An Official Publication of the United States Distance Learning Association



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> The 2013 Handbook of Distance Education

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#### PURPOSE

Distance Learning, an official publication of the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA), is sponsored by the USDLA, by the Fischler School of **Education and Human Services** at Nova Southeastern University, and by Information Age Publishing. Distance Learning is published four times a year for leaders, practitioners, and decision makers in the fields of distance learning, e-learning, telecommunications, and related areas. It is a professional magazine with information for those who provide instruction to all types of learners, of all ages, using telecommunications technologies of all types. Articles are written by practitioners for practitioners with the intent of providing usable information and ideas for readers. Articles are accepted from authors with interesting and important information about the effective practice of distance teaching and learning.

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Distance Learning is for leaders, practitioners, and decision makers in the fields of distance learning, e-learning, telecommunications, and related areas. It is a professional journal with applicable information for those involved in providing instruction of all kinds to learners of all ages using telecommunications technologies of all types. Articles are written by practitioners for practitioners with the intent of providing usable information and ideas. Articles are accepted from authors with interesting and important information about the effective practice of distance teaching and learning. No page costs are charged authors, nor are stipends paid. Two copies of the issue with the author's article will be provided. Reprints will also be available.

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# Introducing the 2013 Handbook of Distance Education

#### **Michael Grahame Moore**

#### INTRODUCTION

n the last issue of *Distance Learning*, editor Michael Simonson introduced the most recent edition of *The Handbook of Distance Education*, of which I was the editor, and in which he was featured as a contributor with his chapter on institutional policy issues. In the following article, I am responding to Michael's invitation to explain the purpose of the handbook



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series, as well as to give readers a short overview of the contents of the new edition. I am grateful for this opportunity for the simple reason that successfully compiling 44 chapters by 69 authors, embracing the whole field of distance education, has been only the first step in disseminating knowledge—comparable, I suppose, to the design stage in course developmentfollowing which it is vitally important that what has been created reaches those who are supposed to benefit from it: in other words, readers of this journal, fellow practitioners, as well as students. Both practitioners and students were, in fact, the dual audiences that handbook authors were asked to address. As well as knowledge of research and literature, these contributors were selected for their practical knowledge of teaching and training, with their expertise acquired in K-12 schools, community colleges, corporate training departments and the armed forces, professional continuing education, and universities. Clearly, the aim was to encapsulate the state-of-the-art in all forms of distance education across all sectors of society. Critics (and I am my own most severe critic) will of course spot gaps in the coverage, gaps that may be seen as opportunities for authors in the future-including readers of this article perhaps-but nevertheless I think we can safely claim that there is no comparably comprehensive compilation of literature that reports research of value to practitioners as is found in this book.

The handbook is organized in 5 parts, beginning with 7 chapters of history and theory, then 8 focusing on learners, learning, and learner support, followed by 10 on course design and teaching. After 9 chapters on policy issues, administration, and management, the remaining 10 chapters focus on specific audiences and providers.

This structure is only slightly modified from that of previous editions, the intention being the same, which is to provide a structure for organizing the broadest manageable literature in a way that enables both students and practitioners to go directly to research sources relevant to their particular needs, that being a first step that may lead to their personal, more indepth, follow-up research. This was the same idea that led to the compiling of the first edition of the handbook in 2003. At that time it had finally become apparent to even the most skeptical observer that distance education had emerged as one of the most significant developments in education of the previous quarter century. Nearly 10 years later the need for an updated edition was no less acute, as distance education continued to make inroads into the mainstream of educational and training practice at all levels, and in virtually every field of learning. Across this wide educational spectrum, it is now the subject of almost frenetic attention, as newcomers enthuse about the potential of mobile and social network technologies and the reinvention of delivery systems, with the most recent buzzwords such as MOOCs (massive open online courses) attracting the attention of even the most popular of the popular press. Distance education's traditional role of opening opportunity for learners and its more recently recognized effect of adding to the quality of teaching are now widely recognized, as much by professors in universities and community colleges as by trainers in corporations and

the armed forces, in continuing professional education of teachers, physicians and nurses, public accountants and pharmacists, leaders of voluntary organizations, managers in the corporate boardroom, and workers seeking new skills on the factory floor. Thankfully, what I described in the first edition of the handbook as the "recent frenzy" of precipitant innovation driven by excitement about Internet technology, has subsided to a considerable extent, as that first e-learning generation discovered for themselves the challenges-the hard work!-as well as the benefits offered by the technology. Communication through computer technologies, the Internet, and the web has long ceased to be an innovation for most teachers, and they have settled down to confront the more interesting work involved in acquiring the skills needed for designing and delivering quality programs through those technologies. Just as important, an increasing number of the leaders of their institutions have also begun to recognize the different management and administrative changes needed to accomplish good quality distance teaching. Here I would like to mention the forthcoming book produced by an outstanding team of the country's most experienced managers of distance education programs, led by Gary Miller (Miller et al., 2013), with the title Leading Change in Distance Education: Leading the E-Learning Transformation of Higher Education. This will be the first in a series of books about online learning and distance education to be published by Stylus Press aiming to bring the best of research and practical experience together in a form readily accessible to the thoughtful practitioner.

Among those challenges to our leaders, probably the most difficult is changing the allocation of resources in order to produce mediated programs with quality, and this includes the particularly difficult job of channeling faculty into roles more appropriate for the information age than those they have been accustomed to performing in the classroom. So far, in this regard, timidity still overshadows boldness and considerable more education for leaders is called for. However, it is the students who are learning new ways, faster than either teachers or administrators, growing from childhood to be at ease with the technologies, accustomed to learning informally out-of-school, online, and inducted from an early age into the rewards that follow the effort of distance learning. Our students of course are also driving their teachers to explore the most recent wave of new technologies, the situation of recent years being perhaps worth calling a second wave of frenzy! This is the spread and adoption of mobile technologies, and their application as vehicles for so-called social networking.

In this environment of further maturing in understanding about distance education, as it becomes increasingly part of the educational mainstream, accompanied by continuing volatility in the invention and spread of information and communication technologies, a growing number of practitioners are looking to academia for help afforded by research, and a growing number of educational institutions offer programs of graduate level study that have resulted in what Simonson referred to in his commentary in this issue, as "a growing body of research that builds a foundation for best practices."

Evidence of this expansion in what Simonson refers to as the science, can be seen in the growth in the number of doctoral dissertations that include the terms "distance education" or "distance learning" in their title, averaging, at the most modest estimate, about one hundred each year since the beginning of the decade. As editor for the past 26 years of *The American Journal of Distance Education* I am aware of the enormous increase in interest by university and other faculty in publishing research in this area, resulting in a frequently overwhelming supply of article submissions. I also note the growth in the number of new journals, especially online journals that are able to absorb what the more established journals cannot publish. The extent of this growth in scholarship of distance education becomes even more apparent when we take into account the many research studies and published works that focus on one or other of the component parts of this field, or one of its many applications-reported in terms such as distributed learning, tele-learning, e-learning, open learning, blended learning, and flexi-learning. Each of these subsets of distance education has generated its own following of specialists, some with their own journals, conferences, and an evolving corpus of literature-a natural development in this, as in any, maturing field.

This splitting of the field into component specialties does, however, bring with it one problem, which is that by focusing on what is published using the terminology of one part of the field, readers might be distracted from relevant knowledge that is packaged under the label of one of the other of the field's component parts. In the handbook, we have attempted to give the reader an understanding of the breadth of the field through the chapters in the historical/theoretical section (Part One), and so help them acquire some conceptual tools that enable recognition of both the specific trees in this forest, as well as the woods of which they are a part. Here, just to underscore how critically important it is to recognize how broad is the field before tackling any of its components, I will repeat the definition of distance education: "teaching and planned learning in which the teaching normally occurs in a different place from learning, requiring communication through technologies, as well as special institutional organization" (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 2). Three key words here are worth emphasizing. The first is "normally," which should remind us of that in distance education the use of communications technology is not

an option but is a defining characteristic of the teaching-learning relationship, unlike its use in the classroom where the same technology is ancillary to the teacher's presence. The second word to emphasize is "planned," as in "planned learning," for in this age of ever-ready search engines, and global exchanges of information through social networks, we need to remember that our study is of *education*, and education is always a two-sided transaction, learners on one side and a teaching agency on the other, having the resources to make learning more effective and efficient than when it is entirely self-directed. That is not to detract from the importance of self-directed, informal, independent learning, but it is important to avoid the muddled thinking that we sometimes encounter in the social media in which informal, even serendipitous, learning is spoken of as synonymous, even sometimes replacing, education. Third, the word "organization" reminds us that our field includes-as well as study of information and communications technologies and questions regarding the design of teaching programs and facilitation of learningstudy of the administrative, organizational, and policy issues associated with the provision of such educational programs. Broad too are the research methods that should be brought to bear on those questions, employing techniques from all research traditions-experimental, case study and ethnographic, comparative and historical. The aim of all such activity is the acquisition of empirically based knowledge, organized in a body of literature, and sometimes synthesized into a theory that will act, in turn, to point the way to further empirical research—all having the effect of helping the practitioner design and deliver more effective instructional programs.

## HOW TO USE THE HANDBOOK

The motivation for producing the handbook had two roots. First, as the editor of

The American Journal of Distance Education for more than a quarter century and as adviser of doctoral students during that same period, I have noted that one of the most common causes of difficulty and failure for researchers as well as students is a too-common view that research is nothing more than mere empiricism. From this perspective, the focus, indeed the beginning and end of the research process, is gathering, analyzing and reporting data; I might almost say "grabbing at data." The "literature review" that typically is the second chapter in a doctoral dissertation or comprises the opening section of a research article is too often approached as a tedious chore imposed by convention that has to be got through as quickly as possible before getting to the "real thing"—which is to gather and report data. These data may be the results of a survey or a case study, or-too seldom-an experiment. However much of these data gathered and submitted for publication, and even reported in some dissertation studies, has little or no value! This is simply because the research question that the data are supposed to address has little or no connection with the previous state of knowledge, as reported in the literature. I have found it so sad for many years to see students (and others who should know better) investing time and energy to design a study and collect data that addresses questions that have already been answered-or that are unanswerable, given the present state of knowledge. Not quite so seriously, I see other studies based on a review of a too-narrow set of literature that fall short of their potential by not linking to a wider literature, in other words, a more general theoretical framework. A common example is the research question that addresses teaching and learning through a specific technology, grounded in a review of the research of that technology, but missing a wealth of relevant knowledge on the same question that was conducted in programs using a different technology.

My sympathy lies with the student, confronted by what must seem an almost impossibly confused and anarchic body of literature, with hundreds of journals with titles suggesting possible relevance to the distance education study. What help can be provided? In our view the best help is to address the problem as already stated, that research will fail unless it is based on a good foundation of knowledge of previous research. And therefore it is to meet this need, to provide a structured guide to what is already known about distance education, and thus help better-grounded research, that the handbooks have been written.

