



## Hit ‘Em Long and Straight!

There are many golf courses out there that have been designed and built for specific audiences with no real goal of being inclusive when it comes to inviting players from all over. Those are exclusive and embody the problem we both see when it comes to expanding the game and connecting with new audiences.

Far too often, classes are designed for only teachers and not students. Very few organizations that build content management systems (CMSs) used by institutions take the time to engage with students about how they view and interact with course content. Students are the primary users of these spaces, not instructors.

We really like how Abram Anders and colleagues utilize a user-centered model to develop pre-designed courses. It focuses on collaboration as a means to support faculty within the development of pre-designed courses while exploring an iterative course development approach with tasks and timeframes for each role. We think this is an excellent way of supporting current faculty who want to be more engaged with their students as well as new faculty who need support as they begin teaching. What we also like is that by default this level of care and detail that Anders et al. explore actually aids the faculty in focusing on the student users, that is, their courses become user-centric by default, and that’s a very good thing!

# Chapter 13. Strategic Administration for Online Courses in Communication and Writing Programs

Abram Anders, Jenny Aune, Katharine Fulton  
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Anne Kretsinger-Harries  
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Amy Walton, Casey White  
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

**Abstract:** The strategic administration of online courses in communication and writing programs depends on a balance of standardization and flexibility to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders. Based on experiences managing online courses in three large communication and writing programs, the authors of this study argue that exercising collaborative leadership and using iterative development principles to create pre-designed courses can support a sustainable approach to creating user-centered learning experiences for both students and instructors. In addition to providing a research-based rationale and sharing situated examples, this study provides specific recommendations to help programs promote collaborative leadership and integrate elements of the PARS framework—personal, accessible, responsive, and strategic—into the iterative development of pre-designed courses.

**Keywords:** collaborative leadership, iterative development, PARS framework, pre-designed online courses, strategic administration, writing program administration

Reflecting on the administration of online writing courses or programs, Jessie Borgman and Casey McArdle (2019) warn that a lack of strategy and adequate support for faculty and students “increases the likelihood that online and hybrid courses will become cycles of despair and dysfunction, where faculty blame underprepared students and students give up on poorly executed online courses” (p. 81). The danger of this type of failure became critically apparent for communication and writing programs across the nation when the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated an abrupt shift to online instruction for multiple semesters without the possibility of upfront strategic planning.

The pandemic was a crucible for many communication and writing programs and for their capacities to approach online writing instruction (OWI) in ways

that emphasized strategic investments in instructor- and student-centered design and support. If a lack of strategy leads to a “cycle of despair and dysfunction,” we argue that a strategy embracing collaborative leadership and the iterative development of pre-designed courses for instructor- and student-centered experiences can promote a cycle of continuous improvement and innovation. This strategy is based on these principles:

- collaborative leadership for human-centered innovation
- pre-designed courses that emphasize instructor- and student-centered experiences
- iterative development processes that enable responsive design and support

Following previous research of interdisciplinary collaboration, these principles offer a distillation of insights produced through “developing highly specialized best practices to guide specific projects” and are offered as a heuristic that can be adapted by other programs, teams, and leaders (McMullin & Dilger, 2021, p. 488). Using these principles, communication and writing program leaders can work with their stakeholders to strengthen their collective capacities for continuous improvement and innovation.

The authors of this chapter have experience as the leadership team for three large-scale communication and writing programs in the English department at Iowa State University. We share the unique perspectives and insights generated through our experiences exercising shared leadership as we adapted to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and prepared our programs for sustained adaptability and innovation in online learning for the future.

## Theory and Practice

We found inspiration in the “model of lean programmatic work” developed by Meredith Johnson et al. (2017, p. 17). Based on theories of lean manufacturing and lean startups, this model for communication and writing program administration helped us orient ourselves to lead through our strengths and make disruptive circumstances the occasion for strategic innovation. In alignment with the tenets of lean programmatic work, we focused on addressing the local needs of our stakeholders and exercising social responsibility during an era of heightened challenges for teaching and learning. We also emphasized efficiency, sustainability, and visibility to ensure that we could continue to perform at a high level while prioritizing our accountability to students and instructors. In particular, we sought to navigate the tensions between standardization and flexibility articulated in the model of lean programmatic work. Johnson et al. (2017) highlighted the relevance of this tension for curricular development, noting that standardization can protect “vulnerable populations,” such as inexperienced contingent faculty, by limiting the amount of preparation required to teach while also providing a consistent and user-centered experience

for undergraduate students. Standardization can also enable the efficient use of program resources. However, flexibility is equally important for enabling innovation and disruption: “Experimental approaches can invigorate programs in unexpected ways and propel them forward” (Johnson et al., 2017, p. 31). Ultimately, strategic approaches to curricular development will balance the benefits of standardization with the need to exercise flexibility for innovation in both responsive and planned ways.

