Two Heads Are Better Than One: Collaborative Development of an Online Course Content Template

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Abstract

The authors collaborated to address an institutional need for a high-quality, high-enrollment online introductory psychology course. The course needed to be teachable by different types of potential instructors, including permanent, full-time faculty and temporary, part-time faculty, with a minimum of preparation time needed to set up the course. Although a successful web course had been developed in the past, it was tied to one specific instructor; this fact, plus the low capacity designed into the course, made it cost-prohibitive to offer on a regular basis. Prior efforts to create a course content template teachable by temporary faculty had run into faculty resistance around ownership of the course and quality concerns. This collaboration emphasized the strengths of each contributor, resulting in a final product equal or superior in effectiveness to the face-to-face version of the course.

Keywords: online instruction, online course development, collaboration, adjunct, tenure, cost savings, course redesign

Introduction

Meeting the demand for large-enrollment, lower-division courses is typically one of the greatest challenges academic departments face, particularly in the present-day situation of drastically shrinking budgets. Hiring temporary or adjunct faculty to teach these courses is one way of meeting this demand. Creating fully online versions of these high-demand courses is a way to increase access to them. Even more tempting for departments is to hire temporary or adjunct faculty to teach fully online versions of these high-demand courses. All three of these strategies, however, raise major logistical and pedagogical concerns.

When implementing any of these three strategies, departments must take several factors into consideration. Some may question of the quality of instruction by temporary or adjunct faculty, although evidence is mixed regarding whether there are systematic differences in levels of student learning and success associated with adjunct and permanent faculty. Additionally, large, lower-division courses tend to "drift" over time, with wide variations in learning objectives and learning activities across different semesters and different instructors (Twigg, 2005), a problem that may be aggravated by high turnover among temporary instructors brought in to teach the course.

There are additional considerations that are specific to online courses. Quality of the starting version of the course is particularly important for online courses, because revising them is much more difficult than it is for their traditional face-to-face counterparts. In face-to-face courses, syllabi and materials can more easily be fine-tuned between semesters or even mid-semester. In fully online courses, making adjustments once the course has started is time-consuming, technically difficult and can negatively affect the flow of the course. Furthermore, online courses require substantially more lead time to prepare than do traditional courses, and this preparation requires specialized skills in online design and use of the relevant technology. Berge and Mrozowski (2001), Care and Scanlan (2001), Chute, Thompson, and

Hancock (1999), Robinson (2000), Verduin and Clark (1991), and Walton (2001) all emphasize that the planning phase is of major importance in online distance learning. Asking permanent, full-time faculty to create and teach a high-quality online course may be challenging due to the training and lead time needed, but is at least within reason given their full-time status. Asking temporary or adjunct faculty to do this is more than what can reasonably be expected given the modest pay, minimal lead time that is typical in adjunct hiring situations, and concerns of adjunct faculty related to all of their hard work and time investment not necessarily being tied to continued employment.

To address some of these concerns, specifically those related to online course consistency and faster start-up time, many universities are creating "templates" for online courses. Templates are a way to create efficiencies and bring more consistency to online offerings (see, e.g., Stewart, Bachman, & Babb, 2009). At many universities these templates are being created by the divisions/departments of distance learning/education, for example, the e-Learning Center at the host university for this project. For the purpose of this paper these templates will be referred to as online course *design* templates. Online course design templates set up the online environment, laying out the essential features such as mailbox, announcements, and calendar tools, while typically also providing a consistent appearance with respect to graphics. Providing design templates enables faculty to worry less about course structure and design and more about course content, student assignments and interactions.

A variation of this approach is to borrow another instructor's already-existing course shell. An existing course shell from another instructor will have the essential features as well as course content. The course instructor then modifies the materials to fit his or her preference for the course. Although this approach is more efficient than starting from the blank course shell, there is an issue of one instructor's preferences being much different from another's.

The second approach is to use a publisher's pre-packaged course shell. The publisher's course shell is imported, usually by the institutions technology services, into the instructor's course management system. The instructor can then modify, to a limited extent, the materials and tools within the course shell. Unfortunately, experience has shown the pre-packaged course shells to be difficult to modify.

The publisher's course shells are also specific to the publisher's textbook, with most or all of the material in the shell being linked to the publisher's server. This ties the user to the specific textbook/publisher, such that a change in textbook can result in a complete course shell redesign. These course shells may or may not be compatible with the courseware/learning management system in use at the host institution, which in turn has a major impact on how the course will appear to students, ease of use by students and instructors, and how technical support will be provided. At the extreme end of the compatibility spectrum, some publishers (e.g., McGraw-Hill) provide content within their own stand-alone course management systems, which contain all of the learning management functions (e.g., gradebook, student tracking, assessments) for the course.

