

Creation of Electronic
Noncredit Short Courses:
A Guide for Faculty

Global Campus
Kansas State University



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Noncredit Short Courses at K-State

Noncredit short courses are not new to the K-State learning community. They have been produced for years, delivered in face-to-face settings and have served thousands of professionals from within the state and across the country. K-State's mission identifies the need to serve those needing to complete credit based degrees and those who need noncredit credentials and timely information. The need for excellent noncredit courses increases each year. Not only do noncredit short courses serve the learner but they also have great benefit for the university. Since the participants are located across the world, the noncredit short courses enable the university to be utilized and recognized worldwide. Partnerships with business and industry are made possible and more viable with the development of noncredit short courses and allow the colleges to extend the resources of the university well beyond the actual campuses.

The swift emergence of technologies related to the delivery of information has introduced ways to share noncredit information that could not have been imagined just a few years ago. It now is possible and not unusual for busy professionals to access K-State produced noncredit content anytime, anyplace, by using K-State Pro. K-State Pro, a sister to K-State Online (Axio Learning), has been designed to serve those lifelong learners who are seeking K-State educational opportunities with high quality content but without formal academic credits. Most users of K-State Pro are professionals from myriad fields who seek work based learning updates, greater knowledge bases and CE hours to apply to license or accreditation requirements.

When K-State Pro is used in conjunction with the GoMembers registration system, professionals can register, pay, access content, complete pre- and post- assessments and receive a graded certificate of completion without ever leaving the office or their home. The beauty of K-State Pro for K-State faculty is that it was designed using the same blueprint as K-State Online. This allows faculty members familiar with this learning management system to work comfortably within K-State Pro.

Noncredit short courses can be of various lengths. Typically, most are from one to two hours long but they can be extensive especially if part of a certification program. In the online format these short courses are created by subject matter experts but they are automated and non-instructor facilitated. Often they are offered with an option for CE Hours to be earned. The most popular courses are generally those that enhance professional knowledge or skills, however, courses offering information to enhance personal life skills or improve leisure time are also created. There are of course, some differences in procedures between credit and noncredit short courses that should be kept in mind when designing and offering noncredit short courses. The most important tip for faculty designing short courses is to think of the difference in learners' needs. Noncredit short courses tend to involve one small aspect of learning with only a few learning objectives. Busy professionals may not have time for theory, history, or excessive background information but instead may want only very pertinent and applied information delivered succinctly in a just in time format. It is extremely important that the learning content is accurate, high quality and well presented in an easy to understand accessible format.

Faculty members generally are excellent teachers and have a wealth of knowledge that can easily be translated and condensed from semester long courses into pertinent short courses that then can be marketed to lifelong learners who may be alumni from K-State or other universities, professional organizations and groups, conference attendees, and mainstream university students.

Because noncredit short courses have such value to industry and business, there is a market for excellent high quality university based professional and informal learning content. The financial plan developed for these courses can be tailored to allow a revenue stream to be returned to faculty, departments and colleges. The K-State Global Campus has reserved some grant money to aid in the development of high quality noncredit courses. Faculty interested in applying for the grants need to contact the Dean's Office in K-State Global Campus for information.

Getting Started

The first step for a faculty member wanting to develop a noncredit course is to contact the K- State Global Campus Director of Conferences. An initial meeting will be scheduled and during this meeting, these steps will be taken.

- Objectives Established

- Needs Assessment Discussed

- Target Audience(s) Identified

- Team Players Named (program coordinator, instructional designer, registration specialist, marketing specialist)

- Funding Sources Reviewed (including grants)

- Budget Discussed

- Registration Fees Discussed

- Marketing Strategies Considered

- Examples of High Quality Noncredit Courses Reviewed

- K-State Pro and Go Members Previewed

Strategies for Building a Quality Noncredit Short Course

Most of the same strategies for building a successful online credit course apply to noncredit courses; however, learner's needs are usually very different. After the general audience for the course is determined, the instructor should keep those learners in mind as content is selected and created.

