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Humanizing Virtual Learning Facilitator Guide

Peeking behind the curtain

Welcome to **Humanizing virtual learning: A guide to creating connection, engagement, and inclusivity** (HVL). The HVL [course authors and development team](#) are thrilled that you are running this course at your institution!

As an authoring and development team, we have striven, as much as possible, to create a resource that will meet the wide-ranging needs of post-secondary educators (instructors and academic support unit staff) in the college and university sectors. In the interest of transparency, we offer you a brief overview of the steps we took to identify the needs of our prospective learners, and the design decisions we made to meet those needs.

What did we do to find out about and meet our learners' needs?

Needs analysis interviews

Before starting development, we conducted a series of **needs analysis interviews** in which we asked instructors and ASU staff at academic institutions across Ontario what they were looking for in a resource of this nature.

Here is what interview participants told us they wanted

Opportunities to create resources for their own course/a focus on take-aways they could use

Participants wanted the course to guide them in creating **concrete and tangible resources that they could use in their own context.** Most emphasized a desire to be able to come away from the course with resources for improving or assessing their own real-world virtual course.

An emphasis on examples and peer modelling

Participants wanted to see real-world **examples of humanizing strategies in virtual courses,** and to hear from **peer instructors** about what they did to improve connection, engagement, and inclusivity in their own courses. Templates, case-studies, practical examples, and videos from other instructors were all mentioned as valuable.

Resources on EDDI, accessibility, and mental health and wellness for students and instructors

Many participants were keen for resources that addressed **mental health and wellness concerns** in virtual courses, **both for students and instructors**. Several participants mentioned a need for information on Universal Design for Learning, accessibility, and EDI issues.

Information about how to improve skills in synchronous teaching

Many participants expressed a desire to improve their skills in **synchronous** learning sessions, as they believe synchronous sessions to be an important strategy for humanizing learning.

A modular format that was easy to navigate and deliver asynchronously

Some participants wanted to be able to easily **find and dive into specific topics** of interest readily,

without necessarily taking an entire course. In addition, the time individuals were willing to invest on a course on this topic ranged from 4 hrs to 20 hours, so ensuring modularity was a priority.

A course available both as an OER and in an LMS

Some participants wanted the course available as an OER, so that they could share it with colleagues easily, while others preferred a facilitated offering in an LMS, so that they could experience it in a cohort with peers and facilitated by experts. Several participants indicated an interest in receiving a credential that they could reference on their CV. Some ASU staff indicated that they would like a credentialed version of the course, but some indicated that they did not have the resources to staff it with facilitators, so they preferred a resource-conservative asynchronous LMS course. Some ASU staff indicated that they would not be able to maintain a course in their institutional LMS and preferred the OER.

Design decisions made in consideration of identified needs

The needs analysis informed the following course design features:

- **A modular format**, organized in two parts:

Part	Module
Part 1: Design and Development	Module 1: Designing for Connection
	Module 2: Designing for Inclusivity
Part 2: Delivery and Facilitation	Module 3: Facilitating for Connection
	Module 4: Facilitating for Inclusivity

  These modules can be completed sequentially or as stand-alone modules, allowing participants to begin at whatever module aligns best with their goals.

- **A focus on application-based outcomes.** Activities in the course are designed to help participants actively build/reflect on/revise/facilitate their own virtual course to give them tangible take-aways that they can apply to their own virtual course.

- **Plenty of practical examples, case studies, and templates.** We've made these easy to locate by:
  - separating out "Strategies in action" examples on their own pages in each module, and
  - highlighting the "Strategies in action" examples on each module overview page, including direct links to the examples, strategies, and templates provided throughout the module.

To ensure that we were meeting the needs of as many users as possible, we created this course with two distinct components:

- **An Open Educational Resource (OER)**, built within Pressbooks:
  - [Humanizing virtual learning: A guide to creating connection, engagement, and inclusivity](#) **(HVL Pressbook)**

- o The HVL Pressbook OER is open and available to anyone, at anytime, on the web. It is a self-directed learning experience and has **no credential** associated with it.
- This **Learning Management System (LMS) companion site**, which includes the opportunity for learners to earn a certificate of completion for the course. This companion site contains:
  - o **four module pages** that provide links to the corresponding module in the OER and links to the module activities;
  - o **four module quizzes** in which learners indicate which activities they have completed in each module.

The LMS materials enable learners to earn a credential for the course, either through a facilitated or an unfacilitated offering, as described in the "**Over to you!**" section below.

Environmental Scan

We conducted an environmental scan to ensure we were not creating an OER /course that already existed. This scan revealed many valuable OERs that provide more information about different topics addressed in this course, for those who would like to take a deeper dive into a particular topic. These resources have been curated and included as "**Going deeper**" resources embedded in callout boxes throughout the content pages and listed on each module overview page in the HVL OER.

