

**Syllabus**  
**Course No. 19.770**

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**Course description:** This course is designed to enable teachers to migrate their courses in part or in whole to a Moodle-based online environment. The primary focus of the course is the development of online pedagogies that teachers can apply in order to answer the essential question, "What can we achieve online that we cannot achieve as well or as fully in a more traditional face-to-face environment?" To respond to that question, participating teachers will study, discuss and apply proven online pedagogies designed to improve individualized attention, to provide intensive collaborative learning approaches, to provide additional opportunities for teachers to mentor their students, and to provide better opportunities for school-home communication.

Overview: Participating teachers will integrate these pedagogies within the context of improving student achievement in ways equal to or greater than those of face-to-face courses of the same title. This course can be completely online (asynchronous - no on-site class meetings) or blended/hybrid (mix of in-class and online) depending on local needs. Either way, a major component of this course includes highly interactive online discussions emphasizing the relationship between student achievement and collaborative learning. Through participation in this course, teachers will develop their own course site on Moodle. (See Student Assessment section at the end of this syllabus.)



Instructor: Romeo Marquis, founder of The Learning Curve, is the developer of this graduate level course and is its primary instructor. He is a former teacher, principal and associate dean for academic technology and distance education. He continues to teach in three graduate programs for teachers and administrators at Framingham State College - Curriculum & Instructional Technology,

Educational Leadership, and TASO (Teachers in American Schools Overseas). He is a recipient of the Pathfinder Award from the Massachusetts Computer Using Educators (MassCUE) and the Contributor of Distinction Award from Massachusetts Colleges Online. His company, [The Learning Curve](#), partners with [IMG Software](#) to provide a unique combination of educational and technological expertise.

Email: [romeo@romeomarquis.com](mailto:romeo@romeomarquis.com)

Phone: 508-395-0090

Skype: romeomarquis



**Texts:** Required materials are available in the course Web site.



**Course objectives**

1. Participating teachers will demonstrate understanding of the advantages of online learning for their students.
2. Participating teachers will prepare dynamic course content including a detailed syllabus with links to relevant Web sites for students and their parents.

3. Participating teachers will search for and find various media relevant to their own teaching areas and will integrate multimedia into their course sites.
5. Participating teachers will prepare online opportunities for student interactivity designed to improve student achievement through *content engagement*. Tools will include threaded discussion board forums.
6. Participants will develop assessment tools to measure student performance beyond basic skills into higher levels of critical thinking.



## Course outline

**?** Module 1: Why online? The ongoing migration to an online environment began several years ago and continues to expand at exponential rates. While the initial thrust was in higher education, elementary and secondary schools are now adapting to this environment at a rapid pace. During this module, participating teachers will answer the essential question, "What can we achieve online that we cannot achieve as well or as fully in a more traditional face-to-face environment?" They will answer this question through assigned readings and through threaded online discussions. They will combine their thoughts with those of their colleagues in order to develop specific objectives for the online course that they plan to develop.

- Instructor's notes to be supplied.
- Developing an online learning community; answering the essential question, "What can we achieve online that we cannot achieve as well or as fully in a more traditional environment?"
- Developing and sharing your preliminary plan for your online course site; creating your initial course site in Moodle; configuring your course site.



Module 2: Developing a dynamic syllabus and other content for online teaching and learning. An effective syllabus is much more than a course outline. It is a summary including a course description, instructor background, course objectives, description of text (if required), outline of major topics, and student assessment procedures. In a K-12 environment, the syllabus should also include a brief section for parents - how to contact the teacher and other relevant information. The syllabus becomes a contract of sorts between instructor and students. In a traditional environment, the syllabus is a rather static document. In an online environment, however, the syllabus is a dynamic document that includes links to related topics. In this module, participating teachers will develop a dynamic syllabus for the online course that they are preparing. They will complete this assignment with the benefit of assigned readings coupled with interactive online discussions allowing for collaborative learning.