A third approach is to use an online course shell *content* template. This approach uses a course shell template that has been created by faculty within the department offering the course. More than a course shell design template, but similar to the pre-packaged publisher's shell, a course shell content template includes all of the tools and course content needed for the course. One of the advantages of this approach is that the design is unique to the department and host institution's goals and course expectations rather than those of the textbook publisher. Another advantage is easy customization by future instructors so that they can modify the course to add "personality" and updated content to the course.

Turning now to the present project, the first author had developed a very successful web course. It was developed by her and was directly tied to her. This fact, plus the low capacity (typically 30 students) designed into the course, made it cost-prohibitive to offer on a regular basis. The second author was, at the time, adjunct faculty. He had been teaching for the department for several years prior to being approached about teaching a fully online version of Introduction to Psychology. The second author contacted the first author to see if he could look at her course design and content; a common practice for both tenure-line and adjunct faculty. Upon review of the first author's material, the second author found it difficult to adapt the design and content, particularly given that the planned course would have a much higher capacity (60 – 90 students).

During this interim planning phase, the second author chose to use an option offered by the textbook publisher: publisher-created course content already embedded in a design template. This option was initially appealing because the design was already complete and the content was already embedded into

the design template, complete with professional graphics. Despite this initial attractiveness, numerous problems soon arose.

The initial importing of the textbook publisher's course content was more difficult than expected, requiring the coordinated efforts of both the University's e-Learning center staff and the textbook publisher's technical support staff. Once imported into the University's course management system shell, the content was supposed to be customizable, with the capacity for the instructor to easily blend, add, edit, reorganize, and/or delete content. In fact, this customization process turned out to be cumbersome and error-prone. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of the content was either missing, mis-ordered, dead (in the case of Web links), or simply did not survive the import process. In the end, the instructor time needed to correct these problems completely wiped out the time savings from the premade materials. The access code students had to purchase to use the publisher-supplied content presented further obstacles, necessitating multiple communications between the second author, students and the textbook publisher's technical support staff. In summary, the publisher-supplied template produced no time savings for the instructor, did not ensure quality, and proved frustrating to the students, who had paid additional charges for the use of the template. As a final indignity, much of the surviving content consisted of the same materials already available on the publisher's free Web site. Table 1 summarizes the major differences between using a publisher-supplied content template and a faculty-generated content template.

Given the shortcomings of commercially created content templates, faculty-created content templates seem to strike a good balance between efficiency and quality. Unfortunately, faculty may perceive content templates as a case of a tenure-line instructor's hard work being unjustly appropriated , thus undermining the department support and buy-in needed to sustain such a project. In the authors' experience, faculty cited these concerns in several discussions of how best to direct the development of online course offerings. These discussions reached few firm resolutions, however, those opposed to the template concept also conceded that the alternatives – all online development and subsequent teaching being done by permanent faculty, all development and subsequent teaching being done by adjunct faculty, or limiting the development of online offerings – were also problematic.

Furthermore, there were few available models of how such a process would work, further distorting faculty perceptions. One common view was that simply making course materials available to an incoming instructor would constitute the bulk of course development, when in actuality and as mentioned previously, it can be surprisingly difficult to step into a course someone else has designed for him or herself to teach. Typically, there is no documentation, meaning explicit instructions, on how to use the course materials or what the learning goals of these materials are. This can be particularly problematic in the online environment, where there are often dynamic, technically complex computer-based activities designed specifically for that course. It can also be time-consuming for the incoming instructor to figure out the best places where the course can be customized for his or her own style, or even where the course must be customized from one semester to the next (e.g., in the *Information about the Instructor* section of a welcome page).

These difficulties can be addressed fairly easily, but only if the course is developed ahead of time with the incoming instructor, and his or her needs to modify/personalize, in mind. This means not only creating documentation and setting up easy-to-use, effective materials, but also the more subtle matter of perspective. The typical individual method of course development in which there is little collaboration or feedback from other professionals is poorly suited for the task of developing a course that is easily grasped by another instructor, whose approach and background will be different. The gap is especially glaring when it is a permanent faculty member developing for the future adjunct instructor who is more and more likely to be the one using the template. Adjunct instructors face a special set of challenges, relative to other types of faculty. Because adjuncts often hold unrelated, full-time jobs, they may not be able to allocate the time and resources (including professional development and training) needed to be effective in the online classroom (Shelton & Saltsman, 2006). It is reasonable, therefore, that if adjuncts are the "end users" of the template, input from an experienced adjunct instructor will greatly aid in development.

