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Volume 8 Number 3 2011 DESTABLE A CONTRACTOR OF THE STATE OF THE STAT

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EDITOR

Michael Simonson simsmich@nsu.nova.edu

MANAGING EDITOR Charles Schlosser cschloss@nsu.nova.edu

Assistant Editor

Anymir Orellana orellana@nsu.nova.edu

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT Khitam Azaiza azaiza@nova.edu

COPY EDITOR Margaret Crawford mec@netins.net

Association Editor

John G. Flores jflores@usdla.org

PUBLISHER

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EDITORIAL OFFICES

Fischler School of Education and Human Services Nova Southeastern University 1750 NE 167th St. North Miami Beach, FL 33162 954-262-8563 FAX 954-262-3905 simsmich@nova.edu

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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MANUSCRIPT PREPARATION GUIDELINES

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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Women's Empowerment and Distance Education

Khitam Azaiza, Guest Editor

INTRODUCTION

Distance education has been seen as a potential solution to help women achieve their educational goals. The majority of distance learners are adult women (Hunter, 2007). For many women, balancing a job, family, community, and education can be a major challenge (Furst-Bowe, 2002) when society sees women as homemakers, mothers, housewives, and child minders (Kwapong, 2007). In the Middle East, taking time away from husbands and children is a major issue for wives and mothers (Omar, 2005). In Pakistan, women in rural areas are often



Khitam Azaiza, Fischer School of Education, Nova Southeastern University, 1750 NE 167 St., North Miami Beach, FL 33162. Telephone: (954) 262-8466. E-mail: azaiza@nova.edu unable to attend formal schools because of the inflexibility of the formal system (Haque & Batool, 1999). In Africa (e.g., Nigeria), illiteracy remains at the center of women's empowerment problems. Thus the innovation of distance education is a solution to overcome educational barriers.

Simonson, Smaldino, Alright, and Zvacek (2009) defined distance education as institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated and where interactive telecommunication systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors. Simonson et al. explained that changes in society, politics, economics, and technologies have a major influence on the status of distance education. However, learners in rural areas perceive distance education as a hope and an opportunity to achieve their goals. Lorenzetti (2007) defined the world of distance education as a means to observe how online learning can help students manage geographic distance and time to pursue an education. For many students, including Palestinians, distance education aims to release the pressure on the traditional institutions and to make higher education available to employed students who cannot attend face-to-face classes in any society (Salah, 1992).

EFFECT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION ON WOMEN

Ojo and Olakulein (2006) and A. Khan (n.d.) noted that education is the sum of knowledge and experience that makes an

individual a better person. The impact of educational attainment level in any society is a true value of the distance education phenomenon. In addition, education opens the opportunities and choices for women to work and to become more selfconfident. Ojo and Olakulein (2006) stated,

Given the fact that education enhances a person's sense of self-worth, confidence and also creates an awareness of capacity, women will become more assertive of their roles in social activities and take initiatives for themselves rather than wait for the decisions to be made for them. It can also be surmised that their income earning potential and development will rise with the new educational status. (p. 151)

According to Gokool-Ramdoo (2005), education enables women to discover, explore, and develop different aspects in their society. Furthermore, Bukhsh (2007) explained that education is the key factor in empowering women to take their rightful place in society. Education gives status and confidence in decision making. Studies showed that women with low educational levels were affected by limited career opportunities, and women who pursued higher education had higher confidence and gained more career opportunities (Haque & Batool, 1999; Kwapong, 2007).

Khan, Shazli, Khan, and Sait (n.d.) and Ibrahim, Rwegasira, and Taher (2007) explained that most Arab and developing countries' governments cannot afford to establish higher education institutions that meet the citizens' needs. Distance education has succeeded in solving that dilemma and provided the chance of pursuing higher education at a reasonable cost (Ibrahim et al., 2007). According to Khan et al. and Ibrahim et al., distance education is growing rapidly. According to Kamal and Sultana (n.d.), the distance open learning system is a solution for economic issues; it is a cost-effective and flexible way of educating people. The use of open and distance education is no longer a matter of choice; it is the only option for some countries due to their social, cultural, economic, and mobility issues (A. Khan, n.d.).

Distance education has been seen as a potential solution to help women achieve their educational goals. In addition, the need for innovative learning methods is obvious because of its flexibility (Gokool-Ramdoo, 2005; Hammad, Sarie, & Al-Ayyoub, 2004; Kwapong, 2007). Distance open learning provides a way for women to have education because it is very difficult for them to attend traditional classes due to domestic duties (Kamal & Sultana, n.d.). Women's access to education has improved their status within the family and expanded their economic roles (Gokool-Ramdoo, 2005). Although distance education affords greater flexibility to women achieving their academic goals, it also enforces a third shift on them by adding extra work to their lives that are already filled with job and domestic roles (Kramarae, 2001). In Bangladesh, it is hard for females to attain an on-campus education after marriage or childbirth. Because females usually get married at an early age, they cannot leave their family and attend school (Kamal & Sultana, n.d.). In Saudi Arabia, distance education became a solution for housewives to obtain an education (Khan et al., n.d).

Studies found that distance education is suitable for Mauritian women learners; nevertheless, Mauritian women are facing technology challenges (Gokool-Ramdoo, 2005). In Pakistan, women have more opportunities through distance education than traditional education (Bukhsh, 2007). Open and distance education has been used to educate most Nigerians, including women, at low cost to reduce the unemployment rate and poverty in rural areas (Jegede, 2002; Ojo & Olakulein, 2006a).

Furst-Bowe (2002) stated that women face challenges balancing their job, family, community, and school. Thus, women

who pursue education at a distance are better able to manage their other duties. Although distance education is hard for students, it is a valuable alternative, and women can achieve their education at low cost and study at their convenience (Wooller & Warner, 2001). According to Kwapong (2007), numerous educational studies reported that women's participation in distance education was high as compared to traditional modes, and most women who attended distance education institutions were married, had dependents, and were working. Furthermore, a wide variety of evidence from different countries supports the conclusion that open and distance education has the potential to provide equal opportunities in higher and continuing education. However, geographical location and isolation have been identified as limiting the educational opportunities for women (Kwapong, 2007).

ARTICLES IN THIS SECTION

The articles in this section present different aspects of women's distance education in the Middle East including cultural difference in distance education between Arab and American distance learners, evaluating e-learning in Jordanian institutions, and the needs of distance learning at the Palestinian institutions.

Gail Weatherly from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler wrote an article entitled "Seen But Not Heard: Women in Online Learning Are a Source of Knowledge, If Asked." Her article offers evidence that online women learners can be valuable resources for those wishing to research the field of online learning. Perhaps those women are considered to shape and improve the field for future online learners.

Eli Collins-Brown, from Methodist College of Nursing, and Gail Weatherly, from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler, wrote an article entitled "Core4Women: Where Women Share and Discover Online Learning." Their article presents the foundation of a new online community that unites women seeking information about online learning and women who have knowledge of online education. This community is called the Collaborative Online Resource Environment for Women (Core4Women).

Gillian McKnight-Tutein and A. Sasha Thackaberry, from Cuyahoga Community College, wrote an article entitled "Having It All: The Hybrid Solution for the Best of Both Worlds in Women's Postsecondary Education." Their article presents four models of hybrid course structures for investigation, adoption, and research to determine implications for gender. Furthermore, recommendations are presented to increase women learners' accomplishment in a hybrid learning environment.

Rebekah K. Nix, from The University of Texas at Dallas, wrote an article entitled "The International Forum for Women in E-Learning: Leading by Example, Learn-Experience." With Her ing article addresses the foundation of the International Forum for Women in E-Learning community that was initiated by Darcy Hardy. International Forum for Women in E-Learning is women conference that is related to the United States Distance Learning Association.

Rochelle Franklin, from Franklin Educational Solutions, Inc., wrote an article entitled "Using Web 2.0 Tools to Balance Work, Life, and Term Papers." Her article addresses tools and technology as educational solutions to assist women to balance their life as mothers, wives, employees, students, et cetera.

CONCLUSION

Distance education has been seen as a potential solution to overcome women's educational barriers. Distance education has a tremendous impact on women's achievement and empowerment. Articles in this section are examples of what women can accomplish in distance education environments.

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Seen But Not Heard Women in Online Learning Are a Source of Knowledge, If Asked

Gail Weatherly

INTRODUCTION

WHY ASK WOMEN ABOUT ONLINE LEARNING?

hile women comprise the majority of learners in higher education (Aud et al., 2010), there is little evidence that women are asked to shape higher education or, more specifically, online learning. Research of women in online learning (Bostock & Lizhi, 2005; Graddy, 2006; Halio, 2004; Hoskins & van Hoof, 2005; Rovai & Baker, 2005; Leisure, 2007) provides a framework



Gail Weatherly, The University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler, 11937 US Hwy 271, Tyler, TX 75708. Telephone: (903) 877-7480. E-mail: gail.weatherly@uthct.edu of investigation; however, the majority of researchers engage in analyses of women acting as participants in online learning rather than as change agents of online learning based on their experience in the field. This is surprising in light of projections that by 2019 females will number 11.2 million (59%) undergraduate enrollments and 2.1 million (61%) postbaccalaureate enrollments (Aud et. al., 2010).

Rovai and Baker (2005) conducted a study of 281 online graduate students, of which 83.9% were females and 16.1% were males, and found that female participants reflected a stronger sense of community and greater levels of perceived learning in the online environment than males. Females posted more messages to discussion boards, indicated they felt more connected to other students, and indicated they felt their online learning experience was more aligned to their educational values and goals. Rovai and Baker (2005) suggested:

The benefit of online education isn't merely access but includes educational effectiveness. Women participated in the courses at higher rates than male students and identified their experience as socially richer (as evidenced from the sense of community) and educationally more effective (as evidenced by perceived learning) than men. (p. 40)

In this article, the author offers evidence that women, who comprise the majority of online learners, are a valuable resource for those wishing to research the field of online learning. This evidence may be considered by those shaping and improving the field for future learners, as well as online educators who strive to develop student-centered online learning environments.

What Questions Should We Ask Women About Online Learning?

Researchers often fail to consider that women are relational learners (Burge, 1998) and may not be willing to write their experiences in a box on a survey. They want to speak to someone who understands what it means to be an online learner. As Dirkx (2006) suggested, there are times when evidence-based research methods and technical-rationality fail to address the "particular context, demands, uncertainties, complexities, and ambiguities" (p. 284) of a situation.

Rather, Dirkx (2006) advocated "a reflective, narrative insider approach ... to generating deeper understanding of practice" (p. 286) wherein "researchers create opportunities ... to perceive and address problems in a situated and contextual manner" (p. 286) to "bring about learning and change, whether in individual understandings and behaviors or institutional and social policies" (p. 287).

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH OF WOMEN IN ONLINE LEARNING

So, the old saying, "It doesn't take a rocket scientist ..." might apply to the dearth of research focusing on women's experiences in online learning and why that information is not being used to bring about improvements in the field. Women who are completing, or have completed, online degrees should be asked: Why are you choosing online education? What are the barriers you have had to overcome to enter online education? What do you expect to gain from earning an online degree? Did earning an online degree change you or your life? If so, what kind of change did you experience? What qualities do you value most in online instructors? How do you define a quality online instructor? How do you define quality online education? Asking these and other questions of the majority of online learners, women, might lead to improvements that will benefit all learners. Asking these and other questions could help institutions better prepare online instructors; develop engaging, studentcentered online courses or programs; and offer learning opportunities superior to mind-numbing memorization and regurgitation associated with passive learning.

In 2006, I set out to ask questions of women who had earned a fully online master's degree. The women who participated in my study did so voluntarily. They were contacted by the directors of their online programs, and they e-mailed me if they wanted to participate. Eighteen women met the criteria for the study. I traveled approximately 5,000 miles to ask them in-depth questions about their experiences in online learning and what effect, if any, earning the degree had on their lives.

The women shared insights about a wide range of issues surrounding online learning. Some voiced appreciation of the anonymity, freedom from prejudice, and less threatening environment they sensed in their online programs. Many described barriers that had threatened their dream of educational attainment, including pregnancy, severe morning sickness, serious illness, physical disability, incarceration, disruption as a military spouse, responsibilities of a single mom, care of elderly parents, obesity, shyness, preference for the online learning environment, geographic distance from a campus, and so on. Women I spoke to were able to overcome barriers through online learning, and, in so doing, recognized changes that occurred in their lives. The variance associated with change will be discussed in the next section.

6

How do Women Define Excellent Online Instructors?

When asked, these women shared perspectives about characteristics of excellent online instructors, quality online courses, and the benefits of online learning, in general. With the growth of online enrollments at 21% while the growth of overall higher education enrollments lags at less than 2% (Allen & Seaman, 2010), it is prudent to respect the feedback of women completing online learning. Understandably, information from 18 graduates of online programs may not be generalized to all online learners, but their insights contribute to the body of knowledge that exists regarding online learning. Table 1 provides statements from the participants about the characteristics of excellent online instructors.

Why Listen and Respond to Women in Online Learning?

Providing and accepting feedback is an excellent means of improving courses, programs, and entire institutions. Women, who represent the majority of online learners, have unique insights that could prove beneficial as institutions struggle to define quality online instruction and set benchmarks to maintain quality in online learning. Will women increasingly choose universities whose online courses demonstrate awareness of and response to their needs? For so long, women have had to adapt to a man's world in academia; could the status quo be altered in a way that allows learning to become more inclusive? Just as students require feedback from instructors, so do institutions require feedback from the students to complete the circle of improvement in learning. Hirumi (2005) noted:

Feedback is vital to e-learning.... Feedback comes in two basic forms: confirmatory and corrective. Confirmatory feedback lets students know what they did correctly. Corrective feedback identifies areas and provides recommendations for improvement. Current guidelines recognize the importance of providing timely and appropriate feedback, but they do not detail the nature of the feedback.... To establish world-class standards, consider specifying the need to design and sequence e-learning interactions based on grounded instructional strategies. (pp. 317-318)

Such benchmarking encourages quality that "promotes and emphasizes the student in the evaluation of successful learning" (Ellis & Moore, 2006, p. 363).

What are Potential Outcomes of Online Learning for Women?

Online learning can enable learners to attain positive career and personal outcomes, become more self-confident, and serve as role models for others. Yet, online learning can also be a means for realizing heightened self-awareness and transformation of one's preconceived ideas and beliefs.

Women who participated in the author's study of online learners experienced change. Some entered new careers, earned promotions or higher salaries, while others gained self-confidence, improved status among their peers, or became a role model to others, particularly to their children. While these changes were expected, other, more significant levels of change seemed to take the learners by surprise; one-third of the women reported unanticipated changes in how they viewed themselves-changes so significant they led to altered relationships and shifts in decisions about the future.

Difficult decisions included leaving a spouse; opposing family members who fought against a mom's effort to return to school; entering an online doctoral program; or moving from one country to another.

Mezirow (1978) pointed out that transformation is "often gained through an increased sense of competency and

| Communication | Teaching Skills | Course Design Skills |
|---|--|--|
| Excellent online instructors | Excellent online instructors | Excellent online instructors |
| convey a lot of information very efficiently and in a very friendly manner; approachable; they [are] not rude or condescending; they demonstrate a willingness to help students. care about your success in the class. indicate they value you as a student by their presence in the course and the nature of their feedback. are able to carry on a virtual conversation. have compassion and can empathize with students. Sometimes technology doesn't work. People lead busy lives. realize there are no stupid questions and that smart people ask questions. respect our preconceptions and beliefs but try to expose us to things we haven't thought about before. are flexible, ready to respond to student needs. understand how to build a sense of community and classroom in the online environment. notify students when he or she will be out of contact for a designated period. provide prompt feedback. show enthusiasm and have a sense of humor. | are able to envision what students are going to have to go through to learn what the instructor is trying to teach, which means students don't have to jump through unnecessary hoops. have good writing skills. have knowledge of the field and hands-on experience in their field. should have been an online student at some point. know how to prompt students with questions in the discussion board to re-engage them and take the discussion to a higher level. are willing to share their own experiences with online students. have the ability to share power, awareness that it needs to be done, and an acceptance of the awareness that it needs to be done. are able to think ahead and be creative in putting together resources. are willing to share their knowledge through synchronous as well as asynchronous discussions. must be a good typist, most important in the synchronous activities of an online course. are highly organized. know how to use the tools of the software so they can communicate well online. model a willingness to learn. | have the skills to design a course so that it has an element of complexity that makes it challenging, and the student feels he or she has accomplished something by working through the maze of requirements, but not [so] stupidly convoluted that students become constantly disoriented by the expectations. create a course that is inviting and conveys passion for the subject. provide students advance organizers and a sequence of activities for what the student will encounter module by module. will direct students rather than just measure them according to a rubric. design the learning to consider different learning styles and are adept at teaching to different learning styles. require group work for projects and communication that promotes interaction. know how to chunk material in such a way that it engages people in a meaningful way about a particular objective or concept. state benchmarks for their response to students. focus on the human aspect and student learning more than on the technology. understand how to build a sense of community and classroom in the online environment. |

Table 1. Characteristics of Excellent Online Instructors

through a supportive social climate in which provisional tries are encouraged with minimum risk" (p. 107). Mezirow (2004) also suggested, "The fully developed learner moves through a series of developmental forms to arrive at the highest potential for understanding the *capacity* to engage in transformative learning" (p.

69). So, there are elements in online learning that support significant, transformational change within learners, particularly regarding their self-perceptions.

Other researchers (Taylor, 2007) were also specific about factors in the online environment that contribute to a transformative learning experience, including an emphasis on writing, life experiences of the participants, and greater opportunity for reflection. Transformation, when and if it occurs, is unique to the individual and may be the result of a crisis that prompts the learner to engage in critical reflection or to change his or her perspective (Kilgore & Bloom, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

As mentioned previously, one third of the women in the author's study had a transformative experience as a result of entering and completing online programs. In other words, the person who entered the virtual classroom was not the same person who exited the virtual classroom because of changes in self-concept, selfacceptance, self-confidence, self-direction, and willingness to act on her altered perceptions (Rogers, 1961).

Figure 1 illustrates the potential transformative elements in the online environment, as drawn from the literature on online learning and from the experiences of women in the author's study.

Several participants emphasized the online environment was a safer environment that prompted greater participation because the individual felt less risk when

Mental: learners are cognitively stimulated by the vastness of learning resources at their disposal. The potential for independent thought is enhanced due to 1) electronic availability of instructor and peers, 2) independence of the learner to engage more fully in critical self-reflection and reflective discourse, and 3) replacement of teacher-focused nucleus with supportive guide.

Environmental: learners experience a safe environment associated with 1) fewer restraints associated with race, gender, disability, weight, personality, etc., 2) a more diverse set of peers who bring a broader array of perspectives to the discussions; and 3) greater emphasis on written thought which is derived from confident reflection.

Relational: online learners connect "mind-to-mind" and (1) share information that is pertinent to the learning and less culturally situated or biased, 2) are linked to other students and instructors via rapid, one-on-one communication, and 3) shape learning with their own life experiences.

Figure 1. Weatherly model of transformative elements in the online environment.

making contributions. For shy students, or students who had experienced bias or prejudice in traditional classes, the element of anonymity became one of the most important aspects of the learning environment. These and other elements supported the possibility of transformation among those who, as Mezirow suggested, had within them the *capacity* to engage in transformative learning.

It is significant that online learning offers students an opportunity to become more aware of how they might be different from others (Cranton & Roy, 2003) or to gain a sense of identity, autonomy, and responsibility for their own lives (Mezirow, 1978).

CONCLUSION

How Can Listening to Women in Online Learning Shape the Future of Online Learning?

Valuable lessons remain to be learned from the thousands of students entering online learning, particularly now that the economy seems to be drawing more students into higher education.

Many more institutions reported seeing an increase in demand for online courses and programs than for face-to-face in 2009. The same pattern is evident this year as well. Three quarters (74.5%) of all institutions say that they are seeing an increase in the demand for online courses and programs as a result of the current economic downturn. (Allen & Seaman, 2010, p. 14)

In order for higher education to gain momentum in a new age of information, decision makers must first acknowledge the voice of the learners they serve and then set about to create learning experiences that correlate with characteristics of those being served. Women who have children, who work full-time, who are remote from a university, or who have other demands placed on them to the degree they cannot attend traditional classes should be seen as a population that can yield information and which should be given consideration by administrators in higher education. Is academe listening? Many among the ranks voice their skepticism that higher education, which has been reluctant to alter its standard mores, is now hearing and responding to the voices of students. "The ivory tower, as academe has been called, is crumbling, just as the Berlin Wall toppled under the economic and societal pressures in an increasingly interrelated and complex world" (Hainline, Gaines, Feather, Padilla, & Terry, 2010, p. 10).

