

SABBATICAL REPORT: TECHNICAL RETOOLING, ON COURSE, & ACCESSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

My sabbatical project focused mainly on technical retooling. During my sabbatical semester I completed courses in Flash Web Animation and Digital Photography and video instruction in Microsoft technologies and Web development. Topics included Cascading Style Sheets, AJAX/Spry, Fireworks CS3, Photoshop CS3, Dreamweaver CS3, design concepts, Web accessibility, and dynamic web development with PHP/MySQL). I explored new technologies including shopping carts, search engine optimization, Silverlight, Ruby on Rails, Expression Web, Flex, RSS, Wikis, and Sharepoint. As a result of my sabbatical I have updated my courses to include new technologies. I updated a module on Web accessibility for my Advanced Web Development class and will include it in the ED 214 (Developing an Online Course) class when I teach it again.

I also attended a 3-day On Course II training and applied what I learned to develop learner centered instruction that supports a variety of learning styles. This workshop modeled learner centered instruction and provided inspiration and practical suggestions for making it work in the classroom. I've extended the strategies to online instruction. The experiences and methods for group work emphasized in the workshop offered a framework I can use to develop a new team project course for Graphic Design and Web Development students.

Exploring these technologies and teaching methods has renewed my excitement about teaching.

Resources and examples are at <http://cis2.cuyamaca.net/jreed/sabbatical/>

INTRODUCTION

Though my sabbatical began in August 2007 and ended in January 2008, the learning and development is ongoing. This report is divided into 3 sections based on the three areas of my sabbatical: technical retooling, On Course, and Web Accessibility. Each section outlines what I did, what I learned, and how I have applied it in the classroom.

TECHNICAL RETOOLING

During my sabbatical semester, I completed **GD 222: Flash Web Animation** and **GD 210: Digital Photography I**. I learned a great deal about Flash Actionscript, Photoshop, digital camera controls, printing processes, and photo composition. All of these skills will overlap with my teaching focal point: Web Development.

I created a web site that shows a slide show of my work at cis2.cuyamaca.net/jreed/photos. I am pleased with what I learned and produced, and the artistic side of photography was deeply satisfying. The focus on technology alone can lead to burnout.

Technology changes rapidly in the field of Web Development, so in addition to taking formal classes, I completed video training online at Lynda.com. This video training includes hundreds of titles related to graphic design and web development. Many titles include downloadable files so one can practice what is shown in the videos. I was impressed enough with the quality of the videos to try using them for instruction in my own classes during the spring 2008 semester. Lynda.com offers a special rate for students, so I required that students subscribe for 8-week intervals. In many cases, the instruction offered on Lynda.com is more current than what is available in a textbook. It seems that by the time a book is published, it is nearly obsolete. Video instruction can be produced in a more efficient and environmentally sustainable way. I have created my own video instruction in the past, but this is extremely time-consuming, especially considering the need for captioning video to make it accessible for students with hearing impairments. I am extremely grateful to find high quality instruction online that is appropriate for my subject area. At the end of the semester I will request feedback from students. My hope is to effectively mix and match books and video to create rich instruction that works for all kinds of learners.

Over the sabbatical I watched over 400 movies ranging from 2 to 15 minutes each. The topics I covered are shown below.

LYNDA.COM TOPICS REVIEWED

Artist Series with Hillman Curtis
Blogger Essential Training
Building an Online Shopping Cart
CSS Crash Course by SitePoint
CSS for Designers
CSS Web Site Design
CSS2 Essential Training
Dreamweaver CS3 Beyond the Basics
Dreamweaver CS3 Dynamic Development
Dreamweaver CS3 Essential Training
Dreamweaver CS3 with CSS Essential Training
Effective Presentations
Expression Web Essential Training
Fireworks CS3 Essential Training
Flash CS3 Professional Essential Training
Flash User Experience Best Practices
Flashforward 2007: What's This Button Do?
 Communicating Web 2.0 Through Design
Flex 2 Essential Training

Getting Started with Acrobat 8 Professional
Getting Started with Expression Design
Interaction Design: Process and Inspiration
Introduction to Internet Searching
iTunes 7 New Features
Photoshop CS3 for the Web Essential Training
Photoshop CS3 New Features
Ruby on Rails Essential Training
Search Engine Optimization
Setting Up MySQL 5 for PHP in Windows
Setting Up PHP 5 for Windows with Apache or
 IIS
SharePoint 2007 Essential Training
Silverlight Essential Training
tokidoki: Creative Inspiration
Web Accessibility Principles
Web ReDesign: Strategies for Success
Windows Vista Essential Training
Working with Color