Table 1. Comparison between publisher-supplied and faculty-generated content: Introduction to Psychology, Northern Arizona University, versus typical publisher supplied content.

	Publisher Supplied	Faculty Generated
Faculty access to course content prior to course adoption	Preview may be limited to "demo" mode.	All material fully visible prior to a
	Procedure for importing varies by publisher.	Instructors import content using automated process that requires advanced technical skills.
Example Learning Materials	Test/quiz banks, video clips, flashcards, interactive animations, graphics, crossword puzzles, learning modules, and links to external material.	Written and audio material, orientation to online environment discussion topics, links to external material, learning objectives
Assessments	Test banks; may be formatted in ways that are not fully compatible with all course management systems	Short-answer responses to tutorials and video clips, multiple-choice quizzes, orientation quiz, pre-post learning assessment.
Ease of use/Technical Support	Moderate to minimal setup time. Modifications may be difficult.	Setup time is considerable, depends heavily on faculty training and experience.
	Technical support may be available through the publishing company, and may also be handled by the instructor.	Technical support may be available through the host institution, or be handled by the instructor.
Cost to students	Usually an additional fee, which may be minimal (some as low as $4.00).	None beyond textbook and course tuition.
	Students may have to buy an "access code" to access the shell.	
	Usually a 7-15 day free trial period	
Summary of advantages and disadvantages	Setup time can be minimal, but compatibility and support issues may cost time later.	Requires substantial upfront investment of faculty time and technical support by the host institution.
	Attractive, professional graphics.	Features such as graphics and animations usually more limited.
	Interactive activities such as animated flashcards.	Can be modified easily, e.g., with adoption of a new textbook.
	Difficult to modify or customize.	
	Book-specific. Most of the materials belong to the publisher and cannot be transferred to a new course	Content typically richer, e.g., with inclusion of course-specific audio and written materials, and customized.
		Book-independent, can also be instructor-independent if designed as such

The purpose of this article is to provide such a model, with the goal of disseminating a concrete "roadmap" to collaborative development, including ways to build faculty buy-in for the process. The present development project was supported by a small intramural grant, with the goal of creating a course that could be re-taught for a number of semesters without re-development each time a new instructor took on the course. The advantage of collaborative development was that it allowed the developers to take advantage of each contributor's relative strengths: In the case of the adjunct instructor, these included experience with a wide variety of online teaching activities and student ability levels, and knowledge of what would make teaching a fully-developed online course easier from the adjunct's perspective; in the

case of the permanent instructor, experience developing online courses and in-depth knowledge of course material.

Method

The authors began by reviewing online materials they had used in the past to determine what had worked well and what would need to be revamped or replaced. They also worked together to articulate their goals, priorities and guiding design principles, and establish how these would best serve the diverse needs of the students (something that instructors working individually ought to do, but often do not; see, e.g., Bain, 2004). Guiding principles included many drawn from Twigg's (2005) course redesign concept, including the following:

- Mastery learning, in which learning activities are not fully self-paced but in which students have some choice about when and in what order to master specific learning goals
- On-demand help, in which students receive frequent, timely feedback, and in which there are opportunities for social contact with other students.
- Active learning

The authors were also strongly guided by the cognitive psychology background of the first author. This led to the design choice of emphasizing frequent, lower-stakes exams, an approach supported by extensive research demonstrating that tests function as highly effective learning opportunities (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006b). In addition, the authors chose to structure the course in highly modular fashion, in which the requirements and activities are similar for every sub-part of the course, based on positive student feedback from prior course versions using a similar approach.

Over a period of approximately three months, both authors met to discuss the goals and strategies they wished to see used in the final version of the course, and worked separately to edit materials and set them up within the University's course management system, Vista Blackboard, as a course content template that could be imported by individual instructors. The second author also put together materials documenting the structure and workings of the course, a guidebook of sorts for incoming instructors. A Web development grant from the host institution's e-Learning Center supported the extra effort during this time.