In addition to listening to what female graduates have to say about their experiences, administrators can implement changes to anticipate populations of learners who require greater levels of flexibility in learning or, even more pressing, to prepare for groups of learners whose circumstances threaten the completion of their education.

For example, mentoring is needed to encourage survivors of abuse to enter online learning; after accessing and entering education—often a major hurdle—this population may need to experience the flexibility of distance education and see it demonstrated at higher levels through patience and supportive feedback. Though the problem of abuse among women is significant, it is largely unacknowledged by higher education (Wagner & Magnusson, 2005).

Women interviewed by the author often asked if a mechanism existed by which they could share their knowledge of online learning with other women. In response to this question, the author and a group of approximately 30 women in the field of distance education founded the Collaborative Online Resource Environment for Women (CORE4Women), which is a free online social network where women discuss online learning. Currently, more than 400 women have joined CORE4Women .org to ask questions about online learning or to give others encouragement and guidance about online learning. The need for mentoring among women is prevalent, and this forum takes one step toward meeting that need, particularly for those who are non-traditional, adult learners.

As Kramarae (2001) indicated, "many of the most critical issues for women in online education are only now being recognized" (p. 6). Accordingly, the potential research topics mentioned here are only a portion of those that could be undertaken to research women in online education. As interest in distance education and the numbers of women in online education continue to grow, research will, hopefully, proliferate and provide a more enlightened framework by which to shape policies, programs, and theories in online learning.

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Core4Women Where Women Share and Discover Online Learning

Eli Collins-Brown and Gail Weatherly

INTRODUCTION

he Collaborative Online Resource Environment for Women (Core4Women) is a new online community that unites women seeking information about online learning and women who have knowledge of online education. Core4Women.org began in the hearts of women who recognize the advantages of online learning for women. As participants in a doctoral research project, women who had earned an online master's degree were interviewed about their experience as female online learners. Common threads that rose out of these

interviews were; overcoming barriers to education, gaining courage in their personal and professional lives, becoming eligible for jobs or promotions, and becoming role models for their children. They persistently asked why there was not a mechanism for them to share their experiences in online learning with other women still struggling to get an education. Thus, Core4Women was created.

HISTORY

In the fall of 2007, the findings from the research were shared at the International



Eli Collins-Brown, Dean of Educational Technology and Faculty Development, Methodist College of Nursing, 415 St. Mark Ct., Peoria, IL 61603. Telephone: (309) 672-5533. E-mail: ecollins-brown@mcon.edu



Gail Weatherly, Director of Accreditation and Affiliations, The University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler, 11937 U.S. Hwy 271, Tyler, TX 75708-3154. Telephone: (903) 877-7480. E-mail: gail.weatherly@uthct.edu

Forum for Women in eLearning Conference by Gail Weatherly, founder of Core4Women. Weatherly received overwhelming encouragement to develop a site that would allow women to share information about online learning with other women who were asking for information. Over 30 women who are engaged in online learning contributed to the writing of a proposal that was submitted to the United States Distance Learning Association.

On August 31, 2008, the executive council of the United States Distance Learning Association applauded the idea and recommended a social networking site be developed for the purpose of helping women learn more about online learning. Council members suggested using Ning because it provided a comprehensive social network environment. Soon after, the Core4Women website was founded at core4women.ning.com.

In the spring of 2009, a group of mentors and participants began piloting the site. The first participants were residents of a nonprofit organization for single parents; all of them were survivors of abuse. Volunteer mentors were women from higher education and business who felt strongly about supporting women who may not be able to access traditional education.

During the pilot phase, Core4Women .ning.com attracted attention from several organizations:

- In April 2009, Marc Parry of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* wrote about Core4Women. The article provided a summary of how Core4Women can contribute to greater awareness of online learning among women seeking education, and also support women initially considering online learning as a means of access to education (http://chronicle .com/blogPost/New-Project-Enlists-Women-t/4652/).
- A podcast publicized by the United States Distance Learning Association as

part of the 2009 national conference allowed founders to share the story of Core4Women, describe how the organization became a reality, and the goals of the organization (http://usdla-org .blogspot.com/2009/06/better-waywomen-telling-women-about.html)

Get Educated.com signed on as a supporter, offering four \$1,000 scholarships to women who joined Core4Women during the pilot phase and who entered or were enrolled in online programs (http://www.geteducated.com/guide-to-scholarships-and-free-money/4-guide-to-scholarships-and-free-money/280-geteducatedcom-online-education-scholarships-for-core4women-members)

In the summer of 2009, residents of the same nonprofit organization from across the state joined the site. Without any publicity other than that already mentioned, Core4Women grew to 35 participants and 46 mentors. These included participants who are survivors of abuse, women in the military, spouses of military service members, and mentors who are presidents of universities, founders of commercial Internet sites about online learning, instructors of online education, former online students themselves, academic counselors and advisors, support personnel for online faculty and students, and so on. Each one a personal reason for joining has Core4Women.

THE CORE4WOMEN MISSION

Core4Women:

- Supports and encourages those who seek to empower themselves through online education.
- Is a social network where women access information and resources to attain their education goals with the assistance of experienced mentors.

• Values a woman's right to self-fulfillment and increased potential through education, while recognizing the positive impact mentoring can have on the success of women.

Women comprise approximately 60% of online learners (Aud et al., 2010). Because women tend to be relational learners (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997), the challenge for Core4Women was to build a social network that is free and supports online learning through discussion and sharing of resources (Rovai & Baker, 2005). The growth has been substantial: from 27 states and 15 countries represented in November 2009 to 47 states and 28 countries represented and over 340 members as of November 2010.

MENTORS AND MENTEES

We anticipate great demand and great interest in this site because it makes it possible for women to dialogue about online learning, share resources and information, and provide encouragement to women who may not receive encouragement from anyone to seek education and who find traditional education outside their reach. These are women who need to learn about online learning, and Core4Women, now a partner with Ning, opens the door for them at http://www.core4women.org or at http://www.core4women.ning.com

The mentor group began with the original group of 30 supporters who wrote the initial proposal. Additional mentors have been recruited through conference presentations, listserv postings and word of mouth. As of February 2011, there are over 390 members of the social network site with over 60 serving as mentors.

Testimonials within Core4Women, which are confidential, affirm several things that motivate those who give to Core4Women. Women want and need guidance about online learning, information about accredited online programs is still opaque to women unfamiliar or out of touch with academia, and women value mentors who provide encouragement, information, and share outcomes of their own learning experiences. Technology now allows us to reach and assist a broader, more diverse group of prospective students whose decision-making about education is more complex than that of a traditional learner.

There are many leaders in distance learning who are supporting Core4-Women. Among the supporters are: Julia Teahen, president, Baker College Online, founded a group just for Baker College learners who are also Core4Women members. She personalizes mentoring with students who have questions about online learning. Her introduction to Baker College Online is found at https://www .baker.edu/departments/admissions /presidents/julia.cfm. Stella Porto, program director, master of distance education and e-learning, University of Maryland University College, joined the effort to support Core4Women at the International Forum for Women in eLearning conference in November 2010.

Porto and students in her master of distance education program and e-learning students at University of Maryland University College are planning to host live discussions on a variety of topics related to online learning that will benefit members of Core4Women. Vicky Phillips, founder, GetEducated.com, a first generation college graduate, was immediately interested in Core4Women when The Chronicle of Higher Education publicized the forum in 2009. To date, Vicky and her organization have granted four \$1,000 scholarships to eligible Core4Women members. Information about Core4Women scholarship recipients is online at http://www.geteducated .com/online-degree-financial-aid/freecollege-scholarships/280-online-degreesfor-women.

How is Core4Women Growing?

Members of Core4Women span the globe. There are members representing 28 countries; however, the numbers change rapidly. The mission of this forum, which includes empowerment of women through online learning, may offer a unique opportunity for women who cannot openly seek knowledge or self-fulfillment. This includes women who have been disenfranchised by violence, abuse, or social mores that do not give them voice.

The Turkish American Women Association in Dallas, Texas, welcomed Core4-Women speakers in December 2009; within days, several Turkish American Women Association members joined Core4Women to learn more about online learning. The warmth and friendship of that face-to-face meeting was something to be emulated online! Information about the presentation and photos of that meeting are on the Turkish American Women Association http://tawadallas.org/index website at .php?option=com content&view= article&id=105:tawa-december-luncheononline-education.

THE FUTURE OF CORE4WOMEN

Core4Women is a volunteer organization. Women, and men, have given hours of their time to utilize social media to support a virtual community that reaches out to some of the most vulnerable learnerswomen, many times single mothers, who are balancing a job, a family, and course work in order to serve as a role model to their kids and to make life better for their families. In 2010, an application for 501(c)(3) nonprofit status was submitted to the Internal Revenue Service. The application, which was completed by a lawyer and a certified public accountant, was received by the Internal Revenue Service and is pending approval by late spring of

2011. After approval is given, Core4Women will be eligible to pursue grants, and donations given by individuals will be tax deductible. Revenue will then allow Core4Women to implement scholarships, in addition to those given by GetEducated.com, and also to conduct a self-study with web analysts in order to continually improve service to women seeking information about online learning.

Core4Women was born out of a need and desire for women to connect with women about online learning opportunities and to provide and receive support for the challenges that are unique to women online learners. Core4Women provides a secure, social networking site to facilitate this mentor/mentee relationship, as well as the sharing of resources and information. In this way, it is hoped that Core4Women will touch the lives of those who are seeking to improve their lives through pursing higher education through online learning. To find out more about Core4Women, please see www.core4women.org

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Having It All The Hybrid Solution for the Best of Both Worlds in Women's Postsecondary Education

Gillian McKnight-Tutein and A. Sasha Thackaberry

INTRODUCTION

he intersection of learning and technology has complex implications for gender. The relationship between technology-driven learning modalities like online and hybrid courses in postsecondary education and academic performance is a topic of great study and also great speculation.

If, as many researchers and authors believe, women learn differently than men, then they excel in different learning environments from their male counterparts. Hybrid courses are uniquely positioned to take advantage of the perceived inherent strengths of the way women are thought to learn. But all hybrid courses are not created equal. Different types of hybrid structures need to be recognized, researched, and analyzed to determine implications for gender and recommendations for use in an effort to increase the achievement of women learners. Presented here are four models of hybrid



Director, Innovative Learning Design and Quality, Quality Matters Institutional Representative, Office of eLearning and Innovation, Cuyahoga Community College, 2900 Community College Avenue - MMC 52B, Cleveland, OH 44115. Telephone: (216) 987-3612. E-mail: Gillian.McKnight-Tutein@Tri-C.edu



A. Sasha Thackaberry, Senior Instructional Designer, Office of eLearning and Innovation, Cuyahoga Community College, 2900 Community College Avenue - MMC 56C, Cleveland, OH 44115. Telephone: (216) 987-3649. E-mail: Alexandera.Thackaberry@Tri-C.edu

course structures for investigation, adoption, and research.

Women as Learners

Do women have unique characteristics as learners that might have repercussions for effective online and hybrid course models? Popular beliefs about women as learners include the theory that women have a predilection for subjective and affective learning methods. A second popular belief postulates that women learn in a relational manner, focused on drawing connections (Hayes, 2001, p. 38). This second theory would indicate that women might be predisposed to excel in online environments that espouse social constructivism, as many contemporary learning management systems do.

Indeed, recent research in brain functioning may support this theory, as findings of a 1999 study by Hales indicates that "more parts of women's brains are active in certain cognitive tasks than in men's brains." This evidence has been used to suggest that women's brains are therefore more connected (as cited in Hayes, 2001, p. 38). Though final conclusions regarding this supposition are not yet widely accepted, it does provide an interesting basis to support the theory that women are uniquely positioned to be effective online learners. This suggested aptitude necessitates a new look at the design of hybrid learning environments to maximize the achievement of women as adult learners.

WOMEN AND ONLINE LEARNING

Much has been made of the assumed disadvantage of women when it comes to technology-formatted education. This disadvantage was attributed partially to studies conducted in the late 1990s which subsequently spread to become the academic equivalent of an urban legend.

More recent studies indicate that this assumed disadvantage is virtually nonexis-

tent. In a study on gender differences in performance in online environments conducted over the years of 2002-2004 with 1991 learners at the Open University in the United Kingdom, results indicated that "women's access to technology and enrolment in the online version of the course was comparable to men's" (Price, 2006, p. 353). Conversely, the study found that women were significantly more academically successful in the online version of the course than were their male counterparts, with a greater percentage of women than men completing the online course. Additionally, women were "twice as likely to pass the online version" (Price, 2006, p. 353). These dramatic findings—regardless of whether they can be attributed to women's presumed advantage for "connected" learning-inform and expand our understanding of the success of women in online educational environments.

This same study explored whether there were disparities in the access that women have to technology and the Internet. It found that women's and men's access was remarkably similar. The question then becomes, "Why do women achieve highly online?" This article explores hybrid models that may be even more effective in supporting women's achievement in a blended learning environment.

WOMEN IN HYBRID COURSES

Though there is a lack of conclusive evidence in research on women relating to hybrid courses, a recent study exploring gender, self-efficacy, and academic performance found that women in hybrid courses using online discussion modalities demonstrated higher self-efficacy than males, which correlated directly with academic performance (Lin & Overbaugh, 2008, p. 1006). Though the authors noted that "the overall effect size was small, so implications should be offered with caution," these findings are consistent with other studies about women's academic performance in online formats (Lin & Overbaugh, 2008, p. 1006).

There are many resources for effective online instructional design that could be correlated with the perceived aptitude of women for connected or relational learning styles, using instructional strategies like project-based learning, collaborative learning, and social constructivism. There are virtually no resources, however, associated with different types of hybrid learning experiences.

The discussion of the effectiveness of hybrid learning—and much of the research—is limited to the presence or absence of the two combined components that make up hybrid learning: face-to-face instruction and online instruction. But just as all face-to-face learning experiences are not structured in the same manner, and all online learning experiences are not structured the same manner, it is important to acknowledge that not all hybrid experiences are structured the same way.

What models could be created for effective instructional design of hybrid learning that would speak to the perceived strengths of women's learning styles? The hybrid models proposed herein attempt to address just that.

HYBRID MODELS OF LEARNING

The models put forward here are named descriptively. In practice, they can be customized to individual faculty and institutional needs and may be combined in logical pairings. Some are more suited to one subject area than another, though many subjects traditionally thought of as occurring in a highly independent way, such as mathematics, (which itself is more and more commonly being taught in a collaborative fashion) can be taught using these models.

The Flip Model

The Flip Model is best described as the reverse of a traditional hybrid course.

Instead of lecture occurring in the face-toface course, the online time is spent in direct instruction, with the materials and resources delivered via a variety of media formats including text, video, audio and animations. It should be noted that the online portion here is not intended to house lecture captures (video of instructors lecturing), but rather a range of robust resources that are delivered using the most appropriate technology. The online portion of the course also houses discussion forums for general questions, like instructor-led Q & A, inquiries about the details of assignments, and other instructional housekeeping particulars. Assessments-including quizzes, papers, reflections, and projects-are all submitted online.

The face-to-face portion of the class is reserved for group work on projects, engaging learner-led discussions, work on portfolios, analyzing case studies, and group skill simulations (e.g. mock trials, debates, interviews, etc.). The face-to-face time, then, becomes an environment ideal for connected learning in context; something at which women excel (see Figure 1).

This model is best used for courses that have the potential for a high level of learner-to-learner interaction, such as political science, sociology and psychology, performing arts, and literature. This model would also be effective for science courses in a lab setting, where learners work in groups on experiments or discussions of theory in person. It is also ideal for courses that require the creation of a body of work such as a comprehensive portfoliocourses like those in media production, digital design, and fine arts. The Flip Model is also appropriate for courses that require collaborative creation with individual reflection.

THE INSTRUCTIONAL SPLIT

This model uses a ratio of direct instruction equal to the break of the model. So, if



Figure 1. Flip hybrid model.



Figure 2. Instructional split hybrid model.

30% of the instructional time of the course occurs face-to-face, then approximately 30% of the face-to-face class is spent in direct instruction (i.e., direct noninteractive delivery of information in any modality, most commonly lecture but also via other types of media). Therefore, in this example, 70% of the online time would be spent in direct instruction. The rest of the time not devoted to direct instruction would be filled with a variety of other instructional strategies and activities, including discussions face-to-face and online, assessments in-class and online, group projects in both environments, et cetera. In short, the activities and resources are determined. The time allotted to these activities and resources in the face-to-face and online environments is in direct proportion to the time commitment breakdown of the class itself (see Figure 2).

This model allows for a very integrated approach to the course, using collaborative activities, activities designed for the learner in seclusion, and technology-driven resources in both modalities. The type of activity or assessment can be in the modality for which it is best suited. For example, if in-class writing assessments are necessary, online assessments can be created and auto-graded by the learning management systems, thereby allowing instructors



Figure 3. Online in the classroom hybrid model.

to focus their time on the higher-level, more integrated course objectives.

This model is best used for courses that require skill acquisition and skill application, interpretation of information, or have a need for a variety of assessments.

ONLINE IN THE CLASSROOM

The Online in the Classroom Model requires the use of a computer lab for the face-to-face portion of the class. In this face-to-face lab environment, learners practice skills with the instructor present and available for immediate remediation. Assessments may also be completed in the face-to-face environment.

In the online portion of the class, skill practice can continue with additional webbased resources. Assessments may also be done online. The focus of the online portion, however, is generally the learner-tolearner interaction, which occurs almost exclusively online. A recommendation for structure is to include things like virtual study groups, where learners either practice skills together online or apply those skills in online group projects (see Figure 3).

Skill-based courses match well with the Online in the Classroom Model, along with courses that require access to software loaded on college computers. This allows for the demonstration of skills with specialized technology equipment. It is also ideal for hybrid math courses that utilize publisher web-based content or other online practice.

THE COHORT EXCHANGE

This model incorporates two distinct, consistent groups of learners working together towards solving contextualized problems, creating or designing work product, or discussing issues from multiple perspectives. In this model, learners belong to one group of fellow learners online, and belong to a different group of learners face-to-face. So each learner participates in two different groups. The overall class, however, has more than two unique groups online and two unique groups face-to-face. The specific number of groups online and face-to-face would be determined by the number of learners in the course.

The learners who use this model are therefore exposed to a highly collaborative learning experience, and one in which they attain and share knowledge as part of two distinct learning communities. This is a contextualized model in which women may excel academically (see Figure 4).

Good matches for this model are courses that require discussion and/or the development of cooperative working



Figure 4. Cohort exchange hybrid model.

skills. The Cohort Exchange complements courses that can be organized into larger project-based assignments with real-world implications, and courses where learners need to assume different roles in different contexts, focusing on information sharing. Lower-level courses may not fit with this model. This model best meets the needs of higher-level courses with complex objectives.

CONCLUSION

There has been no significant research to date on the effectiveness of specific hybrid models and the implications of those models for gender. The premise as presented in this paper is that hybrids are inherently best suited for women. The goal, however, is to create online environments and activities that continue to increase women's achievement at the postsecondary level while creating equally engaging and dynamic learning environments for men. This can result in higher academic performance, retention, and degree completion for both. Further study of different types of hybrid courses is needed to analyze their effectiveness, correlate it with gender, and work to improve outcomes for both genders.

