The Creation and Benefits of an Online Orientation

For the SUNYIT Information Design and Technology Program

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This year, incoming graduate students will come from all kinds of learning backgrounds and most will have no idea what to expect when stepping into an online instructional environment for the first time. My project serves as the buffer to help with this transition. I developed an online orientation package that is a "getting started" guide for new Information Design and Technology online graduate students and helps them overcome any anxiety that may occur. This project is needed not only to lower incoming stress but also lower the time needed to search for this important information. Having everything available will put the immediate focus on learning instead of stumbling to get started. I have been a student at SUNYIT for five years both off and online so I have the knowledge of what an incoming student will need to know in order to be set up properly to succeed. Therefore, this project addresses the question; what can an online orientation provide students new to the SUNYIT Information Design and Technology online graduate program? The challenge in the creation of this project was to figure out the most valuable information to include because an overflow of information can be counter productive. The design of the package was also important because a student needs to be able to easily find and access what they need at the start of their first semester of this program. I created this project using principles I learned from courses in the Information Design and Technology program. These principles included instructional and website design. The final prototype I present here will be a good resource of techniques and information that can be included when the real online orientation is created.

Orientation- a usually general or lasting direction of thought, inclination, or interest.

Induction- an initial experience.

Coherence- integration of diverse elements, relationships, or values.

Facilitation- the increasing of the ease or intensity of a response by repeated stimulation.

Social Presence Theory- the degree of awareness of the other person in a communication interaction.

User Centered Design- a design philosophy and a process in which the needs, wants, and limitations of end users of an interface or document are given extensive attention at each stage of the design process.

Interface- the place at which independent and often unrelated systems meet and act on or communicate with each other.

Malleability- capable of being shaped or adapted.

Transcendence- lying beyond the ordinary range of perception.

Purpose- the reason for which something exists or is done.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In today's current education climate, college students are vastly different from last generation's students in a number of ways. Each student comes into an educational environment with a different background and it's the job of the school to understand that each student is different and to prepare them to not be overwhelmed with what is expected so learning can be done effectively. So what makes up today's college student? Well first, the student demographics have changed. Since 1970 there has been a large increase in the number of older students enrolling, making the age range of the classroom very diverse (Hansen, p 1). I can imagine that the latest economy problems and the loss

of jobs could add to this discrepancy. The proportion of culturally diverse students has also increased and continues to. "By approximately 2030, the proportion of non-Hispanic white high school students will drop to the 50% mark. Cultural and ethnic sensitivities will make the classroom a very different place from what it is today" (Hansen, p 1). Another change in student demographics from last generation is that students with disabilities have increased. Before the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, students with disabilities could not have equal opportunity at a higher education (Smith, 1993). The family situations also have a clear impact on how today's student is made up. Many students are the first ones in their family to go to college and this can conflict with their academic success. This is due to the lack of support at home and criticism for doing work when the family has no idea about the commitment that goes into higher level learning (Mitchell, p 13). Low income families also make it so students need to pay for their schooling and thus work and learn at the same time (Mitchell, p 13). Family divorce can also have a major impact on the make up of a student. "For some, this might lead to an accelerated maturation process, but for many others it leaves scars and distrust – maybe even cynicism - of adult authority figures" (Hansen, p 2).

In the past 10 years, technological advances have made it possible for students to learn completely online. The clear advantage to learning online is that students can learn from any location and on their own time. Online learning allows people to continue their education because of the low cost and time efficient setup (Richardson & Swan, p 69). "Today's online courses are not restricted to lecture notes and a discussion board. Distance education courses now include a wide range of programs such as multimedia technology, streaming video, graphics, voice communication, applets, and other advanced

technologies that may have to be installed and configured to meet the course objectives" (Mensch, p 2). New roles for teachers have developed because of this new technology. Teachers need to build up a learning community where there is interactivity and interaction. They also need to pay more attention to detail and structure while finding original ways to convey emotion (Swan, 2002). Even with all the technology in place, many think that learning online will never be as effective as in-classroom learning. Since the majority of learning takes place outside of the classroom, you could say that if the instruction has the same quality in both environments, there would be no difference on the effectiveness (Swan, p 16). With many people switching to online learning as their graduate education preference, an effective online preparation needs to be put in place.

There are many examples where colleges have realized the traditional orientation process does not work for online learners and have adopted new systems that specifically prepare these kinds of students. In 2009, The University of Sydney created a website for orienting their graduate students. "A schema addressing three dimensions (interpersonal, technical and reflective) was constructed and operationalised as a staged orientation plan (GettingOnTrack). Students are able to move through the three stages participating in activities which align with their needs before, during and after enrollment" (Lever, et al. 2009). There were 179 students from six graduate health sciences courses that participated in giving feedback to the GettingOnTrack website (Lever, et al. 2009). One student said "It works well because it is like a practice run to the real thing" (Lever, et al. 2009). They also found out that there was a need for the service throughout the semester, not only before the start of courses (Lever, et al. 2009).

In 2004, a one credit orientation course at North Carolina State University was introduced for students that were new to online learning. The course was designed by four instructional design students of the university (Bozarth, et al. p 87). The topics they wanted to include in their orientation project were: setting appropriate expectations, guidance in online etiquette, information on available support resources and an assessment of the readiness of the student for online learning (Bozarth, et al. p 88). The lack of a consistent way for students to be prepared and not having the ability test out the technology in a realistic setting were some of the reasons for the students to embark on this study (Bozarth, et al. p 88).

The UCL Centre for Health Informatics and Multiprofessional Education in London redesigned its induction program for postgraduates in 2007. The goal of the induction program was to give students a chance to meet their personal instructors and to take part in information retrieval exercises to get the basics on how to read health informatics articles down (Murphy, p 2). They designed the induction to contain two parts, a face to face and then an online portion. "Our rationale for having two forms of induction was that since none of our students had prior experience of online learning they would be more likely to understand the educational philosophy and the commitment they would need to make if they had the chance to meet with staff and other students before they began to engage with them and the learning materials online" (Murphy, pp 2-3). The online portion was to be completed within ten days and was divided into six topics. The six topics were an introduction, a learning experience sharing portion, a review of study skills, how to prepare a bibliography, how to explore health informatics resources and going beyond the induction (Murphy, p 4).