The collaboratively developed course used *Exploring Psychology* (7th edition), by David Myers. Materials also included a set of "online lectures," in parallel written and audio format. The written-format lectures comprised a set of Web pages presenting material in a concise, informal style with links and illustrations where appropriate. Audio format lectures comprised a set of downloadable MP3s, each covering one chapter of material in 30-60 minute segments. The first author used *Garage Band* to record and edit these segments, which more closely approximated the style of an informal podcast rather than that of a traditional in-class lecture. Each module of the course covered three chapters of the textbook, for a total of five modules. For each module, students were required to take three multiple-choice quizzes (one per chapter with the option to re-take each quiz one time), participate in one online discussion, and complete one "media-based assignment." To better allow students to tailor the class to their own interests, and to head off any objections to potentially sensitive topics, the authors allowed students to choose from a set of options for the online discussions and media-based assignments. Lastly, students were required to complete a set of orientation assignments intended to ensure that they were familiar with course requirements, online learning and the Blackboard Vista system. Appendix A gives detailed descriptions of the major features of the course, along with excerpts and examples.

The redesigned course was taught for the first time by the first author over the Winter intersession of 2008-2009. It was fine-tuned and then taught by the second author in the Spring semester of 2009, and finally handed over to a new adjunct instructor (F.T.) not affiliated with this project in Fall 2009.

Results

Students in all sections of the host institution's Introduction to Psychology course complete a brief assessment of general psychology knowledge during the first and last weeks of the semester. This assessment consists of 25 multiple-choice items modified from Thompson & Zamboanga (2004). It is not tied to a specific textbook, and students receive a small amount of course credit for completing it, without regard to their answers. They do not receive feedback on their answers, and items are identical across the pre-test (first week) and post-test (last week) components of the semester.

At the time of this writing, no results are yet available for the Fall 2009 semester, so analyses focus on the Spring 2009 semester. Performance of students in the collaboratively developed Web version of the course (n = 66) was compared to performance of students in a traditional, face-to-face version of Introduction to Psychology held during the same semester, using the same textbook (n = 374). Analyses focused on students who completed both the pre-test and post-test assessments, so that scores could be compared using within-subjects statistical tests rather than between-subjects tests, which are less statistically powerful. 37 students in the collaboratively developed Web course (56%) and 171 (46%) students in the traditional course completed both assessments. Mean percent correct in the collaboratively developed Web course was 33.51% (SD = 11.24) on the pretest and 46.16% (SD = 18.1) on the post-test. Mean percent correct in the traditional course was 34.17% (SD = 12.09) on the pre-test and 41.03% on the post-test (SD = 15.10). In other words, students in the Web course showed 12.65% improvement across the pre- and post-tests, compared to 6.86% improvement across tests in the traditional section.

Statistically significant improvement across pre- and post-tests was observed for both the collaboratively developed Web course (t [36] = 4.49, $p < .001$) and traditional course (t [170] = 5.87, $p < .001$). There was significantly more improvement in the collaboratively developed web course compared to the face-to-face course, as evidenced by a significant interaction between course type (Web vs. traditional) and time of testing (pre-test vs. post-test), F (1, 206) = 4.19, p = .020).

Focused discussion with the adjunct instructor presently teaching the course produced uniformly positive feedback about the structure and ease of use of the resulting course template. Two other instructors have also approached the authors regarding how to adapt the materials and structure for use in their own courses. In particular, instructors have praised the user-friendly modular course structure, the orientation materials, and the degree of choice students have over which topics to focus on in Discussions and Media-Based Assignments.

Conclusions

The results support the effectiveness of unconventional approaches to designing and delivering high-demand courses such as Introduction to Psychology. Incorporating the perspective and needs of permanent and temporary faculty during the development process is one way to address both quality and access, ensuring the best possible student experience over the long term.

Besides the collaborative approach, several factors contributed to the success of the project. While some faculty in the host department remain skeptical of the idea of full-time faculty developing courses for delivery by other levels of instructor, the department is generally positive toward the results of this project. One reason may be that the authors have positioned this course as a high-quality alternative that complements existing face-to-face course offerings rather than threatening them, which in turn is made possible by the high demand for the course. The project is also well placed within a larger set of institutional goals, which focus on increasing quality and reducing instructional cost.

Lastly, the host institution's well-developed instructional technology infrastructure was critical for the project's success. Both authors, as well as the adjunct instructors involved with the course thus far, have had formal training in the Vista Blackboard system provided by the host institution. The authors stress that while course content templates can save a great deal of time, they are no substitute for online teaching skills, and use of a template by individuals unskilled in Web delivery will most likely result in a poor experience all around.

