CASE STUDY 8
Managing Volume
**Case Characteristics**

This professor’s profile was similar to Cases 6 and 7 (Table 13). He was a full professor (FP) and was relatively available (3) which ended up meaning that we met more often than I had with the other professors (8+). He was personally motivated to proceed with his course design (P) and we had more time than usual before his course was to begin (3). Finally, his knowledge of design and teaching online was limited (1/1) and his current course syllabus contained only general objectives (2).

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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<td>M</td>
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**Gender:** male  
**Profile:** FP = advanced in his career (16+)  
**Reason:** P = personal  
**Time-to-delivery:** 3 = in over 4 months  
**Availability:** 3 = 31 to 45 hours  
**Number of sessions = 8+**  
**Knowledge of Design:** 1 = novice level  
**Knowledge of DE/OL (online learning):**  
1 = had never offered a course via DE or OL  
**General Obj./Specific Obj.:** 2 = GO only

Before our first meeting, I asked the professor, as I usually do, to send me a copy of his course syllabus as well as any program-related syllabi. Because this course was not about to begin and we had several months ahead of us (probably about six) to develop it, I actually started to breathe easier, as I had in Case 7. This time around, the allotted time was acceptable (although still minimal in any absolute sense).

**Session 1:** At our first meeting, I introduced myself and described my role. I demonstrated my awareness of the content his course syllabus by summarizing my initial analysis. I then asked him to tell me about his course content and of his interest in offering it online, etc. The professor was very enthusiastic about the possibilities offered by information and communication technologies (ICT), although he admitted he was not very familiar with their use. He had always taught in a traditional manner, and particularly enjoyed his weekly exchanges with his students. He says that it was one of the “joys” of being a professor. He also explained
that his course was compulsory in the second year of the program. We looked at his current syllabus, a relatively well-designed vertical course plan but not very practical in terms of identifying which activities were to be completed in which week. I then presented him with the three short tutorials I had developed (in earlier cases). The last tutorial, on the Horizontal Course Syllabus Model (HCSM), really seemed to get his attention. He said that he found this model interesting because he had always wanted to improve his course structure but neither had the time to do it, nor a clear idea of just what to do. He felt that by linking all of the elements into one logical and coherent structure, his course syllabus would improve in clarity. As we left the meeting, we both resolved to undertake a parallel analysis of his current syllabus in light of the HCSM. We agreed that, at our next meeting, we would discuss transitioning from one to the other.

**Session 2:** Since our last session, the professor realized that, by undertaking a critical analysis of his course syllabus with respect to transferring it into the HCSM, he was asking far too much from his students each week. He came to this conclusion when he was thinking about his weekly breakdown of activities and tasks that he expected his students to do. And yet, when he had originally planned his course, adding items as he went along, it had not seemed like there was that much work involved. At least, he said, he had not noticed. Now, after beginning to transition to the HCSM, he feared having to question maintaining some of his course content, given the quantity of work he now realised he was expecting from his students. So, we began this session with a critical analysis of his plan and broke down his content, one week at a time. This task generated the usual question: “Which objectives are linked to the content?” From this analysis, I intended to proceed to the design of his GOs and SOs.

As usual, we started with Week 2 of the course (the first course serving only to present his syllabus to his students and to give an overview of his subject matter). Aware of the fact that a lot of professors become frustrated when faced with having to identify their objectives, I did not insist. I got him to talk about his course and noted the GOs he wanted to focus on. I decided not to present him with my sample drafts right away,
preferring to email them to him later. In this way, he would be able to re-read them between sessions.

Establishing general objectives connected automatically to the way a he had distributed his texts throughout the course. I tried suggesting he think in terms of his objectives *before* thinking about what reading materials he wanted to use because, I explained, one should first be certain about *what one wants done* before thinking about *what to use* to get it done. He had already used most of his texts in two other courses. (He just told me, in fact, that this particular course will be a blend of two other courses of his and that it would be less advanced and hence less demanding from his students than the other two because his students will be from outside his field.) He usually expected his students to read approximately 150 pages of text a week, including a chapter from his own book as well as several articles, a number of cases studies, a few technical reports and his course notes. Nevertheless, after my explaining the individual and team assignment concepts, he decided to decrease the number of readings to be done and to add more practical exercises, in the aim of enabling his students to apply what they were reading about.