Many who have created technological environments took advantage of user and human centered design to give the user full control over what is being transferred into their brain and to provide feedback and input during the process.   In Cohn, et al (2002), a new design was needed for a health website that would be effective in transferring information to patients. The design let the focus be on what the patients and physicians thought was most important, resulting in a site that was easy to use (Cohn, et al, p 329). In another example, Butler, et al (1996) describes the creation of a digital library for the University of California that used a user centered design. They took actual problems users had with the old system to enhance the redesign. "Furthermore, implementing them in an actual system requires that designers understand who the users are, how they do their work, the purposes for which they will use the DL, their needs and prior knowledge, and their response to the prototype: in other words, user-based, iterative design" (Butler, et al, 1996).

Ebner & Holzinger (2006) used user center design in a higher education setting to create an e-learning game. The method of user input they used was creating a questionnaire for the students to fill out and to give their opinion on what aspects in a game is important to them that will fuel the motivation to learn. The results had the similar learning effects of traditional methods but a sense of joy and fun was expressed by the students (Ebner & Holzinger, p 21).

Billinghurst, et al (2007) presents evidence of the human centered design model being used to create an augmented reality handheld display. "The main task of the device was to support basic viewing of AR content and to enable users to navigate freely

through the content" (Billinghurst, et al, p 2). By using this way of design, the users were able to be part of every step of the design process. As a result, the data researched showed the value of the human centered design in understanding every users need. A usable augmented reality handheld device was created based off the users feeling that it was very comfortable to use (Billinghurst, et al, p 4).

In 2009, Fujitsu implemented human centered design to improve the usability of their cell phones. This included research, development and evaluation processes (Kanazawa et al, p 226). Improvements were immediately seen in the text messaging interface and the search functions on the cell phones. The high customer satisfaction due to this design method has given the company new opportunities to be competitive in the market (Kanazawa et al, p 231).

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

An orientation provides new students with their initial interaction with the university which can result in the students forming their first impressions about their own expectations (Murphy, p 1). The reason for an orientation is to "facilitate the student's successful integration into a new and unfamiliar academic and social setting" (Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, p 156). Scagnoli (2002) expands on this idea of facilitation by providing aspects that students need to be assisted in when being oriented. These include the transition process, academic integration and social integration (Scagnoli, p 3). Graduate students will need to be transitioned into an environment that is completely different from their previous school or study (Lever, et al., p 221). These students will be unfamiliar with the new administrative regulations and what is expected of them

(Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, p 156). Murphy (2008) thinks the orientation can help "non traditional" students make an easier transition to higher educational learning. Students must be motivated and familiar with university culture in order to succeed (Murphy, p 2). Graduate students usually take shorter courses, therefore the course work piles up quickly and if they aren't transitioned fully they will fall behind significantly (Lever, et al., p 221).

Having academic and social integration is important because it creates a learning climate where there are relationships between students and professors (Barber & Hassanien, p 36). "Entering university can be a daunting time, where unfamiliar faces and places surround each student. In order for students to feel less anxious and more at ease, it is important for those involved in induction to quickly create a sense of belonging" (Barber & Hassanien, p 36). To help with this process, orientations can provide students with information on student organizations, activities and services that will help them in the social transition (Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, p 156). Having social connections let students relate to other students and faculty which helps them adjust to academic demands and learning how to manage everything that goes into having academic success (Lehning, p 41).

An orientation is necessary for online students because they have to overcome different obstacles when learning because there are technological barriers in between the professor and the student. Shelton (2000) says "students come into online courses with different technological competencies, learning styles, communication skills, motivations and attitudes" (Shelton, p 1). An online orientation therefore needs to provide the learner with a minimum understanding of the interface being used to teach the material. She says

the faster the student learns the interface, the faster the student will focus on course learning (Shelton, p 3). "Without an orientation, online students would be left with traditional tools in a non-traditional environment. Because a reliance on technology changes the process of instructional delivery, introduction to the technological infrastructure of a technology-reliant program is necessary" (Leong & McKimmy, p 2937). Students will develop anxiety if they are not properly prepared to learn online. Anxiety can cause tension, insecurity, depression and insomnia (Hullinger, p 22) "Research shows that anxiety not only has effects upon behavior, but upon academic performance. This can lead to lower test scores and grade point averages, in addition to higher attrition and lower satisfaction" (Hullinger, p 22).

Without short term comfort with the online learning interface, frustration can occur that can lead to learners dropping out. Nash (2005) believes factors like lack of guidance, poor preparation, lack of introduction information, no support from the faculty and having trouble contacting them all contribute to the online learning dropout rates (Nash, p 1). Richardson and Swan (2003) believe the non face to face interactions of an online learning environment gives the student a disadvantage of not learning directly from a physical presence (Richardson & Swan, p 70). The non face to face communication can lead to students feeling disconnected from the program, have lower motivation and a lack of self direction (Lynch, 2001). The social presence theory states that you develop better communication when the person you are communicating with seems more "real" and therefore have a higher social presence (Richardson and Swan, p 70). Without the top level of communication, the adaptation of a new environment can

be difficult. An orientation would provide all this information leading to initial comfort for the learner.

It is hard to evaluate what makes a student a good candidate for the adjustment that needs to take place for online learning. Frankola (2001) believes that time management skills is the biggest factor in how well a student will succeed (Frankola, p 2). Palmer and Wojciechowski (2005) did a study on what factors will make a student succeed in online learning. The data for the study was gathered from students taking an online course at a Western Michigan community college from 2000 to 2003, a total of 9 semesters. Out of the characteristics studied, the student's prior grade point average and participation in the orientation session had the strongest connections to how a person will perform in an online course (Palmer & Wojciechowski, 2005). If a learner has a high sense of coherence, they will be able to make all the adjustments needed to be productive in an online learning environment. "Individuals who believe that the world is comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful will be more likely to engage in the developmental tasks associated with work adjustment and will have a more positive interaction with their environment" (Lustig & Strauser, p 129).