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The International Forum for Women in E-Learning Leading by Example,

Learning With Experience

Rebekah K. Nix

INTRODUCTION

n the fall of 2003, Darcy Hardy made a pitch to the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) Board of Directors to let her coordinate an event that would both celebrate the advances women have made in the field of distance learning and provide these practitioners of like minds with a network of advisors, mentors, collaborators and friends. Regardless of the constituency the women



Rebekah K. Nix, Senior Lecturer, Teacher Development Center, The University of Texas at Dallas, 800 West Campbell Road, HH32, Richardson, TX 75080. Telephone: (972) 883-2488. E-mail: rnix@utdallas.edu

might represent (K-12, higher education, corporate, government, military, telehealth, etc.), Darcy told the board that by bringing them together it could only benefit the field. She knew firsthand the challenges faced in developing strong distance learning programs and organizations, and she also knew what it meant to break through the proverbial glass ceiling. She told the board it was time for USDLA to take a leap of faith and let her pull this different kind of special interest group together. And she wanted to create an event that closed with something other than a golf tournament. The event would be called the International Forum for Women in E-Learning, or IFWE. When asked by a fellow board member if she was going to also create a similar event for men, Darcy responded, "No, because then it would be IFME" (Hardy, 2011). The board and chief executive officer of USDLA supported the idea and believed in her enough to give her the green light. USDLA created a community framework that was targeted and focused in ways that had not been done before and so the IFWE community was born.

ONE LECTURER'S STORY

At the fourth IFWE, Darcy Hardy and Ellen Wagner invited me to share a few words about my professional experience during



Figure 1. The IFWE Challenge represented as a word cloud.

their featured videoconference. My head said "You can't do that; those two are giants in distance learning"; my heart simply screamed "Yes!" without missing a single beat. So I stood up, took the microphone, smiled at the camera, and let my able peers in Albuquerque, New Mexico hold me up as I shared my story with new acquaintances in Berlin, Germany. That sort of individual empowerment is what IFWE is about for many women in distance education. The following reflections give concrete examples of how IFWE inspires change within my teaching practice, challenges my research focus, and makes a difference in my world-everywhere, all of the time. They are intended to spark innovation by other leaders, practitioners, and decision makers in the field.

Specifically, I will relate elements of all four annual conferences to the seven statements, summarized in Figure 1, that comprise The IFWE Challenge (http:// www.usdla.org/ifwe2010). To put this in context, I am barely one of the "young boomers." I grew up in a small town surrounded by a big city and enjoyed an enriched, albeit sheltered, childhood. I successfully completed academic training in geosciences, which was almost wholly male-dominated in the early 1980s. I climbed my way up the ladder in the petroleum industry. Then I was intrigued by these things called personal computers and enjoyed a second career with start-ups in radio-frequency identification, factory automation, imaging, and videoconferencing. Except for the marketing, training, and secretarial personnel, I found myself in another arena driven mostly by men. Stressed by surviving the dot com period, I earned my terminal degree online and moved into higher education which has proved to be challenging and rewarding over the past decade.

My impetus for writing this article is not about gender, but because of it. The IFWE experience showed me how to tap into talents and abilities I never would have thought possible. IFWE programs look like those for every other professional conference I attend; however, the subtleties of how it is put together and put on magically cultivate a lasting synergy when attendees, at all stages of their careers, come together. IFWE is a unique conference designed by women for women. As stated on the website, "The intimate format makes it possible for all attendees to be actively involved in participating in the IFWE community" (USDLA, n.d., What Can You Expect From IFWE?).

"PEOPLE LIKE US"

IFWE CHALLENGE: IF WE REACH OUT, HOW INCLUSIVE CAN WE BE?

The majority of my colleagues and friends who see me working have eventually asked: What does WWXD mean? There is a bright orange minibumper sticker with those big bold block letters on my laptop, printer, and hard drive. Ellen Wagner distributed them at IFWE 2006. Her opening keynote explained how consumer technology crazes impact on the future of learning. With powerful graphics and energetic points, she convinced us that we were all eWarriors, forging the newest best practices in the field of eLearning, just as Xena: Warrior Princess used her formidable fighting skills to help people in the American supernatural fantasy adventure series. Hundreds of women now ask themselves "What would Xena do?" when facing "battle" in most any setting!

Staying true to the course, Wagner delivered "PLU" lapel pins to IFWE 2010. When Hardy welcomed us to Albuquerque, she asked us to wear them like our conference badges. Trusting her leadership and knowing that it held significance, we all smiled on recognizing the same pins being proudly worn by attendees at ONLINE EDUCA BERLIN during the live discussion hosted on the last day of both conferences! PLU stands for "People Like Us," meaning that we share similar beliefs, resources, needs, and intentions. Like many other influential groups, we each seek out ways "to recognize, nurture, and embrace the human potential of everyone in [y]our life, [y]our community, and [y]our workplace" (Olcott & Hardy, 2006, p. 14).

IFWE is not just a common interest group; it is a community of like-minded individuals who naturally identify with Xena and each other. Thanks to the Internet, the concept of community no longer has geographical limitations. Thanks to USDLA, the sense of community fostered by IFWE transcends space and time because of seemingly silly, simple blazes like WWXD and PLU. Individual conversations are continued via e-mail and other meetings. Of course, you can find IFWE on Facebook! The great thing about our all being involved in distance learning is that we do value meaningful connection. Annual face-to-face gatherings with colleagues from around the globe are thereby all the more special.

BELLY DANCING WORKSHOPS

IFWE CHALLENGE: IF WE DARE TO BE CREATIVE, WHAT FREEDOM CAN WE FIND?

Balancing professional agendas, family responsibilities, daily necessities, and personal needs is trickier than ever in this age of virtually unlimited possibilities. It is true, we do tend to teach in the ways we were taught, to lead in the ways we were led, and to learn from others' experiences and to draw on their expertise. That was all much easier when we knew what to expect and understood what needed to be done. Anyone reading this article can appreciate that the ways we work and play in today's digital society continue to change at an unprecedented rate.

In the midst of the broad intellect assembled at a narrowly focused professional meeting, you cannot begin to imagine how surprised I was to find myself holding two shiny zills and wearing a fourtiered gold-coined chiffon hip scarf at my first IFWE preconference workshop! (Yes, there are photos on Facebook.) That is so not my style, typically. However, since a respected university regent and my own vice-chancellor were sporting the same garb, I figured it was some secret to success! In fact, the invitation to "shimmy and shake" at the belly dancing workshop has become one of the more popular IFWE traditions. Most all attendees—with or without rhythm and dance experience—have donned the bells and scarves to discover a great way to tone and exercise any body type.

More to my surprise than the outfit, the experience showed me the physical power of being female and the beauty of individual character. I had taken that essence for granted in my approach to integrating educational technologies and distance learning leadership even though I overtly incorporated it in my personal life and my teaching practice. Now I can appropriately use it to my advantage to bring something new to the table. Theory does not effect change; people do. Teachers, in particular, must be encouraged to exercise playfulness, ingenuity, and creativity. Always a matter of context, "play" is the free spirit of exploration, doing and being for its own pure joy. Technique is acquired by "the practice of practice, by persistently experimenting and playing with our tools and testing their limits and resistances" (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 42). IFWE provides a tangible opportunity for participants to gain organized knowledge to make practical changes in education.

MOBILE ROUNDTABLE DINNERS

IFWE CHALLENGE: IF WE SHARE IDEAS AND COMBINE OUR EXPERIENCES, WHAT ADVANCEMENTS CAN WE FUEL? Borrowing from the website again, IFWE is an opportunity to share ideas, learn about distance learning programs and products, gain a better understanding of being a leader in the field. It provides participants with a wonderful opportunity to establish new relationships and contacts with others involved in distance learning. The format of the event allows attendees to learn about relevant topics from many different points of view. (USDLA, n.d., What is IFWE?)

That—true collaborative learning—has happened for me on various levels at each IFWE conference. Since most participants do travel to the relatively small gatherings, the hospitality committee plays an important role in creating opportunities for interaction in suitable environments.

The mobile roundtable dinners provide one example of how this is achieved. The committee makes reservations at recommended restaurants for whoever signs up for one of several topics of current interest. Transportation is arranged so that the group remains coherent from start to finish without the bother of often frustrating and potentially confusing details. Open to the possibilities, I ended up sitting beside the chief executive officer of a nationally recognized distance learning program. The serendipity is in that I was poised to launch an online degree program. There was no readily available model for such leadership at my institution. Over the course of the meal I learned how to ensure success for my fledgling program with the benefit of my new friend's experience.

At IFWE 2007, two colleagues and I presented another example of how IFWE connections impacted that same project. "Accepting the IFWE challenge, first issued in the fall of 2004, initiated a long-term relationship that guided the design and delivery of the three-course research sequence in the online ... degree" (Nix, Barksdale, & Ledbetter, 2007, p. 1). Although the design and methods of that collaboration will be of interest to some, the most pertinent part of that presentation now is how each of the three collaborators answered the IFWE challenge, literally. Note that in addition to the formal paper and presentation poster, there is an IFWE Challenge poster at http://www .utdallas.edu/~rnix/#Research. The professional development and personal growth of at least these three professionals continues to be impacted by the IFWE ideas and ideals.

GIFT BASKET GIVEAWAYS

IFWE CHALLENGE: IF WE FOCUS ON DISTANCE LEARNING, WHAT DIRECTIONS CAN WE SET?

By now you likely are starting to read between the lines of the official IFWE conference programs. Another fun tradition that everyone looks forward to with great anticipation is the gift basket giveaway. For me, this is another powerful expression of the creativity of the innovative women who attend IFWE. I was honored to donate baskets to the 2006 and 2007 conferences. Even though my officemates were not able to attend themselves, we shared our own unique insights and gained a shared experience by putting together a basket to represent our pride in our projects. At registration, IFWE participants receive a numbered ticket. There certainly is no need for added incentive to attend the combined sessions where someone draws a matched ticket from the fishbowl. Since you must be present to win, there are often several gasps and moans when the call is close!

The enticing baskets and boxes, and an occasional sombrero, are rivaled only by the time and effort that IFWE presenters dedicate to their sessions. IFWE sessions address the personal, social, and economic scalability of new approaches to implementing, evaluating, and institutionalizing applications of new technologies in corporate, government, education, and consulting fields. Exploring emerging opportunity at an intimate level, the annual conference themes reflect similar changes in the roles and expectations of IFWE's members: Dancing on the Glass Ceiling, Riding the Waves of Change, Catching the Dream, and Rise to the Challenge.

The titles of past presentations evidence the importance of planned and spontaneous exchanges that could only happen at IFWE. Some topics are timeless, like overcoming faculty resistance to new technologies. Many are fleeting as better, faster, and cheaper solutions are released and updated regularly. But the lessons learned about how to adopt new tools and adapt to new trends are transferrable across multiple contexts. Because of the deep connections encouraged in the IFWE milieu, the necessary expertise in diverse areas is available "on request" through the extensive network actively maintained between meetings.

SPA TREATMENT EXCLUSIVES

IFWE CHALLENGE: IF WE DON'T TRY Something, How Will We Ever Know?

USDLA's initiation of IFWE marks a critical "tipping point" in my career in higher education. A newscaster recently pronounced that "Men have the man cave; Women have the mom cave" (Tam, 2011). Regardless of your personal opinion of either, the fact remains that more and more people are creating their own personal space for relaxation, renewal, and reflection. My favorite author said it well when she was selected to write her credo in one of six cottages at Hedgebrook, located on Whidbey Island in Puget Sound: "I am aware that I am the recipient of a generous and unexpected gift of ... a sense of order, a recognition of beliefs, and a direction of prose ... all three at once" (Zwinger, 2000, p. 4). Indeed "IFWE is a time for attendees to listen, think, talk, network, reflect,

dream and learn" (USDLA, n.d., What is IFWE?).

If you noticed the IFWE venues, you may have picked up on the fact that the conferences are hosted by nice enough hotels or resorts with impressive spas. That spa component is not optional and may be the deciding factor on where we meetseriously. As critically as digital communication skills in distance education today, the spa facilities at IFWE conferences do matter! That is because the IFWE founders are not just crafty planners with wellness agendas, they are diva directors with a passion for supporting the human beings who are or may become our leaders, practitioners, and decision makers. The planning committee brokers fantastic deals during off seasons and builds in "free" time for networking, catching up with the office, or simply not working at work for a change.

I internalized this during one of our more unusual networking activities. The local Girls Inc. chapter taught us how to make our own dream catchers in the Native American tradition. Picture a ballroom with 20+ round tables covered with beads and feathers and reeds and twine. No, not very high-tech, but the perfect venue for exploring what really matters at the heart of what each person working within those various groupings discussed throughout the guided exercise.

THE "SECRET HANDSHAKE"

IFWE CHALLENGE: IF WE COLLABORATE, WHAT ISSUES CAN WE PROMOTE?

Only "the powers that be" in the USDLA office know which IFWE registrants are eligible for "secret handshake" privileges. It is beyond the scope of this article to explain this totally upright deal! The point of mentioning this item is to reiterate that the only way to comprehend the magnitude of what IFWE is all about is to experience it either first-hand or as a beneficiary of its influence on those who are catalyzing transformative change in distance learning.

Mary Lynn Pulley dedicated her life's work to searching out keys to resilience. At the Center for Creative Leadership she investigated the effects of the massive corporate downsizings and restructuring of the early 1990s. Even though it may not seem so dramatic in the field of distance learning, any change involves loss. How you deal with that is up to you. Pulley noticed that some people "bounced back" better than others. In terms of personal identity, meaning, and purpose, "the changes fell primarily along two different dimensions: the degree to which they changed assumptions about themselves and the degree to which they changed assumptions about their work" (Pulley, 2010, p. 76).

Thankfully, because of the IFWE Challenge, I have not had to lose my job recently to "reclaim my soul" and recharge my internal motivation to improve my position. In a world where everything seems to be changing faster and more unpredictably than ever, what matters most is being attended to by the current and upcoming leaders who share the IFWE vision. For example, CORE4Women is an outgrowth of a self-realized IFWE collaboration.

CORE4Women supports and encourages those who seek to empower themselves through online education ... is a social network where women access information and resources to attain their educational goals with the assistance of experienced mentors ... values a woman's right to self-fulfillment and increased potential through education while recognizing the positive impact mentoring can have on the success of women. (CORE4Women, 2008, Mission)

IFWE CHALLENGE: IF WE DRAW UPON A WOMAN'S WAY OF KNOWING, WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL IT MAKE?

These few scant examples hopefully serve to show that the princess eWarriors and diva directors, belly dancers and dream catchers, and expert teachers and life-long learners of IFWE not just can but are rising to the challenges facing distance learning professionals.

IFWE itself is a testament to forwardthinking people of action and the importance of endeavors of the United States Distance Learning Association. Brief in comparison to its accomplishments, IFWE's history is summarized in an interactive timeline at http://www.dipity.com/ rnix/IFWE/.

In closing, whatever your gender or capacity, aspire to lead by example and continue to learn from experience. It makes a difference in ways you might never imagine.

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Using Web 2.0 Tools to Balance Work, Life, and Term Papers

Rochelle Franklin

INTRODUCTION

s a wife, employee, student, and friend, it is hard at times to find a balance between the various areas of my life. Since I teach college courses online and am also completing my doctorate online, I spend much of my time in front of a computer screen responding to e-mails, reading research articles, grading papers, and creating tools that can help my students and, in turn, manage my time better. Early in my online teaching



Rochelle Franklin, E-mail: Rochelle@FranklinEducationalSolutions.com

career I found myself spending large quantities of time answering the same questions over and over from students. "How do I attach a file to my discussion board post?" "How do I check my grades?" "How do I change the file type when saving a word document?" At first, I enthusiastically drafted step-by-step emails with screen shots that showed my students the answers to their questions. Eventually, I became burnt out and frustrated that I had to spend so much time trouble-shooting (what I thought) simple tasks my online students should have already known. My inbox was constantly full with unread and flagged messages and my voicemail overflowed with panicked messages from students expecting calls back. After two semesters of this stressful, hair-pulling, and exhausting experience I was ready to walk away from online teaching forever.

Fortunately I was scheduled to complete a graduate course that summer that delved deep into Web 2.0 tools and their role in the virtual teaching environment. It was during this course that I had my "aha" moment and emerged from the cacophony of discouragement in my head, to the plateau of efficiency and innovation. I realized that I should be working smarter, not harder—and that there were a myriad of Web 2.0 tools that could help me become more effective, more personal, and create a balance in my life.
DEVELOPING AN ARSENAL OF "HOW-TO" FILES

The first area I researched was Web 2.0 tools that I could use to create "how to" files that could assist my students with their frequently asked questions. I wanted a tool that was user-friendly for both the instructor and the student. The solution-Jing (Tech Smith, 1995). The Jing Project is a free download that allows users to create short video clips (5 minutes or less) that captures the image on their computer screen, while recording any audio or narration. These short video clips could be shared instantly via web, e-mail, IM, Twitter, or even embedding the html code in the learning management system. Immediately I found the answer to the majority of my students' questions. I created Jings that gave an overview of the learning management system the college used, how students could change the file type when saving their documents, attaching files to the dropbox or their discussion board posts and even how to access their course materials. Now, instead of having to repeat myself over and over again, I just included the link to the appropriate Jing when responding to students. In turn, the students appreciated being able to see step by step how to solve their problem and also enjoyed hearing my voice direct them through the process. It not only reduced the number of frantic e-mails and phone calls I received, but also built a rapport with my students and helped close the transactional distance between us. Currently I include my Jings as part of my course set-up announcements. I also have a Jing that welcomes students to the class and provides an overview of each week.

CREATING A ONE-STOP SHOP

As I developed a variety of Jings, I wanted to find a way to put all of these video clips in one place for my students, instead of creating multiple announcements or uploading all the files to the docsharing

tab. To accomplish this goal, I used Glogster EDU (2007). Glogster EDU is an interactive virtual poster that can include multimedia elements, including text. audio, video, images, graphics, drawings, and data. My primary purpose was to create a Glog that had the title of each of my "how to "Jings, which was hyperlinked to the video file. By creating a Glog and putting all of the links to my "how to" arsenal, I only had to create one announcement on my course home page and embed the html code provided by Glogster. This created a one-stop shop for my students that were available during the duration of the course.

SCHEDULING ONLINE APPOINTMENTS

Even with the use of Jing and Glogster, there were still times when students needed to contact me to discuss personal situation that were not appropriate in the online forums. Instead of the inevitable phone tag, I wanted students to be able to make an appointment with me and also allow me to set consistent office hours when I would be available for phone calls. To accomplish this, I used Lattiss (2006)—a free online appointment scheduler. I would create open appointment times on my Lattiss calendar, embed the html code into my instructor page, and students could schedule themselves for a specific day and time for me to call them. The scheduler would ask for the student's name and phone number and then automatically generate an e-mail for both the student and instructor with the appointment details. This allowed me to manage my time by carving out time for phone calls and also let students know when I was available to speak with them privately.

FOSTERING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

I quickly learned that teaching in the virtual environment was very different than teaching in a brick and mortar school. Students often felt disconnected and alone in their online courses and did not feel like they were part of a group. To help alleviate this feeling of solitude, I incorporated Voice Thread as a meet and greet during the first week and as a wrap-up at the end of the course. "Voice Thread is a collaborative, multimedia slide show that holds images, documents, and videos and allows people to navigate slides and leave comments in five ways-using voice (with a mic or telephone), text, audio file, or video (via a webcam)" (Voice Thread, 2007, p.1). Students could create a free account, upload a picture of themselves, and record their introduction. This allowed students to see real pictures of their classmates and foster a sense of community in a group of complete strangers. By putting a face with a name, it helped students see each other as people and not just names on a screen. This also created an environment that was not threatening, encouraged rich dialogue, and built relationships between students.

HOSTING SYNCHRONOUS WEB SESSIONS

During the early stages of my online teaching career, I would offer my students support via e-mail and pre-created web tools, but I felt that something was missing. One semester I decided to experiment and host an optional, weekly synchronous web session for any student that needed assistance. Initially I used the live webconferencing tool available in the college' learning management system, but the audio was only one-way (my students could hear me, but I could not hear my students) and found it to be insufficient to meet my needs. Instead, I created an account with Dimdim and pay a nominal fee each month to host weekly webinars. Dimdim is a collaboration tool for online meetings, desktop sharing, training, webinars, and distance education (Dimdim, 2010). Once I sign in, I can schedule a recurring meeting that uses the same conference call number each time (which I post for students). Students then follow the webinar link to enter the meeting room and can either call in using the conference call number or use their computer microphone to speak. Students know that I will be online at a set time each week to help them and it is an "open door" policy. Students are not obligated to come and do not have to stay during the entire hour, but they know I am available. Students have told me this weekly session makes them feel safe, knowing I will be available consistently in case they have a pressing issue.