The use of a systematic assessment measure also contributed greatly to the perceived success and legitimacy of the project. Assessment tools are rarely perfect, or even close to it, yet having even an imperfect assessment method in place makes it possible to make a broad comparison across collaboratively developed and traditional versions of a course. This type of empirical evidence helps advance discussion of development efforts from subjective perceptions of course quality toward a more objective focus on student outcomes. In the present project, student outcomes were clearly not reduced for the collaboratively developed online course, and may have even been improved, compared to the traditional course.

The authors envision that faculty and administrators will use the present project to sidestep many of the common problems associated with developing and delivering online courses. For high-demand, high-impact online courses, departments should consider investing extra effort and expertise in the development process, with the anticipated payoff of being able to re-use the end product in the form of a content template. When course developers understand from the outset that their goal is a more generic

template rather than highly individualized materials, this is feasible, particularly if more than one staffer collaborates on the project.

The present project also stands as yet another example of the effectiveness of online course delivery, given that, if anything, learning gains outstripped those accomplished by the traditional, face-to-face version of the course. This finding may encourage those embarking on the demanding task of building fully online course offerings, and it may also become part of the strategy for building faculty support for such efforts. In times of reduced resources and ever-expanding demand for access, it is crucially important to remember that online course offerings are not merely adequate alternatives to traditional course delivery, but can potentially offer outstanding instruction. Done correctly, online instruction can save money, but it can also provide exceptional quality.

In summary, new technologies and new institutional pressures should encourage faculty to take a new view of how courses are developed and delivered, and by whom. In the case of this project, collaboration took the form of tenure-line/non-tenure line instructors' working together, but there are many other configurations that could be explored. By challenging the traditional one-instructor, one-course approach, departments may uncover a wealth of new ways to deliver better courses using the resources they already have at hand.

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Appendix A

Major Features of the Content Template, With Examples

Orientation Materials. Student learning materials included two pages of online material covering course policies, technology/broadband requirements, technical support contact information, and tips for success in the course, situated in a folder on the Course Content page within Blackboard Vista. These learning materials also listed seven tasks students complete in order to demonstrate their ability to navigate the online course environment.

Example excerpts from the Orientation Materials:

TASK 1: Take a moment and go to the Vista e-mail system and send me an e-mail that contains the number for the "Academic Computing Help Desk". Put "Academic Computing Help Desk Number" in the subject line.

Telephone: If for some reason you cannot get in touch with me via the Vista e-mail system, then, and only then, try the WebMail system. If neither of these works, you can call the Psychology Department office at (928) 523-3063. You can leave a message for me there.

Announcements: At times I will post announcements for the class. I recommend that you make it a habit to check the announcements page on a regular basis.

TASK 2: Go to the "Announcements" page and read the first announcement.

Calendar: There is a calendar for this course. It contains information pertaining to the course and due dates for assignments.

TASK 3: Find the course calendar (go to "Calendar" under "Course Tools") and send me an e-mail stating what is on the calendar on December 19, 2008. Put "Calendar" in the subject line.

Discussions: Part of your final grade comes from your participation in discussions. It is important that you be able to navigate around the "Discussions" area of Vista.

TASK 4: Go to the "Discussions" area and do the following:

This is a very brief exercise designed to help everyone get a sense of who else is in the class.

1. Write 1-2 sentences about yourself (only share what you are comfortable sharing) and then complete this sentence:

When you think of me, imagine...

Publish this paragraph for everyone to read.

2. Read the posts from the other class members. This means that you may need to return to this discussion post after you make your post.

3. Respond to at least two other classmates' postings.

2. Orientation Assessment. The content template contains a twenty-question quiz over orientation materials, due before any other assignments or assessments, situated in the Assessments tool within Blackboard Vista. Students may take this quiz twice and only the highest score counts.

Example orientation assessment items:

Online learning is not easier than the traditional educational process and learning does not occur passively. Like a traditional classroom, how much you learn depends on how much effort you put into class work. To get the full benefits, you need to _____.

1. become involved with campus activities

2. become actively involved in the learning experience

3. create a MySpace page related to psychology

4. understand the difference between molecules and atoms

It is highly recommended that you have access to at least a DSL or Cable Modem connection to the Internet, especially when you are _____.