I took note of some potential specific objectives in Week 2, while he was explaining the themes that would be broached and the readings set for that week. Next, we considered the individual work for which students would be responsible. At this stage, the EM pointed out that, although he expected students to read about 75 to 100 pages of various articles and course notes every week, he had never before prepared exercises to facilitate their accomplishing this task. I mentioned to him that an individual assignment can serve as a guide or a kind of reading grid. I suggested we take the time to develop a model based on the key points in one of his proposed texts. The series of questions we developed only took about 20 minutes to prepare. I explained that the questions asked would orient the students toward the most important parts of the text. Moreover, these questions, aimed at the individual, also readily served as the basis for developing team assignments (TA).

*In case the professor did not have enough time to do all of this, I thought I’d suggest that, especially towards the end of the course, he could have his students create their own assignment sheets and share them with their team members, a simple exercise to organise that would actually assist*
I shared this idea with the professor who was immediately interested. Because his instructional style draws upon the Socratic method—maieutics—(like the professor in Case 6), he took the position that it is extremely important for his students to develop their critical thinking by learning how to ask the right questions, i.e. to focus on the essential. To save time, he agreed that we should develop individual assignment models that his students could use to develop their own assignments. The professor could then devote more time to preparing his team assignments and weekly plenary sessions, which, in his opinion, would require a lot of preparation time. Now we started developing a few model individual assignments for the first weeks of the course. But, from Week 4 onwards, the professor figured his students would likely be able to write up individual assignments for the remaining weeks of his course.

**Session 3:** This week, we began work on the team assignments. This professor had never had his students work in teams or in pairs, so he was unsure of how to design these assignments. I showed him a few examples from other courses I had worked on and proposed a list of activities that could best be completed in teams or dyads, and we examined it (See Appendix 3). He saw that quite a few of the proposed activities would apply to his field but also pointed out that there were a few that he simply did not understand and still others where he saw no possible application. I answered his questions about potential activities for his course and gave examples of the unfamiliar ones. So we started planning his team assignment (TA) based on the activities he felt were most promising.

The first TA focussed directly on the Individual Assignment (IA) for Week 2, which required students to highlight the key points in two required readings that appeared to contradict each other. The open-ended questions of the assignment required students to compare their answers to individual activity questions and to negotiate any diverging opinions, in order to agree on their team answer. The team assignment provided a double-entry grid for synthesizing their answers. It was here that we
realized that these assignments could best be done in dyads, rather than in triads or bigger teams. Consequently, the professor decided to create two-person teams, aware of the fact that this would require more assessment on his part but equally conscious of the benefit to his students. He wanted above all to create a quality learning environment. Moreover, given time constraints, he had the option of asking only some of the teams to present their results each week. However, everyone would have to be prepared, just in case...

*The professor appears to be taking this design work seriously—a task he said he had never previously had, nor taken, the time to do. This is something I hear a lot since beginning these case studies. Professors want to plan their work in detail and their students' assignments but, because of the time factor, simply cannot manage to get it done or do it as well as they would like. They repeatedly tell me that having a designer to support them in this process reassures them and urges them to do their work thoroughly. All in all, the simple fact of having someone who values this work seems to release their energy. This manifest interest for the design work on their part thus bodes well for the future. It appears that professors who hear colleagues in their department, faculty or school speak about the work they are doing, are starting to introduce some of the said elements into their own courses.*