ENCOURAGING COMMUNICATION

In my online courses students know they can reach me in a variety of ways—posting on a discussion board, via e-mail, scheduling an appointment, or during my weekly web sessions. I want my students to feel they can communicate with me in a nonthreatening way. I do not want my students to be intimated to approach me for help or if they are struggling with personal issues that will affect their schoolwork. To accomplish this, I also post my Skype phone number and my Skype ID (Skype, 2010). When I am working, I am typically signed into my Skype account and show myself as available. If a student has a pressing issue that needs immediate attention, I encourage them to call me or instant message me through Skype. Very rarely will I have a student abuse this access, but it is just another way that I make myself available to my students. The majority will send an e-mail rather than making a phone call, but those who do contact me through Skype use the instant message feature.

As I progress through my online teaching career, I am sure the field of virtual education with change dramatically. With those changes, I want to ensure I achieve a sense of balance between my professional and personal life. As an online educator, I do not have the privilege of holding typical working hours, but I can contain my professional obligations to times that meet my students' and my family's needs. Using Web 2.0 tools to work smarter has allowed me to find a balance that was missing when I entered the field of virtual education.

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Distance Education Design The Importance of Designing Interaction and Activity Into the Course

James R. Brunet

INTRODUCTION

istance education often is considered to be a new style or new way of learning and with that new style the thought is that there should be a new method to teach. In fact, distance education should only be considered a new vehicle for the learner to receive the content. Clark states it well, "The best current evidence is that media are mere vehicles that deliver instruction but do not influence student achievement any more than the truck that delivers our groceries causes changes in our nutrition" (Clark, 2001). The



James R. Brunet, Senior Curriculum Designer, 39 Purpletop Dr., Grayson, GA 30017. Telephone: (719) 684-3233. E-mail: jcbrunet@comcast.net

way the learner processes the content is no different than when they are engaged in a regular face-to-face course.

With this new "vehicle" the design of the distance education course has to take into consideration the fact that the course will not have the same methods to engage the learner as does a face-to-face course. Several ideas will be discussed, why interaction should be incorporated into distance learning, detailing the learning styles that need interaction, as well as various types of interaction that could be incorporated throughout distance education courses.

WHY INCORPORATE INTERACTION?

A common misconception is that since a computer is used in distance learning the interaction is already incorporated. This is far from the truth; with the lack of face-toface interaction due to learning from a distance, the interaction needs to be more purposeful and designed. It has been demonstrated that a highly interactive course leads to a more successful outcome. Consider this: "Researchers have determined that highly effective virtual teaching requires a highly interactive classroom (Cavanaugh et al., 2005; Friend & Johnson, 2005; Zucker & Kozma, 2003). Distancelearning research indicates that this instructor-learner interaction is the most important ingredient in student success" (Cavanaugh et al., 2009). It is important to also take into consideration all aspects of the learning process as well as the way various learners' process and analyze information.

Simpson and Du also found that learning style was a significant predictor of course enjoyment. "Assimilators," who preferred abstract conceptualization and reflective observation, got the greatest satisfaction from their online courses. "Convergers," who preferred abstract conceptualization and active experimentation, got the least enjoyment from their online courses. Simpson and Du also noted that Assimilators made the fewest posts to online forums, while Convergers made the most. (Brown-Syed, Adkins, & Tsai, 2005)

Research has shown that student interaction is a key factor in the overall satisfaction of an online course. This interaction is supported in many facets including student-teacher interaction and student-peer interaction. Chang and Smith (2008) note that "According to Perez's (2001) research, many students reported that the main disadvantage of distance education was a lack of personal interaction between the instructor and the students" (p. 407). If a learner feels they have a disadvantage due to lack of interaction the end result will be a decreased perception of quality of their educational opportunity. This perception could lead to a decrease in the quality of education for the learner. For example, "In Rost's (2000) research regarding distance education, online instructors utilized forms of technology that lacked personal interaction, decreasing the quality of education" (Chang & Smith, 2009, p. 407). Involvement on the part of the instructor goes a long way toward the satisfaction of the course as well as the overall success of a course. The interaction can be carried out in many forms, but maintaining a real presence with the learner is crucial for that learner to feel engaged and part of a group.

Chang and Smith (2008) state that new techniques must be constructed that make time for students to interact,

because personal interaction between teachers and students, students and students, and students and course content directly relates to student course satisfaction. Stravredes (2002) emphasized the importance of interaction by affirming that student achievement and positive attitudes increased as the level of interaction increased. (Chang & Smith, 2008, p. 411)

Chang and Smith are emphasizing that interaction is crucial to the feeling of course satisfaction. The interaction does not necessarily need to be between just the student and the teacher; student-to-student interaction and student-to-course content interaction is desirable as well. However, it must be incorporated with all forms of personal interaction. If it were left to strictly student-course content interaction the success factor would not be as high, because student-course content interaction is merely a one-way interaction with the student. Students need the opportunity to talk through and discuss ideas and concepts with other students as well as gathering feedback and motivation from their instructor. Chang and Smith (2008) substantiate this by saying:

Gao (2001) investigated the effects of different levels of interaction on achievement and attitudes of college students in a Web-based learning environment. The results of the study showed that active learning on the part of students directly contributes to their learning outcomes. Gao declared that providing feedback from instructors helps reinforce the learning material and provides further motivation for students to become even more active in the learning process. (p. 411)

Chang and Smith (2008) also noted that "LaPointe and Gunawardena (2004) conducted research to understand the relationship between peer interaction and learning outcomes in computer-mediated conferencing.... The final research results indicated peer interaction had a strong direct effect on learning outcomes" (p. 411).

Chang and Smith (2008) go on to note that a significant contributor to perceived learning is an increase in student satisfaction, which is created by increased interaction between the instructor and the learner. With the advancement of the Internet there are many more opportunities available for the instructor to design and implement interaction with the student.

Student satisfaction is an indicator of the success of a course. However, it is not the only measure of why interaction is important in distance education. Interaction also works to keep the learner engaged and on task throughout the course. In a face-to-face course, common practice is to attend class and work toward certain deadlines and check points for assignments that may be due. With distance education the learner does not have face-to-face opportunity the to be reminded of coursework. One key attribute necessary for success in distance learning is the ability of the learner to keep on task and not procrastinate. The learner is tasked with their syllabus and deliverables at the beginning of the course and it is their responsibility to work to ensure those tasks are accomplished and done so on time. Interaction with the instructor and other students as well helps to keep the learner on target to completion with these requirements.

Another key reason to incorporate interaction is purely for social interaction. The process for thorough learning is often through social interaction. This is substantiated by Kreijns, Kirschner, and Jochems (2003):

There is ample empirical evidence that cognitive processes necessary for deep learning and information retention occur in dialogues (Van der Linden & Renshaw, 2001). However, research on group learning shows that asynchronous distributed learning groups (DLSs) utilizing computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL) environments often lack the social interaction needed for these dialogues. (p. 335-336).

INTERACTION AND LEARNING STYLES

Just as in face-to-face facilitation, learning style should to be taken into consideration in distance education. One common indicator of personality types is the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). This indicator determines an individual's personality type by asking a series of questions. These questions help to determine certain characteristics in a person's personality that are then placed into categories within the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. "[Myers Briggs Type Indicator] indicates ways that an individual prefers to interact with the environment, by measuring that individual on four scales. The first scale, Extroversion-Introversion, indicates whether the person gets energy from interaction in the outer world or reflection in an inner world" (Brown-Syed, Adkins, & Tsai, 2005, p. 8). This indicator could show that an individual with a propensity toward the Extroversion indicator would be more satisfied with a high degree of social interaction built into the course.

Teaching online courses in order to effectively match learners' cognitive styles has been the focus of recent scholarship. In a 2001 issue of College Teaching, Dustin Howell recommended three specific course-design principles to minimize student dissatisfaction with online learning: using problem-based learning in lieu of lectures, creating connections between students, and individualizing the course. She recommended the addition of "multiple sensory options" such as video clips and diagrams for visual learners, audio files for auditory learners, or creating online "manipulative" teaching aids for haptic learners. Katherine Holmes also supported this, advocating the incorporation of a variety of information types, including text, graphics, audio, video, and simulation, to ensure that library tutorials maximize learning opportunities for all types of students. (Brown-Syed et al., 2005)

Many studies have shown that interaction is a key component to learning, as indicated by Brown-Syed et al. (2005):

According to Khaled and Baldwin, interaction helps to personalize the learning experience and helps learners process information. They found that global learners practiced each type of interaction (information, other students, and instructor) more than sequential learners. Over ninety percent of both sequential and global learners felt interaction with information was important to their learning. (Brown-Syed, Adkins, & Tsai, 2005)

Brown-Syed et al. discuss the types of learners: sensory, visual, active, and sequential. They offer alternatives for each in the distance education field. Sensory learners work best through their sensestouch, smell, taste, hearing, etc. They go on to say how an asynchronous Web-based learning structure may restrict the learning opportunities by relying too heavily on a decontextualized and text-based medium. (Brown-Syed et al., 2005) Alternatives for the sensory learner should be taken into when consideration developing the course. "However, Web-based instruction can be supplemented with out-of-class experiences, such as site observations' (Brown-Syed et al., 2005, p. 21).

The visual learner likes to see the information they receive; graphical representation is the best medium for this learner. Distance education has an advantage for visual learners, as most of the content they receive can be transferred by some form of graphical representation. Ideas such as videos, pictures, and diagrams are just a few of the options available to the visual learner in distance education.

The active learner likes to be busy doing things, whether through experimentation, simulation, discussion, or any other type of direct application of learning (Brown-Syed et al., 2005).

Online discussion boards can be used to simulate classroom discussion about students' work activities. Additionally, case studies can be used with small discussion groups, to help students apply their classroom learning to "real life" situations. Short quizzes embedded into Web lectures may help active learners monitor their learning. (Brown-Syed et al., 2005, p. 21)

Initial class setup and design of a syllabus is crucial to the sequential learner. This learning style works well with step-by-step instruction connecting the steps to the larger whole (Brown-Syed et al., 2005). Brown-Syed et al. note that the global learner is different in that they like to understand the whole before they dissect it into smaller pieces. They further note that since these two learning styles are relatively balanced in numbers these different learning types can present a challenge in Web-based courses.

Classes might begin with an overall introduction of the relevance of the topic for example, discussing organization of information as a method of facilitating information access, before taking on the intricacies of cataloging rules. Web-based instruction also encourages the creation of highly structured course materials. (Brown-Syed et al., 2005, p. 22)

FREQUENCY AND TYPES OF INTERACTION

Social integration should be one of the main aspects of interaction with distance education, largely due to its impact on learning through the cognitive process as well as the overall course satisfaction. Kreijns et al. talk about some pitfalls when it comes to social interaction that can be used to ensure a disciplined process is incorporated into the design of a course. If it is so evident that social interaction is a prerequisite for collaboration and collaborative learning, why then do educators, instructors, and designers often appear not to pay the needed attention to it when using or designing CSCL environments? There appear to be at least two factors identifiable which can be seen as pitfalls to social interaction. Pitfall 1: Taking social interaction for granted; Pitfall 2: Restricting social interaction to cognitive processes. (Kreijns et al., 2003, pp. 340-342)

Let us look at these pitfalls. Often social interaction is taken for granted. Since social interaction does not need to be designed into a face-to-face course the thought is generally the same for distance learning. The thought is that it will happen naturally just as it does with face-to-face learning. "If we discount the problem that most educators do not know what they have to do in order to encourage social interaction (Kearsley, 1995; Rourke, 2000a), what remains is the observation that a majority of educators- consciously or unconsciously-takes social interaction for granted" (Kreijns et al., 2003, p. 340). Kreijns et al. go on to say that inclusion of technological media with the means of communication as well can lead to taking for granted that the social interaction will happen. Just because the media are available does not necessarily mean the interaction will take place appropriately; some structure should be built in to ensure the interaction is useful and productive.

The second pitfall listed by Kreijns et al. is restricting social interaction to cognitive process. They explain that there needs to be a sense of community built among the learners. The learners need to feel comfortable with each other. In order to allow the opportunity to be vulnerable and share openly the learner needs to have built a comfort level among other learners. Activities that help to foster this level of comfort should be built into the course as well. Some ideas would be to encourage the learners to share their biography to introduce themselves, as well as establish some chat sessions to ask questions about their personal or work lives.

"An interaction is commonly understood to describe actions among individuals" (Bernard et al., 2009, p. 1247). Bernard et al. goes on to say that there are basically three types of interaction: student-student, student-teacher and student-content interaction. Student-to-student interaction is just that, interaction that happens among students. This interaction can be synchronous such as videoconferencing and chatting or asynchronous through discussion boards or e-mail messages. This interaction could happen face-to-face with distance education becoming popular among on-campus students (Bernard et al., 2009).

Student-teacher interaction is crucial at the beginning of the course in order to establish/encourage open dialogue relationships with the instructor from the beginning of the course. The instructor seeks "to stimulate or at least maintain the student's interest in what is to be taught, to motivate the student to learn, to enhance and maintain the learner's interest, including self-direction and self-motivation" (Bernard et al., 2009, p. 1248). This interaction may also come in the form of synchronous through telephone calls, videoconferencing, and chats as well as asynchronous through mail, e-mail, and discussion boards. Bernard et al. also stated that, as with student-student interaction, this can be face-to-face as well with a blended classroom environment (Bernard et al., 2009)

Student-course interaction refers to students interacting with the subject matter under study to construct meaning, relate it to personal knowledge and apply it to problem solving. Moore (1989) described SC interaction as "the process of intellectually interacting with the content that results in changes in learner's understanding, the learner's perspective, or the cognitive structures of the learner's mind... SC interaction may include reading informational texts, using study guides, watching videos, interacting with computer-based multimedia, using simulations, etc. (Bernard et al., 2009, p. 1248)

Another cutting-edge interaction tool is mobile technology. This new technology can have advantages as well as some disadvantages, consider this: "While mobile technology enables such flexibility, it is not without its drawbacks. Learners may find if difficult to adjust to study while in transit or in nontraditional environments" (Koole, McQuilkin, & Ally, 2010, p. 61).

CONCLUSION

Distance education can be seen as an easy format to facilitate, taking less time than a typical instructor led face-to-face course. However, excellent distance education courses can often take as much if not more time than a typical classroom setting. This can cause facilitators to slight certain areas of the instruction if they are taxed for time. As Orellana (2006) noted, often facilitators will take the easy way out for facilitation:

Respondents to the CSIQ commented the following: "If I'm teaching a class (as an adjunct) in addition to my "regular" full-time job, I may not incorporate as many interactive activities, regardless of class size" (Respondent 32); and "most adjunct professors have other jobs and tend to do feedback two or three times a week ... not daily" (Respondent 7). (p. 149)

Facilitators and designers of distance education must maintain the high standards that are expected with all forms of face-to-face education. "Highly facilitated interaction implies the use of emails, frequent phone conversations, the use of collaborative tools such as threaded discussions and synchronous chats" (Cavanaugh et al. 2009). In order for distance education to maintain a highly effective presence those involved need to maintain high standards. As Chang and Smith (2008) noted, "The most significant contributor to perceived learning in these online courses was the interaction between the instructor and the students" (p. 412). Learner satisfaction in the course often has an impact on the learning received.

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Georgia Virtual School

Melanie W. Goss

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to trace the creation and evolution of Georgia Virtual School (GVS) and to discuss the reasons that Georgia students are participating in the program. The program details and offerings and what GVS students and teachers are saying about the program are also discussed.

The Georgia State Board of Education approved a plan endorsing online Advanced Placement (AP) courses as well as core curricular courses in August of 2001. The Virtual Learning Business Plan was approved in order to address a need for online courses in Georgia schools to provide special curricular opportunities



Melanie W. Goss, Teacher, Crisp County Middle School, 1116 24th Avenue East, Cordele, GA 31015. Telephone: (229) 276-3460. E-mail: mgoss@crisp.k12.ga.us

and options for schools that had problems with providing complete course offerings, that were experiencing scheduling conflicts, and that had a shortage of highly qualified teaching staff (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

In October of 2001, Georgia's virtual learning program was turned over to Technology Services. Georgia had qualified for a 3-year federal grant Advanced Placement Test Fee Program offered by the U.S. Department of Education that targeted low-income and disadvantaged Georgia students who take AP courses. Georgia qualified for the grant based because more than 50% of its students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

AP Nexus was the official title of the grant, which was a collaboration among Georgia, Tennessee, and South Carolina. The objective of the grant was to make online courses available to those students who were the target of the grant, the low-income and disadvantaged students. Apex Learning was hired to provide the courses online. At the time of the contract, Apex Learning was the largest online AP course provider (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

The AP Nexus program became known to Georgia schools and interest was expressed by many schools systems to participate in the program. Many of the schools that expressed interest in the program did not qualify for the grant, and the Georgia Department of Education began to hear of a need for more online AP as well as regular core curricular courses to be offered. This led to an expansion of Georgia's online offerings with other vendors and new contracts (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

Several Georgia school systems had already been interested in online learning and met in Atlanta to address the need for a state-sponsored virtual school. The response to creating a statewide virtual school was great, and all of the system representatives in attendance at the meeting agreed to collaborate and assist with the creation of Georgia Virtual School (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

GEORGIA VIRTUAL SCHOOL

Georgia's governor signed the GVS bill on May 4, 2005, establishing Georgia's first virtual school. GVS offers courses to public students as well as private and homeschool students. Each of GVS course meets Georgia's standards for Quality Core Curriculum and Georgia Performance Standards. GVS also meets College Board standards, and offers a variety of scheduling options to meet the needs of all local school systems. GVS is expanding continuously and refining and adding course offerings (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

WHAT GVS STUDENTS ARE SAYING

I just think it's really cool that I can talk to students who are in the same class across the state. This was a great way for me to take a class because other science classes didn't fit with my schedule. (Toon, 2007, para. 2)

In college, the teacher's not going to be on you telling when things are due every day or reminding you, so I'm really learning that from this class. I think other students could get a lot out of this. (Toon, 2007, para.)

It allowed me to do my work on my own time. During school you have to wait for the teacher. On the internet you can do all the work in advance. I like going at a fast pace. (Reinolds, 2005, para. 9)

I'm taking Mandarin Chinese. It's always been a dream of mine to travel to Asia and be a English as second or other language teacher. I feel that Mandarin would help me in a way securing my place at that job. (Benton, para. 5, 2010)

It's really different. It's very exciting, and it's a new way to challenge yourself (Benton, 2010, para. 6)

You've got to be on your p's and q's to pass an online course, because you've got an actual teacher somewhere out there monitoring what you're doing. (Benton, 2010, para. 11)

WHAT GVS TEACHERS ARE SAYING

I'm still teaching students, I just go about it totally different. I like to do online chats and get to know the kids too. While the courses offer students more flexibility and opportunities, they're not for everyone. (Reinolds, 2005, para, 9)

Generally a C-student in a building is a Cstudent online. And an A-student in the building is an A-student online. (Reinolds, 2005, para. 22)

Usually they start out slow and then they catch on and get the same grades as in the classroom. The ones who do very well tend to be just organized people anyway. (Reinolds, 2005, para. 24)

WHO ARE GVS TEACHERS?

GVS's faculty includes retired, former, and full-time teachers. Some of GVS's teachers have made the choice to stay at home to teach due to personal reasons (Reinolds, 2005).

TRAINING FOR GVS TEACHERS

GVS teachers must complete a ten-week online training course. They become famil-

iar with the pedagogy and teaching of virtual learning. They receive training in the technical aspects of online teaching and get hands-on training by a mentor teacher. They complete a student teacher training period, which is facilitated by experienced online teachers (Georgia Virtual School, Teacher Training Section, 2010).