Previous research has found that pre-designed courses—which offer complete implementations of shared curricula, including major assignments and developmental learning activities—can provide consistent, user-centered experiences for students and allow instructors to focus on course delivery and assessment (Mitchum & Rodrigo, 2021). Pre-designed courses create space for instructors to focus on presence and student engagement and provide a balance of cognitive, social, and teaching presence (Garrison et al., 2010). Though standardized courses can limit instructor autonomy, it is important to recognize that thoughtful, accessible, navigable online courses require extensive investments of time and expertise to develop (Remley, 2013). Pre-designed courses not only save instructors preparation time, but they can help instructors develop online pedagogical expertise through structured practice with well-designed online instructional content and learning activities (Rodrigo & Ramírez, 2017). Furthermore, Jo Mackiewicz and Jeanine Aune (2017) have argued that pre-designed courses can become a platform for collaboration between program leaders and faculty as they engage in idea-sharing through communities of practice. Thus, shared curricula implemented in pre-designed courses can be standardized to consistently support students and instructors *and* foster the type of serendipitous experimentation that promotes creativity, adaptability, and innovation.

Building on this work, our programs implemented the PARS framework and its “personal, accessible, responsive, and strategic” elements in our shared design process (Borgman & McArdle, 2019, 2021). Through iterative development involving multiple overlapping collaborative design teams and multiple forms of assessment, we were able to make significant and timely changes in our pre-designed courses to address evolving instructor and student needs as we moved through different stages of the pandemic. Our efforts are aligned with previous research demonstrating that collaborative approaches to online curriculum design can promote a balance of standardization and flexibility and enable the development of accessible online teaching and learning experiences for both instructors and students (Smith et al., 2021).

Above all, we sought to bring a user-centered mindset to designing for our students and instructors. As Michael Greer and Heidi Skurat Harris (2018) argue, “A user-centered mindset returns students to the center of the conversation, energizing and improving professional development in which teachers and students, not technology, shape learning experiences” (p. 23). Toward this end, our

approach has been inspired by human-centered design and design thinking processes as we oriented ourselves to design as a form of creative problem-solving and treated our pre-designed courses as prototypes to be successively revised (Leverenz, 2014; Wible, 2020).

## Program Context

Iowa State University enrolls 25,000 students in more than 80 undergraduate programs across six colleges: Agriculture and Life Sciences, Design, Engineering, Human Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the Ivy College of Business. The university's vision to "lead the world in advancing the land-grant ideals of putting science, technology, and human creativity to work" includes a communication proficiency policy requiring all students to be able to communicate effectively in written, oral, visual, and electronic (WOVE) mediums (Iowa State University, n.d.).

The Department of English has three multicourse programs that support Iowa State's communication proficiency policy (see Table 13.1). ISUComm Foundation Courses (FComm) offers a sequence of two multimodal composition courses. ISUComm Speech Communication (SpComm) offers two public speaking and professional speaking courses. ISUComm Advanced Communication (AdvComm) offers four upper-division professional communication and writing courses. In total, these three programs employ over 100 instructors, ranging from first-semester graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) to faculty with more than 30 years of experience, and provide communication instruction to upwards of 12,000 students in 450 sections every academic year. As of spring 2022, 21 percent of all program sections were taught online.

As Table 13.2 illustrates, prior to the pandemic, each program had varied approaches to online learning and different levels and forms of instructional design and technology support. At the start of the pandemic, as our entire institution moved to online learning, each program capitalized on its unique resources to quickly support instructors and students. As the pandemic endured, our programs continued to make iterative improvements to their online courses. During the 2020-2021 academic year, our program leaders began to collaborate more frequently and worked together to address challenges that emerged for all of us.