User experience (UX) testing

After we developed the prototype module (Module 1), **we conducted UX testing** with instructors and ASU staff. Participants were observed as they performed a series of search tasks in the developed module and were subsequently interviewed about their experiences, sharing what they liked, didn't like, what worked well for them and what did not. Usability problems that surfaced during this testing were fixed, including:

- improving navigation by enumerating the module overview pages;
- improving the layout of the module overview pages;
- more clearly explaining the options for navigation in the "About this course" section;
- embedding videos directly on pages rather than linking to them;
- ensuring that all images had alt-text and descriptive text, and
- improving the activity instructions.

However, the biggest take-away from the UX testing was a reaffirmation that participants wanted the course to focus on **practical applications and take-aways that they could use in their own contexts**. As one participant asked, "*What do I gain from it? Are my students going to be more engaged, [will there be] efficiencies in my workflow, will it save me time? I am looking for the reward*."

As a result of this feedback, we streamlined our learning outcomes, framing them as "**What you can take away from this course**," and better signalling them in callout boxes on module overview pages.

It is also worth mentioning that some UX participants were very eager to read the research literature in support of the design principles we introduced in the module, while others weren't interested in this at

all. To address both of these audiences, we have included "**Going deeper"** resources in callout boxes throughout the course, and also listed links to these resources on module overview pages, to enhance findability.

That, in a nutshell, describes the backstory of this course. We are delighted to hand it over to you now, to continue its journey, and to take the story in whichever direction you and your learners need it to go.

Over to you!

As explained above, our needs analysis identified that while some prospective learners were keen to **acquire a credential for this course,** and to **participate in a facilitated version** of it, others (e.g., ASU staff at some institutions) indicated that they would **not be able to maintain a facilitated offering** of the course in their institutional LMS.

To meet these divergent needs, we offer below a few recommendations for delivering a **credentialed** version of this course in your institutional LMS, either as an **unfacilitated** or as a **facilitated** offering.

If you intend to run an unfacilitated version

This course is currently set up to run unfacilitated. The unfacilitated version of the course can be set up to result in a credential. We've made this easy to do:

1. On the Course Overview page, learners are provided with a **Course Schedule** that shows the structure of the course, and outlines recommended deadlines to help learners stay on track to obtain their certificate of completion.
    - If you are running the asynchronous unfacilitated course in cohorts, where everyone starts at the same time, you may want to add the specific days of the month/week by which you would like learners to complete each module.
2. Learners will move through the content modules at their own pace, following the recommended due date structure.
3. At the end of each module, learners are provided with a list of activities and are asked to complete 3 of their choice. Rather than submitting these activities for grading, learners are asked to complete a module quiz to indicate which of the 3 activities they completed. If 3 activities are selected, learners will be given an automatic passing score of. A passing score on all 4 Module quizzes indicates the successful completion of the course.
4. Upon successful completion of the course, learners can be given a **certificate of completion**. A Word version of a certificate of completion is available in the Facilitator Guide section of this LMS. It can be adapted (e.g., by adding an institutional logo, and including the successful participant's name and the date of completion of the course) and sent to successful participants either automatically through your LMS, or manually:
    - If your LMS allows for conditional release of content, you may be able to automate the release of a generic version of this certificate, once participants achieve a pass on all 4 module quizzes. If this is the case, you will need to modify the Certificate of Completion, to create a generic version without a name or date field.

- If your LMS does not have this functionality, a facilitator may need to manually check that participants have successfully completed all module quizzes and email the certificate to successful participants individually.

If you intend to run a facilitated version

Some ideas for you to consider include:

1. Providing learners with a **structured schedule** with deadlines. We have created a schedule for you, but feel free to modify it to align with your needs. You can access the schedule in the Course Overview section of the LMS.
2. Creating **dropboxes or assignments** for learners to submit their activities, and having facilitators offer individual feedback.
3. Creating **discussion forums** for learners to share ideas and receive feedback from their colleagues prior to submitting their activities to the dropboxes or assignments.
4. Setting up one or two **synchronous sessions** where facilitators and learners can discuss course content and ask questions or offer course-specific advice in real time. If you decide to hold a session like this, you may get more uptake and participation if you poll learners ahead of time to see what topics(s) they would most like to discuss. If you know of an instructor at your institution who is a champion in humanizing learning practices, they may be willing to join a synchronous discussion and share their experience.
5. Asking learners to engage in a **final reflective exercise**, as drafted below. This can be made available as an asynchronous discussion activity.

   > *Final Reflection Activity*
   > Take this opportunity to reflect on what you've learned in the course, and how that will impact your approach to creating humanized virtual learning experiences for your learners.
   >
   > **Discussion prompt:** How has your thinking about virtual teaching and learning shifted as a result of what you've learned? What will you do differently? What change(s) will you implement right away?

6. Upon completion of the course content and activities, providing learners with the **certificate of completion** located in the Facilitator Guide section of this LMS.