We then moved along to the Week 3 team assignment. The professor decided that the texts for this week and the nature of the individual assignment lent themselves to a Web-research type of activity. He had already identified quite a number of interesting sites and Google-indexed them. As it had been some time since he had conducted this research, we went online and found two new sites that he felt were important. From these available-online resources, we studied the information that the students would be able to obtain and created a grid for them to fill out (showing categories with sample answers). The professor decided not to provide them with research parameters, descriptors or key-words. They were to discover these from the weekly readings. Now that the professor was confident in his ability to create Team Assignments, we decided that, at our next meeting, we’d focus on plenary session activities development.
Session 4: This professor was particularly preoccupied with the plenary sessions because he had always taught on campus in a traditional way. Hence, contact with the students was extremely important to him and he wanted specific details on the online “virtual classroom” environment. So I gave him a rough overview of the asynchronous learning management system (LMS) and the synchronous, virtual classroom platform we were using. (I also made a mental note-to-self to ask the project manager to meet with him later on and actually walk him through these tools, having him try them out). So I first showed him the functional capabilities of the asynchronous platform from the student’s point of view.

I intentionally decided not go into the functional capabilities from the professor’s point of view. Having already had the experience of seeing their eyes glaze over at how the LMS worked, or their being completely overwhelmed by “all that technology,” I no longer wanted to chance their rejecting it out of hand. Accordingly, I started introducing them to the pedagogical features of the LMS, showing them how students could access their materials with the click of a mouse, 24/7. “Sell the sizzle” was the mantra playing in my mind. I would then leave them in the care of the IDC so that he would ease them into the editor-access mode. I saw that when I presented them familiar elements, such as accessing Word documents or PowerPoint presentations, etc., they were able to connect this to existing schemata, thereby better negotiating the transition from old to new. By collaborating closely afterwards with an educational consultant, they learn to become autonomous in getting their course online and keeping it maintained.

I highlighted the advantages of the LMS: students had access-on demand; instructors could add or subtract content at will. In this course, the professor shared a well-known problem already mentioned by other professors, i.e. converting his numerous paper-based documents into digital format. The professors were constantly on a seesaw, on the one hand interested in obtaining free and unfettered access to knowledge for themselves and their students while, and on the other, concerned about protecting their copyright and that of their colleagues.
This dilemma is far from being resolved. For instance (at the time of publication), Canada’s Access copyright agreement covers the distribution of photocopied documents but is silent on the handling of digitized documents, unless materials come under a Creative Commons license. Some faculty members maintain that what they write belongs entirely to them while others concede that their university may own a right to part of it or, at the very least, has a right to access what they produce. Still others, seemingly a minority, contend that university professors are paid to produce knowledge and that they receive all the support they require from their institutions to write and produce texts and thus disseminate their knowledge. Asking for further payment could denote a lack of professional ethics. Still others (perhaps an even smaller minority) even consider that requiring the students they teach to buy the books they have written is unethical, feeling that such material should by rights be digitized and placed online. These various positions reflect different levels of conflict of interest. The debate, though just beginning, will reach unknown heights in the years to come, to the point where the publishing industry might disappear, at least publishing houses as we know them today. To be continued...

Next, I presented the synchronous virtual classroom to him, again from the user/participant’s point of view. I insisted on the fact that this environment would allow him to continue implementing his own pedagogy, thanks to the two-way communication software. One of his chief concerns had been how all of this would play out online. I emphasized that this software, besides enabling two-way audio communication, split-screen viewing, Web safari, application-sharing, and so on, was really not a lecture platform, but rather one for fostering problem-solving through dialogue. I also explained that his website, soon to be filled with documents, activities and resources, could better serve the purpose of lecturing because any kind of document could be uploaded there, such as Camtasia-enhanced (i.e. soundtrack-enabled), PowerPoint presentations. I told him that after putting all of your documents on the LMS (texts, Individual Assignments, Team Assignments, PowerPoint presentations with sound tracks, even video clips, etc.), you could lecture to your students and tell them everything you have to say about a given subject. And they could listen to your lecture when it best suited their schedule. Then, during the weekly online, real-time plenary sessions, your students...
would have their say. You would get a chance to listen to them report on what they had learned that week by working on the assignments (both Individual and Team). The synchronous platform gives them an opportunity to talk to you about what they have seen and understood. It is best implemented as a feedback tool. Afterwards, I proposed a series of tests with the synchronous platform. He seemed thrilled by the whole idea.

