

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
Instructional Technology

EDIT 641- Understanding Virtual Schools (1 graduate credit hour)
Offered in the Fall, Spring, and Summer Semesters Yearly
Offered Online

PROFESSOR(S)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

- A. No Prerequisite
- B. This one credit hour course is designed to develop students' knowledge about the world of online learning for K-12 students. As part of the course, students will examine the history of online learning, current trends in online learning, and the characteristics and learning needs of K-12 virtual learners. In addition, students will examine and critique sample virtual high school programs as well as selected demonstration courses made available by a wide range of service providers. Finally, students will examine the literature related to the benefits, limitations, and important criticisms of virtual learning opportunities for K-12 students. The course culminates in the submission of a briefing paper presenting clear recommendations to educational policy makers.

NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY

This course is an online course. Students participate in an ongoing process where the learner takes responsibility for structuring his or her time and decides, within a broader time frame, when it is appropriate to complete assignments. Each student registered for a course is a learner of one and is assigned an Online Mentor. The Online Mentor reviews all the assignments submitted, makes suggestions if the assignment is incomplete, responds to ideas, and/or makes suggestions for ways that students can refine their work to construct a more convincing argument or create more powerful learning opportunities. The online mentor asks questions about what students are thinking or learning about. The online mentor is the student's online ally and is the contact point when an assignment does not make sense, when there are difficulties with technology, or if students are stuck for a good teaching idea. The course is web-based and uses a cluster of organized web pages. In addition, students will use phone, email, and synchronous chat functions to communicate with their mentor.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

This course is designed to enable students to:

1. explore the current state of virtual learning opportunities for secondary education students;
2. identify and describe the range of characteristics associated with secondary education virtual high school students;

3. examine and analyze a representative set of virtual high school learning environments for common and distinguishing characteristics; and
4. review the literature and research associated with a range of representative virtual high school learning environments and to be able to identify benefits and limitations inherent in these environments.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

This course is designed to meet the standards established by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The NBPTS Standards for every field and developmental level are centered on five core propositions that express the effectiveness, knowledge, skills, dispositions, and commitments of the accomplished teacher:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- Teachers are members of learning communities.

REQUIRED TEXTS

There is one required text for this course and a number of web references to appropriate articles. The primary text for the course is

Maeroff, Gene (2003). *A Classroom of One*, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. (ISBN: 1403960852)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT, AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

A. Requirements

1. Students will complete the textbook and submit 25 word summaries of the central ideas as well as a set of elaborating bulleted statements. Students will use Inspiration software to construct a web representing their summaries and elaborations for each set of reading.
2. To demonstrate knowledge of the characteristics of virtual secondary education learners, students will construct three personas or profiles of potential virtual learners. In addition, students will assume the persona of virtual secondary education students and draft a letter to the school board stating why virtual learning opportunities should be available to them.
3. To demonstrate knowledge of the range of virtual learning environments available to secondary education students, students will examine a representative set of virtual learning environments and virtual learning courses and complete a table of attributes that result from their examination. They will then complete a short analysis of the results identifying trends, strengths, and weaknesses.
4. Students will read a supplemental set of articles that reflect current literature and research related to the outcomes of virtual learning opportunities for secondary students. Upon completion of the readings, students will summarize their findings using a benefit/limitations table.
5. In response to a request from their Superintendent, students will prepare a PowerPoint presentation and briefing paper to present to their school board about virtual learning for secondary education students. The presentation and paper are to be designed to inform the school board about the current state of virtual learning for secondary students, the benefits

and limitations, and to make a recommendation for guidelines that the school board should use to select opportunities for their students.

B. Performance-Based Assessments

This course includes two performance-based assessments. The first is a PowerPoint presentation, and the second is a 3 to 5 page briefing paper. These are described in #5 in Requirements.

C. Criteria for Evaluation

Assessment of each is guided by a rubric. The rubrics are as follows:

A School Board Presentation Rubric

	Masterful and Concise (5)	Appropriate and Sufficient (3)	Weak and Incomplete (1)
1. Slides are aesthetically constructed			
2. Slides do not have too much information - rather they prompt and identify main points/topics			
3. Speaker's notes are complete and provide sufficient prompts for important supporting information the speaker would provide verbally			
4. Slides have been carefully checked for spelling and grammar			

A Briefing Paper Rubric

	Masterful and Compelling (5)	Appropriate and Articulate (3)	Weak and Not Very Convincing (1)
1. Includes a well-written introduction to virtual learning			
2. Includes a well-written description of the needs and uses of virtual learning by high school students			
3. Includes a well-written description/ analysis of virtual high school programs and courses			
4. Presents a clear recommendation for district action and includes appropriate statements about concerns and criteria			
5. Has been carefully edited for spelling and grammar			
6. Includes references to add authority			
7. Is no less than 3 pages and no more than 5 pages			

D. Grading Scale

Requirements	Possible Points
Inspiration Summaries and Bulleted Points	10
Personas of Virtual Secondary Students	5
Letter to Superintendent	5
Table of Attributes and Analysis	15
Benefits and Limitations Table	10
PowerPoint Presentation with Speaker Notes	20
Briefing Paper	35

Grade	Point Range
A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	86-89
B	80-85
C	70-79
F	69-below

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS

All students must abide by the following:

Students are expected to exhibit professional behavior and dispositions. See gse.gmu.edu for a listing of these dispositions.