CHAPTER 4: DESIGN

To build an effective learning environment, design elements need to be implemented. The first element of design is human centered design. This element deals with characteristics that need to be included in technology to increase the control of the user (Cooley, p 66). The characteristics include: coherence, inclusiveness, malleability, engagement, ownership, responsiveness, purpose, panoramic and transcendence (Cooley,

pp 69-70). I constructed my project based on these nine characteristics. Human centered designs are needed because other designs fail to encourage human interest and only focus on the goal of the project (Gasson, p 41).

The **purpose** of this project is to create a learning environment that will let the user do the objective seamlessly. Since the objective is to orientate new IDT students, the site needs to be accessible, useable and contain all the information necessary. Since there are sites already available that contain some orientation information already, I implemented the characteristics of **panoramic** and **transcendence** by encouraging students to visit them for more knowledge.

This project utilizes **coherence** because it shows what technology can now do to help the orientation process. Using a website with screenshots and visual steps enhances the possibilities of future designs to give the user everything they need to feel as comfortable as possible in getting familiar with unknown material. The step by step process of orienting gives **responsiveness** to the user by displaying screenshots on what should be seen if they were doing everything correctly.

Inclusiveness is where "the system should be inviting and tend to invite you in and make you feel part of a community" (Cooley, p 68). Since my project is built for the IDT program, I have included a section that gets the new student a way to understand how the program works and other links to get them "familiar" with what to expect. This also forms **engagement** for the user because it creates the feeling of being included.

While the point of the project was to create an "event" where the student could view and participate in the whole thing all in one sitting, I also made a number of links on the top and side to give them the option to resume at any point. This customizability

option to view the orientation the way you want is how I utilized the concept of **malleability**. You therefore create **ownership** with the process because you can choose to do everything your way after being pointed in the right direction.

The second element of design I will be including is user centered design. "The role of the designer is to facilitate the task for the user and to make sure that the user is able to make use of the product as intended and with a minimum effort to learn how to use it" (Abras et al, p 2). When you begin to design, you need to recognize who your users are. The primary users are people who will actually use the finish product often, secondary users use it rarely and tertiary users are people who are affected by it (Abra et al, p 4). Once you have identified all your users, taking their opinions can measure how satisfying and effective the final result will be.

For this project, my primary users are the students that are new to the online Information Design and Technology program and needs to be facilitated to be prepared to learn effectively. My secondary users will be students who know most of the information on the site but will be looking at it just for a reminder or reference. The tertiary users are anyone affected by the information on the site. This can include faculty or students who are involved with the program.

To get these users involved in the design process, I set up a discussion which displayed my projected contents so far and got their opinions on them. My discussion directions said:

I am currently creating a thesis project entitled "The Creation and Benefits of an Online Orientation for The SUNYIT Information Design and Technology Program" and need

your input on the contents. The point of this project is to figure out the most important information and the best techniques of displaying the information that would potentially be included in an event style orientation that is made for online students who could not make the face to face meeting.

Current Project Sections

Program Overview- Program Requirements, Course Descriptions for Upcoming Semester, How to Access Library and Student Services

Registration- Look up classes, Add classes, View schedule, View and Paying Your Bill, Health Requirements/Waive Health Insurance and Submit Transcripts

Computer Services- Accessing and Using Email, Create It Account and Create Mac Account

Online Learning- How to Access Angel and the Technical Requirements for your computer

For Students: Explain your orientation experience when you entered the IDT program. What types of things did you have trouble grasping or needed help with initially? Look at the current project contents I have listed. Is there anything you would add or delete from that list?

For IDT Faculty: Explain your orientation experiences with students. What parts of the process do they usually have trouble with? What kinds of questions do students usually have in preparing to learn online? Also, take a look at the current project sections I have listed. Is there anything you would add or delete from that list?

The past orientation experiences that were described in the responses from the students and faculty provided me with what information to include and what not to include.

Many students brought up difficulties with initially creating their SITNET account. This account is used to access personal information as well as signing up for classes and using school resources. This is something I would have assumed students took care of before viewing the orientation but I realized after reading the comments that

it should be included. I then added in full instructions on the SITNET account and placed it as the first page at the start of the orientation.

The students and faculty also agreed that the course overview needed to contain more specific elements in the program overview section. These included credit requirements, registration tips, links to online media and past projects and also a section on free online tools/programs that every student should be familiar with before starting the program. I added in these suggestions.

The online learning section was a part I needed a lot of input on because there are orientations out there already that help with preparing students for SUNY's online learning network. The suggestions I had were to just include links to these tutorials and requirements. Having all the links in one spot is beneficial because the students would not have to search for them.

The full discussion transcripts are located in the back of this paper.

I chose a website to display this online orientation to take advantage of it being able to be accessed by anyone at any time. Also, a website makes it easy to be updated and changed throughout the creation process. To build this site, I used principles I learned in the advanced web design course that the Information Design and Technology program offers. These principles included color usage for attention/contrast and a common theme using Adobe Dreamweaver.

For the design, I used a traditional two panel display with one being for links on the side and the other being for the main content. The left links panel helps the user keep track of how far they have gone into the orientation and how much they have left. The

right content panel is bigger and keeps the focus on the information and to move on quickly and effortlessly.

The color scheme I chose was dark blue and black for the backgrounds and white for the text. The white text keeps the users attention on top of the dark background colors. All links are underlined and turn to yellow when rolled over. However, a flaw exists when using different browsers. Some browsers change the viewed links to purple which can blend. I tested this site throughout with the Firefox browser and it works best on there. This is a design flaw that needs to be taken into account because not everyone uses one browser.

To set this site apart, I used different techniques other than words to transfer knowledge. These techniques included annotated screen shots, a jing walkthrough and a quiz.

Screenshots of the actual site are located in the back of this paper.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

I evaluated how effective my created orientation was based on the opinions of students in the IDT program. After the project was completed, I created another discussion for students to complete that included questions on what they like about the site, what they dislike about the site, what information I may have missed, what they would change and what ways it can be improved. Overall, the feedback was great and specific.

One student said "I definitely believe this is a great tool for incoming IDT students. The side tabs are great in case a person needs to stop and come back. They won't need to redo the whole process". They also commented on the walkthrough of banner being great, the screen shots being helpful and wishing they had a list of tools before they started the program.

