

# In My Own Words: How HIOTLP Helped Me Redesign my Online Courses

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## Abstract

COVID-19 continues to spread throughout the United States and other countries, resulting in a global pandemic that has challenged schools and educators alike to reinvent how they instruct and how students learn. The pandemic brought on a new set of challenges which led teachers to question how they can maintain content engagement during virtual instruction. The High Impact Online Teaching and Learning Practices (HIOTLP) course provided rich content, strategies, and activities that helped me transform my courses into virtual, interactive environments of learning where my students gained the content and were fully engaged. This narrative tells the story of my experience being a part of the HIOTLP course, what I learned, and how it helped me redesign my courses.

## Narrative

Spring 2020, the world was at a standstill. We were facing a global pandemic that not only took lives, made many ill, but changed the way we lived, interacted, taught, and learned. Education was hit hardest because it forced educators to adapt to a new way of instruction; a way that many were not accustomed to. With the added pressure of changing how educators instruct and how students learn, there was one question that I asked myself, “How can I transform my classroom to an online learning environment while still engaging my students with the content? I was unsure if I would ever find the answer to my pressing question because teaching in an in-person modality was what I was accustomed to; it was all I knew.

It was not until I received an email with an opportunity that would change the trajectory of how I would not only instruct but engage my students in an online-learning modality that I found my answer. High Impact Online Teaching and Learning Practices (HIOTLP) was a four-week intensive online course that was specifically designed for faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This course was delivered both asynchronously and synchronously and involved course readings, videos, resources, opportunities for reflection, as well as supplemental readings and resources located in weekly modules. This course allowed me to work at my own pace and engage weekly with my team members and team mentor.

The initial module or Module 0 involved a welcome and an introduction to the course.

During this time, we had the opportunity to review the syllabus, formally meet the team mentors, and listen to a brief synopsis of the course expectations. At this point I did not know what to expect. I knew that this journey would not be easy, but I would walk away with valuable tools that would help me engage my students in an online teaching format. To gain a greater understanding of the course, Module 0 also included an article entitled, “Five High Impact Teaching Practices” (Fink 2016). This article defined High-Impact Practices, often referred to as HIPs as teaching and learning practices which include capstone projects, learning communities, undergraduate research, and internships that are beneficial to all students. Fink (2016) in his article concluded that if faculty sought to create learning experiences that were inspired by HIPs, the following high-impact teaching, and practices (HITPs) would be evident. Such practices included helping students become meta-learners, where they learn about their own learning and learning processes; learning-centered course design; using small groups in a powerful way; service-learning, which is a form of experiential learning where students apply what they have learned in the classroom when addressing human and community needs; community engagement with reflection; and being a leader with your students.

After completing Module 0 and becoming more familiar with what the course offered, I was ready to move onto Module 1. This module focused on the Fundamentals of Online Teaching and Learning and began with an online teaching brief video. Here, I learned seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education which included good practice encourages student-faculty contact, considered to be the most important factor in student motivation and involvement; good practice encourages cooperation among students where learning is collaborative and social; good practice encourages active learning where students are actively engaged in the learning process through discussions, writings, relating to their past experiences, and application; good practice gives prompt feedback which involves providing appropriate feedback so that students are able to reflect on what they learned, what they still need to know, and how they can assess themselves; good practice emphasizes time on task which looks at students learning effective time management; good practice communicates high expectations which is considered important for everyone; and good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning because there are varied ways to learn and diversity should be embraced. There were also several videos that focused on ‘key features of high-impact practices,’ ‘small teaching online,’ and ‘understanding by design.’ One of the sections in this course module provided several supplemental resource articles. The article, “How to be a better online teacher,” (Darby, 2020) was the one article that stood out to me in this module because it was an advice guide that included principles and practices for better online teaching, common misperceptions, ways one can find help, and key terms in online education.

We were now at the halfway point of the course and focused on Module 2. This module looked at Learning Management Systems (LMS) and digital tools that could be integrated into any LMS. As with the previous module, this module provided several resources which included a checklist that could be used as a tool in evaluating technology. The article, “Discussion Boards: Valuable? Overused? Discuss” (Lieberman, 2019) was another resource found under Module 2. This article looked at the use of discussion boards in online classes and how often they are misrepresented and used incorrectly. Utilizing an online learning format, I implemented discussions in the form of virtual Socratic seminars in my courses. Students were encouraged to use the Question Quotation and Talking Point (QQTP) method, a tool that I learned from one of the HIOTLP course participants. The use of this method allowed my students to develop

questions, highlight parts of the reading, and create talking points to engage in rich discussion.

Another article, “The Art & Science of Quality Course Announcements: How to Avoid the Trap of the Info Dump,” (Faculty Focus, 2019) focused on how well-intentioned many professors are when providing a wealth of knowledge and resources to their students simply because they want to help. I was able to connect with this article because I too have been guilty of wanting to help by providing my students with an abundance of resources that I felt would be beneficial to their learning in the course in which they were enrolled in. There were also other great resources in this module that offered ways professors can connect with online students and how technology can be used as a learning tool, one being Flip Grid. I used Flip Grid as an introductory tool in my online courses. This was a big hit with my students because it moved away from the simple creation of a PowerPoint presentation and allowed them to be creative and share who they are in their own unique way.

After several weeks of learning about online course design and delivery, Module 3 focused on learning objectives, assessments, culturally relevant assessment, and how to write measurable learning outcomes. This module helped me to develop learning outcomes which represented what my students were expected to demonstrate. Using the “Writing Measurable Learning Outcomes” (Osters & Tiu) document, I was able to revise students’ learning outcomes in my syllabi by identifying student learning behaviors, assessment methods, and student performance criteria.

The last and final module provided a useful collaborative tool, Trello, that can be integrated into several LMS. Trello is a collaborative tool that allows a team to work collaboratively in a virtual format. Module 4 also looked at creating a syllabus, creating discussion rubrics, inclusive teaching, and assignment redesign.

## **Summary/Conclusion**

During this course, I have had the opportunity to learn, engage, grow, and be inspired. Even though it was an intensive course, I was able to learn about the fundamentals of online course design and delivery, various aspects of digital learning and technology tools that I was able to use in redesigning my online courses.

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