All GVS teachers are highly qualified. They must complete the online training course. They must be cognizant of the special policies and procedures that are unique to the virtual learning environment. The mentoring process for GVS teachers assures quality and consistency throughout the program. GVS teachers who teach AP courses must also complete a special training course before teaching AP classes. Sixty of the 165 highly qualified instructors with GVS have become certified to teach AP courses (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

Meeting Student Needs Through GVS

Twenty-two percent (77) of Georgia's high schools do not offer AP courses, and 19 of them do not offer more than one AP course. When students apply for college, they are at a disadvantage over other Georgia students if they have not taken AP courses. Since AP courses help students prepare for the college-level work, these students are not on a level with the students who were able to have access to the AP courses. The size of the school systems, along with staffing problems, hinders these systems from being able to offer the types of course offerings that they would like to offer. Georgia has 180 school systems, 35% of which have less than 2,500 students. Over 33% of Georgia's school systems have one high school. Ten percent of Georgia's high schools have a population of less than 500 students. This limits these systems in course offerings and properly qualified staff to teach the desired specialty courses (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

Students have scheduling conflicts, want to add to their current course choices, move faster in their program of study, make up failed courses, have illness which renders them homebound, or may have moved in from another state and need to catch up on Georgia's high school requirements for graduation (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

ENROLLMENT IN GVS

In the fall and spring, GVS allows students to take one Carnegie unit during their regular state-funded school day. Students who are homebound due to medical reasons are allowed to enroll on a case-bycase basis. Public school students are given priority over students who attend private schools and those who are home school students (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

There is a two-phase process to registration in GVS. Phase I consists of allowing public school students a period of time to register for the limited number of seats before private and home school students are allowed to register. Phase II allows the private and home school student to register for the full-time employee-funded seats, if available, after Phase I (Georgia Department of Education, 2007)

TUITION FOR GVS

GVS offers a half Carnegie unit courses for \$300 and one Carnegie unit for \$600. The tuition only applies to nonstatefunded seats in GVS (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

GVS INSTRUCTORS' SALARIES

The instructors at GVS are paid on a per student basis by the Department of Education: \$130 per student for a half Carnegie unit course, \$155 per student for a half Carnegie unit AP course, \$260 per student for a one Carnegie unit course, and \$310 per student for a one Carnegie unit AP course (Georgia Virtual School, careers section, 2010).

GVS CREDIT RECOVERY PROGRAM

GVS offers students credit recovery for courses in which they have been unsuccessful in meeting the course requirements for graduation. The academic seat time has been satisfied, but the content standards have not been met. The credit recovery program's goal is to increase the graduation rate and to help struggling students remain in school (Georgia Virtual School, Credit Recovery section, 2010).

Georgia students who were previously unsuccessful in attaining credit towards graduation and who are enrolled in a public school in Georgia may participate in the online credit recovery program. It is encouraged that these students be determined to achieve their goals, be independent, and be self-motivated (Georgia Virtual School, credit recovery section, 2010).

GVS's COURSE OPTIONS

GVS offers 20 AP courses to Georgia students. AP courses are college-level and approved by the College Board. They help prepare Georgia's students for the AP exams required of each AP student in the spring of each school term. College credit is often awarded to students who pass the AP tests (Georgia Virtual School, Advanced Placement Courses section, 2011).

GVS offers the following courses: computer science, French, Spanish language, English language, English language and composition, calculus, statistics, European history, government and politics, human geography, macroeconomics, psychology, U.S. history, world history, biology, chemistry, environmental science, physics, art history, and music theory.

GVS offers the following regular courses, among others: Banking and

investing, broadcast video, computing in the modern world, fundamentals of web design, financial Literacy, Chinese, Japanese, French, Latin, German, Spanish, advanced composition, journalism, speech, geometry, trigonometry, and astronomy.

In 2009, the language courses were the most popular with GVS students. Latin, Spanish, French, German, Chinese and Japanese were among them (Benton, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Georgia is one of many states that have established virtual schools to enhance the educational choices for its students. In its second year, GVS doubled its enrollment (Starkman, 2007). By the end of the second year, GVS had increased its enrollment from 1,500 students to 4,600 students (Christensen & Horn, 2008). Georgia is expanding its course offerings and training more teachers with each new school year. Georgia purchases some courses from other online schools and also trades courses to widen the course offerings to its students (Starkman, 2007). Funding for GVS comes from both state and corporate grants which includes BellSouth, which granted GVS over \$20 million dollars in its first three years (Starkman, 2007).

According to the GVS program director, online learning is definitely on the ascent and is not a wave of the future; rather, it is here—and to stay. She states that she truly believes in online learning (Starkman, 2007), and that GVS benefits students in both rural and urban areas. She notes that if an AP course does not make at a particular high school, there is a solution online. She also gives the example that students need free periods in order to take connections or exploratory courses such as theater and band and offering an online course after school can solve this scheduling conflict (Reinolds, 2005).

GVS offers solutions to Georgia students in areas that were unsolvable before 2005. Students in rural areas have access to highly qualified teachers in specialty areas such as foreign language, AP math classes, high-quality business and finance courses, and computer courses not available in the many small rural school systems. Students who are hospital homebound have access to classes and can work at times when they feel well enough to work. This alleviates the extra pressure that these students feel by being away from the classroom for extended or regular periods of time. Formally or currently home-schooled students have options to go beyond the limitations of their home-school teachers in areas of specialization. Many of the GVS course offerings require highly specialized training for its teachers. Students who transfer to Georgia from out of state areas have choices in catching up with their peers toward graduation requirements. Students who have been unsuccessful in required courses can take credit recovery courses and get back on schedule for graduation. Students who feel stifled in the brick-and-mortar setting can expedite their graduation date by moving ahead of the regular students. Students who have special talents, such as in music, dance, and sports, can work their training and or performance schedules around their schoolwork. There are many areas of benefit to

Georgia students with the establishment of GVS. GVS plans to continue to expand its course offerings, including those for middle grades (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

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"I think it's really cool that I can talk to students who are in the same class across the state. This was a great way for me to take a class because other science classes didn't fit with my schedule."

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Distance Education Accessibility for Students With Disabilities

Marcelle Gornitsky

INTRODUCTION

istance education is defined as "institution-based formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunication systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors" (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2009). Along with advances in technology, distance education is providing greater opportunities and access to "diverse learn-(Ortiz, ers and larger populations" Mccann, Rayphand, & Leong, 2009). However, the unique environment of distance education can provide a number of challenges and barriers to accessibility for one



Marcelle Gornitsky, Instructional Designer, Nova Southeastern University, 310 College Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314-7796. Telephone: (954) 262-4951. E-mail: mg1345@nova.edu

group of learners: students with disabilities. Allen and Seaman (2010) report that 4.6 million students were enrolled in an online course in fall 2008, representing a 17% increase over the previous fall. Many students enrolling in these courses have disabilities and take online courses for the flexibility and convenience. Depending on the type of disability a student may have, many aspects of an online course can present a challenge. Assistive technologies are available but may not accomplish their goal unless the underlying design of the course or platform of delivery can provide the necessary information for the assistive technology to function successfully.

According to Keeler and Horney (2007), there is a lack of awareness and accommodation for students with disabilities, who make up 13.8% of the student population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). While the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) prohibits the exclusion of otherwise qualified students to equal education and access, many websites, online courses, documents, and electronic software/tools are not designed to be accessible (Fichten et al., 2009). In order to improve accessibility, instructors and educators should be aware of the laws relating to accessibility, the barriers to accessibility and the various actions that can be taken to ensure that online education can be accessible to all students.

THE LAW

The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) allows for all qualified individuals to

obtain equal education and access to all programs. Any educational institution receiving federal funds is expected to make its programs accessible to students with disabilities. In addition, further solidifying equal access is Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which calls for inclusion of students with disabilities and for reasonable accommodations, such as assistive technologies for these students to participate in the institution's programs (Searle, 2006). While the above Acts apply directly to academic institutions, there is some disagreement as to the application of requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, which requires accessible technologies to be made available by the federal and state agencies to all its employees and the public (Edmonds, 2004). Section 508 defines specific guidelines that must be taken into account to ensure that "when Federal agencies develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology, Federal employees with disabilities have access to and use of information and data that is comparable to the access and use by Federal employees who are not individuals with disabilities, unless an undue burden would be imposed on the agency" ("Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility Standards (Section 508)", 2000). These standards cover the following technologies:

- Software applications and operating systems;
- Web-based intranet and internet information and applications;
- Telecommunications products ;
- Video or multimedia products;
- Self-contained closed products such as copiers; and
- Desktop and portable computers.

If academic institutions are not required to comply with Section 508, are they still expected to provide accessible services and programs to students with disabilities? They are required to do so under the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which do not address technology per se but do address equal access to educational programs offered. Since most distance education courses within post-secondary institutions are web-based, the guidelines established by Section 508 and those of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) should be taken into consideration by academic institutions when designing their own websites/information portals and offering courses online (Burgstahler, 2010). The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines are a set of standards that were developed by the Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C), which is the international governing body of the World Wide Web. These guidelines provide web developers with four principles that should be addressed when designing web pages with a view to accommodating students with disabilities. According to these WCAG 2.0 Guidelines, websites should contain material that is perceivable (accessible to all senses or assistive technologies), operable (easily navigable using a mouse, keyboard or assistive device), understandable (information is presented clearly and logically) and robust (allowing the access of assistive technologies to the content).

If one examines the different categories of disabilities and the barriers encountered by students with these disabilities, one can understand why these guidelines should be addressed in designing all online material to enable these students to access the educational programs offered by an academic institution. In general, the types of disabilities that will be discussed in relation to accessible design of online courses are visual, hearing, cognitive and physical disabilities. Assuming that a student has been able to apply to, gain acceptance to, and register for an online course that is delivered via a learning management system that is accessible, can that student be successful in this learning environment? If instructors or course designers are aware of the guidelines for accessible design and

are trained to implement these guidelines, the experience of students with various disabilities can be greatly enhanced. Since an exhaustive discussion on accessibility issues is beyond the scope of this article, a brief overview of the general issues and possible solutions will be presented.

COURSE WEBSITES AND LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Institution or instructor websites and/or learning management systems are used to organize and deliver course content to students. When developing these interfaces, web developers and programmers need to adhere to the WCAG 2.0 guidelines to allow for accessibility. Blackboard, which has acquired WebCT and ANGEL, has made an effort to increase its accessibility. The National Federation of the Blind recognized Blackboard Learn, Release 9.1 for its efforts in ensuring accessibility for students with visual impairments. While Blackboard has improved the accessibility in the areas of dynamic content awareness, keyboard navigation, test structures, ability to upload multiple file types for flexibility, multimedia controls. accessible and improved form interaction, it has yet to address the difficulty with such access to discussion boards, the text editor, and the virtual classroom. Blackboard, however, continues to work with its clients on accessibility issues through its Accessibility Interest Group ("Accessibility in Blackboard 9.1," 2010).

In general, the following should be taken into consideration when designing learning/course management systems or web interfaces. A visually impaired student attempting to access an online course will not be able to see graphics or read text. For students with low vision, screen magnifiers are available and for those who are blind, screen readers can be used. JAWS, a Freedom Scientific product, is an example of a screen reader that can be used with many software programs and internet browsers. However, screen readers can only read text so an image rich web/course page hinders accessibility for the visually impaired student. The guidelines suggest that alternate text be associated with images so that screen readers will be able to read any information related to an image. In addition to graphics, tables may be used to present and organize data; however, tables could also present a problem for screen readers. All tables should use appropriate headers (> within the HTML code) ensuring that the data are associated with the appropriate headers, thus allowing the student to understand the information relayed by the screen reader. In addition, it is important to note that visually impaired students using a screen reader will need to navigate using a keyboard, so it is essential to design the navigation and the links on a website/ course page in a logical and simple fashion. When designing a website associated with a course, a designer or instructor should ensure that the use of frames is minimized, but if used, the frames should be clearly titled according to their purpose. If an illustration or graph is used in a course and would be inaccessible by a screen reader, it is advisable to provide a text summary for the illustration. It is obvious that the visual impaired face the greatest barriers to accessibility. Considering and applying the above recommendations and others according to the Section 508 and WCAG guidelines, will remove some of the obstacles encountered by visually impaired students when accessing the web interface or learning platform interface of an online course ("Introduction to Web Accessibility," 2010).

Hearing-impaired students will not experience any issues accessing a website or interface unless there is audio or another medium embedded in the design. If text transcripts of all audio is provided, the hearing impaired student can experience the course in the same manner as other students. The obstacles encountered

by physically impaired students in this regard are quite different. These students, like the visually impaired, may not be able to utilize a mouse and may rely on a keyboard or assistive device like a mouth stick, single switch device, sip and puff switch or head wand. When designing an online course, instructors and designers should try to ensure that all navigation can be accomplished through these devices and that these students can control the pace of navigation through any of the online components (Roberts & Crittenden, 2009). Issues faced by students with cognitive disabilities (such as learning disabilities) when accessing online interfaces and platforms can stem from the inability to process large amounts of information presented in a disorganized and haphazard manner. The cognitive category of disabilities covers memory deficits, problem solving deficits and attention deficits, to name a few. One could argue that when considering this category in designing instruction online, it is helpful to consider multiple learning styles and present material in multiple formats, clear organizational structure, and simple writing ("Introduction to Web Accessibility," 2010).

COURSE MATERIAL

Once a student is able to access the website or interface of the distance-delivered course, it becomes necessary to access the content of the course. The next issue that needs to be addressed is the format of the materials used to deliver the content, an issue that can be resolved and controlled by the individual instructor. If the content is delivered through web pages, these, along with Microsoft Word documents, can be accessed by screen readers for the visually impaired student. When creating Word documents, it is advisable to use the same guidelines for accessibility relating to screen readers mentioned above, especially when using images and tables. Microsoft Word 2010 now includes an

accessibility checker that allows for easy identification and repair of accessibility issues. In addition to Microsoft, Adobe Acrobat and Dreamweaver (a web authoring tool) have accessibility checks available in the latest versions of their programs. Contrary to popular opinion, not all PDF documents are accessible to screen readers. Microsoft Word documents can be saved as accessible PDFs and documents can also be saved in an accessible PDF format through Adobe Acrobat. When saving as a PDF document in Microsoft Word, there is an option for creating tags for accessibility, which needs to be checked to ensure that screen readers can access the content ("Is PDF Accessible," 2010).

Many instructors provide PowerPoint presentations that accompany or replace lectures. An instructor should be aware when designing PowerPoint presentations that the information should be accessible to screen readers and should incorporate the same design considerations as web pages, including alternate text for images, explanatory hyperlinks, et cetera. Because tables in PowerPoint can present a problem, presentations could be saved as PDF files to enhance accessibility. As part of the Microsoft Office Suite, PowerPoint also includes an accessibility checker. In order to convert PowerPoint presentations into an accessible web format. an instructor can utilize a tool like The Virtual 508 Accessible Wizard, which creates an HTML version of a PowerPoint presentation created in versions up to and including version 2007 ("PowerPoint Accessibility," 2010).

Any of the above mentioned formats should pose no problem to the cognitively impaired student, physically impaired student or hearing impaired students; however, hearing-impaired students may encounter an obstacle if any embedded audio or media are included in a Power-Point presentation. This should be addressed by providing text transcripts of audio or other media components.

Video components of an online course present an obvious problem to students with visual disabilities. When utilizing video in a course, it is advisable to include a text transcript and/or audio equivalent of the video, which could also include descriptions of the video. The text transcript will allow the visually impaired student to access the material through a screen reader and will also assist students with hearing impairments to access the material in a different manner. In addition, the multiple modes of presentation could benefit students with cognitive disabilities. For the hearing impaired, videos or other multimedia should be captioned utilizing software available that can create captions within Windows Media, Real Player and QuickTime movies. Two examples of such software are Magpie, developed by the National center for Accessible Media (NCAM) and Hi-Caption developed by HiSoftware. ("Web Captioning Overview," 2010).

Macromedia Flash has become a very popular means of presentation of material, as it is dynamic and incorporates graphics, text, and animation. However, it can present a number of accessibility barriers. The improvements made in Flash MX allow for the creation of accessible content, however, the material must be developed with the intent to be accessible to screen readers that support Flash. Alternatively, content can be developed to be self-voicing, where every visual component of the movie will be presented in audio form. Captioning should also be provided for hearing impaired students and all navigation within the movie should be keyboard accessible ("Creating Accessible Flash content," 2010).

COLLABORATION TOOLS

Interaction and collaboration are important components of online courses. Synchronous chat sessions using a text chat could pose a problem for the visually impaired student since they rely on screen readers. In addition, students with cognitive disabilities, such as dyslexia may not be comfortable participating in such an activity where their disability could be exposed. An alternate method of synchronous communication might be an Elluminate Live session, where the session can be captioned for the hearing impaired while the visually impaired student can benefit from the audio component. Elluminate Live is compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and provides for keyboard access to menus and dialog, closed captioning and screen reader compatibility ("Elluminate Accessibility," 2010).

Wimba Classroom provides features such as closed captioning, keyboard-only navigation, and voice-activated video switching, among others, in compliance with Section 508 and other accessibility guidelines, like W3C ("Accessibility Mission," 2010). It is important to keep in mind that students with physical disabilities may have difficulty with the pace in a synchronous session, as their reaction and response time may be slower. Instructors may, therefore, need to provide an alternate mode of communication or provide an accommodation.

The complex navigation required in discussion boards can pose a problem for the visually impaired student. A design of the discussion board should allow for keyboard navigation, be devoid of JavaScript and excessive popup windows that would necessitate mouse utilization, and be organized in a logical fashion that would facilitate accessibility to a screen reader (Watters et al., 2005). As mentioned above, Blackboard indicates that the discussion board is an area of focus for them in their efforts to increase the accessibility of their product.

ACCESSIBILITY EVALUATION TOOLS

Web developers and instructional designers face an often-daunting task in trying to ensure that all material is accessible by all students. However, there are tools available to verify whether websites or other online material are truly accessible. As mentioned above, many software programs include accessibility checkers (e.g. Microsoft and Adobe products). WebAIM offers a free product called WAVE, which can check web pages for compliance with the guidelines of Section 508 and WCAG. In addition, Web AIM provides a page of links to various tools to assist in compliance but cautions that human judgment is of primary importance in this regard. ("Accessibility Evaluation Tools," 2010)

CONCLUSION

Armed with this information, it is much easier to design a course that would be accessible to all students. As the definition of distance education offered by Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zvacek (2009) indicates, learners must be able to connect with resources, other learners and instructors. Administrators, developers and instructors need to take on the challenge of providing these connections to allow the inclusion of diverse learners, including those with disabilities

An approach advocated by the Center for Applied Special Technology to increase the ability for all students to establish these connections, is that of Universal Design for Learning. The principles outlined in this approach that should be applied to course and curriculum design are: allowing for "multiple forms of representation" of material, "multiple means of expression," and "multiple means of engagement" (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2010). Within an online course, these principles can be applied easily with careful planning and consideration for students with different abilities and learning styles. Poore-Pariseau (2010) recommends that "recognition must be given to the fact that retrofitting accommodations in online environments is not only an arduous task, it is often impractical, necessitating training in concepts

such as Universal Design for Learning to be placed at the forefront" (p. 155). If a proactive approach is taken toward designing courses for accessibility using Universal Design for Learning principles, more doors can open for students looking to take advantage of the growth in distance learning. However, if courses are not designed in this fashion, they create "new barriers to equal participation in academics and careers" (Burgstahler, 2010, p. 7).

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DISTANCE EDUCATION IS DEFINED AS INSTITUTION-BASED FORMAL EDUCATION WHERE THE LEARNING GROUP IS SEPARATED, AND WHERE INTERACTIVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS ARE USED TO CONNECT LEARNERS, RESOURCES, AND INSTRUCTORS.



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Facilitating Thesis Writing in a Digital World Mentoring at a Distance

Jeanne Evelyn Janzen

INTRODUCTION

he attrition of candidates for advanced graduate degrees represents a perennial problem for many institutions of higher education, due to suggested lack of support, stress, and the solitary nature of thesis writing. Research by the National Center for Education Statistics (2007) indicates that a large number of candidates for advanced degrees finish their coursework, but do not complete their thesis. A master's degree program at Fresno Pacific University has addressed this



Jeanne Evelyn Janzen, Program Director for the Master's Degree in Curriculum and Teaching, Fresno Pacific University, 1717 S. Chestnut Avenue, Fresno, CA 93702. Telephone: (559) 453-5550. E-mail: jjanzen@fresno.edu dilemma, designing an innovative support system to facilitate the thesis writing experience. The use of an enhanced process for mentoring at a distance was devised, including the creation of an online course, the use of a virtual classroom, and an enhanced communications system. These features addressed the deficit issues, better supporting the candidates in the process of writing their thesis at a distance, and increasing the number of graduates.