Another student said "Overall, the orientation looks good. I found it gives a concise overview of the key information for starting into the IDT program. The only thing I didn't like was the quiz. I'm not sure what its ultimate purpose is and it doesn't seem to do much to enhance the transmission of information to new students".

More critiques came from another student on a few clarifications with the wording on the types of user names and issues with the colors that resulted from using a different browser. Unlike the other student, this student felt like the quiz was very helpful and served its purpose of helping remember certain techniques you need to know for every semester. This student concluding by saying, "You have done a fantastic job in pulling all this together. This is going to be so helpful. I am glad you incorporated the Thesis information as well".

The full transcripts are located in the back of this paper.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY

My goal for this project was to provide graduate students new to the SUNYIT Information Design and Technology program a way to be prepared to learn online quickly and conveniently. The website format made my prototype easy to access and to critique. My research question asked what an online orientation can provide students

new to the SUNYIT Information Design and Technology online graduate program. Based on the assessment, it can be concluded that anyone that uses this orientation will be able to get answers and gain knowledge quickly even if they are experienced or not knowledgeable with the orientation process. The combination of the two models of design (user and human centered) made the most important information easily found, and gives the user full control without being overwhelmed.

The orientation information I included consisted of four sections; computer services, program overview, registration and online learning. The computer services section included setting up the SITNET account, accessing and forwarding student email and how to access and use the library services. The program overview consisted of the program requirements, thesis/project information, course descriptions for the upcoming semester and a list of tools needed for the program. The registration section included processes to look up classes, register for classes, view schedule, view/pay bill and waive health insurance. The online learning section consisted of a set of links and tips to get started with SUNY's online learning network.

There were many techniques that were beneficial in making it easy to transfer knowledge to anyone viewing the orientation. For example, the step by step format I used helps keep you on track and organized with what is being presented.

Even though the purpose of this orientation was to view it all in one sitting, the section links are helpful for anyone who needs to go back to a part or pick up where they left off. This also helps gage how much you have left to learn.

The annotated screen shots were beneficial because you can get confirmation of what the step is suppose to look like to keep you on the correct path. A jing video was also experimented with and is helpful in spots that it can be used.

A quiz can be beneficial if the questions make sense. For the quiz I included, I tried to provide questions that had to deal with situations that arise every semester so the student would remember.

The IDT program can benefit from this prototype by using the effective information and techniques that were researched, gathered and implemented.

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APPENDIX A: DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPTS

Discussion 1: Project Contents

Student 1

I found the program overview to be pretty straight forward from my research on the SUNYIT website. When I had questions I contacted Dr. Kahn and Maryrose Raab about the actual matriculation process. Dr. Kahn put me in touch with the professor who was teaching the first course I was interested in (Prof Dougherty). Prof Dougherty actually put me in touch with a couple of current students who had taken her class and were moving along in the IDT program. I found the feedback from the current students to be very helpful. It gave me a great idea of what to expect from the program other than course descriptions listed in the catalog. As for accessing library services I navigated the SUNYIT site and read on my own. I find that with online learning a lot of it is the individual searching and taking the initiative to learn on their own. Clicking and searching by trial and error.

The registration piece was another area that was "learn on your own" Clicking and searching by trial and error. Hoping that did register in the correct manner. I was not familiar with the Banner system so like anything you're not familiar with, you have to take the time to familiarize yourself. I navigated and figured things out regarding paying my bill etc. Submitting Transcripts: I did not have an issue here as my undergrad was from SUNYIT 20 years ago so they still had my records.

Obtaining my SITnetid was however an issue. I had no idea what it was because they automatically assigned it when the SITnetid system went into place. I was already graduated with my B.S degree. (So I was basically grandfathered a SITnetid without even knowing) My SITnetid is actually related to my maiden name and I wasn't sure who to call to find out what it was. I never received anything in the mail or an e-mail indicating what it was. That makes it difficult to log on! So for anyone that graduated before the SITnetid system was in place they won't know what their id is and they have no communication system in place to my knowledge to find out. (no e-mail, letter or anything). If you are taking a course before being matriculated some type of information on how to obtain your SITnetid should be made clear. Maybe there is something in place now but a year and a half ago I had no communication regarding my SITnetid.

As indicated earlier I had difficulty doing anything without my SITnetid. Once I had obtained my SITnetid I logged on to multiple services and had to experiment once again. I remember searching the SUNYIT site and calling the helpdesk. I pretty much learned on my own. I created a MACLAB Account only through the help of the professor in my last class. Prof Rogers had done a Jing demo of creating a MACLab account for our Web design class to upload our files to the server.

I completed the Angel tutorials that were recommended. I logged on a week prior to classes starting trying to get a good feel for how to use the application. I will admit even though I completed the Angel tutorials there is nothing like the "real deal" being full blown into a class that has 50+ posts you have to follow. I found it difficult at first to follow conversation. My classmates gave some pointers to make it easier. It takes some

getting used to. I experimented multiple times trying to follow posts the easiest way (threaded vs. nested etc.). I have found that through each additional class I have taken I have learned more and become more proficient. Embedding images/copy paste etc. Even the panic of losing material has subsided. I learned the hard way – I lost things multiple times in Angel when it bombed out. Classmates once again gave the pointer – "write up in word then transfer to Angel". Pointers such as the last one could have prevented some frustration. Not all Profs make the recommendation to do that and I don't recall it being written in the tutorial. I may be mistaken, regardless; it would be nice to have the reminder. When you are new everything is overwhelming, especially if you have never taken an online class before. I did not have any issues with the Technical requirements for my computer. You have a broad range of areas covered and I can't think of anything else at this moment in time. (Other than the suggestions I have indicated earlier).

Response to Student 1

Like you, I had to do a lot of trial and error even after attending a formal orientation. I am hoping that presenting all my ideas in one place would help see the effects that it can have. I love that you brought up the Sitnet id. It is something that I completely forgot about and definitely needs to be included. Your online learning experience is also similar to mine and I am having trouble deciding what should be included in regards to this project just because there is an angel orientation in place. As of right now, I plan to include all the links that are intended to help in the transition but have them all in one spot so it is not scattered like the current format.