Collaborative leadership across programs during the pandemic became essential to help us triage problems and develop a unified approach for offering faculty support and resources. In the following sections, we will share the strategies we developed and our recommendations for implementing the PARS framework to support the strategic administration of online courses in large-scale communication and writing programs. These sections include recommendations for collaborative leadership, pre-designed courses, and iterative development that come from our shared experiences of collaborating across programs.

**Table 13.1. Communication and Writing Programs at Iowa State**

FComm ISUComm Foundation Courses	SpComm ISUComm Speech Communication	AdvComm ISUComm Advanced Communication
Multimodal composition 2 course sequence ENGL 150: Critical Thinking and Communication ENGL 250: Written, Oral, Visual, and Electronic Composition	Public and professional speaking 2 course options SpComm 212: Fundamentals of Public Speaking SpComm 312: Business and Professional Speaking	Professional communication and writing 4 course options ENGL 302: Business Communication ENGL 309: Proposal and Report Writing ENGL 312: Science Communication and Public Engagement ENGL 314: Technical Communication
225 Sections 61 instructors 5,500 students 18% online (spring)	45 sections 24 instructors 2,000 students 11% online (spring)	180 sections 32 instructors 4,000 students 39% online (spring)

*Note. Statistics are based on AY 2021-2022.*

### PARS for Strategic Program Administration

Prior to the pandemic, the directors of our three programs largely focused on their own courses and faculty, engaging in sporadic, as-needed collaboration. This changed as our program leaders found themselves navigating similar challenges created by the pandemic:

- How might we create student-centered online courses tailored for undergraduate students without experience with online learning?
- How might we make the workload manageable for our teaching faculty, who teach multiple sections per semester, and our graduate students, who teach on top of their own graduate work?
- How might we provide training for instructors with varying levels of online teaching experience?
- How might we remain adaptable and supportive as primary delivery modalities shift throughout different phases of the pandemic?

Multiple iterations of our collective approach to online course development provided rich opportunities to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of courses and program processes. Additionally, our increased collaboration and responsiveness to feedback resulted in a shared, iterative process for course creation and shared capabilities for instructor support and training.

**Table 13.2.A Developmental Timeline for ISUComm Programs**

Pre-Pandemic Independent Growth	Spring 2020 Emergency Transition	AY 2020-2021 Iterative Development	AY 2021-2022 Collaborative Leadership
AdvComm Developed online courses in 2015 and initiated Quality Matters review	AdvComm Pivoted to pre-de- signed online cours- es with all sections using Blueprint delivery process	AdvComm, Sp- Comm, FComm Engaged in iterative development to address instructor workload and stu- dent engagement	AdvComm, Sp- Comm, FComm Continued to refine pre-designed cours- es and promote instructor engage- ment and creative collaboration
SpComm Developed hybrid courses in 2014 with no plans for fully online courses	SpComm Created online course modules based on pre-de- signed hybrid courses	SpComm, FComm Developed and tested pre-designed online courses and enhanced instructor support	
FComm Developed online learning activities with an online course pilot initiat- ed in fall 2019	FComm Created online course modules based on pilot online courses		
Collaborative Created online learning team (OLT) and online learning coordina- tor (OLC) roles	Collaborative Led design sprints with OLC and OLT support	Collaborative Implemented Blueprint delivery process for all pro- grams; developed shared process for iterative course design, review, and delivery with OLC and OLT support	Collaborative Developed flexible versions of pre-de- signed courses for both in-person and online course delivery

Over time, we became more strategic in our focus and began to think about how to sustain the continuous improvement of our programs. We began to ask a new set of questions:

- How might we build on our established success and keep our online pre-designed courses vibrant and evolving?
- How might we sustain instructor engagement and provide flexibility as they work with our standardized curriculum and pre-designed course materials?

- How might we more directly involve the expertise and creativity of our instructors in the design of new instructional material and activities?

Above all, we sought to employ user-centered approaches to better integrate the expertise and perspectives of our stakeholders into the iterative design process and to ensure more diverse, inclusive, and equitable outcomes. It has been extremely gratifying to be able to iteratively address instructor and student concerns, semester by semester, and to see those issues become resolved and give way to new challenges.

