Faculty of Education

EDUC 5001G
Principles of Learning
Course outline, fall term, 2010

There is also a general Adobe Connect room available 24/7 to education graduate students:
Name: 2009-2010 Masters of Education General Room
URL: http://uoit.na3.acrobat.com/medgeneralroom0910/

Your Adobe Connect login is: your UOIT student ID number
The Faculty of Education will send you your initial password.
The purpose of the general room is to allow students to meet for the purpose of discussing course content and projects, especially in the interest of organizing and completing group projects.

You should plan for the full three hour Adobe Connect meeting time, but whenever possible, class meetings will last closer to two hours since a great deal of course work will take place in WebCT. Adobe Connect meetings are recorded—if you are unable to attend a regularly
scheduled Adobe Connect course meeting, you will be given an address for the recording. This is generally preferable to attending on the “wrong” evening since class discussions and activities may differ in the two course sections over time. However, if you wish to make a case for attending the other class, the possibility may exist.

Course Description
Course number: EDUC 5001G            Credit hours: 3
Course name: Principles of Learning

In this course I will introduce some of the history and current thinking about how human learning takes place. A principal focus will be learning in the context of formal learning environments like schools, colleges, universities, corporate or military training sites, etc. That is to say, our interest in studying learning in education is not entirely abstract: we want to understand learning for the purpose of improving learning environments. I will encourage you to look for the similarities and differences that characterize different learning theories and to look for new pathways of possibility for your own teaching and learning activities.

If the course is successful, students will have a richer understanding of principles that guide learning, a better sense of how to structure learning experiences for themselves and others, and a basis for thinking critically about and using digital technologies in education.
Most importantly, I hope students will leave the course with a sense that human learning is a distinctive feature of humanity, that our understanding of how learning occurs is really only beginning to take shape, that the field is rich with controversy, excitement, and possibility and that helping others to learn is a noble and rewarding way to earn a living.

Course goals and outcomes
My goals for the course are that it should serve to increase students’ knowledge and understanding of both historical and contemporary views of learning, provide them with resources and skills for continuous learning about learning, and facilitate professional performance by enhancing students’ ability to use their new knowledge and skills in practice.
Outcomes are a function of inputs. For this course, my inputs include such things as preparing this course outline, gathering resources for the course, selecting a textbook, developing and
maintaining the course WebCT site (and Wiki and social bookmarking sites), designing activities intended to enhance learning, presenting information in Adobe Connect meetings and in text form, engaging in dialogue with learners about the course content, honestly assessing student work, (and bringing my expertise to bear on all of the preceding). I hope that these inputs will help students to achieve the goals outlined above; however, the more important determinants of individual outcomes will be the time, energy, thought, and creativity that individual students invest in the course. With minimal commitment, students should gain a better knowledge and understanding of learning and an increased capacity to apply that knowledge and understanding in their work. With sincere and genuine curiosity, energy and imagination applied industriously, students may emerge with fundamentally different ideas about how people learn, about the current and future directions of research on learning, about ways to promote and encourage learning, about the place of technology in teaching and learning, and about what it means to teach.

I have done what I can to make it possible for everyone who takes the course to achieve these grand outcomes; I can only hope that all of the learners take advantage of the opportunity. If they do, we will have a great adventure together.

**Course Design**

When this course is finished, you will hopefully have more sophisticated ideas about course design. Hopefully, too, you will understand that in planning for an education graduate course, the instructor must assume the students will come from diverse backgrounds, have different levels and kinds of professional experience, work in a variety of different settings, have a wide range of interests and abilities, and have unique and personal expectations for their courses and programs. With so much variability, what kind of design can work?

