

Learning in a Digital Age

A Study in Course Creation

In the current technology-enhanced world, there's an assumption that most everyone is comfortable with, and capable of online learning. While the ubiquity of digital communication, automated assistance, and constant connectivity supports this assumption, the reality is that many people around the world, from all walks of life, don't have the skills required to effectively use digital resources and technologies for an academic purpose.

Providing a resource to help learners gain more value from Open Educational Resources (OER) is a primary concern for the Open Education Resource universitas (OERu). While designing the 1st Year of Study programme for OERu, the team determined there was a pressing need for a credit-bearing course to improve digital literacy skills, and thus the Learning in a Digital Age (LiDA) course was conceived.

Crowdsourcing a Curriculum

E-learning expert and independent consultant [Gráinne Conole](#) was brought in to coordinate the collaborative approach used to build the LiDA course. By turning to an extensive network of experts and professionals from around the world – four countries and both hemispheres – the development team identified and discussed the foundational requirements for incorporation the LiDA course. “Crowdsourcing is the process of getting work or funding, usually online, from a crowd of people,” said Professor Conole. “The idea behind crowdsourcing is that more heads are better than one. By canvassing a large crowd of people for ideas, skills, or participation, the quality of content and idea generation will be superior.”

Participants were invited to contribute to the course development via GoogleDocs, social media ([#OERuLiDA](#)), or directly on the [WikiEducator platform](#). By drawing from two existing courses from OERu partners, the team designed the curriculum for maximum re-use by OERu partners and other educators interested in sharing this course.

Open Design and Development

The OERu is heavily focused on open development to create repurposeable content, and refined as needed. The LiDA course was designed from start to finish as an open course, under a Creative Commons license, to enable engaged institutions to use it in its current form for their own students, or adopt it as a formal course for accreditation or a degree. Irwin Devries, Interim Associate Vice President of Open Learning at Thompson Rivers University and member of the team that developed the LiDA course shared,

“The diversity of offerings available to learners also means there is more potential for them to get lost and confused; more than ever before, learners need supportive ‘learning pathways’ to enable them to blend formal educational offerings, with free resources and services.” ~Gráinne conole, *designing for learning in an open world*



“The open design and development model, rather than being fixed in one time and place and in a particular cultural setting, becomes viable for repurposing by learners, instructors, and others interested in reusing the content for new cultural, instructional, and technological settings.”

“A balance of dynamic design decision-making and intentional collaboration among developers in learning design and related skill areas will help to support such innovation.” ~Irwin Devries, Interim Associate Vice President of Open Learning at Thompson Rivers University

Learning from the Learning Process

Developing the LiDA course through the OERu open design model, including a transparent and dynamic public record of the decision-making process, brought additional benefits to the educators from partners involved in the course creation. For Michelle Harrison, Senior Instructional Designer at Thompson Rivers University, working on the project brought additional benefits. “The opportunity to work with Gráinne, an expert in this process, was a fantastic learning experience,” shared Ms. Harrison. “The way the course development was structured, and the open source tools – such as the Kanban board (hosted at plan.oeru.org) and WikiEducator – provided a great opportunity to learn new approaches to course design, and I’ve since incorporated this learning into additional course development.”

1st Year of Study at OERu

Upon completion, the LiDA course will be made available through OERu, and will also be included in the 1st Year of Study programme, a comprehensive offering designed to prepare learners for academic and professional success. The 1st Year of Study is a no-charge programme with optional exit credentials assessed through OERu partners.

“As a philanthropic co-operation, the OERu 1st year of study will assist non-traditional learners embarking on their higher education journey who, through lack of funds, work commitments or lack of provision, may not be able to study through traditional mainstream channels.” ~ Wayne Mackintosh, Director of OER Foundation, and UNESCO / ICDE Chair in OER