### Collaborative Leadership

Our experiences demonstrated that collaboration and invention could thrive in the right environment and with dedicated support. We recognized that a collaborative approach to leadership should occur among program leaders and with our faculty and staff. During the early phases of the pandemic, close collaboration between program leaders and a commitment to seeking feedback through multiple stakeholder channels served our programs extremely well. Our program leaders met frequently and shared the feedback and issues that were reported by instructors, which included questions and concerns raised by students. Working together, we were able to identify patterns and prioritize global concerns, such as helping students with time management and clarifying communication expectations for instructors. With the support of our design teams, we were able to develop and implement new instructional content and provide on-demand support for our courses to meet these needs.

Our approach to collaborative leadership also involved internal collaboration with faculty and staff. For example, during our emergency transition to online instruction in the spring of 2020, the FComm program convened a design team that consisted of the program director, assistant directors, online learning coordinator, and the two lead instructors from our online course pilot. This small team, with its well-situated members, was able to provide a fairly robust and diverse sample of instructor feedback and reported student concerns that represented both instructor and GTA perspectives in our two courses. The director and assistant director solicited feedback from first-year GTAs in our mentoring program, the online learning coordinator reported feedback from experienced term faculty, and the lead instructors shared feedback from a pilot team that included experienced online instructors. This approach to collaborative leadership helped us create responsive incremental changes, and it informed more impactful changes to our standardized curriculum and pre-designed courses insofar as it informed our extended, team-based design sprints over the summer.

Our programs emerged from the early stages of the pandemic with stronger pre-designed courses, a shared process for iterative development, and a more



collaborative approach to leadership with more clearly defined roles and integration of stakeholder contributors (see Table 13.3):

- Program directors and assistant directors lead curriculum development and instructional design and provide professional development as well as course-specific support for instructors.
- An online learning coordinator and the online learning team of GTAs support the development and design of Canvas course sites and provide on-demand online learning and technical support for instructors.
- Program instructors engage in collaborative design teams and communities of practice and contribute to program assessment activities.

Moving forward, we sought to cultivate ecosystems of innovation and idea-sharing for our programs. Our leadership teams experimented with diverse formal and informal approaches to collaboration and worked to create communities founded on trust, support, and visibility. Once the groundwork for collaboration was established, faculty and staff leaders were able to thrive in a variety of contexts, from program-sponsored work teams to organized communities of practice to informal social networks of colleagues. Our programs involved instructors in shared leadership using a spectrum of collaboration strategies (see Table 13.4). These collaboration strategies helped integrate the expertise and perspectives of diverse faculty and staff into design processes and offered individual instructors opportunities to directly shape leadership decisions that impact their courses.

**Table 13.3. Collaborative Leadership and Shared Capabilities**

<b>FComm</b> ISUComm Foundation Courses Director Assistant Director	<b>SpComm</b> ISUComm Speech Communication Director	<b>AdvComm</b> ISUComm Advanced Communication Director Assistant Director
Shared Support Program Support Staff Online Learning Coordinator Online Learning Team		
Shared Processes Regular program directors' meetings with program staff Iterative development and review process for pre-designed courses		

**Table 13.4. Collaboration Strategies to Support Innovation**

Context	Strategies
Emergent Leaders	<p>Create informal and formal leadership roles for instructors who make valuable contributions to design teams and communities of practice.</p> <p>Empower experienced instructors who are willing to share expertise and instructional materials with peers and provide suggestions for improvement.</p>
Design Teams	<p>Use extended-project design teams to support the iterative development of instructional designs with in-depth engagement and real-time feedback.</p> <p>Use brief, highly structured design sprints to involve diverse instructors in shaping curriculum, policies, and instructional designs.</p> <p>Use research assistants to discover research-informed approaches to challenges and prepare scaffolding for design teams.</p> <p>Recruit collaborators who can contribute diverse perspectives and bring expertise from multiple programs and contexts.</p>
Training and Professional Development	<p>Use orientations and graduate teaching assistant proseminars to offer situated instruction and curated development resources.</p> <p>Use a formal mentoring program and/or mentoring circles to support professional development and promote engaged social learning.</p> <p>Provide on-demand training materials to support experienced instructors with the transition to online teaching and learning.</p>
Communities of Practice	<p>Lead experimental teaching teams to pilot and provide feedback on new instructional designs and/or thematic content.</p> <p>Lead professional development opportunities that feature diverse community perspectives and expertise and provide opportunities for informal idea-sharing and collaboration.</p>
Social Networks	<p>Create informal opportunities for co-creation and idea-sharing such as lesson-planning co-working sessions.</p> <p>Create informal opportunities for mutual support and idea-sharing such as grading co-work sessions.</p> <p>Offer opportunities to build relationships through unique learning opportunities and teaching assignments such as learning communities or shared theme sections.</p> <p>Promote backchannels for informal sharing and surface challenging feedback, such as peer-to-peer social media groups.</p>

### Recommendations for Collaborative Leadership Aligned with the PARS Framework

Promote *personal* leadership by offering inclusive collaboration opportunities for instructors and by integrating student feedback.