ON COURSE

I attended the three day On Course II workshop in Maryland in October, 2007. This was the most interesting and meaningful workshop I have ever attended. We learned how to create and facilitate learner-centered instruction and group activities by **doing** it. Skip Downing practiced what he taught, so the **way** we learned was as powerful as **what** we learned, and understanding was deeper than it would have been in a typical workshop. I created a video of my experience at

In the workshop we were provided with 80 structures for learner centered activities. We worked in groups to design instruction for a topic chosen by the groups. The instruction used strategies to appeal to different kinds of learners. Along the way, we learned ways of facilitating group processes and learning activities.

Though I am always interested in improving classroom instruction, I'm also interested in improving online instruction, so I went through the 80 structures provided, chose some that were suited for online instruction, and developed examples (strategies) for them. The sidebar shows a selection of some favorites.

I plan to offer staff development related to this and share this in the ED 214 (Developing an Online Course) class.

Naturally, I also hope to integrate more learner centered activities in my own face-to-face and online classes. Developing successful strategies takes time and experimentation, so this is an ongoing process.

At the conclusion of the workshop, I signed up to be an On Course Ambassador. I hope to encourage other faculty members to attend On Course training and conferences.

Selected Strategies for Learner-Centered Online Instruction.

PROJECT: students create a product that they share with other students. In a Web Development class, for example, students create a web site.

PEER REVIEW: students offer feedback to other students. Teachers could do this in discussion, via synchronous conferences (cccConfer.org), or by using a web form. Students could first be coached about the "feedback sandwich" technique.

JOURNAL: students create a blog to share their thoughts and experiences as they work through the course. For example, students post short movie reviews for a cinema class.

VIRTUAL GUEST SPEAKER: students conference or participate in online discussion with guest expert(s)

COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE BASE: students study a small bit of a course and share a definition, explanation, example, etc. For example, each student could take a component of an essay, explain it, and give a good and bad example. These would be posted online so others could use it and possibly even offer feedback.

LECTURE: brief segments (<10 minutes) work best online. Audio and compelling images are extremely helpful. Camtasia (www.techsmith.com) creates narrated video of whatever is on the computer screen or adds audio to Powerpoint and produces it as a video. Jing (www.jingproject.com) is a free tool that lets you capture what is on your screen (images or video) and post it online without knowing anything about web publishing. Consider doing things you might not do in the classroom (interview an expert or former student, show a group of teachers discussing a topic). You can also find wonderful resources online.

ACCESSIBILITY

To get up to date with accessibility and universal design, I reviewed many web resources and videos. Following are those I found most helpful:

- Lynda.com videos on Web Accessibility Principles.
<http://movielibrary.lynda.com/html/modPage.asp?ID=448>
- Working Together: People with Disabilities and Computer Technology
http://www.washington.edu/doi/Video/wt_dis.html
- About Section 508
<http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Content&ID=3>
- Adobe Accessibility Resource Center
<http://www.adobe.com/accessibility/>
- University of Washington's DO-IT
<http://www.washington.edu/doi/>
- UNC Guidelines for Creating Accessible Web Pages
<http://www.unc.edu/webaccess/guidelines.html>
- Fresno State How To's
<http://www.csufresno.edu/accessibility/resources/how-to.shtml>
- W3C Web Accessibility Initiative
<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>

To apply what I learned, I updated a learning module for CIS 213 (Advanced Web Development). This module is available at <http://cis2.cuyamaca.net/jreed/213/notes/accessibility.asp> . I will also use what I learned for ED 214 when I teach it again.

CONCLUSION

For technology instructors, keeping up to date is a never ending struggle essential for keeping our courses and programs vital and relevant. Time is needed to study, reflect, and apply, especially when one wishes to make changes in curriculum and pedagogy. The sabbatical leave helped me recharge. The many hours I spent learning and applying new technologies were invaluable and would have been impossible without the sabbatical leave.

A special thanks to the Governing Board of the Grossmont Cuyamaca College District for supporting this professional growth. Without it, I would be behind the curve on the constantly changing technologies in the field of web development. On Course helped me assess my teaching style. Application of learner centered instruction strategies should improve the performance of students in my classes.