	CLO[#]
[EoPX]	CLO[#]

Time on Task

Expect to spend the following amount of time on your learning:

Learning Activity	Approximate Time
Lecture	[## min/hr]
Read	[## min/hr]
Watch	[## min/hr]
Activity / Assignment	[## min/hr]
Cumulative Total	[## min/hr]

The time(s) provided here are approximate. If you find that you are consistently taking significantly longer to complete the task(s) indicated, please contact your faculty.

Watch template. This is a sample of a completed “Watch Template.” Providing complete sample templates provides educators with insight with potential ways to present information, what they should be considering and what a completed template could look like.

Watch Sample Page

Watch:

[Module Title]

[Video Title Goes Here]

Provide some context around why you are asking students to watch this video. This may include probing questions or things you would like them to reflect on or consider as they watch. You can use the  icon to insert a video of your choice and then remove the sample below. If you don't wish to use this page, please delete it.



Direct Video Link: [Mohawk Momentum](#) (1:52)

Donec vel mi a ante eleifend dapibus nec quis diam. Orci varius natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. Maecenas id nisl porttitor, interdum nulla non, pretium justo. Maecenas vitae risus eget neque venenatis mattis. Donec at purus augue. Proin aliquet erat sagittis sodales porttitor. Quisque vitae diam sit amet elit imperdiet hendrerit ut ac turpis. Cras non viverra sem. Ut dapibus nunc id luctus fermentum. Integer maximus sapien eget dolor sollicitudin bibendum.

Video Transcript

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nullam varius lacinia quam vitae mattis. Nunc cursus sed metus at ultrices. Vivamus consectetur libero non posuere tincidunt. Vivamus fermentum sagittis interdum. Quisque ac felis sapien. Proin id suscipit enim, dignissim fringilla metus. Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis in