FWI Progress Report

On-Line Learning Contracts: A pilot project for Psychology, Neuroscience & Behaviour (PNB) experiential education courses
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BACKGROUND – FWI PROPOSAL:

The department of Psychology Neuroscience & Behaviour has been administering independent study courses both in the department and in the community for many years. All of these experiences have been conducted without the benefit of a learning contract, which has become common practice in Bachelor of Health Science programs or the experiential education courses within the Faculty of Science. The present proposal planned to rectify this shortcoming to ensure maximal benefit, for the students, from these intensive experiences.

Currently, a traditional learning contract involves students completing a paper form describing the project and how they will be evaluated, in consultation with the primary supervisor. Next, the community supervisor (if applicable) approves the project and method of evaluation followed by approval from the academic supervisor. Finally, the administrative office approves the entire contract. If at any stage there are problems with the proposal, the student is left returning to the beginning and modifying the challenging portion of their contract. The final form is kept on file in the administrative office, for a limited duration, after the course is completed. Since learning contracts are an important tool for successful and positive independent study experiences for both students and advising faculty members, developing an efficient tool for managing a contract is essential to experiential learning.

Goal. To develop an on-line web-based system that would allow students to maximize their experience in a laboratory or library study within the department or the community. The system would be scalable to accommodate the entire University population if it should prove effective.

IMPLEMENTATION:

This project originally proposed to use the FWI funds for on-line contract software development. Once the proposal received funding, we worked with the Science Media Lab to draft a Request for Proposals. Based on that process, we concluded that the $10,000 would not develop a full-fledged application, and that any application created would not be scalable. In collaboration with MIETL (McMaster Institute for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching and Learning), we have decided to use the existing Learning Portfolio AVENUE tool to develop On-line Learning Contracts.

Using AVENUE to Learn’s Learning Portfolios as the software for On-line Learning Contracts required Contract Form template creation, but little software development. The PNB department Curriculum Assistant (CA), Irina Ghilic,
developed the Learning Contract templates, and trained faculty and students on their use. The CA met with AVENUE to Learn staff at MIIETL, to ensure the end product met the best practices of pedagogy and instruction. We implemented the on-line contracts in January 2014, in the PNB 2QQ3 Individual Lab Study course. This is a competitive course that typically has 15-20 students enrolled in Term 2 of Level 2.

The main steps for developing and implementing the on-line learning contracts were:

1. Create Contract Form (see PDF 1 – Learning Contract Form)
2. Add professors and students to the AVENUE PNB 2QQ3 course
3. Create a Dropbox in AVENUE for each professor
4. Create a grading scheme for the Learning Contract Dropbox submission (a mark out of 1) that would allow for completion marks to be assigned (1/1), but no real grade value for the course (0% value attributed to the Dropbox submission)
5. Once the final form was submitted to the professor’s Dropbox, as instructed by the step-by-step documents (PDF’s 2 & 3: Step-by-Step for Students and Faculty, respectively), the professor gave a 1/1 if the final contract was satisfactory
6. Any administrators added to the course would be able to access each Dropbox OR the grading sheet, and see which students received a 1/1 (which marked completion of the contract between the student and the professor).

Students and Faculty were given step-by-step instructions on how to fill out the form, share the contract, add comments, make edits, and submit the final Learning Contract.

**DISCUSSION:**

Due to the project being a pilot study, and not mandated by departmental requirements, not all PNB 2QQ3 professors complied with the requirements for completing the contracts. However, feedback given by those professors who completed the contracts was positive. The process was deemed “simple, fast and clear”. Students also found the on-line learning contracts to be easy, and the step-by-step documents to be extremely simple to follow. The entire process was not onerous on the professors, or the administrator of the course, and the feedback system was easy to follow by all parties involved.

