Course Overview or Syllabus

Planning, Technology, and School Improvement:

05.638-031

Instructor:

Judith Davidson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Graduate School of Education
University of Massachusetts-Lowell
51 Wilder St.
Lowell, MA  01854
(978) 934-4611
Judith_Davidson@uml.edu

Why this class?

With the advent of digital technologies, and more recently with the development of the World Wide Web, we know ourselves to be living in a dynamically changing world. These new technologies have implications for all aspects of our lives, including education. Educators must grapple with the technology challenges of our age and develop means of integrating these tools and processes in their educational practices. The challenges are not only individual, but also institutional—people, and the organizations in
which they work, must learn how to use these tools and help young people to make best
use of them. This course aims to help you sort out some of these pieces.

Course Description

Planning, Technology, and School Improvement is designed to provide educators with an
opportunity to think about new digital technologies and their implications for educational
practice. In particular, this class will help you to think about the systemic implications of
changing technologies for schools and other organizations with educational missions.
Using hands-on research techniques, you will explore the technology ecology of an
educational setting to learn about the assumptions/needs, strengths/weaknesses of this
context, so that you can make research-grounded suggestions for improvement and
change.

Course Objectives:

1. You will learn new things about digital technologies and the ways they are
   impacting our lives.
2. You will think hard about the implications of these new technologies for your
   own educational practice.
3. You will learn how to use action research tools to examine your educational
   contexts and make research-based plans for change in the arena of technology.

Class Components

Each student in this class will undertake a series of interlocking inquiries about
technology use within a particular educational setting. At the conclusion of the course,
these inquiries will be combined to create a comprehensive overview of technology
issues at this site, from which you will develop an action plan for steps that could be
taken in the future.

Each inquiry combines a knowledge component (readings and other forms of
presentation) with a hands-on in-the-field component. Throughout the course, students
will be reviewing and responding to each other’s materials (in the way that you would in
a real research project).

These components will be sequenced across the course. Each of these inquiries will
contribute to the final action plan.
1. **Getting Started:** We will start the course by undertaking a few limbering up activities that will help to orient you to your own outlooks as you begin to plan for the semester’s project. (Technology Inventory and Proposal Assignments)

2. **Educational Practices:** With the Educational Practices assignment, you will lay a base line in regard to technology use in your setting. The two major tasks are:: School Walk Through Assignment and Visual Data Assignment.

3. **Digital Natives:** This assignment will provide you with opportunities to delve more deeply into the perspectives of clients’ views of technology in your agency.

4. **Professional Culture:** In this section, you turn to looking at educators’ perspectives on technology use. Everyone will conduct an interview with a fellow educator (questions are provided); and then you will collect a second interview either face-to-face or through a survey using the same set of questions. You will analyze the interviews and develop initial findings to be presented in a report.

5. **Administrative Structure:** In this section you have the opportunity to learn about technology from the administrative point of view as you interview a key administrator with technology responsibility.

6. **Community Context:** In the community context, you will identify key stakeholders and consider the ways they are connected to your organization through technology and/or make contributions to the technology development of your organization. As a component of this assignment, you will gather technology artifacts from your setting across the semester.

You will shift gears at the conclusion of the semester to engage in:

**Action Planning:** In the final weeks of the class, you will have the opportunity to look across the full spectrum of materials you have collected to develop an action plan.

The conclusion of the semester will see the completion of your:

**Electronic Portfolio:** The Electronic Portfolio will include a full account of all your class activities. It will contain an introduction to the volume you have created.

I know this sounds like a lot of work, but we will take it in baby steps, and I think you will find it, not only doable, but pretty interesting.

What about a textbook?
This course will not use a standard textbook. Instead, we will be using materials available from the Internet—websites, videos, powerpoints, podcasts, electronic journals, etc. Given the rapid growth of technology, textbooks are like modems—too slow! These materials are located under the Weblinks tab. I call this area the “Electronic Textbook”.

Another major text in this class are the texts you will create. These texts will include: Observations, interviews, short papers, and other materials related to the course. Trust me—you will have no lack of reading material!

You will be gathering together the texts you create in something I call the Electronic Portfolio (as distinct from the Electronic Textbook). Each student will create an individual Electronic Portfolio that is something very much like a digital textbook of the course—created by you for you.

The Electronic Portfolio’s will be organized in our class wiki space. To get to the Electronic Portfolio area, please go to Web Links and you will find Electronic Portfolio at the top of the page. You can sign into the Electronic Portfolio (technically our wiki) using your student ID and password. Wiki’s may be new to many of you, but I think you will find them an interesting tool for collaborative work.

All class assignments will be deposited in the appropriate place in your Electronic Portfolio. Final assignments will also be submitted to the appropriate Assignment drop box.

What about chat?

Officially, I must schedule a chat—and I will set that up for Monday mornings from 11-12 pm. Monday mornings are the time I have put on my calendar to work on your class.

If you are taking a class in an online medium, I am assuming you want the greatest flexibility for learning—a weekly synchronous chat brings us right back to the old fashioned classroom—and that seems to be a contradiction to what we are trying to do here. Also, in my online classes people are in a variety of time zones—and it is an imposition to ask everyone to conform to one person’s ‘right time’.