In the course of your readings, you may come across “Constructing the Syllabus: Devising a Framework for Helping Students Learn to Think like Historians” by Todd Estes of Oakland University in Michigan. The article begins as follows:

In his fascinating portrait of college life, *Alma Mater: A College Homecoming*, P. F. Kluge quotes a professor who says of teaching and its effect on students: "Sure, teaching is method and information, but it's something else, a gift, an
enrichment of your life, a transformation that you spend the rest of your life discovering…. [You continue to learn that what students] got from [their mentor] wasn't mainly stuff he said in class about Moby-Dick. It was a posture about books and living, new categories, relations to larger realities and questions." In a similar vein, writer and literature professor Jay Parini writes: "It is much safer to rely on [teaching] ‘content,’ to believe that if students have studied a certain sequence of texts... that they have somehow moved closer to being educated. In truth, it is having a stance toward this material, a tone, a manner of address, that matters more." Exemplifying such an approach, Parini suggests, was the teaching of Robert Frost. "Frost gave the class something they could take with them out into the world after they left college: an approach to reading and thinking that was radically skeptical.... He gave them a way of being in the world, too, that involved making endless connections, of drawing things into comparison.”

Estes goes on to say that he has no illusion that he has this kind of impact in his classes, but he aims for it nonetheless. I am less humble. I know that over my 40 years of teaching, I have had just this kind of impact on some of my students. I could name some, but I know that there are others who might say “I had this crazy ed such prof once—I can’t remember a thing from the course, but he made us write short reaction papers to the things we read and I started doing that for all my courses and it really made a difference for me.” Or maybe “I took “Introduction to Computers in Education” from a guy that couldn’t find a shirt and tie to match, but we learned how to create little multimedia programs and that totally changed how I think about learning.”

So, I am designing this course so that people will leave the class changed. I want them (you) to be people who have new ways to think about learning that will impact all of their other courses and their professional work. Of course, I aiming at 100%, but if I get one, it will mean far more to me than if I taught you all to recite definitions of negative reinforcement by heart. (However, negative reinforcement is a MASSIVELY misunderstood concept—I’ll also be happy if everyone really understands and can apply that concept.)

What does this mean in terms of course organization? It means that there will be a lot of different ways to access the content—a textbook, Internet links, videos, social bookmarks, a wiki, primary research articles, online discussions, face-to-face (Adobe Connect) meetings. It means a lot of freedom in how you get at the content and very high expectations about what you do WITH the content. It means that I expect you to open your mind, challenge your past knowledge and understanding, question your interpretations of previous experiences, immerse yourself in new
ways of thinking about learning. If it is all working right for you, you should find yourself having dreams about the course content or readings. That may sound strange—but sometime during the course, I would love it if someone said “Hey—I know why you think we should have dreams about this stuff.”

If you need a name for this approach, you can call it collaborative knowledge building, but that is only part of what we will do.

I want this to be an adventure for you, but only your own attitudes and approach to the material will determine whether that happens.

**Required Texts/Readings**

The text for the course will be


by the Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education ([CBASSE](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=9853#toc)), published by The National Academies Press.

(If the link does not work, use this URL: [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=9853#toc](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=9853#toc)

Click on “Read this book free.” There are various options for purchase of the book in soft cover or PDF, but you can continue to use this site if you prefer. The combined book and PDF is the deal I have taken.

The course will rely heavily on online readings for information about the psychology of learning. In addition to the general list of resources at the course web site and the readings assigned for each week, students are very strongly encouraged to seek, find and share readings that will enrich the learning experience of their classmates. Shared readings will be listed in a social bookmarking site at: [http://delicious.com/ilprofessori](http://delicious.com/ilprofessori)

A separate Weekly Schedule of readings will be available in WebCT. It indicates the text chapters, other readings and other resources that will be the focus in each class meeting. *Additional readings will be recommended during the course by both the instructor and the students.*
Assignments

In this course, learning is meant to result from active engagement with others in the exploration of a body of knowledge and its potential applications. In the course of that study, I expect that learners will come to understand what the textbook authors have summarized nicely:

The new science of learning does not deny that facts are important for thinking and problem solving. Research on expertise in areas such as chess, history, science, and mathematics demonstrate that experts’ abilities to think and solve problems depend strongly on a rich body of knowledge about subject matter (e.g., Chase and Simon, 1973; Chi et al., 1981; deGroot, 1965). However, the research also shows clearly that “usable knowledge” is not the same as a mere list of disconnected facts. Experts’ knowledge is connected and organized around important concepts (e.g., Newton’s second law of motion); it is “conditionalized” to specify the contexts in which it is applicable; it supports understanding and transfer (to other contexts) rather than only the ability to remember. (p. 9)

Consequently, the assignments for the course are meant to focus on that “usable knowledge” and to give students an opportunity to show their developing expertise.