- Create opportunities for diverse instructors to shape and contribute to curricular development and course designs and integrate student feedback to frame and focus collaboration activities.
- Create accessible collaboration opportunities with greater and lesser time commitments from intensive experiences like design teams to expansive experiences such as social learning events.
- Use co-creation and social learning activities as the occasion for leaders to connect with instructors to build rapport, trust, and shared purpose.

Promote *accessible* leadership through the alignment of curricula, policies, and pre-designed course formats across programs.

- Design program policies to be user-centered and aligned across programs to create clarity and consistency for both instructors and students and to address global issues in holistic and sustainable ways.
- Design courses using consistent and aligned organizational and formatting patterns; the use of repeated module structures and weekly schedules can lower cognitive load not only for students but also for instructors. With less time needed to anticipate the flow of instruction and student work, instructors can focus on personalizing instruction and delivery.

Promote *responsive* leadership by offering instructors timely learning opportunities and support.

- Provide opportunities for learning and idea-sharing that are specific, situated, and timely to increase engagement, and provide instructors the support they need when they need it. For example, a community of practice could meet just before a module begins to review learning objectives, share ideas for adapted activities, and share strategies for assignment-specific formative feedback.
- Provide on-demand support with clear guidance for how different types of questions can be addressed to different contacts and resources—program leaders, program staff, online learning specialists, institutional information technology, etc.
- Communicate timely and reiterated invitations for instructors to seek support for sensitive issues such as working with students who are disengaged, disruptive, and/or experiencing mental health issues.

Promote *strategic* leadership by collaborating across programs and creating shared capabilities for collaboration and idea-sharing.

- Connect, coordinate, and share ideas with leaders of similar programs in your department or institution. Collaboration with peer leaders can provide valuable perspectives and lead to the creation of shared approaches and resources that can strengthen all programs.
- Create shared processes and technology-based platforms for exchanging ideas and content.
- Create curriculum-aligned design and instructional materials—such as

assignment, activity, and lesson-planning templates—to make it easier to share, reuse, and build each other’s work.

## Pre-Designed Courses and Standardized Curricula

To support our instructors and students, all three programs have developed pre-designed online courses that implement standardized curricula based on a shared syllabus, major assignments and grading rubrics, and supporting learning activities. Common features of our pre-designed courses include:

- brief lecture videos focused on key concepts and skills
- discussion activities that promote social learning and engagement
- process and micro-drafting activities to apply concepts and make progress on major assignments
- structured draft workshops that use discussion activities and collaborative writing applications to facilitate sharing peer and instructor feedback
- video-based presentations that integrate rehearsal and peer feedback activities

These courses are delivered as fully ready-to-use course sites using the Blueprint course functionality of the Canvas learning management system (LMS). The Blueprint functionality allows the creation of one primary Blueprint or template course, which can be connected to Canvas sites for each course section. Blueprint allows for efficient Canvas site creation and the capacity to “push” on-demand updates and fixes to all connected sites. Each program also provides pre-semester workshops and orientations for all instructors as well as comprehensive text- and image-based course setup guides. These courses integrate features aligned with the PARS framework (see Table 13.5).

Promoting personal approaches to delivery and a sense of instructor ownership is a fundamental challenge for using pre-designed courses. While these courses can support instructors in many ways, they can also be perceived as restrictive of autonomy and demotivate instructor engagement (Mackiewicz & Aune, 2017; Mitchum & Rodrigo, 2021; Remley, 2013). To mitigate these issues, it is important to involve instructors in course development processes and to promote opportunities to adapt and customize instructional content and activities (Rice, 2015; Stewart et al., 2016). Course development processes can offer valuable opportunities for professional development in which instructors can develop and contribute their professional expertise while collaborating with peers toward common goals (Penrose, 2012; Rodrigo & Ramírez, 2017). Ideally, pre-designed courses can also integrate dedicated spaces for adaptation and customization, such as open activity slots with recommended activity options.