Student 2

Personally, I think identifying a thesis topic is probably the hardest thing about getting a masters degree. I would find it easier if I had a better idea about the areas of research that our professors are actively engaged in. I'd like to be easily able to pull-up their journal articles and any other articles that they find very informative in their research. I'd also love it if they'd propose a direction they're going and any ideas they may have in how a student's masters project could help them achieve it. The other item I'd have for you is this: Assuming you get a comprehensive orientation built, who & how is it going to be kept up-to-date? Will the project include any ideas on how to transition such a thing out of the "lab" and into the real world?

Response to Student 2

The goal of the project is more of the effects that having an online orientation can have on students who are preparing to learn online but could not make the formal orientation held at the school. The ideas I am going to present are seeing how effective having everything in one spot can be with the use of technology. Many people are scared going into an online learning experience because they are overwhelmed with the process and an online orientation would make them feel more comfortable with how to do everything so they do not miss something in preparation.

Student 3

I would also add a section named grades. I would like to see this type of information accessible through Angel instead of Banner. I would add in this section a U-tube or some kind of tutorial how to use the Angel software. My experience with the IDT program was all strictly online. I did not attend a campus orientation session. I basically completed the admission forms, wrote a check, and signed up for courses. I talked with the school secretaries to get started with the Angel login. I looked around a little on the site, but picked up most of the skills from other students who had been enrolled in the school.

Response to Student 3

Your experience is the reason for this project being created. People that do not attend the face to face orientation seem to get confused about how to get started. So the goal of the project would be to replace that. Your idea of having a grades section would be good for an idt site but not an orientation one. I am going to however try and help with the angel transition by putting all the tools created for that purpose in one spot. It's hard to go much further than that with angel because an orientation for that was already created. This whole project would be more towards what you talked about with the secretary and getting you familiar with the idt program before you start it.

Student 4

I did not attend the IDT program orientation online because, if I recall correctly, it was scheduled at a time when I had a conflicting appointment. Orientation materials should allow asynchronous communication since so many students in the program seem to have work hours that can conflict.
I also think that a significant portion of the orientation should include outstanding examples of work that students in the program have done. This could help incoming students see what top-quality work in the program looks like and can serve as an incentive/goal for them.
There seem to be a significant number of people in the program who are not familiar with some fairly basic computer applications (i.e. the Adobe Creative Suite, etc.) that people who are interested in information design should know. I think it might be useful for an orientation to have information that points people to online resources (both inside SUNY IT and beyond) that may not be a formal part of the IDT courses, but which are significant tools that students should know. Right now, there are some links to certain tools, but those are embedded in Angel and they are not accessible once a semester is over.
I also think a general "community" area where past graduate can check in might be interesting for both past and present IDT students.

Response to Student 4

Your idea of showing past students work is great. Currently, there is a section like this on the idt main program site. I was going to point to that site for more information but I will consider including that. Your other idea of getting familiar with the tools would be tough because each class introduces new tools and usually the teacher is good about providing you with the information and tutorials when they are introduced so providing a set list of things you may or may not need could be confusing considering this would be for people who are just starting out in the program.

Student 5

My orientation experience was very limited. I had really no knowledge outside of the IDT webpage before beginning the program. I think the biggest issue I had was the scheduling of classes...cores only offered every 3 semesters. Since I didn't realize that, I will need to file for an extension from NYSED to keep my teaching position. Maybe a sample schedule would be a good thing to have available. Students can visually plan their program then. Most importantly it would be great to have one place to see all of this content instead of having to go from Angel to Banner to SunyIt website to IDT webpage....

Response to Student 5

Your idea to include the information that all core courses will not be offered every semester is important and I will put it in. However, it would be impossible to predict what your schedule will look like based on that because everyone is different and that could change based on what the teachers want to teach. I am creating this as a replacement to the face to face orientation for those who can't make it so all the general information that you would need throughout the semester should be provided by the main idt site.

Student 6

I did not attend the orientation in person, and do not remember a lot of wat I had the most dificulty with when I began. One item that I never inquired about was how to get a student ID card. There are discounts for memberships to the YMCA if you are a student, but you need a valid ID card. Since I did not attend orientation, I never did get an ID card. One of the things that I was concerned with was taking classes in the proper order so that I would not be waiting for a required class to come around.
Learning how to access my SUNYIT acount, pay bills, register for classes, etc could have all been explained a ittle more when I began, but I was able to find my way through it fairly quickly.
The biggest issue I had was that my education was being paid for by someone else, and they did not pay the bill on time. All of the classes that I registered for were dropped, and I had to re-register for all of my classes. I almost did not get back into the Information Design theory class, which is required. I think that a warning is needed for students to avoid a similar situation.

Student 7

I also did not attend a formal orientation. I transferred into the program, so I had a lot of questions about what courses would transfer in, etc.... a section on that may be good!

Otherwise I think you have covered almost all - plus other suggestions such as the SITNET ID (a big difference with SUNY IT and my undergrad is that you use the same login info for BannerWeb and Angel...)

Providing information on viewing a schedule, paying your bill, etc. is essential - it took me a long time to realize that BannerWeb was the equivalent to WebServices, which is what Banner was called at my undergrad institution. Simple things like the bursar's office vs. Registrar vs. Student Accounts - if someone needs to contact an office, it's a little confusing!

I also agree that linking to the Angel tutorial is good, repeating isn't necessary....it truly took me 2-3 semesters to feel comfortable in the environment, another tutorial wouldn't have sped that up. It would also be good to provide instructions on joining teh IDT Community Group in Angel - not sure if the thesis group is necessary for someone who is just beginning in the program.

I've never created teh Create It Account and Create Mac Account - so new users don't feel too overwhelmed, is that something professors can instruct students to setup if they are needed?

Response to Student 7

The sitnet idea is definitely something I forgot and I will cover that first so everyone knows how to get into the banner web and stuff. Your idea to include what classes transfer in is a great idea but I think those go on a case by case basis and I wouldn't have the ability to know any of that but it is a great comment. The angel stuff is tricky because there is an orientation in place so I am just going to try and point people in the right direction to the tutorials that they provide. I believe all idt students should be in the community group automatically….at least I was. It is weird though because I tried to search for it and it did not come up. I will look more into that. The creation of the mac account is actually more for students who attend the school and need to get in the mac labs. However, I did create an account for the webspace ability when I took a certain idt class so I am debating whether it is important enough to include.

