Online writing students as expert end-users in their own experience

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The big idea

—

Online writing students are expert end-users of their own experience in our classes

*I am indebted to Jones (2018) for the phrase "expert end-users" and the underlying logic of this idea as well as to Crane (2015), Crane & Cargile Cook (Forthcoming), and Still & Koerber (2010).

Challenge 1: Instructor-student hierarchies

Who's the expert here?

Challenge 2: Teaching with technology

So...

many...

tools...

Key Assumption

Students are an expert in at least **one key area**

their own experience of the class—as end-users of the class syllabus, assignments, LMS.

They understand…

- the impact of the course on their time
- their digital capacities
- life on their side of the screen

Key Assumption (con.)

Students play a crucial role in creating their learning experience.

Key Assumption (con.)

An idea gaining traction as

- social justice practice
- user-centered design practice

Crane, K. (2015). *The usability of the course syllabus: Testing syllabi modality and comprehension* (Dissertation).

Crane, K., & Cargile Cook, K. (Eds.). (Forthcoming). *User experience as innovative academic practice*.

Jones, N. N. (2018). Human centered syllabus design: Positioning our students as expert end-users. *Computers and Composition*, *49*, 25–35.

Shivers-McNair, A., Phillips, J., Campbell, A., Mai, H. H., Yan, A., Macy, J. F., … Guan, Y. (2018). User-Centered Design In and Beyond the Classroom: Toward an Accountable Practice. *Computers and Composition*, *49*, 36–47.

Still, B., & Koerber, A. (2010). Listening to students: A usability evaluation of instructor commentary. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *24*(2), 206–233.4

Solution—User checkpoints

First implemented this by introducing "user test" checkpoints early in the semester

In f2f and hybrid class,

- Syllabus usability test
- Presentation/discussion of LMS "backend"

*For more detail refer to my forthcoming chapter "'A nice change of pace': Involving student-as-course-users early and often" in *User experience as innovative academic practice* edited by Kate Crane and Kelli Cargile-Cook

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Solution—In *practice*?

SAY "ASYNCHRONOUS"
ONE MORE TIME

Um...it's hard—especially in asynchronous classes..

Do **you** know what it's like to truly shout into a void?

HELLO FROM

I do <shudder>

Solution—In practice
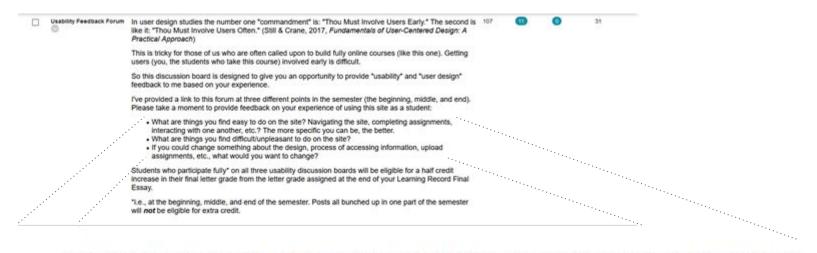
Ways we cope:

- Lecture videos
- Screen capture walkthroughs or how tos
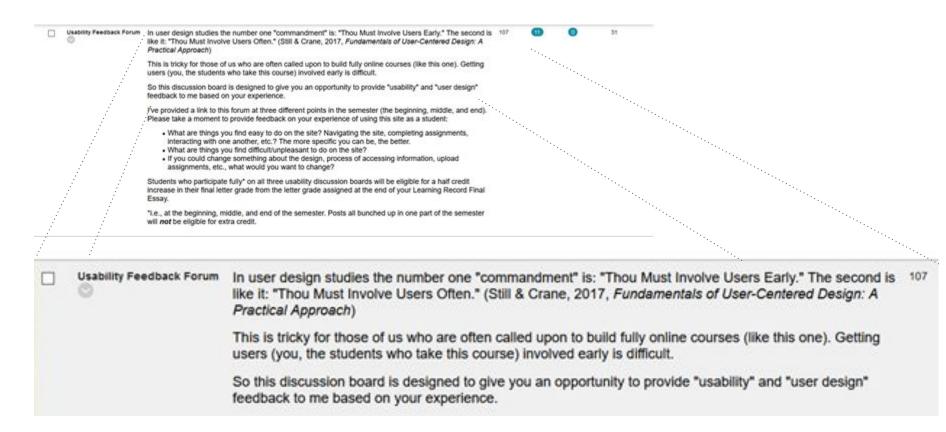- FAQ boards where anyone in class can ask or answer questions