1. reading your textbook chapters

2. taking quizzes and exams

3. studying for exams

4. out walking your dog

3. Discipline-Specific Content (Written and Audio). Course content includes approximately 120 online pages of written material, including one page of learning objectives for each of the 5 modules. The same material is covered in one 30-45 minute podcast-style audio file per module, which is in MP3 format.

   Example excerpt from written course content:

   Chapter 1: What is Psychology Really About?

   Here's the formal definition: Psychology is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes.

   As a profession and a field of study, psychology is pretty misunderstood. It's also a field that has changed a lot in the last few decades, so the popular image of psychologists tends to be out of date. Here are some common misconceptions about psychology:

   • Myth 1: "Psychologist" means someone who counsels people about their problems.

   • Fact: Many psychologists are therapists or counselors, but many others work in other fields including public health, sports training, information technology, human resources, and education. In addition, not everyone who works as a counselor is trained as a psychologist. Some counselors have degrees in social work or education rather than psychology!

   • Myth 2: Counselors do therapy by analyzing people's dreams and family history over a long period of years.

   • Fact: This approach, known as "psychoanalysis," was popular during the early days of psychological therapy and is practiced by some counselors today. However, contemporary counselors tend to take a much more brief and focused approach to solving specific problems in the "here and now," rather than focusing on a person's past.

   • Myth 3: Psychology has more in common with the study of literature and history than with sciences such as biology and chemistry.

   • Fact: Today's psychologists tend to base their ideas on studies carried out using similar techniques found in sciences such as biology. These include forming hypotheses that can be tested by gathering and statistically analyzing data. Most psychologists, like other scientists, have a very skeptical outlook on ideas in their field - we don't believe in something until we have evidence to support it. (That's why most of us take a pretty dim view of ideas without much supporting evidence, such as ESP!)

   *Try this **click'n'match** quiz to test yourself on what psychologists do. In addition, you can visit **www.apa.org** to learn more about careers in psychology (as well as just about anything else you would like to know about the field - it's a very big site!)*

4. Chapter Quizzes. Fifteen multiple-choice assessments cover material from each textbook chapter and set of written/audio course materials. Students can take each assessment twice and keep only the highest score. Each attempt draws randomly from a set of approximately 30 questions.

5. Media Based Assignments. These assignments, situated within the Assignments tool within Blackboard Vista, asked students to engage with online materials freely available on the Web, then return to the Blackboard Vista shell to complete a short written essay relating the online materials to psychology. Students have a choice of approximately 4-10 online resources to choose from for each of the 5 modules. The purpose of these assignments was to build critical thinking and communication skills and to engage students with course material in novel ways.

   Example Media Based Assignment:

   Stanford Prison Simulation

   (One option under Module 5: Disorders, Therapy and Social Psychology)

   YES THIS REALLY HAPPENED!

   Look over this web site about the Stanford Prison Simulation: http://www.prisonexp.org/

Then complete the following assignment:

Go to "Assignments" under Course Tools (left side of the page).

Click on "Module 5: Media-Based Assignment".

Respond to the following questions:

1. What would happen if someone tried to replicate this study now? What are some of the ethical issues related to this study?

2. How could an individual so easily fall into a role? Why didn't the "prisoners" just leave? "Surely this couldn't happen to me?" Or could it? How powerful is peer pressure? Why do you think peer pressure is as powerful as it is?

3. Many of these individuals had to go in to therapy after the simulation was over. Does this surprise you? Why do you think they need to go in to therapy?

4. Tell me why you think learning about this experiment helps to better understand psychology.

6. Discussion Forums. The content template comes with 3-4 detailed discussion questions per module. The purpose of these forums was to create a dynamic online environment (i.e., one in which new content would appear on a daily basis), give students the opportunity to apply course material to their own lives, and to build a supportive social atmosphere.

Example discussion topic:

As the textbook states, psychological disorders have been treated with a bewildering array of harsh and gentle methods.

Psychotherapy (often referred to as therapy or counseling) is treatment involving psychological techniques.

The public impression of psychotherapy is varied. Much of this impression is a result of the media, e.g., motion pictures and television.

For this discussion posting, give an example of psychotherapy that appears in media and provide your critique of how it is portrayed. For example, in the television show "Frazier," the lead character, Frazier, is a psychiatrist who has a radio show. He confesses to using a psychoanalytic approach, but in reality it is not. Additionally, it would be very unlikely that a psychiatrist would do a radio show. Most psychiatrists primarily see patients for biomedical therapy.

Have some fun with this. There are numerous examples out there.

Read the other students' posts. Reply to at least two other posts.

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