Faculty 1

I've never really done orientation with our students, except informally. It seems to me students have the most trouble getting into & out of ANGEL, and into and out of their SUNYIT gmail, and into the SUNYIT library.

In terms of preparing to learn online, I think that exposure to some of the tools that talk about learning online would be very helpful There are a bunch of "tests" (self-administered) that provide some guidance.

I think your sections cover it pretty well. Make sure that everyone knows how to access the Library databases with their SITNet ID, that is really important.

And I agree with many of the student comments about the thesis process are valid; need a section in the orientation about project/thesis/etc. -- "How to get out of SUNYIT with your degree" -- we can get people in, but we need to get people out as well; perhaps covering expectations in the orientation is a good idea.

Response to Faculty 1

For some reason I took the sitnet account for granted and forgot people need to know how to get it and where they need it. I think the expectations idea is great. I will include something like that in the course overview section and we can critique it once its there.

Faculty 2

I think a key aspect of the orientation site could be a live discussion board where issues are discussed and questions answered (as you've done here to some extent). Just as we use Angel for in class discussions we should also use it to discuss programmatic issues. Many of the same questions come up over and over and if a discussion group was properly maintained we could review what's already been discussed. The problem is that students often don't realize a discussion group exists and an unused discussion group has no value - so you'd need to come up with a strategy for motivating students to participate.

Create a set of links to resources that are already out there. As several students noted, many students don't realize what's already available. Links are also better than a lot of new, fresh content as it avoids the problem of who updates the information. Thus, if you link to Angel tutorials rather than write them yourself or copy/paste current tutorials to your site the tutorials will be updated as Angel is updated. (In fact Angel is being updated in the spring from 7.3 to 7.4 and Angel is changing dramatically in 2014 to another application - probably NG)

List a basic set of tools needed by all students. These may not be needed for ALL classes, but they underly what they'll need as they go through the program. Even if students don't need every tool for every class, they will need them at some point in their studies. Right now I would list and link to information and tutorials about Jing, Zotero, Angel, Elluminate, PDF makers, Office but you might want to check with other faculty and students for recommendations. You should also note access to low cost software via the SUNYwide software purchasing site at UBMICRO.

Advisement issues - it would be great to include a link to the latest archived orientation session. Kathryn and I run them every semester and they are archived, but some students don't watch them probably because they don't have easy access to them from a central site.

The biggest confusion regarding advisement (as has been noted): that the three core's are rotated, one per semester, this means every student can graduate in as few as three semesters but it also means if they "miss" an offering they have to wait until it comes around again (never more than two semesters). This is explained at the archived orientation sessions.

Another key issue is that students can only transfer in six credits because of the SUNYwide residency requirement for any masters.

The waiver of the portfolio and recommendations requirements if students take IDT classes before they apply and have a 3.5 GPA (but this may not be relevant to your site).

Students should also realize that they need to register as quickly as possible to guarantee they will get into classes. Non-matriculated students need approval from the program coordinator (currently Kathryn Stam)

A link to the program FAQ, which answers many key questions noted in ITEM 4 above (and others). See the idt.sunyit.edu website for a link. List the FAQ headings at your site so students will know what's there

Theses projects - links to faculty research projects and a link to Docushare where all completed theses are archved - this is a great place for ideas as nearly every thesis project has a half-dozen related projects that can be gleaned from each (or just replicate a thesis project in a different location or using different software or simply at a later time). This site is public and is NOT password protected.

Great project! I think that overall we need a clear map to everything that is available and a toolkit for success listing best practices and best strategies for getting through the program.

Discussion 2: Project Assessment

Student 1

Wow! I really like the orientation. You have lots of great information – some of which I wasn't aware of! This is great! I have a few minor suggestions listed below:

Under Computer Services where you are describing to activate your SITNET account – You say "To do this you need to access the banner web page. This is located on the current students tab on the SUNYIT homepage" I would recommend inserting the link to the banner web page here as well as keeping the directions.

Under Accessing and forward student email – you say "When you click that link, you are prompted to enter your user name and password". As a new person I'm wondering what is my user name and password? Perhaps clarifying what a username is? Is that my sitnet id? Or another id? Is it a password I already set up?

The Jing demo for the course schedule is a great idea. When I viewed it your screen was cut off so I could only see where you were 'clicking' once or twice. Is it possible to slow it down a bit as well?

Learning online section – minor typo in the following sentence "The SUNYIT IDT program uses ANGEL for online learning which can accessed" (insert the word 'be' online learning which can be accessed)

Quiz – Loved the quiz. One question needs rephrasing or there are a few words left out? The question pertaining to "which number identifies a course and is important to remember/have when signing".

I found the purple color on the blue background to be a bit difficult to see. There were times I almost missed it in the bottom right.

Student 1 Response

I will fix most of the minor tweaks you mentioned. The "purple" color is resulted from using a different browser than what I made it in so I will look into fixing that as well but compatibility will definitely be an ending issue with this. It is just a prototype of what can be done so it doesn't have to be perfect.

Student 2

Overall, the orientation looks good. I found it gives a concise overview of the key information for starting into the IDT program. The only thing I didn't like was the quiz. I'm not sure what it's ultimate purpose is and it doesn't seem to do much to enhance the transmission of information to new students.

Student 3

You did an awesome job with this! I definitely believe this is a great tool for incoming IDT students. Standout features: The side tabs are great in case a person needs to stop and come back. They won't need to redo the whole process. The step by step of setting up your account. Screen shots ++++ The walk through of Banner is great too! Great idea to include the free software that is so handy in the IDT program. How great it would have been to be familiar with them before classes began...

Overall--very impressive. Definitely helpful. I cannot think of anything else that should be included.

APPENDIX B: PROTOTYPE SCREEN SHOTS

Computer Services

Activate SITNET Account | Access and Forward Student Mail
Library Services

Access and Forward Student Mail

The easiest way to access your student email is by clicking the link in the top right corner of the SUNYIT homepage. When you click that link, you are prompted to enter your user name and password.