The most common form of noncredit delivery through the years has been conferences and workshops. Those faculty members who have been involved in developing conferences know that no two conferences are ever alike. The same principle applies in the development of noncredit short courses—there is not a set formula. The courses will vary in length, usage of multimedia, teaching resources, and types of assessment. Even with this in mind, if the instructor develops several courses to be delivered to the same audience, it would be good to keep the general look and feel of those courses consistent.

The type of information best suited to electronically delivered noncredit courses could be described as follows.

Timely

Closed-ended (convergent) learning objectives

Established information that is non-controversial (with little chance for debate in a non-instructor facilitated short course)

Straightforward

Simple and easily understood

Offers additional information that can be followed up with additional resources supplied by instructor

It is just as important to have a design plan for a new noncredit course as for a new credit course. When designing the courses, keep these tips in mind.

Digitize Content--Course content from credit courses can be repurposed for noncredit courses. The key is to think very carefully about what the noncredit learner needs and then choose only the content that is necessary or most pertinent. The same tools used in credit courses such as PowerPoint slideshows, web pages, digital images, games, audio and video clips are just as appropriate and effective when used for noncredit courses.

Consider Scope and Sequence--With short noncredit courses, this step is even more important. The instructor should look at the overall scope of the material and be prepared to whittle away information that may be less pertinent to the learner. If instructors are preparing a sequence of noncredit short courses that relate to each other, then they will need to plan the scope and sequence even more closely so there is a clear linkage between the learning and so there is no unnecessary curricular overlap. The sequence has to be planned so units build upon each other and are cross linked.

Chunk Information--Break the course content into smaller pieces of information to help students process that information. Use proper naming protocols to properly label each piece of learning. Most noncredit short courses will not have more than one or two multimedia elements.

Incorporate Images--Find or develop relevant images, diagrams, and web pages to help explain course content.

Address Learning Styles--The three most common learning styles are auditory (student learns best when information is presented orally or written in a sequential manner), visual (student learns best using diagrams, images, charts or drawings), and tactile/kinesthetic (student learns best when they are hands –on or actively involved.)

Plan Course Navigation—Keep the course navigation simple, with few clicks.

Maintain Consistency—Create a design that has consistency in the look and flow of information.

Incorporate Accessibility—Like the credit courses, the noncredit courses need to be designed to accommodate students with disabilities.

Address Copyright—Get written permission for any material used in the course. This applies to audio, video, and any multimedia materials. The standards for these noncredit courses are commercial standards which means that “fair use” in US Copyright Law does not apply. Ideally, instructors would create their own multimedia contents and get all the requisite media releases for video captures, audio captures, and other contents. They will then sign over rights to the contents they create to K-State for use in the noncredit short courses (while retaining rights to use their contents in credit courses that they may teach for K-State.)

Components to Include in a Short Course

Introduction of the course should include short description of the course, should define the general audience(s) to whom the course might be applicable, and list the topics to be addressed.

Pre-learning priming (includes learning context, course principles and organizational setup of the course.)

Pre-assessment (typically T/F questions, matching, multiple choice, drag and drop, and sequencing.)

Learning Objectives (usually 2-3 measurable objectives per short course and phrased as verb phrases.)

Prerequisites or level of learning.

Number of CE Hours available.

Length of time for the learning.

Learning Content (Any multimedia tool can be used—slideshows, interviews, audio or video files, components of live lectures captured, links to pertinent reading material and other downloadable resources. These contents should be fully accessible.)

Post-assessment (Assessment should link to the learning objectives and content and actually may be a repeat of the pre-assessment.) If the course is offered with the option of K-State CE hours, a post-assessment must be included.

Post Learning Debriefing (May include suggestions for further learning, including web resources.)

A Noncredit Short Course Readiness Checklist

Short Course Name: _____

Date: _____

Instructor / Subject Matter Expert: _____

Pre-Build Check-off

Approval of the K-State Global Campus coordinator (for course offering scheduling) [Date: ____]

Short Course Contents

Short course description for public use

Measureable learning objectives written as verb phrases

Pre-learning (optional)

Pre-assessment

Digital contents

Post-test

Post-learning debriefing (optional)

Digital downloadables (optional)

Back-End Documentation

Sufficient descriptive metadata for the short course catalog (back-end)

Media releases / intellectual property releases (back-end)