**SCALABILITY:**

Given our work in using Learning Portfolios for Learning Contracts, our team encourages the use of learning portfolios for independent study courses, especially for all departments who are currently using paper learning contracts.
Once a contract form is created within an AVENUE course, any student enrolled in that course can select the form, via their Learning Portfolios, complete it and share it with whoever manages their independent study. The only caveat in using AVENUE for Learning Contracts is the need for a MacID to access the system. However, temporary MacID’s can be requested from UTS, for community partners who are involved in Experiential Learning or Independent Study courses.

Our team is glad to share the “Step-by-Step” documents, and make changes, wherever necessary, to fit specific departmental needs. Moreover, in partnership with MIIETL, the CA can provide training seminars for those interested in adopting the On-line AVENUE Learning Contracts.
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AVENUE LEARNING CONTRACT FORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Name</th>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Name</td>
<td>System</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Name</td>
<td>System</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>System</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* PNB 2QQ3 Supervisor</td>
<td>Text Input - Simple Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNB 2QQ3 Project Title</td>
<td>Text Input - Simple Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Objectives</td>
<td>Separator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In answering each question, please include aspects of Academic Learning, Skills Development and Personal Development</td>
<td>Separator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Learning Objectives (&quot;What will I learn?&quot;)</td>
<td>Text Input - Formatted Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tasks &amp; Strategies (&quot;How will I learn it?&quot;)</td>
<td>Text Input - Formatted Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Separator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Methods of Evaluation (&quot;How will I be evaluated?&quot;)</td>
<td>Text Input - Formatted Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Completion Date for all Objectives and Evaluations</td>
<td>Date and Time Input</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning Objectives

In answering each question, please include aspects of Academic Learning, Skills Development and Personal Development

1. Learning Objectives ("What will I learn?")
2. Tasks & Strategies ("How will I learn it?")

3. Methods of Evaluation ("How will I be evaluated?")

Please include critical milestones and evaluation tools. Make sure to specify the weight and date of completion for each milestone. You may insert a table if it helps you organize this information.

4. Completion Date for all Objectives and Evaluations

7/17/2014

Canada - Toronto
Step 1: Learning Portfolio in AVENUE

Go to your Learning Portfolio in AVENUE to Learn.

Step 2: "My Items" Page

Go to the "My Items" page.

Step 3: Form Response (i.e. Learning Contract)

On the "My Items" page, click Form Response from the Add button.
Step 4: Select Form

Click the name of the form you want to fill out. In your case, "PNB 2QQ3 Learning Contract".

Step 5: Fill out the Form (i.e. Learning Contract)

Fill out the form based on your previous discussions with your supervisor. Let Irina Ghilic (ghilicai@mcmaster.ca) know if you have any questions or concerns.
Step 6: Save Form response

In the Artifact Details area, provide a **Name** and **Description** unique to this form entry. Make sure you **SAVE** the completed form.

**Artifact Details**

**Name**

PNB 2QQ3 Learning Contract - Irina Ghilic

**Description**

Tags

*What are tags?*

[Save] [Back] [Cancel]
Step 7: Share the Form

Go to the form in your Learning Portfolio, and click the drop down menu, located at the end of the form title. Then click "Share".

Step 8: Add users

Click on "Add Users"
Step 9: Search for your supervisor

Search for your supervisor, preferably using their MacID. If you've ever received an email from them, sent from their mcmaster.ca email address, their MacID is whatever comes before "@mcmaster.ca".
Step 10: Select users

Once you find them, make sure you click on their name to add them to your "Selected Users". Make sure your permissions allow your supervisor to add comments and edit. Click **ADD** when you are done.

*Note: This window may look slightly different for you, since I am not sharing a form to demonstrate these steps. However, the same principles apply.
Step 11: Commenting

Your supervisor can now comment on your Learning Contract. You can see the comment right away, and can comment back.

- ANA GHILIC MICU
  - January 15 6:29 PM
  - I think the contract looks good, now that you have taken my comments into consideration. You may submit it to the course Dropbox.