Pre-designed courses can be developed using universal design principles and implemented across all sections to consistently offer accessible learning

experiences for all students in the program (Oswal & Melonçon, 2014; Womack, 2017). In addition, pre-designed courses can be readily available for instructors even when instructors are assigned to courses close to the beginning of the semester. A consistent overall design can also help provide a programmatic feel across multiple program levels, helping instructors and students who interact with the courses.

Through the integration of instructor guidance and design resources, pre-designed courses can also promote responsive and strategic approaches to course delivery. Pre-designed courses can offer a space to share raw materials—slideshow files, video transcripts, weekly overview announcements—for instructors to personalize and organize within a course. Programs can also directly integrate “just-in-time” information for “how to do things” for both instructors and students and could include tutorials and instruction sets, pre-scheduled and/or templated course announcements, or even an unpublished instructor resources module.

Ultimately, pre-designed courses allow programs to implement vision and values into routines and structures across all courses and sections. This approach can ensure comparable learning experiences for all students in a program and support robust approaches to program and learning assessment. Pre-designed courses can also facilitate information-sharing with institutional partners and for accreditation efforts. While there are many benefits, it is undeniable that creating pre-designed courses takes a great deal of time and effort and high levels of collaboration and coordination. As we will discuss further, a structured iterative development process can be essential for sustaining continuous improvement and ensuring coherence, consistency, and alignment in pre-designed courses.

**Table 13.5. Example Features of Pre-Designed Courses Aligned with the PARS Framework**

<b>Personal</b>	<b>Accessible</b>
A personalizable homepage featuring an instructor photo, email, and student (office) hours information can help create instructor presence and promote student engagement.	Instructional videos can be made more accessible for students and instructors by providing downloadable transcript and slideshow files. Dedicated design teams can implement these types of accessibility features in a consistent and aligned way.
<b>Responsive</b>	<b>Strategic</b>
A pre-designed welcome message can provide both students and instructors with timely guidance and up-to-date information. Pre-designed messages can be provided through an LMS as pre-scheduled announcements or unpublished message templates.	Instructor resources can be directly integrated into pre-designed courses as an unpublished module and provide convenient access to guidelines for planning and delivery as well as adaptable instructional content.

## Recommendations for Pre-Designed Courses Aligned with the PARS Framework

- Promote *personal* instruction by integrating spaces for adaptation and customization in instructional content and learning activities.
- Provide modular spaces within courses where instructors are encouraged to create or cultivate their own materials to make it easy for instructors to adapt course sites without fear of breaking course functionality.
- Promote ownership of instructional content by providing copies of slide-shows and transcripts for instructional videos and alternative versions of learning activities that can be adapted by instructors.
- Provide training for creating instructor presence in the course, but also be explicit about workload expectations and time management strategies for online teaching (e.g., explain the difference in grading practices between major assignments and low-stakes learning activities such as weekly discussion boards).
- Promote *accessible* and user-centered learning experiences by creating pre-designed courses based on design principles and user feedback.
- Use design teams to develop and review courses to ensure the use of universal design principles for accessibility.
- Create course designs with strong alignment and consistency in structure, layout, and instructions for different assignment and activity types.
- Integrate user feedback and address “pain points” in user experiences.
- Provide *responsive* support by integrating just-in-time guidance and information for instructors and students.
- Create pre-designed messages using LMS capabilities for pre-scheduled announcements or unpublished message templates to integrate timely guidance for instructors and students. Messages could include welcome announcements, weekly overviews, and timely instructions for specific activities, such as draft workshops.
- Provide integrated materials to support instructors’ delivery, such as an unpublished resource module or integrated assignment and activity alternatives.
- Provide *strategic* support by creating instructor guides for planning, adapting course content, and delivery.
- Provide resources that explain course designs and delivery expectations for new and returning instructors. Ideally, this will include both asynchronous reference materials and synchronous training, workshop, or orientation events.
- Provide a pre-semester checklist to help instructors prepare for the semester.
- Provide pre-designed course setup guides emphasizing required and optional customizations to promote a personal approach to instruction.