The second root motivation for this collection is closely related to the first. Experience as a consultant to a wide range of institutions, states, national governments, and international agencies over several decades has led to the conclusion that a similar impatience for moving to action without adequate comprehension of previous experience characterizes not only the research, but virtually all practice in this field also. Just as it is hard to imagine that in any other field of inquiry researchers could set out to gather data without knowing what research had been previously undertaken, so it is hard to imagine that other professions would set up departments, design courses, recruit teachers, invest millions of dollars, make appearances before Congressional committees, and so on, without first acquiring a substantial knowledge of previous practice in their field; without a thorough knowledge of what had succeeded and what had failed, and the reasons for those successes and failures. Yet in distance education, it happens all the time. University professors, generally knowledgeable in an academic subject, and skilled in lecturing to rows of students in a classroom, are driven into designing courses for delivery on the web or by videoconference with little or no knowledge about how to design programs suitable for learning in what is, still, a more

individual mode of study, requiring the special skills of facilitating interaction with content, learners, and instructors through information and communication technologies. The same could be said about teachers in K-12 schools, and trainers in business and other corporate settings.

Thus the core purpose of the handbook is to be a source of information for students and researchers to help them know what is known before they begin a search for new knowledge, and to help practitioners and policymakers know what is known before they plan, design, and deliver new programs. It should be emphasized that each handbook chapter is only a key. No synthesis or summary of other people's research can be a substitute for study of the original research itself, and so each handbook chapter has to be regarded as merely helping each user to identify the specific literature that then should be studied in depth. Thus it follows that the best way of using the handbook is first to skim the whole book, and subsequently, after deciding on an area for research or noting the chapters relevant to a particular application, to take those chapters as the starting point for identifying the broader literature in that area. The next step, certainly for the student, is to locate each of the items listed in the references of the chosen chapters and, using them thus, dig deeper and deeper into the literature until mastery is achieved. Lest that seems too easy, it has to be repeated that knowledge in this field, like most others, does not lend itself to water-tight compartmentalization and it is vital to be aware that something of value for any question can be found within a chapter having a principal focus that is quite different from the question one is primarily focused on.

In this handbook, as in previous editions, we were able to assemble some of the most respected authorities in the North American field of distance education as well as some "rising stars." In extending our invitations we aimed to deal with

another problem commonly encountered in this, as in all newer fields, which is the problem of authority. Along with my plea to give more attention to building a solid theoretical foundation for their research and practice (i.e., "knowing what is known"), I would like to remind readers of the importance of developing a critical perspective on what is published, recognizing that not all that is published is of equal value. In this age of Facebook, Twitter, blogging, and so-called open source materials, it is a bigger problem than ever before to identify what is trustworthy, and the search engines that make it easy to gather whatever is published on the Web rarely help evaluate its quality. Before one can use literature effectively, it is necessary to learn who are the most trustworthy authors, and which publications are most trustworthy-that have greater authority. In this handbook, at least, the reader can be assured that the authors have considerable authority. At a minimum, almost every one has published research in The American Journal of Distance Education, itself the result of vigorous competition and a rigorous review process. In the third edition of the handbook, most contributors are returning veterans of one or both previous editions, and some have shared the task with their

protégés. Such true authorities are in great demand in a field that is insatiable in its demand for real expertise, and consequently we all have reason to be grateful to them for volunteering their time to make their contributions to this book. They are, in Simonson's words the "true scientists who are studying models and techniques that provide 'touchstones' for decision makers"; certain evidence that, as he says, "The literature of the field is robust."

#### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

Moore, M. G. (Ed). *The handbook of distance education* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge. To see inside the book and to recommend to your librarian see: http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415897709/

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# Midlife Crises of Adult Learners

## Irving H. Buchen

he historical case made for distance education relied heavily on the major differences of the adult learner: older, more self-reliant, already working full-time, juggling and balancing work, family, and study, unhappy with classroom seat time and commuting, impatient often with the abstract and the theoretical, et cetera. We are also now familiar with the demographics of the adult learner built on what we knew earlier of continuing education students and buttressed by later theory, guidelines and findings of cognitive psychologists.

But in the process of presenting such a solid and persuasive argument for the dif-



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ferences of the adult learner and designing curricula accordingly, we may have stopped too soon and believed that our task was over. But as long as we value retention and degree completion, we may have to go the extra mile.

For all their strengths-and there are many-the adult learner population, especially its upper older segment, is particularly vulnerable to the slings and arrows of being at the midpoint of their lives. All universities know how life suddenly happens to adult learners. Instructors are routinely asked to suspend late policies penalizing one grade because of unforeseen circumstances. Academic advisors regularly listen to sad stories sometimes terrible and then are asked sometimes desperately "What do I do now? What do you recommend?" Administrators craft carefully worded policies on granting deadline extensions and then have to read the painful details of why the request is being made in the first place and why it should be granted.

Before considering what if anything should be done, it might be helpful to compile a profile of the basic dislocations of the midpoint, especially those that threaten retention and degree completion. These clearly go beyond preventives or correctives such as time management to prevent or minimize student withdrawal or failure.

The common denominators of midlife events are that they are unforeseen, unanticipated, draconian, and devastating. Indeed, an immediate value of such a profile is to alert adult learners themselves of what may lie ahead as a no-fault generational situation and as not necessarily one of their own making or fallibility. A survey of those key midpoints of adult learners reveals minimally five major sources of debilitation: career, spousal/relational, friends and families, financial, and health.

## SOURCE 1: CAREER

Like many of the situations that adult learners face, this one typically often appears with the figure of Janus—two faced—and signals getting ahead or losing ground. The happy side takes the form of promotions, additional responsibilities and titles, and even job change.

It is not unusual for learners to alert faculty and advisors to such good news and the disconnects that temporarily may accompany it. Frequently it involves more travel—even relocation—and although again some slippage may occur, the basic value of a distanced education is affirmed. Surprisingly, even the unhappy aspects of career shifts and loss frequently end up with such an affirmation.

Still, layoffs and closing of businesses clearly jeopardize retention, especially when it involves not only loss of livelihood but also tuition remission support. Most important, the midpoint in terms of careers is particularly more intense than the essentially stable beginnings or later career plateaus. It is there and then when typically career shifts occur and send shock waves throughout the lives and education of adult learners.

## SOURCE 2: SPOUSAL/RELATIONAL

If married or living together as partners, anything that can go wrong in such relationships happens at midpoint. Why then? The magic is gone or subdued; romance has been replaced by routine. Sometimes it is even the enrollment in an advanced degree program that drives a wedge between them. The career advancement of one over the over often sets up a competitive situation that is divisive. One receives a special promotion or new opportunity in another city (sometimes country) and long distance marital communications and relationships now mirrors that of study and strains the relationship, often to the breaking point.

And of course there is always the fatal attraction to someone else (the archetypal midlife crisis), which may signal separation or separate lives. In any case, the impact is devastating. The areas to be obviously affected are work and study—the two are regularly paired—and of the two, the latter immediately crashes and ultimately, like the marriage itself, may end.

## **SOURCE 3: FRIENDS AND FAMILIES**

It is not unusual for job relocation and/or the end of longstanding interpersonal relationships to put a heavy strain on the familiar and comforting networks of families and friends. Then, too, although adult learners are usually old enough to enjoy the benefits of the empty nest, they suddenly may find it now reoccupied by returning young adults now in need of recycling.

Although engaging such dislocations is not totally new, they may be nevertheless resisted and even resented. Besides, the old ways do not seem to apply. Nothing appears to work the same way after Humpty Dumpty has been put back together again.

## **SOURCE 4: FINANCIAL**

Adults are particularly vulnerable here, especially if their college loan debts are overwhelming The temptation to get a second job runs smack into the fact the adult learner already has a second job: his or her studies. Of course, layoffs or closings strain households incredibly—or the fear of that happening is often crippling. The sense of going up a down escalator often leads to regrets about this or that—woulda, shoulda—one's whole life—and questionable choices and self recriminations. Emotionally it is draining.

#### SOURCE 5: HEALTH

Finally, here life happens with a terrible finality. Parents become seriously ill or incapacitated. Spouses or friends are diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. Hospital visits and funerals suddenly enter and alter the lives of adult learners. Sometimes, most taxing of all, it involves children—your own or a friend's—and the image of inevitable loss and mortality clouds the vision of adult learners, often for the first time.

Clearly, the above spell out with persuasive typicality the range and focus of adult learners being at the midpoints of the lives, careers, and studies. Indeed, it is precisely the convergence of that trinity that makes for unmanageable situations. After all, the conventional wisdom is that when disaster strikes it does so in threes. What, if anything, can be done? Minimally, three initiatives: survey, advising, and leadership.

## **INITIATIVE 1: SURVEY**

The first initiative is to survey your own adult students as to what has occurred at midlife that may have made their continuing of their studies problematic. Although their responses may or may not fall into the above categories and patterns, the profile would be diagnostically valuable.

Besides, each university could refine its survey by building in differentiation items by discipline and by degree level; and, perhaps most important, request ranking of the factors by orders of impact. Of course, an absolute side value is to share the findings and in effect give adult learners a heads-up, alerting and sensitizing them of what may be coming down the pike.

#### **INITIATIVE 2: ADVISING**

The second initiative is to convene the advising staff, perhaps in a retreat to explore the entire issue and to determine to what extent they are aware of the range of problems and what they have found helpful to say or recommend. The multiple goals are three. The most obvious is to raise the general level of consciousness of and receptivity to the special situations of adult learners across the board and to secure their inputs into compiling of the profile. Then, advisers should be asked whether any wish to become expert on at least one major dislocation and/or remediation; are willing to be trained further in that area and then to serve as a go-to referral resource by their colleagues. Finally, an institutionwide packet of interventions needs to be developed by a task force of advisers, faculty, administrators, and learners and then made available to advisors to use as their problem-solving kit.

#### **INITIATIVE 3: LEADERSHIP**

The third initiative is for administrators to address the challenge. Most obviously, they need to help develop the interventions because they are usually across the board and often involve policy. Second, they need to decide the role of faculty, how they will be brought on board and up to speed, and their new diagnostic relationship to advisers.

Finally, thought should be given to expanding the range of the mission statement to now include focusing on not only the whole learner, but also the whole person—and on fusing and aligning the two in their common journey of intellectual and interpersonal development. It is what adult learners are uniquely all about.



# **Running aMOOC?** Massive Open Online Courses

#### **Adam Murray**

ecently, there has been a lot of attention given to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). An example of this coverage is a New York Times article that proclaimed 2012 to be the "The Year of the MOOC" (Pappano, 2012). This article has received a lot of attention not only in traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, and television, but also has been widely cited in social media outlets such as Twitter, forums, and blogs. In recent months, it seems that rarely a week passes that there is not a news article or two printed in the general media about MOOCs. Many of these articles focus on the benefits of providing free high quality courses to anyone in the world. One of the early pioneers of MOOCs, George Siemens,



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stated that MOOCs "can impact lives around the world, for the next billion students from China and India" (Lewin, 2012). The president of edX, Anant Argarwal proclaimed, "It's going to reinvent education. It's going to transform universities. It's going to democratise education on a global scale. It's the biggest innovation to happen in education for 200 years" (Cadwalladr, 2012). With such optimistic statements about the potential of MOOCs, it is hard not to get caught up in the excitement.