1. Learning Theory Wikiography 30% Due: 29 November

There is a course Wiki at http://wiki.apa.uoit.ca/EDUC5001-SEP10. Both sections of the course will collaborate in the building of this Wiki. Your assignment is to submit a brief personal wikiography summarizing, explaining and assessing your contributions to the course Wiki.

An average contribution could consist of

- two substantial contributions to entries about a learning theory (behaviorism, humanistic psychology, connectivism, etc.),
- two original entries about a learning theorist or researcher, and
- three additions, revisions or other major edits to entries made by others

The personal wikiography is meant to document your contributions to the course Wiki in terms of quantity and to make a case for the quality of your contributions.

Indicators of quality include

- clear comprehensible prose
- accuracy of information

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1 In terms of marking, I will consider “average” for a graduate student to be “B.” Higher marks can be obtained through a combination of additional work and/or work of high quality.
2. Analysis and synthesis paper 30%
Due: 6 December

It is undoubtedly clear that learning is not a simple, unitary phenomenon. Learning to swing a golf club is different from learning to critique films or design buildings and all of these are different from learning to play a musical instrument (which is different from learning to compose music). The first task for this paper is to use your growing knowledge of different perspectives on learning to analyse a learning environment with which you are familiar. The learning environment could be a class you teach, a sport you have learned to play, a film like *Dead Poets’ Society*, an online learning package you are familiar with, the way you were taught a second language or any other learning environment you wish to use (if you have doubts about the suitability of what you are thinking about—for example, if you think it may be too limiting in what it enables you to say, talk to me before getting too committed to the topic).

Your analysis should indicate which learning theories or perspectives were involved, what evidence there is to support these claims, and how well or poorly suited these perspectives were
to the learning tasks involved. The second task for this paper is to describe how you might structure the learning environment differently given what you are learning in this course. In doing so, you will need to explain how and why your new structure (your synthesis) might be expected to improve learning.

In assessing the analysis and synthesis papers, I will be looking for evidence that you have thought critically about the learning environment, that you have described the types of learning that were expected and the ways that the designer’s choices reflect decisions about how people would learn in this environment. You should be able to relate these decisions to historical or contemporary views of learning and to discuss the “fit” between the design of the learning environment and the prescriptions of the learning theories/perspectives used. In your synthesis, you should be able to write convincingly about whatever learning perspectives you think would better serve the learning environment and to provide a clear rationale for your expectation that better learning would occur with your new model.

As noted above, it is my hope that the knowledge you acquire in this course will alter your thinking about teaching and learning. The task in this assignment is to look ahead at what your new knowledge suggests about teaching and learning in the future. Will schools become less important as home learning becomes more available? Will face-to-face instruction become an historical oddity? Will shorter attention spans lead to shallower learning for many? Will the availability of search engines mean no one has to remember anything? These are only a few of the kinds of questions you might ask yourself to get a sense of what future you expect. I will be putting exemplars in a folder in WebCT and I will be glad to include pages suggested by class members. A detailed list of my expectations would be highly inappropriate—the task requires knowledge, but it also demands honesty, imagination and creativity. Assessment therefore will be quite subjective, but that does not mean whimsical—by the time this assignment is due, I am confident you will know that you can expect an honest and fair assessment from me.
Pecha kucha is a Japanese presentation format using a fixed number of PowerPoint slides and a fixed (short) period of time. I will explain more later, but you can expect something like “For the presentation of your vision, you will have 20 slides and 20 seconds per slide.” The usual result is a fast-paced but evocative presentation. There will also be some time for discussion.