## Iterative Development

For pre-designed courses to remain effective, iterative course development is essential. While smaller updates are made to the pre-designed course sites following each semester, more extensive redesign projects occur between the spring and fall semesters. Beginning with evaluation, we gather instructor and student feedback on issues ranging from the curriculum to usability and accessibility within the LMS. We then form a small team of course directors and experienced instructors to decide on revisions and updates and establish a plan for completing the work. Once major revisions are complete, another team dedicated to technology support reviews the course for other key issues, such as accessibility, usability, and correctness. For a detailed overview of our iterative course development process, see Table 13.6.

**Table 13.6. Example Timeline for Iterative Course Development**

Role	Task	Timeframe
Program Directors and Assistant Directors	Solicit feedback on fall and spring courses using methods such as instructor surveys and focus groups and review of student course evaluations.	April/May
Online Learning Coordinator	Create initial course sites by copying last-used course content into new sites.	June
Program Directors, Assistant Directors, and Design Teams	Develop new course content and improvements to address instructor and student feedback.	July
Design Teams and/or Volunteer Instructors	Review course sites for problems, and provide feedback on areas for improvement.	Mid/late July
Program Directors and Assistant Directors	Update course sites to address the recommendations of reviewers. Promising new ideas may be identified and piloted by design teams and volunteers before inclusion in pre-designed courses.	Late July
Online Learning Team	Review course sites from a technology perspective, address accessibility issues, check for broken links and settings, etc.	Early August
Online Learning Coordinator	Coordinate with Iowa State's Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching to push course template content to all attached section sites.	August
Program Directors and Assistant Directors	Lead pre-semester workshops to review curriculum, policy, and course updates, and provide resources and support.	Week before the semester begins

Role	Task	Timeframe
Online Learning Coordinator and Online Learning Team	Provide on-demand support and forward curricular design issues and pedagogical questions to program directors.	Week before the semester and first two weeks of the semester
Directors and Online Learning Coordinator	Fix and push updates for any critical issues.	As needed

We have found that this iterative design process affords benefits to all stakeholders, resulting in a higher-quality teaching and learning experience for instructors and students alike. By being actively involved in the design and revision process, instructors see that their voices are heard by program leaders and are valued because suggested changes are reflected directly in the course materials used across all sections. This also allows program leaders to personalize their online courses for the specific team of instructors with which they work.

Having a dedicated time period over several weeks to determine and address major needs makes it easier to follow through on course revisions. For instance, accessibility pain points can be readily prioritized and addressed with a sense of global importance and impact on different stakeholders. Furthermore, challenging changes that would be difficult for individual instructors to address can be made by design teams. This process also allows for prioritization, making it easier to follow through on suggestions provided by instructors and other stakeholders. Some suggestions may be easily and quickly implemented, whereas others could be put on the agenda for a future iteration of the course.

For example, in AY 2020-2021, our instructors reported that they and our students were experiencing workload and time management pressures as they adapted to fully online learning. All three programs conducted self-studies to better understand instructor and student workload and subsequently implemented changes that addressed concerns unique to each program. For spring 2021, our programs made immediate changes which included streamlining the number of weekly process assignments and clarifying grading and feedback expectations for instructors. Over the summer, each program was able to implement additional changes that included more consistent approaches to the organization of modules and weekly activities to communicate expectations more clearly and enable time management for both instructors and students.

### Recommendations for Iterative Development Aligned with the PARS Framework

- Promote *personal* engagement through transparent decision-making and clear explanations of updates and changes.



- Provide resources for instructors that highlight any changes to the course design. For small updates, a pre-semester email is sufficient. For more extensive changes, consider creating a shared resource within the LMS or a file-sharing service such as Google Docs or Box.
- For curricular changes, provide context as to why the change was implemented. For example, if a major assignment has been updated with new goals, prompts, grading criteria, or other important content, briefly explain how that decision was arrived at (e.g., instructor feedback, student evaluations, stakeholder needs, pedagogy research).
- Highlight the contributions of collaborators to share credit and model opportunities for instructors to help shape curriculum and course designs.
- Develop expertise to support *accessible* and user-centered online design and delivery.
- Create, if possible, dedicated roles or teams to assist with course development, technical support, and instructor training. Ideally, individuals in these roles would have or receive training in instructional design and/or online instructional standards such as Quality Matters.
- Recruit experienced faculty to participate in course design projects, and utilize institutional resources to support relevant professional development opportunities.
- Partner with institutional resources to develop expertise and processes that ensure accessibility and universal design of instructional materials.
- Foster a *responsive* iterative design process to build community and shared responsibility.
- Actively seek to involve stakeholders with diverse perspectives in the design process, and solicit multiple forms of feedback that best suit instructor groups. For example, for courses largely taught by GTAs, there may be more frequent informal opportunities for feedback during regular meetings and other interactions with course directors, while experienced instructors with higher teaching loads may provide feedback more readily through a survey or email.
- Encourage instructors to report issues and make suggestions, both large and small, as they interact with the pre-designed courses. Acknowledge suggestions and implement them if appropriate and possible.
- Address persistent issues, such as instructor workload, through responsive course design and iterative improvement.
- Develop a *strategic* process map including timeline, roles, and responsibilities.
- Integrate the full scope of the design process: feedback on the previous iteration, design phase, revision and feedback phase, and support phase. It is important to continually “close the loop” to promote the benefits of iterative design.
- Make sure the design process accounts for different aspects of course