Naturally, all of this recent coverage of MOOCs in the general media has caught the attention of leaders and decision makers in higher education. As can be expected, not everyone is optimistic about MOOCs. Eye-catching headlines such as "Will MOOCs destroy academia?" (Vardi, 2012) and "Do online courses spell the end for the traditional university?" (Cadwalladr, 2012) accompany articles that have less than optimistic predictions of the impact of MOOCs on traditional higher education. Unfortunately, the current coverage in the general media does not paint a completely accurate picture of MOOCs. Most of the articles focus on one form of MOOCs and overlook the other forms. In order to provide a more comprehensive perspective of MOOCs, this brief article introduces a short history, their defining features, their forms, and their future.

## HISTORY OF MOOCS

Although MOOCs have only recently gained attention in the mainstream media, the term was coined in 2008 to describe a well-received online course named

Connectivism and Connective Knowledge, or better commonly known as The CCK08 MOOC (Alexander, 2008; Cormier, 2008). This groundbreaking MOOC was taught by Stephen Downes and George Siemens as an online credit-bearing course at the Extended Education and Learning Technologies Centre at the University of Manitoba from September 8, 2008 to November 30, 2008. What differentiated this course from existing online courses was that fact that it was made available for free to anyone who wanted to participate (Fini, 2009). In total, more than 2,200 people from around the world participated in the course (Downes, 2011).

Another groundbreaking MOOC was Digital Storytelling 106 (DS106) taught by Jim Groom at the University of Mary Washington. Like CKK08, DS106 was originally offered as a credit-bearing course. In fact, DS106 started out as a traditional faceto-face course. In 2011, the general public was invited by Groom to complete the assignments and to interact with the students who were taking the course for credit. It has been estimated that approximately 1,300 people have taken advantage of this offer and have completed assignments (Kolowich, 2012). How DS106 differed from CCK08 was the nature of the course itself. Instead of watching lectures and reading assigned course readings, the focus of the class was on skills development. Throughout the course, the students designed and completed assignments.

Despite several large MOOCs such as CCK08 and DS106 being successfully run, MOOCs were relatively unnoticed by the general public. This changed in the fall of 2011 when Sebastian Thrun and Peter Norvig of Stanford University offered Artificial Intelligence (CCS221) to the world. Although they were expecting several thousand people to participate, more than 160,000 participants from 190 countries enrolled in the course (Leckart, 2012). Even more interesting was that more than 75% of the participants were located outside of the United States (Leckart, 2012).

As a result of the attention given to CCS221, venture capitalists wanted to become involved in the MOOC movement. One of these ventures was established when Thrun left Stanford University and founded Udacity (www.udacity.com) as a for-profit educational company. In the fall of 2011, two other Stanford University professors, Daphne Koller and Andrew Ng founded Coursera (www.coursera.org), another forprofit educational company. Last but not least, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University collaborated to establish a non-for-profit named edX (edx.org).

#### **DEFINING FEATURES**

As the acronym suggests, there are four essential features of MOOCs. For a course to be considered a MOOC, it must have all of the following attributes: it must be massive, open, online, and a course. In this section, each of these characteristics is described.

The first feature of MOOCs is that they are massive in scale. Although this term is quite subjective nature, it refers to the number of students that can participate in the course. Depending on the subject matter, this may range from hundreds to tens of thousands of students. CCK08, the first MOOC, had 2,200 registrants, whereas CS221, a highly publicized MOOC, was truly massive with more than 160,000. These examples illustrate the scalability of MOOCs and underline the fact that they can serve many more students than traditional course offerings. Another aspect of massiveness is the diversity of the participants themselves. Because there are no restrictions as a result of physical location, participants from around the world can enroll. This can result in a very heterogeneous group with a variety of nationalities,

educational backgrounds, and life experiences.

Another feature of MOOCs is that they are open. First of all, they are freely accessible to anyone who is interested in taking them. This is a striking contrast with traditional online courses that are hidden from the public on secure websites. Also, participation is open to all because there is no requirement to be registered at the institution offering the course. In addition, there are no financial constraints because registration fees and tuition fees are not charged. Finally, although not an essential aspect of openness, the actual contents (i.e., course readings) of some MOOCs are freely available under Creative Commons.

The third attribute of MOOCs is that they are totally online. Both the course contents can be delivered and the communication between the instructor(s) and the participants can occur both synchronously and asynchronously. An example of synchronous delivery is when class lectures and discussions take place in real time by the use of learning platform software such as CourseSites (www.coursesites.com) by Blackboard. In the case of asynchronous delivery, instructional videos and lectures can be prerecorded and the participants view or download them as needed. Also, the asynchronous nature of discussion boards allows more people to participate by removing time-based restrictions.

The final attribute of MOOCs is that they are courses. Like traditional course offerings, MOOCs run for a specific period of time. That is to say, MOOCs have starting dates and finishing dates with most MOOCs being between 3 and 15 weeks in duration. However, it should be noted that the contents of many MOOCs are archived and are still accessible even after they have officially ended. Also, like their traditional counterparts, MOOCs have defined learning outcomes and objectives.

# FORMS OF MOOCS

Despite the majority of media attention being focused on one kind of MOOC, they can be divided into three broad categories: network based, task based, and content based (Lane, 2012). The network-based and tasked-based MOOCs are also known as cMOOCs while the content-based MOOCs are referred to as xMOOCs or AI MOOCs. In this section, these three categories of MOOCs are described.

## NETWORK-BASED MOOCS

The first category of MOOCs is network based. They are rooted in the principles of connectivism, a 21st century theory of learning (Siemens, 2005). An underlying concept of connectivism is that learning occurs in a complex and dynamic environment. Siemens (2005) explains how learning occurs in this rapidly changing environment: "new information is continually being acquired. The ability to draw distinctions between important and unimportant information is vital. The ability to recognize when new information alters the landscape based on decisions made yesterday is also critical" (p. 7). As a result, learning is "focused on connecting specialized information sets, and the connections that enable us to learn more are more important than our current state of knowing" (Siemens, 2005, p. 7). One reason that the capacity to learn more is more important than what is actually known is because knowledge is growing exponentially but at the same time knowledge life is Downes drastically shrinking. (2011)explains the relationship between knowledge and learning, "knowledge is distributed across a network of connections, and therefore learning consists of the ability to construct and traverse these networks" (para. 6). Similarly, Kop and Hill (2008) summarize the learning process, "learning occurs when knowledge is actuated through the process of a learner connecting to and feeding information into a

learning community" (Overview of Connectivism section, para. 1).

In the case of a network-based MOOC, the focus is on the process, not on the actual course content. The content "serves merely as a catalyst, a mechanism for getting our projects, discussions, and interactions off the ground" (Downes, 2011, p. 5). As a result, a textbook or course facilitator is not the primary or sole provider of knowledge; there is no "sage on the stage." This type of course is intended for a highend knowledge exchange between the participants. For this reason, there is no formal assessment at all and only self-assessment is present. Cormier, a facilitator of a popular MOOC summarizes self-assessment, "only you can tell, in the end, if you've been successful" (Kolowich, 2012). By design, network-based **MOOCs** are intended for dedicated individuals who are interested in personal and professional development.

Throughout the duration of a networkbased MOOC, participants primarily engage in four activities: aggregation, remixing, repurposing, and feeding forward (Downes, 2011). As the name suggests, aggregation is the collection of content related to the course. This content can take a variety of forms such as articles, videos, podcasts, and blog postings. Naturally, this content comes from the facilitator and the participants. Because of the sheer number of participants in a network-based MOOC, there can be an overwhelming amount of content generated during the course. As a result, an important point for the participants and facilitator to remember is that they are not expected to read or view all of the content. The second activity, remixing, is forming connections with course contents and with external contents. In this activity, participants document their activities and share these records with others. Common ways to remix are blog entries, discussion postings, and tweets. The third activity and an important aspect of learning is repurposing. Repurposing is working with the aggregated and remixed course contents. This activity is the main purpose of a net-work-based MOOC. About the purpose of repurposing, Downes (2011) summarizes that it is "how to read or watch, understand, and work with the content other people create, and how to create new understandings and knowledge out of them" (Repurposing section, para. 3). The fourth and final activity is feeding forward. Quite simply, feeding forward is sharing with other participants and with the general public.

To date, there have been a number of network-based MOOCs on a variety of topics. Topics such as connectivism, learning analytics, personal learning networks, and mobile learning technology have been covered (The MOOC Guide, n.d.). Table 1 shows four notable network-based MOOCs that have been held. As previously mentioned, the first MOOC, CCK08, attracted 2,200 participants. The number of participants in the other notable networkbased MOOCs ranged between 556 and 1,700 (Rodriguez, 2012).

## TASK-BASED MOOCS

Although often classified along with network-based MOOCs, the second category is task-based MOOCs. A task-based MOOC differs from a network-based MOOC because the focus is not on knowledge but on skills. In task-based MOOCs, the participants are asked to complete tasks or assignments (Lane, 2012). Although there is also a community in a task-based MOOC, it is not the primary focus (Lane, 2012), because the focus is on the tasks. However, the participants interact with each other to provide assistance and advice for the tasks.

Like network-based MOOCs, there are task-based MOOCs on a variety of topics. One of the largest task-based MOOCs, DS106, focuses on the development of digital storytelling skills with audio, video,

Year	Name	Facilitator(s)	Number of Participants
2008	CCK08	Downes & Siemens	2,200
2009	CCK09	Downes & Siemens	700
2010	PLENK 2010	Cormier, Kop, Siemens, & Downes	1,700
2011	MobiMOOC	deWaard	556

 Table 1.
 Notable Network-Based MOOCs (cMOOCs)

Table 2.	. Largest Content-Based MOOC (xMO	OC) Providers
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	Туре	Founded	Partners	Course Offerings	Course Duration
Coursera	For-profit	2011	33 universities	207	3 to 15 weeks
edX	Nonprofit	2012	4 universities	7	5 to 15 weeks
Udacity	For-profit	2012	No affiliated universities	18	Self-paced

Note: As of December 1, 2012.

visual, and design assignments (About 106, n.d.). Examples of other task-based MOOCS are the Games MOOC (gamesmooc.shivtr.com) and the Program for Online Teaching (pedagogyfirst.org/ wppf12) offered by MiraCosta College.