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND

Fresno Pacific University (FPU) is a private, accredited, medium-sized master's university founded in 1944 by the Pacific District Conference Mennonite of Brethren churches as a response to the desire of the denomination to be able to provide quality higher education for their youth. The vision for the institution was that FPU would be "a leading Christian university known for academic excellence, innovative programming and spiritual vitality" (Fresno Pacific University, 2011). FPU currently serves over 3,300 students in their graduate, undergraduate, and degree completion programs at their main campus and three regional centers.

It is located in the heart of the California Central Valley, a region which is largely agricultural, whose residents reflect some of the greatest ethnic diversity in the nation, with at least a hundred different primary languages represented by stu-

dents entering the public schools, and economically has been referred to as "California's Appalachia," with more pockets of deep poverty than any other city in the United States-not an enviable statistic. According to a 2005 analysis by the Brookings Institution, Fresno ranks first in the country among large U.S. cities for concentrated poverty, with 43.5% living in "extreme poverty" neighborhoods (Berube & Katz, 2005). Extreme poverty is defined by having more than 40% of the residents living below the federal poverty threshold. Many of the students at FPU are the first in their families to graduate from high school, and enter college hoping to be the first to graduate with a bachelor's degree.

CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

The challenge of the attrition of graduate students became evident as new ways of aggregating data in the School of Education began to be utilized. Records illustrated the fact that a significant number of candidates were not graduating; they were finishing the coursework, but were not completing the summative assessment, the thesis. A survey was done of all candidates in the Curriculum and Teaching master's degree program who had enrolled in the last 5 years. The purpose of this survey was to determine the degree to which the candidates felt supported in the process of completing the thesis, what they saw as stumbling blocks to their completion, what suggestions they could offer to strengthen the process, and to ascertain how many had actually completed. The results indicated that:

- 1. between 50 to 60 percent of candidates who enrolled actually completed their master's degree program,
- 2. candidates felt unconnected with the university once coursework was completed,

- 3. candidates felt unsure of the procedure and process of completing the thesis, and
- 4. candidates were daunted by the scope of the requirement and had difficulty knowing how to focus their research to manageable proportions (Janzen, 2007).

An initial attempt was made to address the low completion rate by assigning mentors to work with each individual candidate. This provided a sense of facilitation for the candidate, but this strategy lost effectiveness in that most mentors were adjuncts who were not clear themselves as to what the requirements were. Support was sporadic and inconsistent. Interviews with the mentors revealed a high sense of frustration in feeling responsible for the candidate's successful completion, but with very few resources.

DEFINING A GOAL

The objective of defining the goal of how best to meet the identified challenge began with a collaborative process. Faculty and staff, along with the Curriculum and Teaching advisory board acknowledged the deficit and began an ongoing dialogue about how to better support the candidates in the process of writing their thesis. In designing an innovation to address the low completion rate for master's degree candidates, it was imperative to review the results, weighing the inputs, the processes and the outputs. Kaufman, Watkins, and Leigh (2001) noted that strategic thinkers will "search for their effective and efficient alignment in order to create a successful educational system" (p. 35).

It was also critical to consider pertinent adult learning theory, andragogy, which identifies characteristics of adult learners as well as four critical elements of learning: motivation, reinforcement, retention, and transference (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). In order to be effective in designing the innovation, those creating the online course should consider these characteristics and elements in their planning, gearing toward how adults learn best. A basic rule of thumb in planning learning experiences for adults in a graduate school is to enhance the candidate's reasons for pursuing the advanced degree and to remove the barriers. Addressing the unique needs of adults in the design process facilitates the creation of relevant learning environments for the population being served. In the formation of the components of how to best create an enriched mentoring system these precepts were helpful guides.

ENRICHING THE MENTORING SYSTEM

The goal recommended by the collaboration between faculty, staff, and the Curriculum and Teaching advisory board was to create a support system that would enrich the mentoring process, lessening the transactional distance (Moore, 2007) between candidate and mentor. This support system was envisioned to have four components which would remove barriers and facilitate communication and a sense of connection. Figure 1 illustrates the components, along with the recommended medium and the potential benefits.

Figure 1 illustrates how an enhanced system of mentoring at a distance could address the problem of low completion rates, as well as candidate and mentor concerns. The system design proposal suggests the following:

- 1. The creation of a Moodle course (see Appendix A) for candidates, facilitated by the program director, which would:
 - provide direct communication with advisor/program director,
 - house a timeline and provide organized access to all necessary resources,
 - allow for easy communication between candidates and mentors, and
 - facilitate collaboration between candidates and the ability to view each other's submissions.



Next step: Diffusion of innovation across campus

Figure 1. Recommendations from advisory board.



Figure 2. Screen shot of Project/Thesis Moodle Course.

- 2. The development of a system of increased interaction and communication between mentors and mentees using Elluminate and Skype, along with increased editing capabilities using Word review features, and
- 3. The use of DropBox for easy document exchange and access to most recent version of the thesis.

DEVELOPING A VEHICLE FOR SUPPORT

The first step in creating an enriched mentoring system was to develop a vehicle for support by using Moodle, a course management system. The Moodle course (see Figure 2) was designed to foster increased communication with both the program director/advisor and the candidate's mentor, keeping in mind the interplay between Moore's (2007) variables: structure and dialogue. In this case flexibility within structure was the goal along with building in the opportunity for synergistic dialogue. It was organized using a module for each component of the thesis, making it easier for the candidate to follow. A resource block was provided with direct links to FPU's online databases, access to RefWorks, an online bibliographic tool, access to TaskStream, which provides the opportunity to create ePortfolio if desired, and Atomic Learning, step-by-step online tutorials for over 130 software applications. This newly created Moodle course would give candidates a greater sense of clarity regarding the process and increase their feeling of connectedness to the university and its resources.

Utilizing Synchronous Interaction

Synchronous interaction was generated by utilizing Elluminate and Skype to facilitate mentoring sessions between candidates and their mentors. Elluminate allowed the mentor to meet either individually with mentees or as a group. Communication could be done verbally using the microphone, visually using the icons, or through text using the textbox. A whiteboard was available for brainstorming or for the recording of ideas generated. The mentor was also able to access the resources in the Moodle course by sharing applications, reviewing the pertinent links at the point they were most needed. Documents could be shared for review and formative feedback.

Skype, voice calls over the Internet, was utilized for one-on-one conversations. Communication was both visual and auditory and provided a very efficient tool for quick responses to questions. International students had easy access to the expertise of the mentor using this tool, as did those nearer in distance.

An engaging method of introducing the use of synchronous interaction to the mentors was used, extending an invitation to an "Elluminate Mentor Party" (see Appendix B). At this first Elluminate session they were given an orientation to Elluminate, to the online thesis course, and to the other required tools. Mentors had the opportunity to interact with each other, ask questions, and become acquainted with the virtual classroom environment. This orientation was followed by a brief questionnaire asking for responses on: a) perceived effectiveness of the tool, b) user's comfort level with the tool, and c) possible suggestions for further in-service training or support required. Feedback from this session was enthusiastic as mentors became aware of the capabilities of the new tools and the potential benefits.

UTILIZING ADVANCED EDITING FEEDBACK

Using Word's review capabilities to give "comments within text" afforded an excellent avenue for providing feedback. In this process, when comments were given within text, the candidate addressed each comment, but did not remove them. When all comments were addressed, the document was sent back to the mentor, who reviewed all corrections, removing comments when adequately addressed. When a section was finished to the satisfaction of both candidate and mentor, it was posted in the Moodle course, where it could be viewed and interacted with by other candidates.

UTILIZING SHARED FILES

Sharing files made the process of accessing the most recent version of the document easy for both parties. DropBox was a tool that made this possible and also allowed candidates to access their document from anywhere they could log onto the Internet. It also functioned as a backup file for the candidate's work.

OUTCOMES

The implementation of the innovation, an enhanced system for mentoring at a distance, has occasioned significant results within the curriculum and teaching master's degree program. In comparison to the original survey results, the new data showed marked benefits:

- 1. candidates were clear about the expectations of the thesis endeavor and were better able to manage their time and efforts,
- 2. candidates felt a sense of connection throughout the thesis writing experience, supported by necessary resources, and encouraged by their colleagues, and
- 3. over 86% of candidates who enrolled completed their master's degree program (Janzen, 2010).

With these positive results, the desire to share the innovation more widely within the School of Education became the next objective. A review of Rogers' (1995) diffusion of innovations theory informed the question of how to approach the task.

DIFFUSING INNOVATION

Rogers' (1995) diffusion of innovation theory defines diffusion as the "process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (p. 5). It suggests that the rate of adoption is increased when: (a) the innovation is seen as better than the previous idea, (b) it is compatible with the values and norms of the social system, (c) it is not too complex to understand and use, (d) it can be experimented with on a trial basis, and (e) it yields positive results rather quickly. These elements are addressed in developing the plan for diffusing the model at FPU.

DIFFUSING THE MODEL AT FRESNO PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

In strategically planning the steps for diffusing the model at FPU, the results from the Curriculum and Teaching implementation would be strong testimony. The positive data illustrates the probable result of greater numbers of high quality, academically-prepared graduates who contribute effectively to the community and society. It demonstrates the effectiveness of facilitating a greater sense of connection (mentee to mentee, mentor to mentor, and mentor to mentee) and with the university. Candidates would no longer feel that they are "flying solo." This innovation would also increase the number and quality of alumni who are satisfied with their graduate experience at Fresno Pacific. They are more willing to support its endeavors; an obvious result highly valued by the university. The implementation of an enhanced system for mentoring at a distance would facilitate stronger WASC data in the number of candidates who are mastering the required "desired student outcomes" and meeting the goals and objectives of the university.

The innovation would be "marketed" first at the academic level to garner both the necessary approval and a vetted legitimacy. The academic steps include:

- 1. approval by the dean of the School of Education and the provost,
- 2. presentation using PowerPoint for discussion to the ad hoc Task Force on Thesis/Summative Assessments,
- 3. presentation for approval to the Graduate Academic Committee, and
- 4. presentation for dissemination to Graduate Caucus.

A final recommendation would be to assess the implementation of the innovation within the School of Education in a variety of ways, giving an array of differing viewpoints an opportunity to be heard. The Moodle thesis course contained an online course evaluation via Survey Monkey in which both the candidates and the mentors would have the opportunity to give feedback, suggestions, and recommendations. The School of Education would also run the completion rate data and compare it to previous figures to determine the effectiveness of the innovation. This information would be reviewed by program directors and the Graduate Academic Council, chaired by the dean, to evaluate efficiency, possibly suggesting adjustments or additions. The institution of these practices will create a continuous feedback loop designed to inform improvement and enhance the effectiveness of the innovation.

SUMMARY

The implementation of an enhanced system for mentoring at a distance stood candidates in the master's degree in Curriculum and Teaching program at Fresno Pacific University in good stead. It stands to reason that diffusion of this innovation to other institutions would serve to facilitate candidate progress in the thesis writing experience, enhance communication, and increase the number of graduating candidates. An interesting next step would be to test the innovation at the doctoral level, to facilitate the dissertation writing experience, and increase the number of candidates who graduate with their terminal degree.

In higher education, low completion rates are not to be accepted and should provide impetus to seek out an improved system. Kaufman, Watkins, and Leigh (2001) note that when institutions fail to compare "the cost of potential intervention against the often unconsidered cost to ignore the need (gap in results)" (p. 151), achieving desired outcomes or useful educational results becom.es highly improbable. Educational institutions today cannot afford to tolerate "what is" when a transition to "what should be" can prove to be substantially beneficial to the individuals involved, the institution, and society at large.

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| Modules in Thesis Moodle Course | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| | Setting Your Focus Setting Your Focus Statement of Intent Rationale To be completed in CRI 771 Research Methods Statement of Intent (1 page) Rationale (3-5 pages) Research Designs Approval for Research IRB Process Using your Statement of Intent and Rationale apply for approval at the beginning of Month 1 (Typically by September |
| APPERGITES | Ist). IRB Process Guidelines IRB Proposal Form Sample Consent Form RB Proposal Research, Research, & More Research Review of the Literature |
| a Complete States | Complete during Months 1-2 (Typcially September - October) Review of the Literature (20-30 pages) Online Research Video - Please view for online research tips. The Literature Review (an overview) |
| | Implementing Your Plan Methodology - Complete during Month 3 (November) Curricular Inquiry Project - Complete during Month 4 (December) Implement Your Curricular Project - Complete during Month 5 (January) Methodology (5-10 pages) Action Research - Cresswell Curricular Inquiry Project (Minimum of 10-12 lesson plans) Implement Your Curricular Project (10-1-5 pages) |

APPENDIX A: SCHEMATIC OF ONLINE THESIS COURSE

| 1100000 | Concluding Your Research |
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| | Analysis of Findings |
| INTE DE LET | Conclusions/Recommendations Complete |
| | during Month 6 (Feburary) |
| | Analysis of Findings (5-10 pages) |
| And I | Econclusion/Recommendations (3-5 pages) |
| | Wrapping up Your Thesis/Project |
| | References |
| | • Appendix |
| and in second | Complete during first week of Month 7 (March) |
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| | • Para Appendix |
| Manual Council Council Council Council | Submission of Thesis/Project |
| | Submission Guidelines |
| | • Submit by end of second week of Month 7 (March) |
| | Editorial Process |
| | Complete by end of Month 8 (April) |
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| and the second se | document here! |
| | Degree Application and Commencement Participation - |
| | Notice Due Dates |
| | Project Thesis Reader Checklist - Please print, complete and |
| | submit with your thesis. |

APPENDIX B: ELLUMINATE "PARTY" INVITATION



No Brick No Mortar No Boundaries

Distance Education and OpenCourseWare

Erika H. Weiss

"Education is learning what you didn't even know you didn't know."

-Daniel Boorstin

THE GOLDEN RULE

R ecently, in the midst of a conversation about academic freedom and academic capitalism, a colleague asked me if I had heard about the golden rule. My thoughts ruminated back to basics. I was able to vividly see the image



Erika H. Weiss, Adjunct Faculty, Reading/ESL/SLS Department, Broward College, 3501 SW Davie Road, Davie, FL 33314. Telephone: (954) 701-7914. E-mail: eraitan@broward.edu

of a classic poster, which hung in my classroom for years. It read, "Everything I need to know, I learned in kindergarten." At that moment I knew that I was missing something, only I wasn't quite sure what it was. The problem I faced entailed not being able to pinpoint a single golden rule from my repertoire of principles connected to the paradigm of conversation taking place that day. After a few moments of silence, and a complete inability to answer, I was told the golden rule is: "He who has the gold makes the rules."

Two timeless ideals-open schools and expanding the freedoms of learners-can be considered "golden rules" or principles, that Charles Wedemeyer-a distance education visionary and founding fatheradvocated. His principles were grounded in educational access and learning opportunities for all people, regardless of race, gender, geographic, or economic circumstance. In 1975, he presented a paper at the ICCE conference on the topic of open learning. At the time, the concept of open learning was new. It had only surfaced a few years earlier when The Open University of the United Kingdom was established. Wedemeyer predicted that technologies and media would change the

way teachers and students interact (Brandenburg Essays), and his ideals helped shape the distance education and open education movements. Although they are both rooted in similar principles, they represent different education models. According to Wedemeyer (1975),

All open schools have one principle in common: they are to a greater or lesser extent efforts to expand the freedoms of learners.... When the adjective "open" is used to qualify "learning" we have put a name to a process of learning that not enclosed or encumbered by barriers, that is accessible and available, not confined or concealed, and that implies a continuum of access and availability. (Wedemeyer, 1975, p. 2)

Wedemeyer's quest transformed educational landscapes and improved qualities of lives for individuals, and societies at large. Distance education, and open learning experiences reflect these principles as core ideals of democratic society.

INFORMATION ECONOMY: THE GOLD RUSH

As with any concept or word, the way in which it is defined determines the scope of its use, the perceptions surrounding it, and its practical applications. In today's open information economy, change happens quickly. Terms take on new meanings that reflect current phenomenon. The word "open" is a prime example. The term open has been crystallized based on the scope of its use in "market" practices. For instance, open is used to describe software products that are attainable at no charge. Open software can be accessed anywhere, at anytime, with an Internet connection. The operational definition of open under this circumstance may mean "free" for the user. Other types of software are accessible for trial periods. They are used as marketing techniques and then serve as a gateway for later purchase. In these instances, the operational definition of "open" would not mean "free," but rather, relate to the concept of borrowing for a period of time.

The concept of open is a trend along the Internet information highway. It is frequently used in the global market place and notable by practices in the software industry. "Open" is also a buzzword in education circles. How does the concept "open" apply to distance education? The answer is not simple, and there are far too many to note within the space of this article. However, the concept should not be disregarded. To the contrary, it should be investigated, and when applications are found to be valid, they can be used to solve problems in distance education; enhancing overall teaching and learning experiences as well as program outcomes.

Distinct operating agendas drive an open information economy. Incentives include intrinsic motivation, socio-psychological motivation, and, of course capital gain (Benkler, 2006). For the purpose of this article, I have selected one open area, because of its rapid expansion. It has attracted global attention and has been involved directly with promoting UNESCO's mission to provide educational access, and information resources to underdeveloped regions around the world. This article will explore Open-CourseWare (OCW) and consider applications to distance education.

THE OPEN MOVEMENT

The first step in understanding OCW is to conceptualize the economic framework of the entire open movement. To establish this background, I refer to Benkler's (2006) book, *The Wealth of Networks*. It suggests that the current economic market is driven through a commons-based, peer-production system that promotes freedom and access based on information incentives (Benkler, 2006). According to Benkler (2006), The undeniable economic success of free software has prompted some leadingedge economists to try to understand why many thousands of loosely networked free software developers can compete with Microsoft at its own game and produce a massive operating system-GNU/Linux.... Eric von Hippel's notion of "user-driven innovation" has begun to expand that focus to thinking about how individual need and creativity drive innovation at the individual level, and its diffusion through networks of like-minded individuals.... Free software is but one salient example of a much broader phenomenon. (Benkler, 2006, p. 5)

When thinking about the broader phenomenon that von Hippel alludes to, distance education professionals might want to consider how an open market of learning resources might affect distance education. For those paying attention, you will see that it already has.

Learning institutions adopt course management systems or learning management systems at administrative levels. They are then diffused throughout the social networks of faculty, staff and student populations. Decisions to adopt technologies must make sense in order for the organization to sustain, or help improve, existing products and programs (Moore, 2002, p. 50). Institutional decisions related to the types of learning-management systems adopted also reflect institutional policies pertaining to academic capital. Unless an organization is looking to alter revenue streams, change current standards and policies, or adopt new standards, they are generally not interested in adopting disruptive technologies (Christenssen, 1997; Moore, 2002, p. 50). Thus, just as learning management systems and course management systems are integral to a program when adopting distance learning programs, an infrastructure is also needed for OCW because it is an open system.

Adherence to copyright laws, publishing practices, and Internet Protocol has been carefully factored into distance education programs. Course management systems and learning management systems serve as communication catalyst support systems. They are designed to be aligned with both institutional and legal guidelines. One of the greatest challenges and concerns with OCW entails issues of copyright and intellectual property rights. In attempts to solve this issue, the Creative Commons was formed.

The Creative Commons license reflects a commons-based peer-production model. It allows one to retain ownership of their work or waive those rights for the benefit of others. The open movement has caused greater degrees of polarity between the concepts of academic freedom and academic capitalism. Perhaps the aforementioned golden rule statement, "He who has the gold makes the rules," is merited when exploring the complexities of these two concepts. To evaluate at a micro level, it is important to take note of distinct differences between OCW and distance education.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN DISTANCE EDUCATION AND OCW

Information and communication technologies have been catalysts to growth in distance education. Information technologies have also played the same role in enabling OpenCourseWare landscapes to grow. OCW and distance education are remarkably different. To clarify the distinction between distance education and OCW, it is necessary to take notice of how each is defined. According to Schlosser and Simonson (2006), distance education is "institution-based, formal defined as, education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors" (p. 1). The OpenCourseWare Consortium defines OCW as, "a free and open digital publication of high quality university-level educational materials. These materials are organized as courses, and often include course planning materials and evaluation tools as well as thematic content" (OCW Consortium, 2010). OCW is not distance education. However, like distance education, it is a disruptive technology. OCW resources can be used to enhance distance education programs, because they provide access to educational resources. Educators, students, and others who are involved in supporting and facilitating learning experiences can use these resources.