design, including curriculum, LMS setup, universal design, and accessibility. For example, once the full course has been developed, have an individual or task force review the shell to check specifically for accessibility.

- Use *strategic* approaches to collect feedback throughout the design process.
- Embrace prototyping and create “good enough” initial prototypes of new assignment and learning activities designs; conduct focus groups or pilot tests with small groups of instructors to get feedback and identify where more instructional material, scaffolding, or changes are needed.
- Involve instructor volunteers to review course sites before using tools like Blueprint to push new content out to all instructors.
- Review and revise to sustain curricular alignment and universal design. It’s easy to introduce inconsistencies when creating new material, especially when diverse contributors are involved.

## Conclusion and Takeaways

Our collective experiences have demonstrated that pre-designed courses can support a strategic approach to ensuring accessible and student-centered instructional designs (see Table 13.7). Pre-designed courses can allow instructors to focus on personal and responsive aspects of course delivery and develop expertise through practice. When developed using iterative design principles and collaborative leadership, pre-designed courses can also become instructor-centered platforms for integrating diverse expertise and enacting shared responsibility for offering high-quality learning experiences.

Furthermore, we have found that strategic administration can be supported by investing in collaborative approaches to leadership that promote idea-sharing and comparison and contrast across programs as well as enable decision-making based on a wider range of experiences and expertise. Collaborative leadership depends on creating inclusive communities in which collaborators at every academic rank, including contingent faculty and GTAs, are empowered to take on leadership opportunities and share feedback. Our programs were fortunate to have program leaders that represented both tenure-track and contingent faculty perspectives, and our design teams almost universally included representation from all instructor ranks, including contingent faculty and GTAs.

Embracing a collaborative leadership approach requires that program leaders invest in building trust and rapport with stakeholders to make them feel comfortable and motivated to share feedback and contribute to design. Trust can be built by proactively seeking, accurately representing, and responsively addressing feedback. Rapport can be created by embracing and implementing the best ideas no matter who suggests them. Leaders themselves have to give up a certain version of top-down control and let the process and feedback play a significant role in decision-making. This can include listening to and acting on uncomfortable, critical feedback. Ultimately, collaborative leadership can support

human-centered innovation through iterative development and the transparent collection of stakeholder feedback precisely because it can make programs accountable to stakeholders in both highly challenging and highly productive ways.

**Table 13.7. Summary Recommendations  
Aligning with the PARS Framework**

Collaborative Leadership	Pre-Designed Courses	Iterative Development
Promote personal leadership by offering inclusive collaboration opportunities for instructors and by integrating student feedback.	Promote personal instruction by integrating spaces for adaptation and customization in instructional content and learning activities.	Promote personal engagement through transparent decision-making and clear explanations of updates and changes.
Promote accessible leadership through the alignment of curricula, policies, and pre-designed course formats across programs.	Promote accessible and user-centered learning experiences by creating pre-designed courses based on design principles and user feedback.	Develop expertise to support accessible and user-centered online design and delivery.
Promote responsive leadership by offering instructors timely learning opportunities and support.	Provide responsive support by integrating just-in-time guidance and information for instructors and students.	Foster a responsive iterative design process to build community and shared responsibility.
Promote strategic leadership by collaborating across programs and creating shared capabilities for collaboration and idea-sharing.	Provide strategic support by creating instructor guides for planning, adapting course content, and delivery.	Develop a strategic process map including timeline, roles, and responsibilities. Use strategic approaches to collect feedback throughout the design process.

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