## CONTENT-BASED MOOCS

The third category of MOOCs is content-based MOOCs. Content-based MOOCs are commonly referred to as xMOOCs. Of the three forms of MOOCs, this form is the focus of the general media. There are three popular content-based MOOCs that receive most, if not all of the media's attention: Coursera, edX, and Udacity (The Big Three, 2012). As shown in Table 2, Coursera and Udacity are forprofit, while edX is nonprofit. Another major distinguishing feature is that Coursera and edX have university affiliations, whereas Udacity does not.

Coursera is the largest and most popular of these MOOCs. It currently offers 207 courses (Course Explorer, n.d.). These courses, organized into 20 categories such as computer science, education, and medicine, are provided by a consortium of 33 well-known universities from around the world such as Columbia University (United States), University of Edinburgh (Scotland), University of Toronto (Canada), and University of Melbourne (Australia). Most of the courses are between 3 and 15 weeks in duration, with the majority of them 5 or 6 weeks in length. However, some of courses such as Computer Science 101 are also offered for self-study.

Unlike network-based and task-based MOOCs, the focus of these MOOCs is on the course content. In an attempt to ensure that the enrolled students have successfully acquired the content, traditional assessment is used. In a Coursera course, Think Again: How to Reason and Argue, all of the course content is delivered in the form of lecture videos that are between 3 and 20 minutes in length. After each lecture, there is an ungraded follow-up homework exercise. After each unit of the course, the students take a graded unit

quiz. However, due to the huge number of students in these courses, it is impossible for the teacher(s) to assess each student on an individual basis. As a result, automated testing is relied on. For this reason, content-based MOOCs are also known as AI MOOCs. Upon successful completion of a content-based MOOC, a certificate is awarded by the professor(s). In the case of Coursera, students who achieve an average score of 70% or more receive Statements of Accomplishment and those who have an average score of more than 85% receive Statements of Accomplishment With Distinction (Course Logistics, 2012). Similarly, Udacity students can receive one of four certificates: Completion, Accomplishment, Accomplishment with High Distinction, and Accomplishment with Highest Distinction (Frequently Asked Questions, 2012). In the case of edX, students receive Certificates of Completion (FAQ, n.d.).

Compared to the other kinds of MOOCs, there is relatively limited interaction between the students. In fact, it is quite possible to successfully complete a content-based MOOC without interacting with classmates. However, the contentbased MOOCs do have discussion forums to facilitate communication. In the case of Coursera, the discussion forum has designated areas to discuss the lecture contents, organize study groups, and schedule Google+ Hangouts.

#### THE FUTURE?

Despite all the potential that MOOCs have, they will not have a major impact on higher education until a number of issues have been dealt with. Hill (2012) identifies four potential problems that must be addressed: revenue models, course completion rates, credentialing, and authentication. In this section, these four problems are briefly described.

A large problem that must be overcome is financial in nature. The current MOOCs,

particularly the large content-based MOOCs, are far from being self-sufficient. They are operating on a combination of grants and funding from venture capitalists. In order to successfully function long term, alternate sources of revenue will need to be found. Of course, one potential of revenue will be from institutions of higher learning. For example, institutions that do not have the resources to offer certain courses could outsource them to MOOC providers. Another feasible source of revenue is from the students. The basic course would be free but additional services such as tutoring and certification would be provided for additional fees.

The second problem is course completion rates or student attrition. Although over 100,000 students register for some of the popular content-based MOOCs, very few successfully complete them. It is estimated that between 5 and 20% of edX students finish their courses (Hill, 2012; Pope, 2012). Although the reasons for such high attrition rates are unclear, one obvious contributing factor is the ease to which students can register for courses. It takes only a few minutes to register for a course. And, because there is no financial commitment, there is nothing to dissuade students from dropping out. One more possible reason for the levels of enrollment is the general public's interest in content-based MOOCs because of the widespread coverage in the media. Many register as a result of their curiosity and have no intention of completing the course. Despite the currently low completion rates, for the reasons mentioned there is little need to be overly concerned about this.

For the majority of the people currently taking MOOCs, credits will not awarded. In order for MOOCs to be seen as an alternative to traditional institutions of higher learning and existing online programs, MOOCs will need to "deliver valuable signifiers of completion such as credentials, badges, or acceptance into accredited programs" (Hill, 2012, p. 94). At present, the Statements of Accomplishment and Certificates of Completion have little extrinsic value. As seen in Appendix 1, the disclaimer in Statements of Accomplishment from Coursera makes this fact quite clear. However, some progress is being made in this direction. Recently, some institutions (Antioch University, Excelsior College, and the University of Texas system) intend to award credits (Pope, 2012).

The final problem is authentication. Until this obstacle is overcome, it is highly unlikely that many institutions will award credits for MOOCs. One way that Coursera is discouraging cheating is the use of an honor code that the students must acknowledge each time they submit coursework (Webley, 2012). Using a stronger measure to prevent cheating, edX and Udacity now offer proctored final exams at Pearson test centers around the world (Webley, 2012). Like their online learning counterparts, MOOCs are looking to authentication technologies. Some of these technologies are Secureexam, Out-of-Wallet, BioSig-ID, and ClickID (Adams, 2012). The Georgia Institute of Technology is looking at incorporating authentication technology such as retina scans and facial recognition in their upcoming MOOCs (Webley, 2012).

MOOCs are an exciting development in higher education. However, they will not have a truly disruptive effect until the previously described problems are successfully addressed. Although the general media is portraying MOOCs as being in competition with traditional higher education, it is more likely that they will complement existing courses rather than replace them. Regardless of what happens, the next few years will be interesting as institutions react and adapt to these recent developments.

#### APPENDIX: COURSERA DISCLAIMER

Please Note: This online offering does not reflect the entire curriculum offered to stu-

dents enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania. This statement does not affirm that this student was enrolled as a student at the University of Pennsylvania in any way. It does not confer a University of Pennsylvania grade; it does not confer University of Pennsylvania credit; it does not confer a University of Pennsylvania degree; and it does not verify the identity of the student.

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MOOC—PRONOUNCED LIKE MOOOOOK, AS IN COW TALK.

# e-Coaching Success Strategies for Synchronous Discussions

#### David S. Stein and Constance E. Wanstreet

#### INTRODUCTION

Our last [chat] session online was just painful.... We were 2 hours into it and we couldn't get one question answered. I mean, it hurt.... I mean, it's like what a waste of 2 hours of my life. Let's just try to answer the question. And part of it was because I think the questions were designed to be very in depth, and the discussions just remained shallow and we couldn't get it resolved. (Vince) **E** ducators often use discussion to help learners become critically informed about a topic or issue, take responsibility for their learning, question their assumptions, and gain more insight into themselves as learners (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). As Vince noted above, however, his discussion group's chats were more painful than productive. The first step in decreasing the pain of shallow chats involves awareness on the



part of the instructor about how learners can facilitate discussion, coalesce as a group, and synthesize comments to move the group toward shared understanding (Stein et al., 2007).

An inquiry-based discussion is successful when learners engage in purposeful, critical dialogue to construct individual and group understanding of the issue (Garrison, 2011). In an inquiry-based discussion, learners take responsibility for their learning, create meaning in a group, and learn from the group. In a physical classroom, instructors can model moderator and discussant skills and have learners practice those skills in the presence of the instructor. Using a stop-action approach, instructors can stop the discussion and provide feedback. Learners can then practice the skill and continue with the discussion. In an online environment, instructors may not be able to have a group stop action. Frequent interruptions by the instructor might disrupt the rhythm of the discussion, especially when the discourse occurs in text-based chat rooms.

In a typical approach to modeling discussion skills in asynchronous spaces, the instructor participates and demonstrates appropriate facilitation behaviors through appropriate comments. Using a scaffolding approach, the instructor removes prompts and hints as learners begin to take more responsibility for the flow and content of the discussion. The instructor might take on the role of a student for demonstration purposes (Baran & Correia, 2009). However, students may still need to be coached in how to organize and moderate an online discussion until the skills are firmly established (Shea, Li, & Pickett, 2006).

In a synchronous, continually flowing chat space, consideration needs to be given to the difficulty of modeling behaviors. Too much intervention or modeling on the part of the instructor, even in the guise of a student, might disrupt the natural flow of ideas. It may be that the speed and flow of a synchronous chat make it impractical for an instructor to be the only voice of guidance. Learners in chat environments need time to reflect, practice, and receive guidance on effective moves made during their discussions. Coaching, rather than modeling or direct instruction, may be an appropriate intervention for improving learnerled text-based chats.

Learners who are coached and provided with timely feedback are able to achieve improvements in their ability to master the subject matter by better integrating and resolving the issues under discussion (Stein, Wanstreet, Slagle, Trinko, & Lutz, 2013). The question for instructors is how to provide coaching and feedback in educational online environments to help students improve their higher order thinking skills, such as integration and resolution. If coaching on discussion skills can increase student performance in the discussion, how then might instructors create a safe space for learners to practice and learn the art of discussion in an ongoing discussion-based environment?

In this article we will first discuss the idea of e-coaching and then describe how we use academic chats in our course. A third section will describe the framework for our e-coaching and feedback process. We will conclude with recommendations for practice derived from our experience with electronic coaching and feedback.

#### WHAT IS E-COACHING?

Coaching is becoming part of the landscape in higher education and is being used to improve learner performance in managing course content and setting academic goals (Murphy, Mahoney, Chen, Mendoza-Diaz, & Yang, 2005; Robinson & Gahagan, 2010). e-Coaching moves the process and guidance to an electronic space. In our work, we define e-coaching as a process that uses electronic tools to improve task performance by increasing an individual's or group's ability to build the discussion skills that are required to come to a collective understanding of an issue.

We use e-coaching for inquiry-based assignments, and we use tools such as email to provide coaching and feedback to learners who participate in synchronous discussions. Comments relate to the desired discussions skills and improvements learners need to make to more effectively participate in online discussions (Averweg, 2010; Rossett & Marino, 2005). The coach assists in the development of the group so that the group can self-manage, correct, and ultimately improve its ability to carry on a discussion and improve cognitive functioning (Hackman & Wegeman, 2005).

We position coaching as distinct from the instructional or facilitation role in that the coach is independent of the learning situation and can provide feedback on the form rather than the substance of the issue under discussion. Unlike instructors, the coach is not accountable to assess the academic performance of the group and focuses solely on helping the group develop the processes to conduct and manage online discussions effectively (Sofo, Yeo, & Villafane, 2010). Coaches focus on the process of being in a discussion; establishing the rules for participation and roles the members might take; asking appropriate questions for clarity, depth, and criticality of responses; making connections among the responses; and other elements of being in and contributing to a discussion (Brookfield, 2006).

# How WE USE CHATS

We teach an inquiry-based course that blends classroom instruction with webbased learning. Specifically, we meet in person at the beginning, midpoint, and end of a 10-week quarter course. During the intervening weeks, we give learners the opportunity to choose whether they will conduct small-group discussions in person or in online chat spaces. The outcome of the discussion is a group posting to the rest of the class that resolves an issue we pose each week.