- ANA GHILIC MICU
  - January 16 12:26 PM
  - Ok sounds good!
Step 12: Submit Form to Dropbox

Once you supervisor gives you the OK to submit to dropbox, please follow these steps. Make sure you submit your form the your lab's dropbox.

1. Go to the Dropbox tool in the appropriate course.
2. Open the folder you want to submit an ePortfolio item to.
3. Click **Add a File**.
   1. Select **ePortfolio** from the left tool menu.
   2. Select the item you want to add (your PNB 2QQ3 Learning Contract)
   3. Click **Select Item**.
4. Enter any comments you want to include with your submission.
5. Click **Submit**.
Step 13: Questions?

Please let Irina Ghilic (ghilicai@mcmaster.ca) know if you have any questions, comments or concerns regarding this process. Thank you, and have a great term, filled with wonderful PNB research :)

Step 0: Learning Contract as "Course Form" (for information purposes only; no action required on your part)

The Learning Contract has already been created for the PNB 2QQ3 AVENUE Course. You can view the contract at any time by selecting the PNB 2QQ3 course in AVENUE, and navigating to the "Edit Course" section.

Forms

Click on "Forms" to view the forms available for the course.
Learning Contract

The form is appropriately titled "PNB 2QQ3 Learning Contract". This form is available to all students registered in the PNB 2QQ3 course.

Preview Contract

You may view the form by clicking it's title, followed by "Preview Form". Please let Irina Ghilic (ghilicai@mcmaster.ca) know if you would like an individualized form (i.e. special items/questions added for your lab).

Step 1: Learning Portfolio

Your PNB 2QQ3 student will complete the first step of the process, by filling out the Learning Contract. Once they have filled out the Learning Contract, you can view it in your own AVENUE Learning Portfolio.
Step 2: Shared Items

You can view the filled out form under "My Items", or, for easier viewing, under "Shared Items".

Step 3: Viewing the Learning Contract

You can view the learning contract by clicking on its title.

Step 4: Leaving comments

You can leave general comments after you've viewed the form by clicking on "Comment". Make sure to "Add comment" once you are done. All comments are time stamped and they will appear immediately in your student's Learning Portfolio.
Step 5: Editing the Contract

Instead of leaving comments, you can edit the student's responses, or leave comments in-text (make sure you make them apparent by leaving them in **bold** or *italics*). You can do so in a couple of easy steps: "Edit" & "Modify Form".

Modify Form
Step 6: Modify and Save

Make sure you save the changes you made to the completed form.

Step 7: Review of final draft

Your students will see the comments or edits as soon as you save them. Once you go through this process once or several times, you can give the student the OK to submit their final contract to the dropbox either by leaving a comment, or by other means of communication (email, meeting, etc.)

Edited by ANA GHILIC MICU

I think the contract looks good, now that you have taken my comments into consideration. You may submit it to the course Dropbox.
Step 8: Dropbox

Navigate to Dropbox to see the final submission of the learning contract.

Step 9: Lab Specific Dropbox

Each lab will have a separate dropbox. Make sure to remind your students to submit their Learning Contract to the correct dropbox. Click on the dropbox title to view submissions.
Step 10: View "users with submissions"

To make it easier for you, please select "users with submissions" and then click on the magnifying glass.

Step 11: View the submission

Click on the title of the submission to view the final learning contract.
Step 12: View the Learning Contract

A new page/tab will open. "View" the learning contract, and go back to the previous page/tab when ready to evaluate the submission.
Step 13: Evaluate the Learning Contract

You viewed the submission in a newly opened Internet page/tab. Go back to the page/tab you were on before you clicked "view". It will now be titled "Evaluate Submission". If you are satisfied with the contract, please give it 1/1 & Publish. Your work is done! Ann Hollingshead and Irina Ghilic will make sure that all your students have successfully completed their online Learning Contracts, and the 1/1 score is an easy way to verify completion. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Irina Ghilic (ghilicai@mcmaster.ca).