Navigating Your Digital Learning Environment

A Learning Environment is an ecosystem of people, values, practices, content, physical spaces and technology. It is the classroom, lab, and library; the teachers and students; the course curriculum and materials; the learning activities; and the integrated tools and devices; all of which are essential for learning, communication, and collaboration.

Why Digital?
The learning environment is becoming increasingly digital as technology resources help extend and individualize learning. One of the hallmarks of a Digital Learning Environment is that it can afford the practitioner access to a collection of resources to customize their approach to teaching and learning. Understanding how to best integrate those resources for your own teaching is at the heart of the DLE.

What’s a DLE?
A Digital Learning Environment is the collection of resources instructors can use to customize their approach to teaching and learning with technology.

Getting Started

Consider your objectives. Knowing where you’re heading and what you hope the students will be able to accomplish once you get there will drive a lot of your other decisions.

Decide on your content. Once you know where you’re going, packing for the trip is a lot easier. Which readings or multimedia content am I going to need that will illuminate our path?

Design your assessments. What skills are my students going to need to help them explore the environment with me? Will they venture out to explore new paths and report back to the group?

Leverage the LMS. Leverage Blackboard for managing tasks such as posting grades, sharing a syllabus, pushing documents to students and uploading papers to SafeAssign, but recognize that there are many tools out there that can be seamlessly integrated into Blackboard’s already robust framework, so don’t stop there!

Customize your toolbox. Consider the learning experiences you want for your students and whether additional resources would help you achieve these experiences. Blackboard is a starter toolbox, and applications like Poll Everywhere, Zoom, and Panopto add functionality while improving accessibility and flexibility.

Consult your colleagues. Instructors who have charted similar territory are usually eager to share what they’ve learned. We’re continually updating our knowledge base and sharing this information in a variety of ways, through DIY pages, faculty workshops, etc. Specialists at eLi, IT, and Libraries can help you consider options.
Putting the DLE into practice. Here are some basic guidelines for exploring your own Digital Learning Environment. We generally suggest starting with course goals and working through the rubric below from left to right. We’ve included an example but feel free to try it on your own.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Goal</th>
<th>Lesson Goal</th>
<th>Lesson / Assignment</th>
<th>Possible Tools</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve student retention of course material</td>
<td>Give students the opportunity to review difficult material and challenge themselves to understand new concepts</td>
<td>Record a video explaining a challenging concept along with a follow-up auto-graded quiz and resources students can review based on their success</td>
<td>Record your video in our studio and edit in iMovie. Post to Panopto and link through Blackboard. Use Poll Everywhere for comprehension check. Point students to Lynda.com tutorials</td>
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DLE Pathways: The concepts below can help you start thinking about the Digital Learning Environment more broadly before narrowing your scope for a particular course.

**Communication:** Effective communication outside the classroom, either synchronously or asynchronously
- Panopto Lecture Capture
- Zoom Video Conferencing

**Collaboration:** Group work can be challenging. These tools can make the most of group work inside and outside class
- Google Classroom
- Google Sites
- Google Docs

**Student engagement:** Giving students a voice during class can help stimulate thought and guide instruction
- Poll Everywhere
- Google Forms

**Course management:** Organizing your course using instructional design principles can help everything run smoothly.
- Blackboard
- Google Drive
- Google Classroom

**Files and media:** File sharing, storage, collaboration space, real-time and asynchronous streaming media solutions
- Box
- Panopto screencast
- Google Drive

**Libraries:** Journal articles, documents, books, etc., production software and equipment, video courses
- Databases & Catalogs
- Media Center
- Lynda.com

**Web based tools:** Speak with an eLearning Specialist about integrating your favorite third party apps into the DLE.

**MS OFFICE 365:** Faculty/Staff cloud-based productivity suite, including:
- MS Word
- Excel
- Access
- OneNote
- PowerPoint
- Sway storytelling
- Publisher
- Teams chat-based collaboration
- Forms

**WMapps/Google Suite:** Cloud-based productivity suite, including:
- Gmail
- Google Docs
- Google Sheets
- Google Slides
- Chat
- Drive
- Groups
- Classroom
- Forms
- Photos
- Sites

Contact us with questions or ideas at elearning@wm.edu