We then started looking at what the Week 1 plenary session would look like. The activities roll-out looked like this: first explain the technologies used in the course (backed up by one of the technical team members) and then move on to his course syllabus. In actual fact, these explanations would simply be a reminder because the students, upon enrolling in the course, would be automatically invited by email to take a tutorial on how the virtual classroom works, before the first session. After going through his syllabus (which would be up on the screen in PowerPoint format) and fielding the usual questions (usually on assessment details), he could then benefit from the platform’s interactive components to conduct a “pre-test”: a student survey to establish their degree of familiarity with course content. The idea here was to stimulate the students’ imagination, to motivate them to stay in the course and to show why this course was a necessary part of their training.

Pleased that the Week 1 outline was sufficiently planned, we moved on to review the Individual and Team Assignments for Week 2. The professor, although a complete novice in online learning, had more than 20 years’ experience in higher education, and he knew full well how to communicate with his students. Loyal to his teaching style, he intended to review the texts to be read and the exercises to be completed before each plenary session. I talked with him about my “hourglass” concept of how a plenary session might proceed (see Figure 7) and he immediately said “It’s similar to what I have already been doing!” What interested him in this figure was that the procedure had been graphically represented. A lively discussion ensued on concepts emerging from his content that could easily be visualized. I proposed that we return to his plenary sessions because I wanted to make sure that he would be ready in time. He replied that, thanks to Figure 7, he now knew exactly what he needed to do. He said he was going to refer to the readings of the week by asking questions randomly, as he usually did, systematically focussing on some
of the harder questions in the Individual Assignment and then moving on to the Team Assignment, picking teams at random to provide their answers. To conclude, he said he’d conduct a synthesis of the content studied during the week and then follow up with an introduction to what would be studied next week.

**Ex Post Facto Interview**

On the design process: “I found the process difficult in the beginning. I had to deal with two people, the IDC and you the designer. In fact, when we first started, we didn’t know exactly who would be taking the course. The department head told me the course was for a group of foreign students enrolled in a regular program in our field of study. Once the design work was almost finished and about half of the production was done, I learned that the course wouldn’t be for regular students; it was to be a more general course aimed at students from various programs. The course would be offered as part of a certificate program. So I discovered that the work that had done no longer fit the real needs because the clientele had changed along the way. But to top it off, the course methodology would have to change, meaning I could not use the Socratic method. In terms of student assessment, there would be no ongoing assessment but instead, one final exam worth 100 per cent; this I did not agree with. I refused to teach a course based on a method to which I did not adhere. Fundamentally, there was a complete lack of communication between the decision-makers and those who were producing the course. Control was lost when the design of the activities changed directions.”

On the design model: “[Before starting,] I was aware of some of the design aspects. For instance, I was already using weekly readings and multiple-choice exams. So I had no trouble adapting to the [design] model. But the weekly ‘breakdown’ [into objectives, content and activities was something I had never done before but I was used to building weekly modules. What I liked best was the instructional method, the way of representing the subject matter and the data, and the way of simplifying it for those who are unfamiliar with the field of study, as is the case for first-year students. Incidentally, I used the method [sic] in my other courses. It is really interesting and useful. The results I’m getting are better. I find that
the courses I’ve designed with you are much better built and much more planned out intellectually. The instructional objectives are clearer.”

On the amount of course planning time required: “It took twice as long to set up this course than it took me the first time [I planned it]. Enough time to write a book! It did not take as much time [as it did the first time] to collect the resource materials. Breaking down the material into weeks is what took time. And defining objectives that are really targeted, developing corresponding activities, writing up quizzes, finding questions—providing students with the tools to understand the subject matter, the equivalent of twelve year-end exams, twelve times the explanations. I counted them all. Then I realized that I had done too much! If I had kept all of the exercises, there wouldn’t have been a single student left in the course by Christmas. I had to remove some team activities because the students just weren’t able to keep up.”