In our course, multiple chats occur simultaneously, which limits the amount of time the instructor can be present in any one chat. Therefore, developing our learners' facilitation skills is critical to their ability to arrive at a resolution during the chat. Shea et al. (2006) report that students prefer directed facilitation from the instructor and may need to be coached in how to organize and facilitate discussions. This is particularly important in courses such as ours that feature learner-led discussions.

As instructors, we no longer assume that learners have the necessary skills to integrate information and resolve issues under discussion (Wanstreet & Stein, 2011). This applies to learners in both online and face-to-face environments, who tend to transfer practices from ordinary conversation to their online interactions (Schönfeldt & Golato, 2003). Therefore, we have developed an approach to provide electronic coaching to improve cognitive performance and electronic feedback to indicate what learners have done well and what follow-up work is required.

## A FRAMEWORK FOR E-COACHING AND FEEDBACK

We have used the community of inquiry model in our course design because it provides a framework for analyzing online discussions in terms of teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). Teaching presence involves course design and administration, discourse facilitation, and direct instruction. Social presence is the ability of learners to project their personal characteristics to others and coalesce as a group; and cognitive presence is associated with higher order thinking that results from recognizing problems, exploring suggestions for consideration, integrating concepts, and developing a resolution

to the issue under study (Garrison et al., 2000).

The community of inquiry framework features templates containing categories, indicators, and examples of each presence. The templates have guided researchers in analyzing the content of synchronous and asynchronous discussions (Anderson, Rourke, Archer, & Garrison, 2001: Garrison et al., 2000; Ling, 2007; Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 1999; Shea et al., 2010, 2006; Stein et al., 2007). The analysis generally takes place when the course is completed and is not conducted as a way to guide coaching and feedback during the course. However, we have used the templates to focus the substance of our coaching and feedback. We have found that a group receiving electronic coaching before each chat and feedback immediately afterwards experienced an increase in higher order thinking over time when compared with a group that did not receive coaching and feedback (Stein et al., 2013).

Coaching involved providing examples from previous group interactions and explaining how to improve discussion performance. Group members were encouraged to practice (i.e., mentally rehearse) the skills before the next session. Our ecoaching cycle began with observation in the form of reviewing transcripts directly after the chat to determine deficiencies in performance. Guidance delivered electronically alerted the group members to identified deficiencies and suggestions for improvement. Practice was encouraged in the days before the next session. The final component, feedback, was provided immediately after the subsequent session to report the extent to which the group members acted on the discussion process recommendations. The coaching cycle was reiterated 24 hours in advance of the next discussion.

Table 1 shows the type of coaching and feedback we provided to address specific categories of teaching and social presence. Teaching and social presence dialogue is necessary for an academic chat to achieve cognitive presence (Anderson et al., 2001) and was, therefore, the focus of our coaching (Stein et al., 2013).

Teaching presence coaching and feedback was informed by the community of inquiry teaching presence template (Anderson et al., 2001). In the category of instructional design and organization, each group was advised to name a moderator and summarizer for the following week so that undue time was not spent organizing the group each week. In terms of direct instruction, members were coached on how to summarize the discussion before moving on to the next part of the question. Regarding facilitating discourse, the group was coached on how to gain agreement that the response reflects the input of all group members.

Social presence coaching was based on the template developed by Rourke et al. (1999) and Garrison and Arbaugh (2007). Social presence coaching promoted the use of cohesive language, such as "we, our, and us" to show the learners working together and coalescing as a group. Feedback

Elements	Categories	Coaching and Feedback
Teaching presence <sup><i>a</i></sup>	<ul><li>Design and organization</li><li>Facilitating discourse</li><li>Direct instruction</li></ul>	<ul> <li>Name moderator/summarizer; establish norms</li> <li>Gain input from all; check for understanding</li> <li>Present questions, refer to readings, summarize</li> </ul>
Social presence <sup>b</sup>	Group cohesion	• Use "we," "our," "us"

Table 1. Community of Inquiry Coaching and Feedback Guide

*Sources:* <sup>a</sup>Anderson, Rourke, Archer, and Garrison (2001); <sup>b</sup>Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, and Archer (1999), Garrison and Arbaugh (2007).

Coaching Before the Chat	Feedback After the Chat
"Confirm who the moderator and summarizer are at the very beginning of the chat and decide on the next week's moderator and summarizer at that time."	"You did a nice job of naming the moderator, so keep it going. Remember to identify a summarizer at the beginning of the chat."
"Consistently follow a convention to signal where you are in your response."	"Bobby and Mary used ellipses to signal when they weren't finished. When you are finished, you might try using 'end' or some other convention. It cuts down on five people talking at once."
"Summarize where you are before moving on to the next question, and check for everyone's understanding."	"I counted about three instances that looked like summary statements, which were supplemented by some of the other group members Going forward, the moderator can ask for a summary to see where the group is headed regarding an answer."
"Get input on every question."	"I can't see that you actually addressed all of the questions, so your moderator will probably be filling in the blanks based on her sense of where the discussion might have gone. You'll want to make your job easier by getting input on every question."
"Include examples from the readings to support your positions."	"With two exceptions, there were no examples from the readings to support your opinions. After initial brainstorming, you'll need to integrate information from the readings to support your opinions and move the discourse to a productive outcome efficiently."
"Offer reasons why you agree or disagree."	"There's quite a bit of simple agreement without any follow-up as to why. You may have good reasons for agreeing or disagreeing that could be useful in writing the discussion posting."

Table 2.	<b>Examples of Simple</b>	, Directive Coachin	g and Feedback
	1 1	,	9

assessed how well the group achieved the goals of the coaching.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

- 1. Coach shortly before a chat and provide feedback immediately afterwards. This will help learners increase their knowledge of the inquiry process, ask questions to confirm their understanding, and facilitate inquiry, among other metacognitive activities (Akyol & Garrison, 2011). We provided coaching 24 hours in advance and feedback 1 hour after the chats.
- 2. Provide continuous coaching in discussion processes and feedback about the gap in those processes throughout the course. Our learners showed an increase in their higher order thinking

with as few as five coaching and feedback sessions.

3. Keep the coaching and feedback simple, directive, and task based (see Table 2). Use feedback to complement the coaching by identifying gaps between the coaching tasks you encouraged and the performance. In that way, coaching and feedback are iterative and build on each other. Our coaching consisted of a maximum of four items before each chat, which were repeated as needed.

Continuous coaching and feedback can reinforce the power of learner-led discussions to foster more interdependent learners so they can conduct inquiries together and model collaborative learning. In addition to teaching, social, and cognitive presence, continuous coaching and feedback contribute to a successful course. Groups benefiting from coaching and feedback will have the tools to move chat discussions deliberately from painful to productive.

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# Delivering an Online MBA Program for Future Business Leaders in Ukraine A Success Story

## Carol A. Gravel and Lilia Dubko

#### INTRODUCTION

driving force for economic growth in the European Union (EU) has been the movement of goods, services, and people throughout the union countries. With this change comes the need for citizens of EU countries to enhance their knowledge and skills in order to be more marketable in the expanding open market. An advanced business degree is a foundation for professional growth for many citizens in the EU and beyond. It could be a challenge for many of EU professionals to obtain an advanced degree from a university, especially an advanced degree from an Ameri-



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can university. This article provides a review of an online master of business administration (MBA) program, developed as a partnership between Luhansk National University (Ukraine) and Franklin Pierce University (New Hampshire, United States), that was designed for working professions who were citizens of Ukraine. The purpose was to address the country's need for advanced knowledge in business that would in turn enhance the ability for citizens of Ukraine to participate in the economic growth within the European Union.

Franklin Pierce University is a liberal arts university whose mission is to prepare students to become active, engaged citizens and leaders of conscience. Its academic programs are grounded in a liberal arts tradition and are unified by the theme of individual and community—the individual's responsibility to community. The university has been nationally recognized for its commitment to its mission upon receiving the Templeton Award for Character-Building Colleges as well as being one of Forbes' America's Top Colleges for several years.

## **PROGRAM RESULTS**

Franklin Pierce University joined with Luhansk National University in a partnership to offer an online MBA program in December 2005. The relationship between the two institutions has yielded a number of positive results:

- A 13-course online MBA that included customization of the curriculum to address European business practices and principles.
- Faculty training for teaching in an online environment. Luhansk National University faculty received training on the online environment.
- Faculty collaboration among Luhansk faculty and Franklin Pierce University to provide support to online Ukraine MBA students and courses when needed.

- Development and delivery of an Accelerated English Language Institute developed in order to promote English literacy for students who might consider entering the online Ukraine MBA program. The institute was conducted on location in Luhansk, Ukraine and has certified over 130 graduates.
- Two entrepreneurial summer seminars in the United States. The seminar provided a select number of online Ukraine MBA students with the opportunity to apply their emerging understanding of entrepreneurship and meet chief executive officers of United States companies where they could learn firsthand what it takes to be an entrepreneur.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN ELEMENTS**

In order to cultivate the desire to manage or lead a business, an educational approach that incorporated the following elements of instructional design was developed:

- 1. *Project-Based Approach*: Several the classes took the form of a project. While working on a project, students develop a variety of skills. The project approach provides a meaning and a context to the learning process. Projects explore topics that enhance business knowledge while at the same time contributing to the students' current work setting. The finished project for a class could be such things as proposal for a new organizational design, improvements to the current accounting process, or a detailed marketing plan.
- 2. *Flexibility:* Because this program was for working adults, the program provided opportunity to for a flexible but effective classroom schedule, while at the same time ensuring that the key elements of the standard curriculum. There are learning objectives and lessons plans for all classes, but also there

was the opportunity to explore issues that come up in the course of a class that directly related to the students' current work environment, when it is appropriate.

3. *Technology as a Tool*: While technology is one of the key elements of the curriculum, technology was also a powerful enabling tool, which supported critical thinking and other developmental skills. The use of an online learning environment created the opportunity for all students to participate in discussions, to share a broader array of knowledge and information, and collaborate with individuals and organizations around the world.

## A STUDENT'S PERCEPTION

An online MBA, like any university degree, is challenging and time-consuming. However, for many professionals throughout the EU an online MBA degree is an ideal way to obtain an advanced degree from well respected universities. The following is a review of the online Ukraine MBA experience from a student's perspective.

Studying to obtain an online degree has certain peculiarities. As with a traditional graduate degree it is necessary to be ready to devote many hours to reading, writing papers, discussing topics with the teacher and classmates. To be successful in an online degree program, however, requires strong skills in self-organization and time management. On the one hand, an online program does not mean that all the work is done online: there are regular textbooks to read, and some sessions with offline instructors to visit. On the other hand, the online program gives more freedom in terms of time planning: a student can start his or her studying session early in the morning or late at night, during a workday or during the weekend. Being flexible means a lot since the majority of the online MBA program students are full-time employees, and many have families to take

care of. Normally, a person who must leave on a business trip would miss classes; this is not an issue with the online program. Fortunately, Internet technologies do not have borders, so leaving the country would equally not interfere with the learning process.

