

BY SHERYL BADIN, SR/WA

Those of us who serve on the International Professional Development Committee have become accustomed to hearing candid feedback from members who want to share their opinion about IRWA's educational offerings. And we appreciate everyone's perspective. We often hear that by taking a course online, one misses out on many opportunities. It is true - nothing can replace the face-to-face interaction provided in a classroom setting. Some of these benefits include interacting with the instructor, sharing war stories with fellow participants, and of course, the networking opportunities.

However, it has become widely recognized that an online format offers additional learning opportunities that might not otherwise be available. Online and other methods of distance learning, such as webinars and video conferencing, are effective ways to supplement classroom learning and engage our international adult learners. While not all courses lend themselves to an online format, many courses do.

There are several benefits of offering and taking online courses. Offering online courses demonstrates that IRWA is a forward-thinking organization, one that recognizes the travel restrictions and time demands facing its members. Online opportunities also enable members to recertify without taking time off from work. Availability is another benefit, as online courses are accessible when it is most convenient for the participant. This is invaluable for those who need to complete their recertification requirements, especially if the course they need is not being offered locally. In addition, an online course can be paused and restarted from anywhere at any time, and it's accessible for an entire year after the date of purchase. Also, with IRWA's growing number of international members, online courses have become essential.

Chapters also benefit from online courses because they receive an honorarium each time one of their members takes an online course. The amount can range from \$50 to \$100, depending on the course length. There is no effort required by the Chapter, so they can concentrate on local events and scheduling those courses not offered online.

Today, IRWA offers 21 online courses, and based on the numbers, there is a growing demand. For the fiscal year ending June 2011, there were 1077 online participants. For the fiscal year ending June 2012, that number increased by 40%



The Role and Development of Online Courses

for a total of 1538 participants. In the three months following June 2012, there were 513 online participants, an increase of over 30% from the same period in the previous year.

The Development Process

Some have asked why it takes six months or longer to launch an online course once it's determined by the IPDC that it's needed. An explanation of the process might help shed some light.

Online course development requires input from many individuals and groups including the IPDC. Once a course has been identified for conversion, we determine whether it should be developed and converted by our online third-party vendor, or by another individual, committee or company. The developer selected is then provided with all course materials, including the instructor and participant manuals, exams and answers, exercises and PowerPoint presentations. They team up with an instructional designer to create an audio script with written drafts of the on-screen content, as well as exercises and case studies.

IRWA subject matter experts then review the content for accuracy. After a few rounds of reviews and revisions, a working version of the online course with audio is created and reviewed by IRWA Headquarters for testing. A final course draft is created and reviewed by the IPDC, who has the responsibility to provide subject matter expertise when designing and reviewing course content. Further edits are made until the final version is approved. A PDF copy of the participant manual is also made available for printing for future reference after the participant has completed the course and written the exam.

The IPDC will continue to assess the quality and relevance of our online courses as a component of IRWA's curriculum, as we serve the needs of all of our members.

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