OCW OVERVIEW

In 2001, OCW was proposed and launched at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). According to Slaughter and Rhoades (2010) OCW was designed to place MIT as a technology leader; however, this was "only after deciding they would not be able to generate substantial revenue from selling online education. What was posted on the web were syllabi, lecture notes, reading lists, not course modules, over which faculty retained ownership" (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2010, p. 286). Nevertheless, when MIT piloted its first OCW initiative, it was an immediate success. In 2002, the program began with 50 MIT courses. These courses also included Spanish translations (MITOCW). The following year the program expanded to 500 courses and added Chinese translations. Since its inception, the program has grown with hundreds of new courses on an annual basis (MITOCW). According to MITOCW (2009)

More than one million visits-or user sessions-have been recorded on the site from an estimated 800,000 individuals, primary high school educators and students. Top visitor groups include high school educators (34%), high school students (15.5%), and parents of high schoolers (13%).... The site contains notes from more than 1,750 lectures, 9,500 assignments, and 980 exams. (MITOpenCourseWare, 2009) MIT, the OCW Consortium, and UNESCO are aligned in missions to avail access to knowledge and information via educational channels. OCW is a digital platform that is crafted to achieve this end. Carson (2009) for the global OpenCourseWare Consortium, reports:

Materials from more than 6,200 courses were freely and openly available, and an incomplete reporting indicated that more than 2.25 million visits were paid to those materials each month traffic reporting did not include traffic to more than 1,600 courses available through the China Quality OpenCourseWare programme. (Carson, 2009, p. 23)

Growth is clear. From the time of the programs inception to present, the amount of course material that has become available, in addition to the traffic accounted for in site visit data, indicates that adoption of OCW is underway.

CONNECTING WITH OCW: A Learning Experience

I have always been drawn to social, political, and economic issues at a macro level. As a long time educator, and now a doctoral student in instructional technology and distance education, not much has changed. Without knowing it, researching Rogers' (1995) diffusion of innovations, and Benkler's (2006) peer-production model, led me in the direction of crossing paths with "open learning" disruptive technologies.

As an educator, I have always been aware of the importance of interaction in a learning experience. Becoming an expert in instructional technology and distance education generates new perspectives in terms of just how important interaction is to any learning process. Recognizing that there is only so much one can learn independently behind the interface of a computer screen, I knew that my next step entailed speaking to an expert about OCW. After doing my homework, I decided to contact Steve Carson.

Steve Carson is the OpenCourseWare Consortium President, and also the Evaluation Coordinator, and Senior Strategist for MIT's OpenCourseWare project. We spoke at length regarding various aspects of MIT's OpenCourseWare. Our conversation afforded me the opportunity to learn more about OCW, and also make tangible concrete connections to some of the information that I had been researching regarding diffusion of an innovation and peer-production, as it pertained to academic freedom and academic capitalism. Highlights reflecting what I processed from our conversation are addressed below.

HIGHLIGHT: STRIKING BALANCE

First, Johns Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health, Tufts University, and Open University of the United Kingdom are all sustaining members of the OCW Consortium, and active participants in the OCW movement. The common thread between these unique institutions is that they all have adopted OpenCourseWare and have distance education programs. Although it is understood that institutions have different goals and objectives, and clearly operate with different business models, all three have not "thrown away the baby with the bath water." Many institutions are fearful that OCW will deplete distance education revenue steams. To the contrary, OCW is not distance education, nor does it present itself to be any form of formal education. OCW is a knowledgesharing venture, and cornerstones are being turned. Whether or not the concept is appealing to all audiences, OCW has had a positive impact on global audiences. To date there are over "13,000 courses published by 150 universities" (OCW Consortium). At some point soon, instead of asking why organizations are participating

in OCW, future questions will emerge and ask the opposite: why *aren't* you involved with OCW?

HIGHLIGHT: GATEWAY

Learning through OCW can be a gateway towards enrollment or towards earning certifications. The concept of OCW as a gateway is much like the software example cited earlier, and it is also similar to CLEPthe College Level Examination Program. The OCW Consortium (2010) reports that at the National Chiao Tung University in Taiwan, "many learners on campus or selflearners outside of school have all taken the test and received certificates" (OCW). Taking a test costs money. Thus, eventually there are cost implications for the learners if they choose to take certification exams. On the flip side, this generates revenue for the institution. At the front end, course materials may be at no charge to the learner; however, at the back end, universities can generate capital from a certification process. In addition, there are potential positive enrollment implications for both the learner and the institution. For instance, once students begin earning credits for the materials they have learned, and have tested and met proficiency standards, students may want to enroll in distance education courses to then complete a formal degree. I place emphasis on distance learning simply because through the process of accessing and retrieving educational resources in a digital environment, learners are already comfortable with some of the technologies associated with distance education. Once learners experience the interactive components of distance education, which is remarkably different than presentations of static OCW material, they will most likely value the formal teaching and learning experience that distance education offers. OCW material enhances the learning experience.
OCW: RESOLVING LANGUAGE BARRIERS

The prevalence of language barriers is an issue within the field of distance education. Many programs are designed in English, yet English may not be the learner's first or second language. This places the learner in a position of disadvantage, and his or her learning outcomes may be compromised due to comprehension issues and communication problems. Hope (2005) points to several disadvantages in transnational education. She notes that "Cultural imperialism as exemplified by the use of English rather than the national language; a standardized curriculum rather than a culturally embedded syllabus; and norms of degrees architecture rather than a local model" (p. 27) illustrate some of the challenges that are prevalent in transnational distance education.

The concepts of no brick, no mortar, and no boundaries are rooted in eliminating structural barriers. The construct of not understanding a language of instruction is a difficult barrier to overcome. Perhaps, layering formal distance education with the support of OCW material, will serve as a means to overcome learning issues linked to language barriers. The OCW (2010) Consortium reports that course materials are available in 16 languages (OCW). Language barriers are documented problems in distance education. Exploring the possibility of a layered approach to distance learning using OCW to facilitate language is an area worthy of research.

EDUCATIONAL VIRTUE

In reality, golden rules are those that guide principles of respect and dignity for all people. The underlying meaning of golden rules is treating others in the same manner that they would want to be treated. Wedemeyer valued education and wanted others to experience what he found valuable. Open schools and freedoms of learners were two golden rules that set the stage for distance education and open learning opportunities. These opportunities continue to grow. Allen and Seaman (2010) note that in the United States, "Over 5.6 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2009 term; an increase of nearly one million students over the number reported the previous year" (Allen & Seaman, 2010, p. 2). Open-CourseWare's growth has also been remarkable. One of the most recent additions to OCW is the development of an online study group designed by a professor and two former students from Georgia Tech. With the influence of social media, there is no doubt that both distance education and OCW will continue to present remarkable learning landscapes and gateways for educational opportunities. Moreover, the potential for formal distance learning programs to coexist with an OCW platform is not only apparent; the models at Johns Hopkins, Tufts, and the Open University exemplify it. Finally, OCW may serve as a prescription to solve one of distance education's problems related to language barriers. Although there may be truth to the saying, "He who has the gold makes the rules," the greater truth is that education professionals have golden opportunities to share, present, and provide education on a global scale with OCW and formal distance education programs. Education is golden!

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Responding to Change Online Education at the College of Central Florida

Connie J. Tice

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

n the mid 1950s when a group of community leaders and citizens began to envision a way to provide educational opportunities to three counties in Florida they had no idea what would happen in the decades to follow. In 1957 Central Florida Junior College was established to provide educational opportunities beyond high school to Marion, Citrus, and Levy counties. The following year Hampton Junior College opened and was one of the first Black 2-year colleges in the state. In 1966 the two colleges merged and in 1971



Connie J. Tice, Senior Professor of Speech Communication, College of Central Florida, 3800 S. Lecanto Highway, Lecanto, FL 3446-9026. Telephone: (352) 746-6721, ext. 6139. E-mail: ticec@cf.edu

their name was changed to Central Florida Community College (CFCC). At this point in the history of the college all students attended classes on what is now known as the Ocala Campus; located in Ocala, Florida. Communication between students and the college was mostly accomplished via mail or students coming to the campus.

The college offered courses in Citrus County on a limited basis until 1984. To meet the continuing demands of the community for educational opportunities the Citrus County School Board partnered with the college and an educational complex was established in 1984; high school facilities were provided to accommodate the college classes. In 1996 a free-standing campus was opened—now called the Citrus Campus—and in 2009 a new building was opened to accommodate more classrooms and a new Learning and Conference Center.

To meet the growing needs in the Levy County area the Bronson Center was opened in 1987. In 1993 the Levy Center moved to a storefront in Chiefland, Florida where it is currently housed. In 2008 the college was able to procure a site for a permanent center in Levy County and when funds are available construction will begin (College of Central Florida, 2011).

In the fall of 2010 CFCC underwent another name change to the College of Central Florida (CCF). The name change came about because beginning in the spring of 2011 CCF began offering the community the opportunity to earn a bachelor of applied science in business and organizational management; in August 2011 a bachelor of science degree in early childhood education was also added to the curriculum.

Responding to Change

According to Allen and Seaman (2008), "Over 3.9 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2007 term; a 12% increase over the number reported the previous year" (p. 1). Community colleges reported an increase of 11.3% in distance learning enrollment during this period; this increase accounted for the majority of the overall growth (Instructional Technology Council, 2008). As a result of this growth in distance learning on the community college campus, the institution has to look to new ways to engage both faculty and students in the learning process.

Community colleges and their faculty have been known for their ability to respond to both change and the needs of their students and the community; CCF is no exception. With the advent of the Internet and the introduction of personal technology that was more affordable the community college student began to expect and demand a different approach to education. To respond to this demand CCF not only brought more computer access in to the classroom they also developed courses that could be taught online.

EVOLUTION OF A PROGRAM

In the fall of 1997 a group of instructors, who Rogers (2003) would most likely label innovators, developed and taught the first 13 online courses for CCF. The instructors were self-taught in regard to course development for online learning and their elearning platform was WebCT 4.1. As a response to the growing demand for online education the E-Learning Department was established in 2004; this department now provides training for faculty and technical support to both faculty and students (J. Strigle, personal communication, November 16, 2010). According to CCF's *E-Learning Handbook* (2010-2011) elearning at the college "involves any formal delivery method in which the majority of instruction takes place via the internet or other electronic means, such as videoconferencing, pod casting, educational software, etc." (p. 11).

The target population of the e-learning courses is primarily students who live within the tricounty area; Marion, Citrus, and Levy counties. Even though these students may not be geographically distant, elearning courses may make the difference between completing a degree and dropping out of college. Geographically distant students are also accommodated and since the fall of 2002 CCF has been able to offer an Associate of Arts degree totally online.

The E-Learning Department continues to provide technical support; however, it has taken on the additional responsibilities of faculty training and the development of specific protocols for course development. To assist in the development of courses and training, a committee comprised of faculty from multiple disciplines serves as an advisory body for e-learning. In the early development of online courses, a faculty member presented the idea to the college curriculum committee and then the course was taught. It was not until 2010 that the E-Learning Handbook was published with definitions of online, hybrid, telecourses, and ITV courses and a protocol concerning the development of new courses (J. Strigle, personal communication, November 16, 2010).

The protocol involves: (a) decisions regarding the need for online courses are made within each department based on both departmental and college goals; (b) the faculty member completes an application, the deadline is one month after the start of each term; (c) the application is signed by the department chair and then submitted to the dean of learning resources; (d) the dean forwards the application electronically to the e-learning advisory board for discussion and approval; (e) when the faculty member is notified of approval he or she will sign up for a series of workshops that assist in the development of the course. This training involves technical training on the ANGEL LMS as needed, instructional design training, criteria for effective online courses, assistance with converting traditional class materials and activities into online format, utilization of learning object repositories, and software designed for the development of online courses (*E-Learning Handbook*, 2010-2011).

As the program grew it was necessary to define the differences between the different online learning courses. Online courses are defined as those courses distributed through the Internet, allowing flexibility in time and/or place (*E-Learning Handbook*, 2010-2011). Hybrid courses are defined as a combination of online and traditional faceto-face courses (*E-Learning Handbook*, 2010-2011). Telecourses are defined as those courses offered in videotape/DVD formats and these are checked out from the CCF library (*E-Learning Handbook*, 2010-2011). ITV courses are defined as interactive television courses allowing distribution of live classes through video conferencing equipment (*E-Learning Handbook*, 2010-2011). The growth of the E-Learning Department, in regard to the number of sections taught for both online and hybrid courses, is reflected in Table 1.

The types of courses being offered either online or using the hybrid format include: English, Spanish, algebra, calculus, statistics, speech, art history, several psychology courses, criminal justice, micro- and macroeconomics, wellness, environmental sciences, chemistry, and world civilization. It is anticipated that several courses using the hybrid format will be used for the two new bachelor degree programs (J. Strigle, personal communication, November 16, 2010).

In the 1950s, having a computer in a classroom or office was not considered. Standard procedure was for the professor to stand in front of a class, size determined by the number of desks, location determined by where the physical college was located, write instructions on a blackboard, and sometimes provide paper handouts. Now, a professor can sit at his or her desk, communicate with any number of students located in many different geographical areas, use virtual tours, and use creative

| Academic Year | Number of Online Sections | Online Enrollment | Number of Hybrid Sections | Hybrid Enrollment |
|------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1998-1999 | 54 | 712 | 0 | 0 |
| 1999-2000 | 71 | 1,065 | 0 | 0 |
| 2000-2001 | 65 | 1,094 | 0 | 0 |
| 2001-2002 | 78 | 1,373 | 0 | 0 |
| 2002-2003 | 82 | 1,724 | 0 | 0 |
| 2003-2004 | 103 | 2,460 | 3 | 54 |
| 2004-2005 | 135 | 3,120 | 10 | 213 |
| 2005-2006 | 173 | 3,812 | 20 | 251 |
| 2006-2007 | 206 | 4,451 | 32 | 509 |
| 2007-2008 | 240 | 5,288 | 54 | 841 |
| 2008-2009 | 299 | 6,886 | 83 | 1,509 |

Table 1. E-learning Enrollment

programs to act as a catalyst for learning. Intermediate algebra and statistics is now being taught online using a program produced by Pearson called Course Compass; face-to-face students also use this program to practice math skills and ask questions of their professors via email.

FUTURE GOALS

The E-Learning Department has developed several goals in anticipation of an even higher demand for online education at the community college level. The E-Learning Department and the advisory committee have defined a number of goals for the next 5 years. Goals that impact the student are: increasing reliable and accessible technology support and developing courses that meet graduation requirements. Goals for faculty include: increasing reliable and accessible technology support and providing more training in regard to the development of, online, hybrid, and ITV courses. Beyond the environment of CCF the goals are to increase collaboration with other institutions, initiatives, and consortia involved with e-learning (J. Strigle, personal communication, November 16, 2010).

THE FUTURE

What will happen beyond the Internet and what is currently happening in online and face-to-face courses? According to the Horizon Report, 2009, we can expect an increase in the use of mobiles in the academic environment, the addition of cloud computing, geo-everything, the personal web, semantic-aware applications, and smart objects. This same report suggested that students are different, there is a need for both innovation and leadership in academia, institutions are pressured to prove students are learning, and higher education is expected to utilize technology.

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COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND THEIR FACULTY HAVE BEEN KNOWN FOR THEIR ABILITY TO RESPOND TO BOTH CHANGE AND THE NEEDS OF THEIR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY.

Identifying and Responding to Online Learners' Differences

Stephen C. Ehrmann and Natalie B. Milman

INTRODUCTION

nline students in the same course usually differ from one another in instructionally important ways (e.g., in their motivation, preparation, cultural context). Using technology, instructors can discover those differences, and then respond in ways that gives each type of student a good chance to excel.

IDENTIFYING MEANINGFUL DIFFERENCES AMONG STUDENTS

The list of potentially meaningful differences among learners is long and can



Stephen C. Ehrmann, Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning and Associate Professor of Educational Technology Leadership, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, George Washington University. Telephone: (202) 994-2651. E-mail: sehrmann@gwu.edu



Natalie B. Milman, Associate Professor of Educational Technology, The George Washington University, 2134 G ST, NW, Washington, DC 20052. Telephone: (202) 994-1884. E-mail: nmilman@gwu.edu

include, for example: age, content mastery, disabilities, gender identity, major, motivations for taking the course or workshop, native language, preconceptions about course content, race/ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and technology literacy.

In any particular course, an instructor can only respond to a few such differences through modifications of course design or teaching techniques. So the first step for instructors and course designers is to consider in advance what the most important differences for learning might be.

Once a few such differences are identified, the next step is to discover whether incoming students do indeed differ in those ways. Two common technologyenabled techniques for assessing differences among online learners are: (a) online surveys, and (b) testing their abilities (e.g., online project; online quiz; video recording of a performance). For instance,

Example of a survey: In a course on educational uses of technology in school, are any of the incoming students already experienced teachers? (If half the students have such experience and the other half are novices, the assignments could be adjusted to use small groups in which the experienced students can help the novices.)

Example of a test: In a course in physics, what abilities and misconceptions do entering students have? The instructor might use the Force Concept Inventory (Halloun & Hestenes, 1985a, 1985b) to identify misconceptions. (Findings could then help the instructor prepare appropriate assignments to test student beliefs against experimental results.) Once the course is underway, other differences among students may need to be uncovered.

Example of a mid-course survey: Suppose that participation in online discussion or teamwork is poor. There are dozens of reasons why any given student might not be participating much (or at all). An item bank such as this one <http://bit.ly/barriers-

online-discussion> developed by Ehrmann, can be used to ask each student what has been holding him or her back; fortunately most such barriers can be lowered if (but only if) the instructor knows the problem exists.

RESPONDING TO STUDENT DIFFERENCES TO HELP EACH STUDENT SUCCEED

Once an instructor has discovered educationally important differences among students, the next task is to respond in a way that gives both (or all) types of students a chance to become engaged and to excel.

One size fits all: If traditional approaches favor one type of student over another, one response is to devise a new approach that is equally accessible to both types of student. For example, assume that the instructor has found that some students have English as a native language while others do not. One way to conduct discussions that provides a level playing ground for both groups is through asynchronous discussion. (In contrast, a real-time online discussion might make things comparatively difficult for non-native speakers because they cannot react as quickly to what they read or hear in real time.)

Different strokes: A second way to help different groups of students learn is by offering options, each designed to engage and support a different type of learner. This strategy is sometimes called *differenti*ated instruction (Milman, 2009; Tomlinson, 2003) For example, suppose half the students in a large class are premedical students while the other half are biology majors. Some homework assignments might include one version designed to motivate the premed students, another version more likely to appeal to biology majors. The underlying goal: to energize both groups of students to work hard because they see the value of the homework. A survey such as this one can help

an instructor discover such differences: http://bit.ly/engage-sce.

Student differences can even be turned into an asset for instruction. Leslie Harris (1996) created a real-time online discussion (using what today would be called a chat room) for students studying persuasive writing at three dissimilar institutions: two small rural institutions and one large urban university. At each college, most people held similar positions on national issues so that it was hard for students to imagine having to make and defend a real argument. But across institutions, the gulf among student beliefs was wide. Online debates in real time laid a foundation for writing persuasive essays.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

A classic study (Schneider, Klemp, & Kastendiek, 1981) compared the assumptions of faculty widely seen as excellent teachers with colleagues who were seen by their peers as average. The "normal instructors" saw their responsibility as explaining and testing; it was the students' responsibility to learn, and, because not all students were prepared, poor performance was to be expected. Though they knew students were different, the normal instructors taught all students alike. In contrast, the exemplary instructors believed that. though students differed, they all had the ability to excel, if each were properly

taught. Therefore each semester the instructor invested attention in each student, experimenting with ways to engage that student or that subset of students. Today's online courses offer exciting possibilities for discovering and responding to student differences, so that all students (and instructors) can excel.

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TODAY'S ONLINE COURSES OFFER EXCITING OPTIONS FOR DISCOVERING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENT DIFFERENCES, SO THAT ALL STUDENTS (AND INSTRUCTORS) CAN EXCEL.

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Try This

Want to Be Respected as a Distance Learning Instructor? Don't Whine, Be a Baby, Complain, or Be a Snob!

