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Growing Your Online Course -Strategies for Success-

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Successful Courses are like Gardens

- > Harmonious in Design
- > Variety of Materials
- > Different Lifespans of Materials
- > Need "weeding" and maintenance



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"Garden" Freshness Model for Online Design

- > Successful "gardens" are well designed before planting
- > Gardens are developed in "sections" of plants with similar characteristics
- > The smaller the plant, the easier to tend and transplant
- > Plants which are grouped into beds are easier to "weed"
- > Lifespan of plants is important – don't "mix and match" in beds – or it is hard to maintain
- > Plants which need continual care should be planted in special containers which make tending them easier.

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LIFESPAN is the Key!

- > Everything has a cycle
- > Some plants continue to live year after year
- > Some plants last only a season and need to be replanted each year
- > Some plants last only short periods before they wither



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The LIFESPAN of Content

Just as with garden plants, our course content and activities will have different lifespans. We will categorize our information and assessments as

- > perennials,
- > annuals, or
- > cut flowers.

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Perennials

- > Are enduring – the same plants (content) remains planted and "active" for three years or more unless an "act of God" forces a change
- > Requires reduced amounts of maintenance
- > Can stand alone (these do not rely on the presence of other plants in symbiotic relationships)

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Perennials = Philosophies, Policies and Procedures

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Course Perennials

- > Course Policies and Procedures
- > Course Objectives and Outcomes (curriculum stds)
- > Major Philosophies, Theories, and Concepts
- > Terms and Definitions
- > Proper Procedures (safety, assignment format)

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Perennial: Theory of Gravity

- > Relatively unchanged since the time of Isaac Newton
- > Not subject to political or social effects
- > Serves as a foundation for other theories (planetary motion, vector-force mathematics)
- > Can be understood SEPARATE FROM its applications (i.e. calculating orbits for the Space Shuttle)

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Perennials: Write ONCE!

By creating separate course documents that provide overviews of the

- > Policies,
- > Philosophies (theories and concepts),
- > Procedures, and
- > Terminology,

you reduce drastically the amount content that needs to be edited and updated with each run of the course.

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Perennials Tips!

- > Do NOT make any mention of your textbook, timeframes, or orders of assignments and activities.
- > Perennial content should be self-contained "learning objects" or "course documents" which do not depend on any other content or resources.

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Annuals

- > Have short lives – and need to be completely replanted on an "annual" basis.
- > Requires "rooting out" the old plant before adding the new
- > Possible to be "harvested" by others
- > Greater dependency on "pollinators"

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Annuals = Agendas, Applications, Activities, and Assessments

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Course Annuals

- > Agendas – Class schedule, order of content, assignment deadlines
- > Applications – using theories and concepts to solve problems and analyze situations in individual or group homework
- > Activities – discussions, explorations, reflections
- > Assessments – projects, papers, quizzes
- > This content should be updated each term – the “to do” lists and activities relating to student learning

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Cross-Pollination with Annuals

- > Design activities that will allow students to Cross-Pollinate in learning activities.
 - > Students find and share additional resources with other students
 - > Discussion and Project Groups to solve problems allow synergies to develop and creative approaches to arise
 - > Students show creativity through use of 3rd-party and Web 2.0 tools (links to content they have created on their blog sites, YouTube postings, cartoons, etc.).

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Annuals Tips!

- > Provide information in discrete / granular “packages.” Easier to “reshuffle” if textbook or term-length changes.
- > Avoid embedding links.
Refer students to a tool and a general title (i.e Discussion of “Applications of Gravity” instead of “The 3rd Mission of the Space Shuttle Endeavour.”)
- > Assessments should be updated each “season.”
Helps avoid any concerns of cheating / from past terms.
Reinforces need for instructor to incorporate current content and applications in quizzes, exams, homework, and assignments.

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Cut Flowers

- > Showcases of flowers in “vases” – currently in bloom
- > Will fast fade and decay (about a week)
- > Can be “mixed” with other blooms for an interesting arrangement
- > Bright and interesting!

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Cut Flowers = Current and Controlled by Others

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Course Cut Flowers

- > Links to **current** news articles and content **controlled** by someone else
- > Content **controlled** by other sites might have broken links; check links immediately before posting for course.
- > Put the content in a special container which is easy to spot.
- > Encourages instructors to share the "latest and greatest" sources and stories with students.

Cut Flowers Tips!

- > "Just In Time" delivery of links and tips.
- > Showcase in the **News** area of the course. Easy to spot, and are "blended" with other newsworthy content.
- > Make it attractive and eye-catching! Use graphic elements and screenshots to help draw attention.
- > Change regularly. Try to post new items at least once per week.

Plant Size

Is it easier to move a 40-foot hedge or 10 small potted bushes?



Having each object in a course completely self-contained helps make it easy to pick up and move. Avoid "entanglements" of the "roots" of courses.

Content Size

- > It is easier to "weed" and transplant smaller objects.
- > When possible, keep each course item self-contained (in its own pot).
- > If your textbook changes, "reshuffle" rather than re-write.
- > Break concepts into file of different levels:
 - > Introduction
 - > Intermediate
 - > Advanced

Lots - 0 - Links

- > More links are better
- > Well-organized and well-named
- > Easier for students to find specific content
- > Easier to rename link titles to provide consistency with assignments, discussions, and quizzes
- > Easier to share content with peers teaching same / similar courses

Sections / Chunking

- > Visual appeal when Gardens group and chunk similar species
- > Chronological order may require repetition of assignment descriptions for similar assignments (i.e. discussions)
- > Function might be a better way to organize Modules
 - > Course Syllabus and Class Policies
 - > Schedule, Assignment Descriptions, and Grading Rubrics
 - > Course Content Topic-by-Topic
 - > Resources, Samples, and Examples
- > Customized home pages can easily "link to" content pages

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Content Presentation / Organization

- > Major Theory / Concept
 - > Learning Objectives
 - > Introduction to Theory / Concept
 - > Applications of Theory / Concept
 - > Case Study / More to Explore
 - > Advanced Applications
 - > Case Study / More to Explore
 - > Discussion Exercise
 - > Assessments / Homework
- > Major Theory / Concept
 - > Learning Objectives

This type of organization uses lots of hyperlinks which are well structured in Modules and Submodules

Changes in textbook or length of term allow for quick re-organization of course

Students can quickly find the specific materials they need

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Summary

- > Divide your content into **Perennials** (long term stability) and **Annuals** (short term stability).
- > Do not add direct URL links into your course content; use News tool (cut flowers showcase).
- > Each Topic or Concept gets a separate file; easy maintenance and re-shuffle
- > Chunk information into groups of similar items.

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Shameless Plugs...

- > <http://TechnologyBites.blogspot.com/>
- > <http://PedagogyOnline.com/>

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