On student assessment: “The closed-end [weekly] quizzes are corrected automatically but I asked a lot of opened-end questions which required a lot of correction. By not setting boundaries, students were free to submit their exercises whenever they felt like it – it was chaotic. Some got them in early, others late. A lot of discipline was required to succeed in a course like this one. On the one hand, if I let things be, they didn’t finish the course. But, on the other hand, if I imposed a schedule, they dropped the course. I’m not sure where this is going. I always believed that this teaching method demanded a lot autonomy and discipline. It is not adapted to young students…it simply does not work. However, for civil servants, adult students, it’s fine. So there is a problem with enrolments. There are a lot of requirements; we have a quality program but not enough enrolments.”

On plenary sessions: “When testing the synchronous platform, some students participated in the trials. But others had problems in connecting. This type of teaching requires a lot of preparation; at least three hours of preparation for each course hour. The slides had to be sent to the technician twenty-four hours before the start of the course. I thought we could do a class] every week but we ended up meeting every two weeks, due to lack of attendance. It was optional. A lot of students couldn’t get
online, either because they had lost their password or for some other reason. The students did appreciate it but it required a lot of time and preparation [on my part]. You have to teach the course plus all the rest.”

On supplementary work: “Slides need to be prepared because you can’t have a student spend an hour and a half in front of an empty screen, it’s just not possible. So, you have to show slides. We had some problems... forgetting to download slides, technical problems, etc. I created slides for the course material every week. But I’m always behind. If it’s Week 8, I’m reviewing Week 7 material to summarize it.”

On the workload: “It took a lot of time to prepare the slides. [This course] is the only thing I’ve done all year. I did not write a book, not an article... I can’t do anything else. It’s not normal. It’s too much. And it’s not finished yet!”

On how the course turned out: “It appears that the course we designed is not adapted to non-regular students – it’s too demanding. But, fortunately, I can reuse everything we’ve done in my regular courses.”

On interaction: “There’s a problem with interaction. The students tend to not intervene freely. So I end up lecturing and they seem to like that. This lack of interaction is always the same, whether we’re in class on campus or in virtual class online. Some have not done their readings. Their attitude seems to be: “we want the professor to summarize what we haven’t taken the time to read.” Especially among adults, this attitude is widespread. They’re passive... bombarding them with questions is what’s needed... I don’t really know where I am at with all of this. They seem to like the course, the slides and presentations. We’ll see what the evaluations say after the course.”

On the software: “Another problem surfaced during course development. Regular students usually access an online website to consult the databases but the site owners insist that the [software] be used only by regular students. Since this course is aimed at non-regular students, this creates a new problem.”
On results stemming from the design process: “The course is now much stronger, much better built. What’s clear is, from an instructional point of view, I am very satisfied. I did not put my other projects aside for nothing. The documents produced are very interesting. It is very satisfying to see some beautiful visual presentations. Technically speaking, I want to be more autonomous...I am very independent. It is part of my profession.”

On potential research: “[This design work] made me think more about communications, such as teaching seminars in my area of study. There is certainly a lot to think about.”

On student autonomy: “What really astounded me was that one of my students is so enthusiastic about this online course [which promotes student autonomy] that he decided to enrol in the regular program.”

On online learning and eye-to-eye contact: “One of the problems with distance education is that we don’t know our students. In terms of communication, it is said that 90 per cent of it is non verbal..., but I can’t see my students and they can’t see me.”

On instructional design: “On the whole, the subject matter is much more structured. If the student is not active during the [online] session, he is during the assignments [during the week]. I try to make sure that the didactic documents they have to read are closely linked to the concepts that I present in class.”

On getting students engaged in dialogue: “Some have not read anything and don’t know what to say, while others have read everything and understood nothing and have nothing to say; still others have read and understood everything, and so they have nothing to say.”

On accessibility and autonomy: “Strictly from an accessibility point of view, these courses are accessible. In the past, students would never have been able to take these courses. It’s an important victory, but it’s not for everyone. One must be autonomous, and most young people lack the discipline to attend class and do these assignments every week.”