Having said this, I do not mean to imply that I do not want to communicate. We will be seeing a lot of each other in the Blackboard and the Wiki space. You are most welcome to email me at Judith_Davidson@uml.edu or call me at my office (978) 934-4611. If you want to get hold of me fast, email me at my university email—it’s better for reaching me than the internal Blackboard email.

Also, I will schedule a real chat if that seems like the best way for us to work together. Please let me know what works for you, but after many semesters struggling with online chat—I think this is the best solution for now.
What about discussions?

In this class you will be expected to participate online each week in a variety of ways:

**Full Group Discussion Area**

1) a weekly hi/check-in, “this is what happened to me this week” in our general discussion area;

**Small Group Discussion Areas**

Small Group 1) review of the work produced by class colleagues; and,

Small Group 2) response and discussion of a reading or other informational piece.

Discussion is an intertwined part of each assignment. I expect you to participate actively—building the conversation with your class colleagues.

My Schedule

This class will “open” on Monday of each week. I will make that my day to focus on your discussion and assignments. I will check into your space at other times during the week as is possible. I will not be online over the weekend.

However, this semester has a couple of Monday holidays (Labor Day, Columbus Day), and on those days we will start on Tuesday.

All materials due for a particular week—weekly updates, assignments to the drop box, assignments to the Electronic Portfolio—are due by no later than 9:00 am of the start day of the work week. If you submit you materials later I cannot guarantee that I can respond, grade, or return them in a timely way…and I’ve found that once things get out of synch…it’s hard to get them back into synch. So please try to meet that deadline.

Course Grading

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Getting Started Assignment:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology Self Inventory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Project Proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational Practices Assignment</td>
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<td>-Walk Through Assignment</td>
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<td>-Visual Data Assignment</td>
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<td>Professional Culture Assignment:</td>
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<td>-Educator Interviews</td>
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<td>Administrative Structure Assignment</td>
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<td>-Interviews with Administrators</td>
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<td>Community Context Assignment</td>
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<td>Digital Native Assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electronic Portfolio</td>
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<td>-final portfolio presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>-weekly updates and participation in large group discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>-responses and participation in small group discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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The overall grading for the semester will be based upon the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>GSE point structure</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>99-100</td>
<td>Work of the highest professional standard demonstrating independent and exemplary performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>96-98</td>
<td>Excellent work demonstrating independent and high quality performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>91-95</td>
<td>Very good work, carefully executed, but requiring some areas of improvement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Mark Range</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>86-90</td>
<td>Good work, indicating careful thought and attention to the task, yet requiring several areas of improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>80-85</td>
<td>Work of graduate standard, but omissions exist or careful analysis is not in evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Graduate Standard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>76-79</td>
<td>Effort is evident, but work indicates lack of understanding of the demands of the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>70-75</td>
<td>Poor quality work with little attention to detail and the demands of the task.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>Work of very poor quality, indicating no understanding of the depth of analysis required.</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>Below 65</td>
<td>Serious neglect or evidence of cheating.</td>
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## Course Expectations

Teaching is an honor and a very special kind of trust. You trust me to guide and facilitate a meaningful educational experience for you. I trust you to collaborate with me in this endeavor. Teaching and learning—it is a sort of covenant.

In order for us to do our best work here, it is essential that we believe the best of each other and work with each other in an honest, trustful manner. If you have concerns, questions, suggestions, or ideas about how the class can be better structured—please contact me and share them.

In a class like this, where review of classmate’s materials takes place on a weekly basis, it is important that we treat each person’s work with respect. It is also important that we appreciate the ethical dilemmas involved in sharing information about schools and learners. Please remember – that what is said here, stays here—do not share information gleaned from individuals in this class about their schools or students with others outside of this class. Our research participants deserve our greatest consideration.

If you have questions about university policies (plagiarism, misconduct, etc.), please refer to the University catalog online. If it is an established policy—it is there!
Education for Transformation

Conceptual Framework of the Graduate School of Education,
University of Massachusetts-Lowell

The central tenets of our conceptual framework are

Excellence, Equity, Inquiry and Collaboration

In this class I interpret the framework in this way:

Excellence: The nature of this class—an inquiry into an issue of personal/professional interest—never fails to draw out students’ best efforts. I am continually impressed by the curiosity and intensity with which class members participate. The class is structured so that this excellence is a shared commodity, that is, we seek to bring everyone up to the highest level of achievement.

Equity: The projects students undertake in this class seek to solve challenging problems related to the integration of technology in education. Within the course, I am always on the look-out for ways to provide all students with the attention they need to do their best work. I also seek to insure that no student is excluded, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Inquiry: Inquiry is at the heart of this course. This course is dedicated to developing students’ skills and inclinations in the arena of educational inquiry. I hope you will leave with a strong appreciation for the value that inquiry has to the educational endeavor.

Collaboration: There are many opportunities for meaningful collaboration in this class. You will be working with class colleagues to improve your work and develop interpretation of your collected materials. Their comments and suggestions will prove invaluable to your work, and likewise, your comments and suggestions will help your class colleagues to improve their work, clarify their meaning, and better communicate their results.

Thank you for joining me this semester. I look forward to the journey with you.