Errol Craig Sull

Survey of the second se



Errol Craig Sull, Online Instructor, P.O. Box 956, Buffalo, NY 14207. Telephone: (716) 871-1900. E-mail: erroldistancelearning@gmail.com

procedures as if your life depended on it. Do these and you'll be a boffo, can'tafford-to-let-this-person-out-of-our-teaching-stable, "The teaching-sun-rises-andsets-on-me!" instructor, right? Actually, not only wrong but so wrong it hurts. Nah, to be that really good you have to add a few more ingredients to the mix so many distance learning instructors overlook: stop complaining and whining, don't be a baby, and never whine.

You are probably saying, "Hey, I don't do that; in fact, I don't do any of that!" So you say ... and if it's true that's not just good, it's great. But just to make sure your online teaching colleagues become the best they can be in computer classrooms I offer this column—sometimes, reminders are needed:

NEVER COMPLAIN TO OTHERS ABOUT YOUR TEACHING LOAD

I hear this often: "Man, you wouldn't believe it: three schools and six courses!" ... "Hey, I wanted this to augment my day job; I didn't realize there was so much work involved!" ... "Ah, the good ol' days in the face-to-face classroom: two classes, and only M-W-F!" Say this to yourself, if you'd like, but never to others: you signed on for this teaching gig, remember? And if you have been hired at more than one school (simultaneously) and/or are being given full loads of courses each session this only speaks to you as an instructor who is really good. Do the job you wanted to do, and remember: there are thousands of others out there who would trade places with you in a nanosecond.

DISTANCE LEARNING INSTRUCTION CAN CRIMP VACATIONS AND FREE TIME—SUCK IT UP

Yup—it's you and the computer, nearly all the time; it's rare when you can tell your students, "Hey, don't count on being around for the next week 'cause I'm going camping in Maine!" or, "I'm going to be busy the next few days, so assignments will be late" -you get the picture. Unless it's an emergency or day here or there your students depend on you to be available; you-YOU-are the lifeforce that keeps that connection between students and you energetic, motivated, engaging. Be gone too long and students start disappearing from class and complaints against you are lodged. Not good, not good at all. So, when you leave for wherever, for whatever, be sure you find where Internet connections are available (there are a host of such sites online). You can be on a beach in Hawaii or having dinner at Noma in Denmark or chilling out at a KOA campground in Iowa or running the Ironman in Lake Placid or nearly anywhere: your students will think you are living in their computers, and that's the way it ought to be.

Don't Look Down on Any Suggestion Offered to Improve Your Teaching

There are online teaching snobs who won't accept advice unless it is 100% certified only applicable to distance learning, not one iota

for face-to-face classes. That's bunk; teaching is teaching, and while there are teaching situations unique to the online environment and the face-to-face environment many suggestions, approaches, tips, and info can be applicable to both. So? Think about it: many of us got our teaching feet wet in face-to-face classes (especially if you go back far enough before there was the Internet)—how much of what you honed in those classrooms do you now use teaching distance learning courses? Accept all advice, then decide if you can use it as is, if it needs to be tweaked, or it just won't work in your class.

STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS WILL GIVE YOU POOR EVALS AT TIMES— DON'T CRY ABOUT IT

You might think you're the perfect online instructor-and maybe you are-but that won't prevent students from giving you poor evals now and then. Sometimes, students take out their own poor efforts on "the teacher," blaming you and using the end-of-course evaluation to vent their frustrations. But don't blow up, get angry, orworst-write an angry e-mail to your supervisor. Bad evals from students come with the territory-just do your best in the class, and if you have one or more students giving you problems in class reach out to them ... and save your and their e-mails "just in case." As for supervisors, take a close look at the ding(s) you were given; you might have overlooked something. And if you do believe it was unjustified ask-in a nice way-for more clarification. The more you embrace, the better you'll be seen as one who wants to improve.

Some Online Schools Just Won't Want You—A Fact of Teaching life

Many, many distance learning instructors cast their teaching nets on the vast ocean of schools offering online courses with the intent of teaching for a zillion different schools. And with all these schools needing so many online instructors and you with such great credentials there's no way you could be turned down. Way. You will be turned down-often-for any number of reasons--including your major course load on your transcripts not matching your subject interest for the school; a school's long-term needs when you only are looking at the now; better qualified candidates (yeah, they do sometimes exist!); and the quality of your writing and/or the wording in your initial contact. Accept this, but don't let it discourage you from pursuing other online teaching gigs. You'll learn from the feedback, hone your application process, have a more targeted search. Also, do your homework: research each school to which you are applying, including finding the names of folks in specific positions-such as department heads-who might have more direct influence in the hiring process than an HR assistant who fields hundreds of applications each day.

You Don't Know It All—And Never Will

The best online instructors—and the ones I most respect—are those who are always seeking out additional sources (human and non-human) to improve their teaching effectiveness. These distance learning folks are confident in their own abilities and subject mastery, but know the perfect, allknowing online instructor is right up there with The Abominable Snowman and The Loch Ness Monster. The more you search out journals, books, newspapers, websites, professional associations (and their conferences), and materials offered by your school the more complete a distance learning teacher you will be. And when you have the opportunity take advice given by others and seek out advice given by others: each of us has different distance learning experiences, and the more we share these with one another the stronger our efforts in the classroom. Your students will get a really, really great learning experience in your online class—and, yeah, your school will come to love you as well.

KEEP YOUR UGLY EMOTIONS IN CHECK—THEY CAN DERAIL YOUR TEACHING CAREER

Each of us has vented: anger, frustration, disappointment, concern, anxiety, all brought about by any number of reasons in the online classroom. Whether from your course structure, students, supervisor(s), and/or school policies the bed of roses you thought would be the backdrop for each of your courses will sometimes also present weeds and thorns. Okay-so it goes. But certainly never let these negative reactions go beyond your own mind (and if you really, really, really do need share your thoughts with someone do so with a significant other, another family member, or close friend-someone who can trusted to take your uglies to their grave before sharing them with others). When these spill over into the tone or wording of class postings and e-mails you can land in deep doo-doo-and once you share a scar it's not soon forgotten.

BE PROUD OF TEACHING ONLINE— DON'T APOLOGIZE FOR OR HIDE IT

If I had a dollar for each time I hear this ...well, you know the phrase. There are many distance learning instructors who just don't feel the pride for doing what they do; it's as if it's not good enough, that it's something to hide from the rest of the world. Look, there are any number of reasons why people choose to teach online, but the fact remains we are TEACHING, passing along information and expertise and insights on a subject area to others so they can do better throughout their lives, academically, professionally, personally; so they can be a lynchpin for positive societal, financial, professional growth in our country. How great is all that? Über great! It makes no difference that you are not world renowned, don't have awards for your teaching, can't buy a Jag from your teaching salary, are not a household name across America—what you are doing is enhancing, improving, and motivating others' lives, not just now but far, far beyond your course. If that is not something of which to be proud I don't know what is.

YOU'LL HAVE TIMES WHEN IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'RE WORKING IN A FACTORY LINE—SO WHAT?

The same old-same old can set in with any profession, and distance learning is not immune. Day after day, week after week, month after month of grading and returning assignments, responding to student postings in discussions, sending out class e-mails and course announcements, reading and following up on supervisors' and support staff directives ... the list goes on, and can be wearing. But this is built into the structure of online teaching; it's simply a portion of any courses offered via the Internet, so you not only must accept and do all of this but do so as if each time it's the first time-and thus your eagerness, excitement, and enthusiasm can't waver. But behind the scenes there are tricks you can use to keep this up: take breaks, incorporate more resources into your classes, apply your creativity to perk up student interest and engagement, stay organized. And remember: all of these "gotta-makethe-doughnuts" tasks are focused on one thing: helping students to learn in an optimal way, and that makes any online teaching drudgery always worth the while.

SITTING ON YOUR DERRIERE ALL DAY AIN'T HEALTHY—WATCH YOUR EATING AND EXERCISE

Folks who teach online often wax poetically about how great it is to be sitting in the confines of their home (or wherever they chose to use the Internet) while teaching. Saving on gas, no driving or parking problems. Rain or snow is always on the outside, choice of clothing makes no diff, food and drink-with loud metal rock blaring-can always be around as the course is taught: all major benefits of online teaching, to be sure. But that's also much sitting, with a real tendency to want a snack when doing a course, with TV and nap breaks off and on-and this can become too easy to accept. Over the long haul this is just not good for your mind or body, so you need to get out: exercise and eat healthy. I've run into too many distance learning instructors who are the victims of what I call "The Distance Learning Instructor's Lazy Body and Mind Syndrome." And you are not the only one who can be hurt by this-your family and friends, sure, but also your students: you can become lazy, lethargic, lugubrious in your efforts in the class. But exercise on a regular basis, with overall healthy eating, and wow: you'll be a force with which to be reckoned.

Remember: Popeye had only cans of spinach to save the day and The Incredible Hulk had to be slapped in the face before his muscles took over—yet the distance learning instructor has so much more available to make it heroically through the slings and arrows of an online classroom.

Ask Errol!

Ask Errol!

s more online courses are offered the questions I receive continue to grow at a fast pace—and that's great, because we can learn so much from one another. I've again selected those that will impact the most distance learning instructors. Please keep your questions coming. Meanwhile, this column's offerings ...

A new version of Word just came out, and there are new editions of other software that



Errol Craig Sull, Online Instructor, P.O. Box 956, Buffalo, NY 14207. Telephone: (716) 871-1900. E-mail: erroldistancelearning@gmail.com

Errol Craig Sull

I also use in my courses. Any advice as to when I should upgrade to the new edition of software?

Your question is one I receive on a pretty constant basis, for three reasons: there is more software being produced, online schools are embracing more of this technology, and software manufacturers realize that the more they develop or upgrade the more income they can make. In the end, all of this breaks down into two factors that will determine the answer to your question:

First, what does your school require? Several online schools require students to use the latest version of Word, and thus you must have it available as well. You will also find that certain free software—such as Adobe Reader and Java—are necessary to read various documents ands files from your school, but these can be downloaded at no cost. Finally, online schools often provide software at no cost to instructors when that software is a required part of the course—do a thorough check to see what your school might offer.

Second, what do you really need for your online teaching? Microsoft's most recent release (for PC) is Office 2010, which includes Word 2010, and Corel debuted WordPerfect Office X5, which contains WordPerfect 5—but do you really need these latest versions? Unless a school requires the current versions the answer is probably not, as there are rather minimal overall differences from the previous editions, at least in the word processing software. But if you are always looking for the next edge, the next "whistle and bell" in your software then certainly go for a new edition of whatever software you use. (I have been known to buy a software upgrade for only one new feature that I believe will enhance my teaching efforts in the classroom.)

There is a word of caution: the first version of a new upgrade to software usually has kinks and bugs for which the company releases fixes, called "patches." If you can deal with the wait it might be better to hold off for a second or third generation of the newest version so these problems can be worked out (a constant check of the manufacturers' websites will keep you in the know).

I just started teaching online, and my school has given me so many policies to follow, as well as strict guidelines for student interaction. From reading your past columns I know you have much experience in online teaching, so do schools tend to ease up on all their rules and regulations, or should I follow them to the letter?

It's important to understand the "why" of so many "you musts" from online schools, and there are really three "whys," each school using one, two, or all: (1) for certification-in order to be recognized as a legitimate degree-granting institution all schools (online and face-to-face) must be accredited by one or more national accrediting bodies. Based on what these accrediting organization require from a school certain policies and procedures will be instituted that all faculty must follow. (2) Schools often have done extensive research-scholarly and experiential-to determine what approaches would best result in an optimal learning experience for students and allow for the greatest retention rate (crucial for a school's bottom line). These results translate into set syllabi structure, course structure, and teaching

approaches to which the faculty must adhere. (3) Some online schools, sadly, set their courses, student enrollment per course, and faculty procedures to get in and out as many students as possible each year. The students seldom receive a good education, and faculty are usually unhappy. If this describes your school my best advice is—to get out.

With all this as background you must keep in mind two items: how committed are you to the school/to your teaching for the school AND will your supervisor give you any guidance over time as to where you can relax a bit? The first two-part question only you can answer-but if schools say certain items are "must" items and you enjoy teaching for the school then do what is required. As for the second question: when you do feel a requirement is really going overboard ask you supervisor just to clarify the strictness of X, Y, or Z requirement-more times than you might think a supervisor will indicate you can approach the requirement with your common sense judgment.

My goal is to be a really good distance learning instructor, and in the 5 years I've been teaching this way I think I've done a pretty good job. But can you recommend some "outside-the-box" approaches that can add to my knowledge of distance learning so my students can have even better experiences in my classes?

You don't mention what you have already done to become a better online instructor, so my suggestions might be some you've already tried. Still, I want to offer a few items that often are overlooked, yet can add much to a distance learning instructor's repertoire in the classroom:

First, be on constant lookout on the Web for real-life examples to illustrate everyday application of the subject being taught. Our classes are stagnant in that we often use textbooks, lectures, and other items that are not live. This can make a classroom experience seem limited to academia, which is not the ultimate goal of our teaching. But when students see their subject in full living form, affecting folks on a daily basis that transitions the subject beyond the bits and bytes of our classroom to their professional lives of now and/or later crucial for any online learning experience.

Second, when you have the option of using a live chat feature invite a guest presenter who uses your subject material in everyday work situations. This is a great example of how technology can add another important dimension to the online classroom. Here, not only will students hear important details, interesting anecdotes, and current application information from an expert in the field but they also have the opportunity to ask questions. And, if you don't have the option of a live chat, go to Plan B: do an .mp3 (audio) or video interview (such as YouTube) of the person, then post it for the class.

Third, look to distance learning newsletters and conferences from distance learning organizations (such as ours: the United States Distance Learning Association) for new ideas, info, videos, booklets, etc. on new developments in distance learning. You'll find a plethora of info—probably much more than you could ever accommodate in your class!

I teach for a few online schools, and two of them require I hold live chats each week of my courses. This really cuts into my time. Any suggestions, or am I just stuck with what the schools require?

Live chats take up an instructor's time: you must be present for the live chat at the same time each scheduled day, for X number of weeks. And it is rare when an entire class—or even a majority of the class shows up for the live chat because it is held in real time, and students can find the selected time overlaps with a work schedule or other "must" responsibilities. (When live chats are not mandated most schools require faculty to record them so students can view them in archived versions.) Yet for those students who attend the live chats research has shown—and my own experience bears this out—that students tremendously benefit from being able to ask instructors questions about assignments or core material in real time and instructors being able to denote a large chunk of time to expanding on a subject's component.

This background points to a tremendous value in offering live chats. And if a school for which you teach requires it remember: you wanted to teach for that school, and with that came an agreement to abide by school policies. If you cannot make the time for the live chats and/or give them your best efforts that school might not be for you. But here's a tip: take your live chats—especially those you develop in PowerPoint—and offer them to your supervisor for distribution to others in your department: this can go a long way in showing you as a dedicated online instructor who is a major team player.

"Nervous"—that's the best way to describe me throughout the year as I'm always worried as to whether I am going to be rehired for the next session with my online school or if I'm going to get the number of courses I desire. I'm tired of this stress. Are there any ways to better assure I do get rehired and get the preferred number of courses?

There is a short answer to your question—a question, by the way, which nearly every adjunct instructor (the majority of instructors who teach online) has asked of him/herself: give the school what it expects from you, nothing less. This is the best insurance you can have for rehire and to receive the number of courses you'd like.

But I said that was the short answer. This background points to a tremendous value in offering live chats and it is because there are also many other instructors who, too, will give what the school requires. So what you need do is always—and I do mean "always" —go beyond what your supervisor and school expect of you in every requirement given you for your courses. Schools know that when students have a very positive learning experience in an online classroom those students will not only take more courses at the school but will also tell their friends. And when a school knows of an instructor who can be depended on to give really good teaching efforts, on a constant basis, resulting in great student feedback/evaluations—those are the instructors that school will first want to keep in their stable and first want to be certain receive as many courses as can legally be offered an instructor (depending on enrollment).

Remember: How boring when a palette of colors is only varied shades of one color, yet the palette of many colors of varied shades lead to deeper, richer, more exciting paintings—such as what we learn from others combined with our own knowledge translate into a more engaging, stimulating, and invigorating online learning experience for our students.

COMING SOON!

The second edition of the award-winning book of readings, Trends and Issues in Distance Education: International Perspectives, 2nd Edition, by Lya Visser, Yusra Visser, Ray Amirault, and Michael Simonson, will be available from Information Age Publishing in the next few months. quickly more relevant visual information should be shown—graphics, visuals, definitions, and examples.

Charity is the virtue that counters the sin of greed. When teaching online, charity means *keep the length appropriate*. Sometimes presenters think that their topic is so important and complex that they "overpresent." To minimize the tendency to runon in a lesson, the class should be organized around single concepts. The single concept is the building block of effective instruction. The single concept is easily presented in 3-5 minutes with a strong introduction to the concept, an explanation with examples of the concept, and a summary statement that clarifies how this concept fits with others.

Patience is the virtue that is the opposite of the sin of wrath. In online teaching the instructor needs to *plan for interaction*. Expecting students to interact automatically, without prompting, is foolhardy. Instead of being disappointed, even wrathful, if no one asks relevant questions, the online teacher should plan for interaction by seeding questions, using chat areas for small group discussions, and developing strategies that tease out interaction.

Diligence is the virtue that wards off the sin of sloth. For the distance educator, this means *preparing and planning*. No matter how many times a topic has been taught or hardware has been used, the need for careful planning and preparation are a must. Review the materials, test the equipment, and practice. A last minute arrival to the course management system or at the webinar site is sometimes unavoidable, but this should be the exception rather than standard practice.

Kindness is the virtue and envy is the sin. The online presenter should *design for the audience*, and plan presentations around what the audience wants and needs to know. Certainly, personal anecdotes are fun, and "war stories" can enliven a topic. However, these distractions might be amusing, but playing to the audience is best left for other performances, not online instruction.

Temperance is a goal and gluttony is to be avoided. The online instructor should have *presenting as the goal in order to avoid lecturing.* Talking is the easiest for most experienced teachers. Unfortunately, the lecture is often the poorest way to promote an understanding in students. Rather, it is best to present, based on a careful design while using visuals that support the topic.

Chastity, yes chastity, is the final virtue that is the counter to the sin of lust. It is important to examine the intent of the organization that is offering online instruction. This institution *must be above reproach*. If the phrases "return on investment," or "cost effectiveness" become the primary reasons why distance education is offered, then the sin of institutional lust may be evident. Chastity also implies purity. For the distance educator, intentions are critical. Teaching at a distance is a way to promote learning through the appropriate use of instructional and communication technologies. The dedication to high-quality materials, rigorous instructional standards, and uniform expectations are necessary if distance education generally, and live, online instruction specifically, are to be considered as equivalent alternatives and partners of more traditional approaches to teaching and learning.

And finally, Renaissance philosophers thought that great personal efforts and external enforcement would be required to help the common person avoid the seven deadly sins. To help, the seven virtues were identified. Today, great personal effort applying best practices is needed by distance educators. We do not want external enforcement. Let's be virtuous!

Online Instruction— The Seven Virtues

Or, How to Avoid the Seven Deadly Presentation Sins

Michael Simonson

uck and mystery have long been associated with the number seven. Seven is a prime number. It is the most important number in dice games. There are 7 days in a week. There were 7 years of plenty and 7 years of famine. Who



Michael Simonson, Editor, Distance Learning, and Program Professor, Programs in Instructional Technology and Distance Education, Fischler School of Education, Nova Southeastern University, 1750 NE 167 St., North Miami Beach, FL 33162. Telephone: (954) 262-8563. E-mail: simsmich@nsu.nova.edu

can forget the Magnificent Seven? And, there are seven deadly sins that are balanced by seven virtues. The seven virtues are humility, charity, patience, diligence, kindness, temperance, and chastity. Centuries ago, these seven virtues were proposed to help people avoid the seven deadly sins.

When it comes to education and online teaching, seven is an important number. It takes seven years to get tenure, seven is the number of classes normally taught in a year, and there are seven best practices of the online instructor. We could call these practices virtues, and apply them as ways to avoid the seven deadly presentation sins often seen in classrooms, webinars, and videoconferences.

Humility is the first of the seven virtues and is the virtue that counters the sin of pride. For the distance educator, humility means *avoiding the talking head*. In other words, when presenting in a webinar or videoconference the person doing the presenting should not dominate the screen, the monitor, or the podium. Certainly, the speaker should establish themselves, but

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