Solution—In practice

Small online writing intervention for design accessibility:

Create a **digital space** explicitly and **strictly for students** to provide **feedback** on their **user experience** and the **usability of the class** you're teaching.

Practical intervention

In user design studies the number one "commandment" is: "Thou Must Involve Users Early." The second is like it: "Thou Must Involve Users Often." (Still & Crane, 2017, *Fundamentals of User-Centered Design: A Practical Approach*) 107 11 0 31

This is tricky for those of us who are often called upon to build fully online courses (like this one). Getting users (you, the students who take this course) involved early is difficult.

So this discussion board is designed to give you an opportunity to provide "usability" and "user design" feedback to me based on your experience.

I've provided a link to this forum at three different points in the semester (the beginning, middle, and end). Please take a moment to provide feedback on your experience of using this site as a student:

- What are things you find easy to do on the site? Navigating the site, completing assignments, interacting with one another, etc.? The more specific you can be, the better.
- What are things you find difficult/unpleasant to do on the site?
- If you could change something about the design, process of accessing information, upload assignments, etc., what would you want to change?

Students who participate fully* on all three usability discussion boards will be eligible for a half credit increase in their final letter grade from the letter grade assigned at the end of your Learning Record Final Essay.

*i.e., at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. Posts all bunched up in one part of the semester will **not** be eligible for extra credit.

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Practical intervention

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Practical intervention

Allows instructors to

- adjust*
- iterate*
- improve* usability

*Please **tell your students when you've made changes and why** otherwise we're just contributing to our collective ongoing digital gaslighting where features appear and disappear from our tools' interfaces seemingly without rhyme or reason.
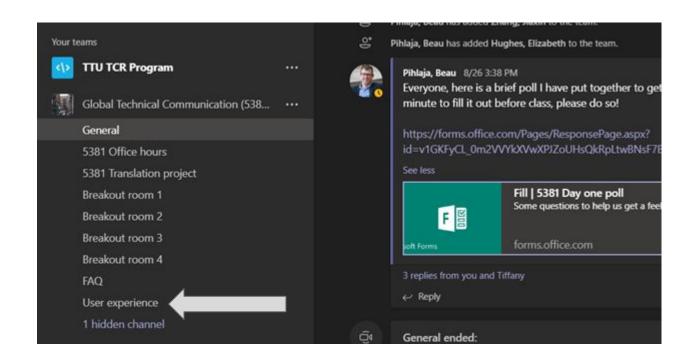
Practical intervention

Challenge of participation

Students have expressed genuine appreciation at being able to speak to these—often simply given—features of the class, especially the LMS or navigability of the class.

Regardless, the credit is extra

Adaptations

Adaptations

Questions | Responses 5

5381 Day one poll

Some questions to help us get a feel for our collective experience learning and collaborating online.

1. Have you ever used Microsoft Teams before?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

2. Have you taken a fully online course before?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

15-second manifesto

Teach writing small online because

… this is not normal time for teaching

… teaching online cannot be prepared for in normal ways

… it only succeeds when collectively supported—beginning with institutions

Conclusion

Let's empower online writing students to act on their status as expert end-users of their own experience in the classes we teach.

I would love to hear how **you** incorporate students' expertise in their own experience into the design and usability of your courses!

Questions?

Please contact me: beau.pihlaja@ttu.edu