Internet technologies are vital for the online program and not only in that they provide access to the Web, which is required. They are a precondition for any online educational program because the learning process employs a system like eCollege, WebCT, or Blackboard, which is in reality the classroom. Indeed, this system offers everything that the learning environment needs: discussion areas for discussing a variety of questions on a weekly basis; easy-to-use tools for communication with the teacher or classmates through the integrated e-mail system, or synchronous tools like chat and ClassLive, a document sharing option by which a professor or any of the students can upload a document to share with the rest of the class; a gradebook, which allows professor-customized grading of each particular student; a dropbox for submitting the weekly assignments; and an online library, which gives access to hundreds of books, journals, and the most up-to-date business reports. Once students log into his online classroom, they find themselves in a well structured online campus with all requirements for each particular the course and the course area, which is divided into 12 weekly sessions (as it is at Franklin Pierce University). Twelve weeks is the time for mastering each course. Each weekly session is unique: each week the students make one step up the course ladder by making new projects, watching educational movies, presenting new milestones, participating in discussions with their classmates and their instructors, solving problems, or analyzing case studies.

Practical application of the theories learned is meaningful; discussing case studies, students analyze external and internal factors that have led to the success or failure of a given department/company; however, trying to foresee all the possible pitfalls when creating one's own business plan or an e-commerce project is times more challenging. Giving this opportunity to its students is a great advantage of the online MBA program.

Each course requires a lot of individual efforts, but students are not alone in the process. Even though professors are thousands of miles away from their students, the input they provide is no less than in a regular class environment; tricky questions during discussions, comments provided to students' threads, personalized e-mails, as well as feedback on the written assignments and projects are but a few activities they are actively involved in. A great importance in such interaction belongs to web conferences with students, when they have a chance to model a real-class environment using available Internet technologies. This experience is truly invaluable. It is an opportunity to discuss ideas related to the learning process, but also a chance to get acquainted with a professor in person. It is necessary for students to see the so-called psychological portrait of their teacher, as the personal charisma of the latter can play a big role in motivating his or her students to fully integrate into the learning process. Despite any available technologies, a human factor in education is significant; therefore the value of faceto-face interaction between students and professors, even if performed through technical means, is difficult to overestimate.

All these technologies and methodologies, when combined into one common process, create a unique learning environment for the students: a computer with Internet access, a well-thought-out time schedule multiplied by the desire and motivation to learn and apply the learning in practice, under condition of absolute mobility.

## **PROGRAM OUTCOMES AND SUCCESS**

The primary objective of the online Ukraine MBA program was to foster economic opportunity for citizens of Ukraine. This was accomplished via the following:

- 1. Education through a variety of applied graduate-level assignments and projects.
  - Twenty-six citizens (women and men) of Ukraine received a customized and innovative MBA.
  - Nine were awarded the highest honor for a graduate business student; Sigma Beta Delta Honor Society membership.
  - Fifteen students traveled to the United States and attended the Entrepreneurial Summer Seminar that was specifically designed and developed for these students, allowing them to meet and collaborate with U.S. business leaders.
  - One hundred thirty-five citizens (woman and men) of Ukraine graduated from the Luhansk Summer English Language Program.
  - A computer lab that can support distance education coursework and an MBA library is available to future students who attend Luhansk University.
- 2. Enhanced business skills for both current and future business professionals.
  - Fifty percent received a promotion or advancement during or after their MBA program;
  - Ten percent title of consultant;
  - Ten percent title of general manger;
  - Thirty percent title of marketing or sales manager;
  - Fifty percent junior manger; and
  - An Education and Business Working Group has been established at the American Chamber of Commerce in Kiev to help education met the needs of the businesses.

# Barriers to Distance Learning The Educator's Viewpoint

## **Naveed Peerani**

#### INTRODUCTION

Distance education has continuously improved in the years since its introduction in the 1800s. In recent years, it has become increasingly more popular and successful. The role of learning has changed from a classroombased setting to an online or distancebased learning format. This change has resulted in an altered role for educators. Prior to the introduction of distance learning, teachers would have a physical classroom where they dictated the learning



Naveed Peerani, Abraham S. Fischler School of Education, Nova Southeastern University, 1750 NE 167th St., North Miami Beach, FL 33162. Telephone: (954) 262-8492. E-mail: peerani@nova.edu process. With distance learning however, the role is learner based and is dependent on how the learner decides to take on the course. In this way, the teacher must adjust their teaching in order to fulfill the needs of the students in this new way of learning (Bawane & Spector, 2009).

With any new innovation there is always both positive and negative feedback and opinions. Distance education is still in its progressive and improvement stage, which means that there will be criticism as well as praise for the new technological techniques of teaching and learning using this format. Despite the success that has been seen in distance learning classes, some instructors continue to reject this method of instructional delivery. There are numerous causes as well as explanations for resistance to the "man-to-machine" methodology, or distance education, by the educators themselves (Beaudoin, 1990).

## DESIGN OF DISTANCE EDUCATION CLASSES

The goal of any educational institution is to instruct and train its students and help them learn better, in a way that can assist them to reach their objective. Learning is not a boot camp where papers are passed out and students must learn everything by rote or be subjected to failure. The entire concept is to engage students to understand the coursework being taught and to be able to use it in the future. There are

those who feel that online education is just that, a boot camp with no interaction or support. This is not the case in a welldesigned online class with a well-trained instructor to guide the students. Students are consistently engaged in discussions, group activities, and classroom assignments and exams, regardless of the location of the instructor, school, or student. The instructor plays the key role in making the online classroom successful, and has the biggest responsibility for the care of the student, no matter which setting it may be. Extreme opposition to online classes is therefore puzzling. Instructors should be able to assimilate new methods of teaching in order to better the education of the students: however there are different reasons that prevent some teachers from embracing this teaching method (Beaudoin, 1990).

#### **RESISTING THE CHANGE**

Educators have been taught to teach a certain way for a number of years. Change is something that people can adjust to, if there is a willingness to do so. With the introduction of distance education, both the learners and teachers had to make a change in their lifestyle and methods of teaching. Some are more capable of adjusting to this change than others. Every individual educator has reasons to either accept distance education into his or her teaching style, or to stick to the traditional classroom setting (Bonk, 2001).

## TIME-IS-MONEY BARRIER

The most common barrier to the resistance to change has to do with time management. There is an extensive investment required in order to maintain an active and engaging distance education course. The time and energy needed by an instructor can be extensive and may call for some time to adjust to the process. Moving from a traditional classroom to an electronic medium may be easy for some but complicated for others. Developing a distance learning course takes more time to construct and maintain, which takes away time from other professional activities, especially those involved in research and publication projects. However, instructors should realize that the time spent in developing lesson plans for the next class could be equivalent to time developing the online coursework. Though it might take more time to initially upload the course online, the instructional and operational costs are generally lower to maintain the online coursework; yet instructors are receiving less compensation and are not provided adequate release time prior to the start of the class to develop the course (Berge, 1998). This is one area in which improvement is necessary, and it differs from school to school. No one knows how everything is going to work in the beginning stages of development, and because it often takes more time and effort to instruct an online class, compensation for that additional time should be equitable for the instructor. This should not be a barrier to old or new instructors wishing to teach at a distance. The shortage of instructional development grants, limited recognition by departments and institutions in promotion and tenure decisions, and minimal instructional design support are all areas to improve in for the future of distance education courses by all educational establishments (Berge, 1998). According to Bonk (2001), "recognition, collaboration, technical support, online sharing of pedagogical practices and instructional design assistance are all ways to increase the adoption of web-based technologies in college teaching" (p. 2).

Increases in pay and recognition reward those who go above and beyond at work, but distance education staff are lucky to be able to work from anywhere and at any time, compared to those who are forced to be stuck in a cubicle throughout their work day. Brick and mortar institutions will always serve a need, but they may soon become unattractive to their clients and everyone's busy lifestyles. In the past 10 years, there has been a tenfold increase in online organizations, schools, and businesses; the growth in online education and businesses may be phenomenal in the future.

Institutions should recognize the unique role of an online instructor, and appropriate incorporate compensation when planning distance education initiatives. A number of institutions have found that special upgrades in office computer equipment are well received, as are adjusted salaries and course load. Recent investigations have indicated that low-cost incentives such as public recognition, notes of appreciation, or special parking privileges are also effective demonstrations of support.

#### NEW TECHNOLOGY TRAINING

One of the major reasons educators resist teaching online is due to a lack of pedagogical training and technical support. Instructors must be trained or have actual experience with online learning before they can be expected to be online teachers (Berge, 1998). With any new idea or invention, training is needed to be able to use the product appropriately. Without training, it would be difficult to fully understand the purpose of any product. For this reason, training should be provided to instructors who are new to the distance education process. The purpose is not to undermine the instructors; even the best of teachers and professionals could always use a little extra help and guidance for any new information or technology that is introduced. The sharing of information is beneficial to everyone, students and teachers alike.

Information seminars and training groups could be held to aid in the teaching process for distance instructors. In this way, the training sessions will not be like a classroom where the teachers are being taught; rather, it will be an open discussion room where ideas are exchanged on the best ways to teach at a distance in the best possible way. The roles of instructors, their current technology use, and their teaching experience should be discussed and combined in order to develop a final model on best practices distance education.

The instructor has the responsibility to present the materials for the course in a way that can be easily understood by the student who is not physically present. With distance learning, all students are doing the work at different times and asking questions at different times, while there is still only one instructor who is responsible for all the students. For this, the instructor needs to be trained and prepared for the change. Time availability and awareness of each student's progress are also important aspects of online learning. All students will no longer be submitting assignments and tests simultaneously. This could be both advantageous and a detriment, as the instructor needs time to pace him/herself as each student turns in the assignment, but would also have to be available at different times in order to make sure all questions are answered.

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats all have to be combined into one blended course that can be presented to instructors to help them in making the distance education class as successful as possible for each student. Programs that offer credible and ongoing training in how to teach at a distance, instead of merely trying to manipulate new instructional technology, would prove the best way to coach instructors in distance education course development (Beaudoin, 1990).

#### INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Interaction with students is one of the most gratifying aspects of teaching. For some, the lack of direct contact with both students and faculty is an issue. The social role involved with being a distance educator is to create a friendly environment for the students. Good teachers often send out welcome messages, use a personal tone, and send prompt feedback with specific examples and references. Keeping a constant flow of communication with students, and encouraging communication amongst the students will promote a successful outcome (Berge, 1998).

Distance learners should be just as aware of their responsibilities and expectations in the class as is the instructor. Both working hand in hand will ensure that the course objectives are fulfilled and should predict a successful ending. It could also prove successful if instructors join national organizations or even local groups or associations that have the common interest of instructional technologists and distance educators. Blogs, communication through Skype or Google, or internal meetings among colleagues to network and collaborate on ideas are other ways to gain others insights and share ideas. Communication is key to facilitating a better understanding of the instructors and also the students. It assists in closing the mental distance between teacher and student, and reduces the feeling of isolation amongst students. Empathizing with students helps to optimize their educational opportunities.