Without content there is no course. On the other hand, simply uploading "stuff" to a course site is often referred to as "shovelware" in online circles. The opposite, of course, includes a content overview supplied by the teacher in a thoughtful manner. For example, if I were a high school chemistry teacher, as I was many years ago, "shovelware" would mean that I would simply list the assigned chapter or pages being studied. On the other hand, it would be much better if I prepared a brief overview of the assigned readings and described what we will be doing in class. This involves some thoughtful writing, of course, resulting in a dynamic overview that takes the student far beyond the limitations of a traditional textbook. Why would I do this? Because as a teacher I recognize that students have different learning styles and that as a teacher I must help them interpret course content that is presented by way of a textbook that is definitely *not* "one size fits all." Your own well prepared overview of how

course content fits within the context of a well developed online course is very important to your students' content mastery. Teacher prepared content can also be in the form of MP3 files or video clips.

- Critical Thinking Community (Select the lesson plans that fit your area. Keep in mind that these plans were not necessarily prepared for online use. It's up to *you* to adapt whatever you think might be helpful.) See <http://www.criticalthinking.org/articles/index.cfm>.
- Go back to the top of your own course site. To what extent does your online course site begin to answer our essential question, "What can we accomplish online that we cannot accomplish as well or as fully in a more traditional setting? Here is another essential question: *In what ways can your online course site help you make better use of the time that you have in class with your students?*



Module 3: Online content engagement. Collaborative learning works! Yet many teachers have experienced the frustration of trying to conduct a productive classroom discussion. Several students willingly participate. Others sit back and listen although we know from research and practice that actively

engaging the content through participation is far more effective than simply listening. Once the discussion has ended, how much do students actually take away with them for further study? Were they able to take notes? Even if the teacher makes use of small groups, how much time is actually available to analyze the discussion in each group? In an online environment like Moodle, these barriers disappear *if* the teacher knows how to organize and lead a highly interactive discussion board forum to actively engage course content. When this happens, *all* students participate. Students who are reticent in class often flourish online; they don't feel intimidated by more confident and verbose classmates. The discussion need not be limited to classroom time; out-of-class participation is content-focused. The forum can include all students or can be organized into

smaller groups. At the end of the forum, all students have a written transcript of the discussion including the teacher's direction and comments. What great study notes! *The key is for the teacher to understand and apply the critical thinking concepts studied on Module 3.*

- Instructor's notes to be supplied
- Same reading assignments as Module 2. Note, however, the critical thinking articles and how these apply to the design of effective online discussion forums. In this module you have an excellent opportunity to give serious consideration to redesigning homework.
- Understanding the different levels of learning and retention; developing online tools for *content engagement*
- Preparing discussion forums and assignments to reflect course content



Module 4: Assessing students at different levels. Relying on what has been learned and applied so far, participants will learn how to apply Moodle's grading mechanisms to the assessment of critical thinking skills and creativity of students in their online course.

So far this course has focused on fundamental online tools and processes that enable you to answer the essential question that I posed earlier, “What can we accomplish online that we cannot accomplish as well or as fully in a more traditional classroom?” You can put together a truly excellent online course site with only the tools and processes that we’ve explored so far. The basic elements of an effective online course are:

- A dynamic syllabus
- Dynamic course content and

- effectively designed discussion forums and assignments that encourage and demand critical thinking and collaborative learning

There is every reason to believe that you can develop an extremely productive and effective online course site using only the tools that we have used so far. One of my personal and professional goals in this course has been to model the essentials within the context of effective pedagogy supported by Moodle. However, you have perhaps come to the correct assumption that Moodle includes additional online tools that allow you to enhance and strengthen your course site. True!

So! If you choose to integrate some or all of the other tools described in Moodle, go right ahead. Experiment and play with these tools until you get the hang of them. But do so not just because they are available but because you will integrate them in a pedagogically sound manner. To find these tools, go to your course site and click on "Turn editing on." As you already know, that will produce two pull-down menus, one for resources and the other for activities.



### **Assessment of participating teachers**

- 30% online discussions reflecting understanding and application of assignments. These discussions are held in a threaded discussion board. Participants are required to submit an initial entry for each assigned topic and then respond to their colleagues within the discussion forum. Entries are evaluated on the extent to which they reflect the subject matter or each module and the extent to which they reflect critical thinking. Letter grades are given in each required forum.

- 30% preparation of assigned materials in some of the modules. These assignments must reflect the intent of the assigned modules (preparation of syllabus, course materials, etc.) and must show evidence of critical thinking. Letter grades are given to each assignment.
- 40% final product: an online course site ready for student enrollees.