Offices | Directories / Search Tools | SUNYIT Email

Search SUNYIT   Go

Forwarding your Email

If you already have a personal email account and would like to receive your student email in the same place, the forward email option is right for you. To do this you must first enter the mail settings located in the top right corner of the screen.

@sunyit.edu | Settings | Help | Sign out

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When you arrive at the settings screen, select the Forwarding option from the top links given. After clicking that, you will be at the screen that lets you enter in your personal email account to have the student mail forwarded to. To add your personal account, click the "Add forwarding address" button. After your information has been entered, it should now show up in the drop box to select.

Settings

General Labels Accounts Filters Forwarding and POP/IMAP Chat Web Clips Priority Inbox Labs Offline Themes

Forwarding:
○ Disable forwarding
⊙ Forward a copy of incoming mail to [   ] and
delete SUNYIT Mail's copy [   ]

[Add a forwarding address]

Tip: You can also forward only some of your mail by creating a filter

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Library Services

You can use your SITNET account to access the many library resources available to SUNYIT students. These are located on the "Cayan Library" tab on the SUNYIT homepage.

| Alumni, Friends & Visitors | Faculty & Staff | Online Learning | Majors & Academics | Cayan Library | Wildcat Athletics |

Research
Catalogs
CulturedMed
Faculty Portal
Journals
Research Guides
Tutorials

Services
AskUs 24/7
E-Reserves
Interlibrary Loan
Library Instruction
Reserves

Databases
Business/Management
Accounting
General Interest
Humanities &
Education
Medicine/Nursing/
Health
Newspapers
Science & Engineering
Social Sciences
Trial Database

Help Us Grow
Book Suggestions
Document Delivery
Donations

Media
DVDs
Photocopy &
Media Equipment

Copyright Information & Policies
Copyright Guidelines
Digital Millennium
Copyright Act (DMCA)
Policies & Procedures
~Circulation
~E-Reserves
~Reserves

As you can see, these services include Journals, Newspapers and other specific Databases that can be used at anytime for IDT research needs.

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Program Requirements

The IDT program is made up of 11 courses totaling 33 credits. The SUNY wide requirement for any master's program states only 6 of those credits can be transferred in. Therefore, 27 credits must be taken at SUNYIT. The 11 courses include 3 Core Courses, a Methods Course, 4 Program Electives, 2 Free Electives and a Thesis/Project.

Out of the three required core courses, only one core course is offered per semester which means you can graduate in as little as three semesters. If you were to miss one core course, you will have to wait until it comes around again, so schedule accordingly. Also, classes fill up fast so register as quickly as possible. If you register and do not pay your bill on time, you will be deregistered from those classes.

To view the complete list of these courses and the break down of credits, visit the IDT program website for current students here; http://www.sunyit.edu/idt/current/

The IDT FAQ page located at http://www.sunyit.edu/idt/faq/ provides any questions you may have regarding course content, potential career fields and accreditation.

Each semester, an archived student-to-faculty orientation discussion is done through elluminate live technology. It would be beneficial to view because it explains any changes and questions there may be within the program. To access this, visit https://webmeeting.suny.edu and choose "Recordings" from the menu bar, search for Nov. 9th 2010 on the calendar and then choose SUNYIT Classroom IDT Russell Kahn Fall 2010.

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Thesis/Project

Each IDT student is required to submit a thesis/project and it must be completed during the term of enrollment. The following information was taken from the IDT Thesis/Project community group located in angel.

Students can choose from 4 options:

1. Research thesis – students choosing to write a research thesis will be expected to engage scholarly literature, develop an appropriate method of analysis, collect and interpret original data, and explain findings within a framework of the scholarly literature. We would expect a thesis to run about 50 pages. Given this length, it is important for students to select a well-defined topic that can be completed within the time frame and within this page length. Methods of analysis might include content or feature analysis of a set of Web sites, an analysis of survey data collected by a research organization, or analysis of ethnographic or interview data collected by the student.

2. Artifact-based project – students choosing to complete an artifact-based project will be expected to engage scholarly literature, identify a challenge that can be solved through the creation of a digital or physical artifact, create the artifact or a prototype of the artifact, and evaluate the process of artifact creation and implementation. We would expect the student to complete a textual description of the project that would run about 25 pages. Potential artifacts include Web sites, a set of podcasts or digital documents, virtual communities, social media installations, print catalog, sculpture or an online course environment. In most cases, the prototype would be field tested in a controlled environment and results of the test reported in the written portion of the project.

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3. Experience-based project - students choosing to complete an experience-based project will be expected to engage scholarly literature, identify a challenge that can be solved through the creation of a digital experience, create and complete the experience (or a prototypical experience), and evaluate the process of experience creation and implementation. We would expect the student to complete a textual description of the project that would run about 25 pages. Experiences could be synchronous virtual interaction, an online discussion forum, a simulated teaching environment, or a LAN party. Another example would be an Elluminate-based forum or webinar on a topic relevant to IDT. Students could team up to develop, produce, and evaluate an event.

4. Meta-analysis - students choosing to write a meta-analysis will be expected to engage a theoretical construct in the scholarly literature, review a substantial body of scholarly findings analyzing that theoretical construct, develop an appropriate technique to synthesize findings, and interpret the literature in light of an original framing of the scholarly literature. We would expect a meta-analysis to run about 50 pages. Given this length, it is important for students to select a well-defined topic that can be completed within the timeframe and within this page length. Meta-analyses might investigate topics such as the effectiveness of information technology for adult learners, the impact of cell phones on youth culture, the relationship between information technology and national or community development, the effects of micro-blogging on writing skills, or the effects of GPS on privacy.

You can view past thesis papers and faculty projects here: https://docushare.sunyit.edu/dsweb/View/Collection-203

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Course Descriptions for Spring 2011

IDT 507 Information Technology- Core Course

Assesses the development and social impact of information and communication technologies. Focuses on emerging technologies of the 21st century and the convergence of traditional with new media. Examines the technical features and characteristics of information and communication technologies, and assesses the evidence for significant social impact associated with their diffusion.