## CONSTRUCTIVISM AS BEST APPROACH TO DISTANCE LEARNING

Constructivism may be the best approach to teaching distance learning classes. Constructivism replaces the standard curriculum with an approach to encouraging problem solving within the context of a person's previous knowledge. Instruction is based on the combination of structure and subject matter to produce cognitive changes in the student. Constructivist instructors style their teaching strategies to encourage students to interpret, analyze, and predict information. Forums and discussions are used for the enhancement of student interaction (Phillips, 2000). Facilitating an online class is very different from a face-to-face class because of the physical distance and lack of personal interaction. The student is required to act upon the environment to acquire knowledge, and firsthand knowledge is gained through the experiences of the students and their interaction with the environment. The instructor is encouraged to focus more on discussions, asking questions, prodding for student responses, synthesizing and summarizing key points, and helping students develop themes to link class resources and outside readings (Gold, 2001). The class should not be based on following a list of instructions given in the syllabus. Syllabism is a phenomenon that can occur in a distance education course; it is the inclination for students to focus solely on the syllabus assignments rather than interact and actually learn the material presented. Instructors should not only check assignments, but should also check participation and the quality of the work and answers produced by each student. In a constructivist setting, learning is not about producing specific outcomes, but the process by which those outcomes are produced (Phillips, 2000).

## CONCLUSION

Some applaud the efforts and opportunities offered through distance education courses, while some are still in the gray area as to how to take these new changes. There are many barriers that cause doubt in people about the success of these courses. Online educators have expressed a desire for more pedagogical tools, advice, and communities for online teaching and learning efforts. Professionals in the distance education field can improve strategies to attract and motivate faculty by identifying these needs and the barriers that accompany them, and in turn, increase the prestige and acceptance associated with online learning programs. Distance education stresses learning, rather than teaching, and is based on the principle that the key to learning is what students do, not what teachers do. Instructors must be adept at facilitating students' learning through particular attention to process, unlike classroom-based teachers whose traditional role is largely confined to selecting and sharing content. The obstacles that need to be overcome are not impossible and distance education will continue to improve and to satisfy the demands of both students and instructors.

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# Examining Global and Glocal Awareness, Knowledge, and Competency

#### Natalie B. Milman

#### WHAT IS GLOBALIZATION?

o one can deny that we live in a world that is, indeed, global. Yet, the term "globalization," and



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other terms associated with this concept (i.e., glocalization), mean different things to different people. Still, it is important to become aware of and examine such concepts and their definitions, particularly as the need for global awareness, knowledge, and competency becomes increasingly important and prevalent, not only in higher education institutions as online programs proliferate and their desire to compete in the global marketplace grows, but also in any educational, corporate, or governmental unit.

Below are just a few examples of different definitions of globalization: These definitions can serve as a starting point for determining whether or not to incorporate this concept in the design and teaching of curricula, training, and professional development offered face-to-face, online, or in a hybrid learning environment.

 International Monetary Fund: Economic "globalization" is a historical process, the result of human innovation and technological progress. It refers to the increasing integration of economies around the world, particularly through the movement of goods, services, and capital across borders. The term sometimes also refers to the movement of people (labor) and knowledge (technology) across international borders. There are also broader cultural, political, and environmental dimensions of globalization ("Globalization: A brief overview," 2008).

- *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*: the act or process of globalizing : the state of being globalized; *especially* : the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets ("Globalization," n.d.)
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: refers to fundamental changes in the spatial

and temporal contours of social existence, according to which the significance of space or territory undergoes shifts in the face of a no less dramatic acceleration in the temporal structure of crucial forms of human activity. Geographical distance is typically measured in time ("Globalization," 2010).

• *Wikipedia*: is the process of extending social relations across world-space. Such extensions arise from the movements of people, things and ideas. It cannot be defined in terms of internationalization or integration as some theorists have suggested, though these developments might be an outcome of globalization. Globalization describes the interplay across cultures of macrosocial forces. ("Globalization," n.d.)



Source: Mansilla and Jackson (2011, p. 12).

Figure 1. Global competency.

## WHAT IS GLOBAL AWARENESS?

All major hiring companies need global citizens. Global sensitivities, global perspective, global insight; along with maturity and a capacity for risk-taking, are exactly the skills every major organization is looking for—in every industry. (Kevin Gill, global director of staffing for Honeywell)

In the financial world, cultural awareness and cultural adeptness are far more important than undergraduate major or existing skill sets... These needs touch all industries, from banking to healthcare to engineering. (Jonathan Jones, firmwide campus recruiting director for Goldman Sachs)

These quotes demonstrate a need for individuals from many different fields, to possess global awareness. Global awareness is:

- using 21st century skills to understand and address global issues;
- learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community contexts; and
- understanding other nations and cultures, including the use of non-English languages ("Global Awareness," 2011).

Yet, many recognize that global awareness is not enough—and that global competency is needed. Global competency refers to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions individuals possess, such as "the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance" (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011, p. xiii). Figure 1 illustrates global competency and Figure 2 provides



are making progress?

Source: Mansilla and Jackson (2011, p. 55).

Figure 2. Global competency.

an idea of what global teaching entails. These might help offer concrete ideas for examining how this concept might be incorporated into the design and teaching of curricula, training, and professional development

#### WHAT IS GLOCALIZATION?

With the emphasis on globalization, it is easy to forget the need for glocal understanding, or glocalization. Glocalization generally combines ideas associated with globalization with local issues and concerns ("Glocalization," n.d.). The concept of glocalization, or having a glocal mindset, recognizes there are often many issues and concerns that should be considered and often addressed within one's "home" (wherever that might be) and not just abroad! Championing glocal awareness or even competency shows that one recognizes the importance of one's locality in light of the world around them.

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GLOCALIZATATION COMBINES IDEAS ASSOCIATED WITH GLOBALIZATION WITH LOCAL ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

# Try This

# **THE ESL Program** A Crucial Component of Distance Learning

# **Errol Craig Sull and David Seelow**

ur country is multicultural, and this is reflected in the wide variety of ethnicities found in our colleges and universities. Where once the idea of offering ESL (English as a second language) assistance and courses was a minor

afterthought in postsecondary education, it has become crucial, for it recognizes the need to help transition nonnative English speakers into a learning environment and an eventual professional mainstream—where English is the primary lan-



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guage. Doing this effectively within the online school and within its online course offerings requires skill, a quality ESL program, well-trained educators, and an ongoing melding of the ESL information and coursework throughout the students' courses. This is a delicate balancing act, but several approaches can make the process a smooth and effective one.

Using an ESL program developed at Excelsior College, by Dr. David Seelow, School of Liberal Arts, director of writing programs and The Online Writing Lab with the assistance of Claire Siskin, project director, a model is found that offers a successful example of such a program that can be developed for any online learning environment.

There are three approaches to effectively integrating an ESL program into the online classroom—understanding the need for an ESL program, creating the ESL program, and integrating the ESL program. In addition, lessons learned from the overall process have made for several improvements in the program. The details:

# UNDERSTANDING THE NEED FOR AN ESL PROGRAM

Nonnative speakers of English struggled in Excelsior's English composition courses and the more advanced Writing for the Professions class, as evidenced by poor grades and relatively high dropout rates. The college lacked a formal remedial education program. Furthermore, the national resources available to online adult learners failed to account for the specific needs of the ESL population. As with all computerbased educational materials, Excelsior grappled with issue of what instruction/ learning could be carried out as independent study and what components and aspects would require the intervention/ feedback of a human instructor or guide.

The idea for the *English as a Second Language Writing Online Workshop (ESL-WOW) Project* was born out of an institutional recognition, and, indeed, a national crisis, that a number of students, particularly nonnative speakers of English, do not have the writing skills needed to succeed in college. From this context, The School of Liberal Arts sponsored the Online Writing Lab (OWL). The OWL, a free online service that provides learners with an in-depth guide to critical aspects of undergraduate writing, was begun in response to feedback from faculty at Excelsior College that their students needed to improve their writing skills. Other useful OWLs exist, but they are often websites that consist of textbased static pages. In contrast, the Excelsior OWL is an interactive and multimedia-rich online resource.

In the view of many instructors, the students whose first language was not English often faced even greater challenges in writing. To address their needs, the *ESL*-*WOW* section of the *OWL* was planned, with the following objectives:

- to help students write effectively according to the conventions of North American universities; and
- to provide students with the skills necessary to be successful writers.

In the 3 years leading up to a grant from Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, approximately 8% of the students taking Excelsior's writing courses were nonnative speakers of English. This population had the highest rate of failure and course noncompletion in required writing courses among the college's adult learners. Excelsior's faculty knew we were not alone in the struggle to meet the needs of nonnative speakers; Charles S. Amorosino, executive director of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages gave testimony to the House Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness on May 19, 2009, stating, "A recent survey among 176 ESL providers showed that 57.4% maintained waiting lists, ranging from a few weeks to more than 3 years" (Amorosino, 2009).

#### CREATING THE ESL PROGRAM

The basic structure of ESL-WOW was envisioned as consisting of a series of interlocking interactive modules that would guide students through each stage of the prewriting, while-writing, and postwriting processes:

- Getting Ready to Write: Generating Ideas, Developing a Thesis, and Mapping Your Ideas;
- Developing Your Ideas: Read Information and Take Notes, Using Others' Ideas, and Compose; and
- Revising Your Work: The Importance of Revision, Reading the Text Aloud, Glossing, and Using a Checklist.

In late 2009, the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education grant was awarded to Excelsior College, and the project officially began on January 1, 2010. A project director was hired, and an advisory committee of four nationally known experts in English as a second language and educational technology were selected.

#### INTEGRATING THE ESL PROGRAM

Excelsior envisioned the creation of the ESL-WOW as the first step in developing an overarching OWL. More than 150 existing OWLs were researched, and it was discovered that was all but two were primarily text based. When writers are struggling with basic concepts and are not familiar with grammatical terminology it is difficult for them to locate the help they need independently in such an environment. Because study takes place 24 hours a day, students must have access to self-help until additional support from writing or tutoring centers can be scheduled. Pressed for time due to additional commitments to jobs and families, a tool that is engaging and easy to navigate is required to help them persevere. Furthermore, the site needed to extensive multimedia support to address ESL students' learning styles. Every lesson includes both text and audio. Animations supplement the step-by-step modular lessons at critical learning points such as the difference in an extended paper's narrative logic between the United States and many other countries.

In addition to the four writing modules, the ESL-WOW has an "avoiding plagiarism tutorial." This module helps students understand what professors in the United States consider plagiarism, and the consequences for such plagiarism. Two short videos enact a typical situation of suspected student plagiarism. Additionally, students can test their knowledge about plagiarism. Finally, the module explains how to avoid plagiarism by learning how to summarize, paraphrase, and cite your source material or research.