Students must follow the guidelines of the University Honor Code. See http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#TOC_H12 for the full honor code.

Students must agree to abide by the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. See <http://mail.gmu.edu> and click on Responsible Use of Computing at the bottom of the screen.

Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the GMU Disability Resource Center (DRC) and inform the instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. See www.gmu.edu/student/drc or call 703-993-2474 to access the DRC.

PROPOSED CLASS SCHEDULE

This 1 graduate credit hour course is designed to be completed in five weeks. Given the online nature of the course, assignments are clustered in weekly modules. Students, in conjunction with their online mentor, are responsible for dividing the assignments accordingly.

Date	Topic/Learning Experiences	Readings and Assignments
Week 1	<p>In this module, students will be introduced to virtual learning, especially virtual learning for high school students. They will learn what virtual learning is all about, a little about its history and goals, and a little about its potential. The best way to begin this journey is through reading chapters in the course book and several additional articles. Students will complete each of the activities listed to the right.</p>	<p>Activity 1: Read Chapters 1 through 4 in Gene Maeroff's book, A Classroom of One. When you have completed the reading, move on to Activity 2.</p> <p>Activity 2: Complete summaries and bulleted elaborations.</p> <p>Activity 3: Read the following articles:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">E-Defining Education Virtual High, Real Opportunity Virtual Schooling Myths</p> <p>Activity 4: Begin work on Presentation</p>
Week 2	<p>In this module, students will be introduced to the virtual learner. Which kinds of students elect virtual learning opportunities? For whom is virtual learning an appropriate option? What are the challenges that virtual learners confront? What are the attributes of good virtual learners?</p>	<p>Activity 1: Read Chapters 5, 6, and 12 in Gene Maeroff's book, A Classroom of One. When you have completed the reading, move on to Activity 2.</p> <p>Activity 2: Complete summaries and bulleted elaborations.</p> <p>Activity 3: Read the following articles:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Students Speak Out The Voices of Experience - Part 1</p> <p>Activity 4: Personas of Online Learners</p> <p>Activity 5: A Virtual Virtual High School Learner Speaks Out</p> <p>Activity 6: Continue work on Presentation</p>
Week 3	<p>In this module, students will be introduced to virtual high school programs and virtual high school courses. As they read about and then review virtual high school programs, they will identify similarities in the choices about delivery, requirements, and content. Then, as they review actual demonstration courses, they will be asked to think about the assumptions about learning, learners, teaching, and curriculum that are reflected in the course designs.</p>	<p>Activity 1: Read Chapters 9, 10, and pages 199 - 204) in 11 in Gene Maeroff's book, A Classroom of One. When you have completed the reading, move on to Activity 2.</p> <p>Activity 2: Complete summaries and bulleted elaborations.</p> <p>Activity 3: Read the following article:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Sizing Up Online Curriculum</p> <p>Activity 4: Virtual High School Program Examples</p>

		<p>Activity 5: Virtual High School Course Examples</p> <p>Activity 6: Continue work on Presentation</p>
Week 4	<p>Although you have encountered reference to many benefits and limitations to virtual high school learning in your readings so far, this module focuses your attention on benefits and limitations associated with virtual high school learning and learners. It is always important to understand the criticisms as well as the promises and to be aware of the challenges others might ask you to respond to. What are the positives related to virtual learning for high school students? What more can you learn about the limitations like funding, curriculum, accreditation, online teaching, and even the concept of virtual learning itself?</p>	<p>Activity 1: Read Chapters 13, 14, and pages 278 -283 in Chapters 15 in Gene Maeroff's book, A Classroom of One. When you have completed the reading, move on to Activity 2.</p> <p>Activity 2: Complete summaries and bulleted elaborations.</p> <p>Activity 3: Read the following articles:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">A Review of Virtual High Schools Virtual Schools: Trends and Issues Knowledge Universe and Virtual Schools The K12 Virtual Primary School History Curriculum</p> <p>Activity 4: A Benefits/Dilemmas Analysis</p> <p>Activity 5: Continue work on Presentation</p>
Week 5	<p>In this module, you will be challenged to do two activities: 1.) finalize your PowerPoint and add recommendations and a list of considerations to be ponder as your school division makes decisions about virtual learning opportunities for its students, and 2.) prepare the briefing paper for school board members and district administrators requested by the Superintendent. In doing these two activities, you will have the opportunity to use all the materials you have read and all the products you have produced to synthesize all that you have learned about virtual high schools and virtual learning.</p>	<p>Activity 1: Complete your PowerPoint Presentation. Add the final sections that will include your recommendations to the school board and inform them about the considerations and concerns they need to ponder as they plan for virtual learning opportunities for school division students. Be sure to refer to the Presentation Rubric to guide your efforts.</p> <p>Activity 2: Prepare A Briefing Paper</p>