IDT 523 Digital Narratives- Program Elective

The theory and practice of creating digital narratives across a range of media is the main topic of this course. The focus will be on different applications of digital narratives that have emerged, and how these applications can be adapted to professional work in a variety of fields. Students will learn about developing a personal narrative and how it can be implemented with digital media. Effective digital design will be addressed. New tools and frameworks for storytelling with digital media will be presented.

"Course Descriptions taken from the IDT Program Website. To view descriptions of all IDT courses visit http://www.sunyit.edu/idt/class_descriptions "

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IDT 541 Instructional Design- Program Elective

Students will learn about the fundamentals of instructional design, its variations and impact on learning outcomes. Several contemporary ID models will be examined. Students will ultimately adopt a personal approach to instructional design.

IDT 545 Change Theory and Information Technology- Program Elective

Examines the theoretical framework of change theory and research in various fields and issues facing individuals or institutions engaged in change. Students will discuss the elements of the change process, the roles of participants in the process and implications for change agents or agencies. Students will apply knowledge of diffusion and diffusion research to a planned, ongoing or past diffusion effort, preparing recommendations or post-mortem analysis of the process. Desirability and unintended consequences of innovations will also be discussed. Non-matriculated students need permission of dean to enroll.

IDT 590 Social Media- Program Elective

Provides students with the opportunity to investigate selected topics in information and design technology. Topics will typically illustrate the application of theory and research. Students may receive credit in a future semester for different topic areas.

"Course Descriptions taken from the IDT Program Website. To view descriptions of all IDT courses visit http://www.sunyit.edu/idt/class_descriptions "

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Tools to Succeed

Listed below is software tools that will help you succeed throughout the IDT program. This is not a complete list and new software can be introduced.

Free Software

1) Jing- a free annotation tool that allows you to take screen shots and video of your computer screen. Found here: http://www.techsmith.com/jing/

2) Gimp- Photoshop-like software to edit images. Found here: http://www.gimp.org/

3) PrimoPDF- instantly drag and drop to create pdf files from your word documents. Found here: http://www.primopdf.com/index.aspx

4) Zotero- attaches to your web browser to help collect, organize and cite sources. Found here: http://www.zotero.org/

5) OpenOffice- comparable to Microsoft Office. Found here: http://www.openoffice.org/

You can also access to low cost software via the SUNY wide software purchasing site at http://www.ubmicrosuny.com

Next Page: Registration

Registration

Look Up Classes | Add Classes | View Schedule | View and Pay Bill
Waive Health Insurance

Look Up Classes

The first thing you need to know when looking up classes that there are a number of ways to get to the course schedule page. The easiest way is by clicking on the "current students" tab on the Sunyit homepage then the "course schedules" link.

Next Page

Registration

Look Up Classes | Add Classes | View Schedule | View and Pay Bill
Waive Health Insurance

After clicking the "course schedules" link, it brings you to a screen containing choices of what kind of schedule you can look for. The Master Course Schedule is the best place to see everything that Sunyit offers.

Course & Exam Schedules

Schedule Search
Master Course Schedule
Online Courses
Class Schedule Search with Textbooks
Closed Courses

The next screen brings you to the schedule search. The first filter you need to select is the term. Once that is selected, the schedules are separated by majors. By selecting the Information Design and Technology major, you will see the courses offered by that major for the current term.

Select Subject

Discipline: ACC Accounting
FIN Finance
FIT Fitness
FRE French
FYS First Year Seminar
GEN General Studies
HIM Health Information Management
HIS History
HLT Health Education
HRM Human Resource Management
HSM Health Services Management
IDS Interdisciplinary Studies
IDT Information Design & Technology
IS Computer Information Systems
ITC Industrial Engr. Technology
JPN Japanese
MAT Mathematics
MGS Management Science
MGT Management
MIS Management Info Systems
MKT Marketing

Next Page

Registration

Look Up Classes | Add Classes | View Schedule | View and Pay Bill
Waive Health Insurance

When you arrive at the Information Design and Technology courses page, you will see a number of important categories to take into consideration when choosing what courses you want to take.

CRN number is needed to sign up for classes and the Crs number identifies the class

CR stands for the number of credits the course is

CRN	Subj	Crs	Sec	Part of Term	Title	CR	CAP	ENL	AVL	Building	Room	Time	Days	Instructor
1957	IDT	534	35W	1	Information Design	3	20	20	0					Kahn

The W in the section number stands for an Online Course

The CAP is how many students can enroll in the class and the ENL is how many students have enrolled for that class

To View the Complete Look Up Classes Process Click here (Jing Link)

Next: Add Classes

Registration

Look Up Classes | Add Classes | View Schedule | View and Pay Bill
Waive Health Insurance

Waive Health Insurance

All students taking 12 credits or more are required to pay for health insurance. If you have your own private health insurance provider, this fee can be waived.

In order to waive this fee, you must re-enter the banner web and select the personal information tab then "health insurance waiver".

- Health Insurance Waiver
- View Addresses and Phones
- Update Addresses and Phones
- Display SITNET ID
- View SUNYIT Campus Email Address

Complete the form and press submit. If you see "Your waiver has been successfully submitted", it will soon be reflected on your bill.

For more information on health requirements and other responsibilities, visit http://www.sunyit.edu/health_wellness/. This can also be accessed from the SUNYIT homepage under the current students tab.

Next Page: Online Learning

Sidebar (both slides):

Information Design and Technology
Online Orientation

- Home
- Computer Services
- Program Overview
- Registration
- Learning Online
- Orientation Quiz

Learning Online

The SUNYIT IDT program uses ANGEL for online learning which can accessed from the current students tab or online learning tab on the SUNYIT homepage. It is recommended that you go through the following guides to get familiar with ANGEL and the SUNY Learning Network.

Angel Quick Start Guide: http://www.angellearning.com/Support/documents/end-users/angel_73/ANGEL_73_Student_Quickstart.pdf

SLN Student Orientation: https://support.sln.suny.edu/section/default.asp?id=NOTERM-SLN-SLNHD-001

Computer Technical Requirements: http://sunyit.edu/online/technical_requirements

That's it! Thank you for completing the Orientation, the next page contains a 4 question multiple choice quiz on important components of this orientation that you need to remember for next semester.

Next: Orientation Quiz