Finally, ESL-WOW has been integrated into all the college's many online courses through a Free Writing Resources link on the college's Blackboard learning management system.

#### LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE ESL-WOW PROJECT

As with all first generations of a new program, areas that needed smoothing and sanding in the ESL-WOW were discovered in a pilot study conducted with San Diego Mesa Community College. These items have been incorporated into the current ESL-WOW. Excelsior College's next step will be to train its large distance education faculty in the use of ESL-WOW as an indispensable student resource. The home page already includes a detailed instructor's manual in both a printable PDF format and as an html page. Thus far, however, these are the major takeaway lessons:

• Assemble an outside advisory committee of diverse and recognized experts in the field of inquiry and involve this committee in at least quarterly meetings. Give the committee focused assignments or homework to address between meetings, and set up a shared website for information exchange and consultation.

- Conduct internal planning committee meetings from the onset of the funding to involve all the vested interests and include academics, information technology personnel, fiscal staff and, ideally, executive staff.
- Formal partnerships with other institutions are invaluable. Consult with these institutions well before the application process and maintain regular lines of communication. Make sure the number of partner colleges is manageable for your project.
- Hire an expert project director immediately using the college's regular search committee process with representation across the various departments.
- Use a mixture of class types: face to face, hybrid, and online.
- Format pilot activities to take place within credit-bearing courses.
- Faculty should be reminded over and over to be made aware of support tools. Faculty awareness will result in more students directed to available tools, affording them better odds at achieving success.

## CONCLUSION

While the ESL program spotlighted here has its focus in the English composition

courses its need and success are indicative of the ESL program's place in all online educational environments. Nonnative speakers of English are enrolled in a variety of subject areas, and often their struggles with the English language becomes a major obstacle to their academic success. Excelsior's overall efforts in creating the ESL-WOW illustrate the complexities in developing such programs, but the overwhelming worth once up and running.

And the need for ESL programs will grow at an exponential rate. The U.S. Census Bureau projects a 125-million person growth in the U.S. population by 2050, with 60% of that growth attributable to immigrants and the descendants of immigrants (Nowak, 1997). ESL programs were once shadow programs, but now must have the spotlight, for they have become a major linchpin in the academic and eventual professional success for millions of Americans. This is a tremendous opportunity for the online teaching environment that must be embraced.

Students and faculty can visit ESL-WOW 24/7 at www.excelsior.edu/owl/esl

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# Ask Errol!

#### istance learning continues to grow at a strong pace, batting aside congressional inquiries and a weakened economy as if they were mosquitoes. This translates into more complexities in various online courses as new technology, strategies, and approaches are introduced. The result is not only a slew of questions on the how, what, and why of teaching online but with new subjects, too. This edition's column brings a mix: new and old. I hope one of these visited your mind.



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# Errol Craig Sull

Okay, I admit it: I'm a bit nervous. My online school recently switched its programs to a new approach to learning called adaptive learning. I went through several training sessions, but I still don't fully understand it. It's beginning to make me feel somewhat outdated in the distance learning field, and I don't like feeling this way. Some of your past columns have had a calming effect of me when you addressed subjects that previously had made me somewhat nervous; I'm hoping you can help me again!

Adaptive learning can require some "getting used to," but this new kid on the technology learning curve is here to stay for the seeable future. As the name says, once students answer some questions about their knowledge of the course topic the adaptive learning program creates a path of learning-through miniassignments developed individually for each student-so the students can be better prepared to handle the major assignments in the course. It can be overwhelming for the online instructor at first: there are charts, lines, colors, and drop down menus (called twirl downs) that seem to fill the screen.

So far, preliminary data suggests this is an effective way to help students, and there is a little trick that can help you master it. Go through the training presentations again (they are nearly always archived by schools so faculty can revisit them), and as the presentation rolls do two things: take screen shots (Ctrl + Print Screen) of the most important steps, then print these out (but also save them to your computer); and take notes on the steps you need to follow, matching the screen shots. This allows you to not only become more familiar with the adaptive learning process but also to imprint the process on your brain. And when you teach your courses use these cheat sheets—you'll feel more at ease, I promise you!

I have never given much thought to calling my online students, and I do this for a variety of reasons. Sometimes an intervention is critical because of low performance, and the phone seems the best way to connect with the student. There are other times when I'll call just to help cement my bond with the students, that is, the students knows I really care about their effort in the classroom, and it also gives the students real time to ask me questions or us to discuss assignments. But a recent incident at my school has me rethinking making the calls. A colleague called one of her students, and in the conversation suggested the student needed to put in more effort on his assignments. The next day, the faculty member received a call from her supervisor, indicating the student had complained the instructor was "insensitive" and "critical" of him. So, this begs the question: just how DOES one effectively interact with students in a call? Now, I'm a bit anxious each time I talk to a student. Any suggestions you can give me would be appreciated.

There was a time when schools with online students would not recommend calling students; it was, overall, online, and thus all contact was to be via the computer. But the times have changed: the more interaction with students can be better, as the students' growth in the classes equate to higher retention. All this by way of saying the #1 rule of talking to students—if there is one—is to remember you are talking under the auspices of your school, thus your interaction on the phone must always be professional, courteous, and course oriented-with any guidelines the school has for student-instructor calls also followed. Next, be very careful of what you say and how you say it: not only is choosing your words important but your tone is crucial. Two tips: use a bit of humor to help relax the student, and always make certain the student understands your only reason for the call is to assist, to help—it's important the student gets a feel that you care. Finally: always keep a record of the call, including a summary of its contents. (Aside: some faculty are recording all such conversations-first getting permission from their institution-asking for the student's permission before the recording begins. This is done for a layer of protection to the faculty member.)

I teach blended courses (some schools call them hybrid) where I meet with my students in a physical classroom 2 days per week; the third "day" equates to time the students spend in the class through Blackboard. While the students seem to enjoy this mix there is more of a definite distinction between class in the room and class on the computer. Can you give some tips on how I can better integrate one into the other for a more seamless class?

The key to making a hybrid course work is to have each component depend on the other; when online instructors give assignments in (for example) the physical classroom that do not appear related to the assignments or material online students treat them as if they are two different classes-not good. Some suggestions: use a lesson in the physical classroom as the basis for an online discussion thread, then take some of these ideas back to the physical classroom for continued debate and/or an in-class assignment; have a group assignment, where each group has its own discussion thread to discuss the project, then have oral presentations in the class relating to the group assignment and what the groups learning in there online interactions; have students build an online resource library for the class relating to an assignment, then have class members discuss their resources in a face-to-face meeting; present a video online relating to the course subject, then discuss or debate the videos contents or merit. By the way: don't hesitate to ask students for suggestions on how to better meld the two halves of the course: you'll find some good ideas you had not previously considered!

My school is fully online, and one of the expected practices is all instructors must post in the discussion at least 3 different days per week. While I do this I admit to doing it in a somewhat lazy way: I have prefabricated discussion responses that are generic to the thread's subject or discussion in general, and I post these on at least 3 different days of the week, so I meet this requirement. But I think my supervisor might be catching on to this, as he sent me an e-mail indicating my discussion posting need to be more personal. So, what do I do?

Initially, I was not going to publish your question, as the answer seemed too obvious: be sure you respond substantively to individual students, and have your responses address the contents of their posts. But with discussion such an integral part of an online course, and so many questions coming my way regarding discussion, I decided yours was probably a situation faced by many online instructors. So ... of course, the best and most professional approach to responding is what I mentioned above: solid posts to individual students, and picking up on their posts' contents. But you can also mix this up a bit: (1) pick a series of posts where several students have responded to each other, all in response to an initial post by a student; comment that such secondary posts take the course wider and deeper, resulting in a richer learning experience for all; (2) post to the class-in discussion-about a trend you've seen in that discussion thread, your thoughts on it, and ask for feedback on what you've said; (3) post some general new main posts each week in each thread. This is to motivate the students to post more and to give more thought to the thread's topic. Using any of these ideas in conjunction with posting to individual students will give you great quality, leading to excellent discussion posting evaluations!

*Remember:* Plants need the sustenance of water and light to grow; likewise, humans need the sustenance of knowledge to grow ... but we have an edge over plants: humans can ask questions.

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- **Tip 5:** Get organized; the syllabus, semester schedule, and list of assignments are the most important documents that provide structure to an online course. Read and understand these documents. Instructors get annoyed if it seems that students have not read the syllabus or met assignment requirements.
- **Tip 6:** Anticipate! Be an attentive student, and be on time. But, fight the urge to be early. If you complete assignments early this may give your instructor the feeling that his or her teaching is not important. Certainly, never be late, but if you are, be sure to inform your instructor that you will complete the tardy assignment as soon as possible.
- **Tip 7:** Get to know your classmates: collaborate, cooperate, and meet (really or virtually). Offer to get together regularly to talk about assignments or to discuss tricky concepts; build your own learning community.
- **Tip 8:** Create an academic profile that includes a professional photograph and academic information. A little personal information is okay, but not too much; keep things professional.

- **Tip 9:** Never use social media for academic activities; social media such as Facebook are for personal, not professional activities. Meet classmates in Facebook, but do not friend your instructor; they want to be friendly, but not be friends.
- Tip 10: Never copy, never cut and paste, and always write in your own words. Use the old trick of *closed book* note taking. Read, then close the book or shut the computer, then take notes. If you want, return to the book or online resource to write an accurate citation and to check details, but do not be tempted to cut and paste; you will forget that you copied and the instructor will catch you!

*And finally,* online classes require a great deal of self-discipline. George Washington said, "Discipline is the soul of the army." For the online learner, discipline is the key to success. Remember, your professors want you to learn so they will prepare challenging courses. They also want to help you meet the challenge.

TIP 10 — "... USE CLOSED BOOK NOTE TAKING ..."

# **Don't Tell Them** The Top 10 Tips for Student Success in Online Courses

## **Michael Simonson**

his column is for online instructors only. If students get a copy of these 10 tips, they will know our secrets. On the other hand, it might be a good idea to share these 10 suggestions with everyone—just to keep things fair. These tips are ways to meet the challenge of being an isolated learner. They help students build a



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learning community—so they really are for students.

- **Tip 1:** Get to know your instructor and try to help him or her get to know you. An e-mail or even a short note mailed using the postal system is a good way to start. Send your introduction at the start of the term.
- Tip 2: Since discussions are a very popular tool used in most online courses, be one of the first to post in order to get your name at the top of the listing of student postings, and always, *always* read instructor posts and respond to them. Instructors like this.
- **Tip 3:** Be one of the last, if not *the* last, student to post. This puts your name at the end of the thread where it is very obvious to the instructor. This also gives you a chance to "have the last word."
- **Tip 4:** When synchronous online instruction is scheduled using Skype, Elluminate, or some other VoIP (voice over Internet protocol), be one of the first to sign in, as soon after the instructor signs in as you can; this way your name appears early when the instructor is paying attention to see who is participating.

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