

Ben: Hi this is Ben, the Academic Technology Specialist and Trainer at the University of Portland. Today I'm joined by Maria Erb, who is our Instructional Designer. Hello, Maria!

Maria: Hey Ben.

Ben: So today we wanted to talk just a little bit about course design, and specifically some of the benefits and the ways you can use our common course format to standardize course design.

So Maria, I know you had some ideas on this, and so my question to you I guess is why would you want to standardize and how would you balance that with maintaining or retaining the ability to have academic freedom and design the course to meet your own need.

Maria: Right, well of course there are a number of positive benefits to standardizing the course. In general, you know, think about students taking five different classes from five different faculty members and each one being completely different. Laid out differently, assignments are in a different spot, course reminders if any show up, at different times at different places. It's just adding unnecessary stress to already stressful lives. So that's the number one reason to do it, but of course on the faculty end, there are also many benefits there. This is one less thing you have to struggle with every single time you design a course. I mean why not have a go-to layout that's already been proven, it already contains everything that you need and it's more of a fill-in-the-blanks approach at that point. And it serves as a checklist for you, you know, did you put the learning objectives at the very beginning of the lesson, do you have a reminder in place for when assignments are due? Do you have a wrap up at the end? You know, just making sure everything is complete. So, it serves that useful purpose too.

Maria: Other than that, there are times when you might have to modify even a very good design layout and that's fine too. You know, especially if it happens on a very occasional basis. But you know that freedom to be able to tinker with things as you need to make it really fit the needs of your course, sure that's fine, but just kind of having that discipline in place of again, using the template as a checklist, will help you if you do need to modify things in the future a little bit. You'll automatically know that you do need to put the learning objectives in a very prominent place and where they're going to stand out. You do need to remind your students of due dates and important other assignments and that kind of thing. So even again if you go for it with a modification that works for your class, you'll still have this really good training in place of how to make sure that your lesson is complete and that students find what they need to find in an easy way for them.

Ben: I think that's a great point, Maria. I had thought of it more from the student perspective, needing to reduce some of that cognitive load that you're spending, needing to figure out not only what am I trying to learn but how am I going to go about learning it in this environment? But I like that you brought up the benefits for teachers as well. And I think a good analogy is to think about when you walk into a classroom to teach, you have the freedom to kind of drag desks around, and rearrange, and to use all the things that are in that classroom as a learning environment as you see fit. But you're probably not going to rip the chalkboard off of the wall

and throw it out the window, you know? Or anything like that. So I just think it's so helpful to have a little bit of structure instead of...like imagine walking into a classroom and it's just totally blank, there's no furniture, there's nothing in there. That's basically what you get with a totally blank Moodle shell.

Maria: Right. And that's stressful for everybody, you know, the faculty member putting that course together – why face that every single time that you need to work on your course? And as a student, and you know, like you said Ben, looking from a student perspective you know we're all busy, we all have a lot of things going on, the easier you can make it for somebody to remember what's coming up, and what's due, and when it's due, and what you need to complete by the end of the week, the easier you can make that for somebody else the better results you're going to get. On both ends, from students and you're grading tasks are going to be easier too. You're going to be glad that you let them know in as many ways and places as possible what's coming up and what they need to do.

Ben: Exactly. OK Maria, well thanks for joining me for this super-quick podcast, probably our shortest podcast ever.

Maria: Ever!

Ben: So we'll see you next time, thanks!