**ALTERNATIVES/FLEXIBILITY**

You will see that part of what I think is important about learning is that the learner take ownership of the process. To that end,

_Pecha kucha topic—if you would rather do your pecha kucha presentation about your analysis and synthesis paper, just let me know._

_International project—I am working on a collaborative project with the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland. If all works out, you would have the opportunity to use your experience and your learning in this course to assist second-year undergraduate students at Ulster as they work on a class project related to “ICT in Education.” You may choose this assignment in lieu of either the analysis and synthesis paper or the vision paper._

_Going my way—got a great idea for something about learning you would really like to explore independently? Great! Give me a short proposal (about 200 words) indicating what you would like to do and how you think it could be assessed and we can talk. Again, may choose to do this in lieu of either the analysis and synthesis paper or the vision paper._

4. **Participation** 10%

The course is heavily dependent of student participation. I will assign a participation mark based on what I perceive to be your level of involvement in discussions both in WebCT and in Adobe Connect as well as your contributions to the course Wiki and bookmarks if you choose to send suggestions. If you think that I may not have all the information that should be considered (e.g., if you provided extensive to support to colleagues in out-of-class communications), you may send me an email explaining what you think I should consider.

**Assessment of student work**

APA style should be used for all formal course projects. A good summary of APA requirements can be found at Indiana University’s Online Writing laboratory (OWL):

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/), but it is advisable for all UOIT education graduate students to have a copy of the current APA style manual.
The descriptions of the assignments given above include detailed information about how the assignments will be assessed and what their relative weights are. Rubrics for the three assignments will be based on the above descriptions.

If, on any assignment, I think the work has not been completed to a graduate standard, I will return the assignment unmarked with some suggestions for revision. If the revision remains below graduate standard, I may suggest that the student reconsider whether this is the right time for them to pursue graduate study.

Students who feel that they could do better on an assignment may opt to revise and resubmit, but the revised mark will not be more that two steps higher than the original (e.g., B- to B+) and in no case will the revised mark be higher than A- (in fairness to those who earned an A or A+ without revision).

The following sections may seem harsh and legalistic—that’s because they are. They are meant to insure that our learning community is based on equity, fairness, and honesty. Please be assured that including them here does not mean that I distrust you. In general, I have rarely had reason to question the academic integrity of graduate students. I do, however, take the principles of equity, fairness, and honesty seriously and, in that spirit, feel I should insure that you are aware of university policies.

Accessibility

To ensure that disability-related concerns are properly addressed during this course, students with documented disabilities who may require assistance to participate in this class are encouraged to speak with their instructor as soon as possible. Students who require alternative testing and examination arrangements or other academic accommodations must contact the Centre for Students with Disabilities (B297) as early as possible to ensure their needs can be met.

Professional Conduct

The Foundations of Practice of the Ontario College of Teachers (see http://www.oct.ca/publications/PDF/foundation_e.pdf ) provides a comprehensive statement on professionalism. Students in this course are expected to act in accordance with these policies.

Academic Integrity
Students and faculty at UOIT share an important responsibility to maintain the integrity of the teaching and learning relationship. This relationship is characterized by honesty, fairness and mutual respect for the aim and principles of the pursuit of education.

Academic misconduct impedes the activities of the university community and is punishable by appropriate disciplinary action. Students are expected to be familiar with UOIT’s regulations on Academic Conduct (Section 5.15 of the Academic Calendar) which sets out the kinds of actions that constitute academic misconduct, including plagiarism, copying or allowing one’s own work to copied, use of unauthorized aids in examinations and tests, submitting work prepared in collaboration with another student when such collaboration has not been authorized, and other academic offences. The regulations also describe the procedures for dealing with allegations, and the sanctions for any finding of academic misconduct, which can range from a written reprimand to permanent expulsion from the university. A lack of familiarity with UOIT’s regulations on academic conduct does not constitute a defense against its application.

Further information on academic integrity is available at: www.uoit.ca/EN/academicintegritystudent

Turnitin

UOIT and faculty members reserve the right to use electronic means to detect and help prevent plagiarism. Students agree that by taking this course all assignments are subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com. Assignments submitted to Turnitin.com will be included as source documents in Turnitin.com's restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents for five academic years. The faculty member may require students to submit their assignments electronically to Turnitin.com or the faculty member may submit questionable text on behalf of a student. The terms that apply to UOIT’s use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com website.

At the time the work is assigned, students must inform their professors if they are not giving permission to have their work submitted to Turnitin.com AND sign the Turnitin.com Assignment Cover sheet at: http://www.uoit.ca/assets/Academic~Integrity~Site/Forms/Assignment%20Cover%20sheet.pdf