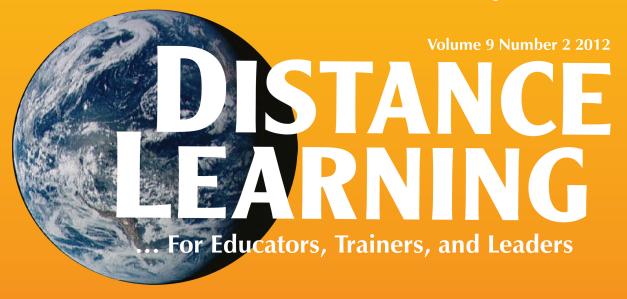
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- ▲ Educating the Professional Millennial Student: What Is the Perfect "Blend"?
- ▲ Compass Learning: A New Alternative to Credit Retrieval
- **▲** Using Web 2.0 Tools for Feedback in the Classroom
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Distance 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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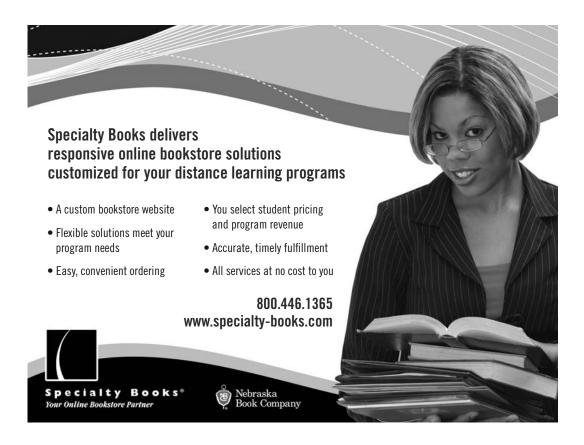
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# Problem-Solving Style and Distance Learning

# Research and Practice

# **Donald J. Treffinger and Patricia F. Schoonover**

roblem-solving style refers to consistent individual differences in the ways people manage change and deal with complex, open-ended opportunities and challenges (Selby, Treffinger, Isaksen, & Lauer, 2004; Treffinger, Selby, & Isaksen, 2008). Although style is just one factor among many (e.g., knowledge and experience, mindset, motivation) that influence a person's natural responses to problem solving and change, it has theoretical and research support and practical relevance for instructional design and

delivery in working with university students. We concur with Millman's view:

Whether one agrees with the notion that students today are different or not, it is imperative that educators, employers, and instructional designers shift their focus from "how students today might be different" to "how should I design instruction to meet the needs of my target audience" and "what do I need to change to meet the needs of my learners?" ... [This] means making thoughtful, informed decisions about how to engage



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learners in the process of learning, accepting learners for who they are, understanding learners' strengths and weaknesses, helping them build on their strengths and diminish their weaknesses, and capitalizing on their [learning styles]. (2009, p. 60)

Information about a person's problemsolving style contributes to instructors' efforts to design and deliver instruction that is differentiated, engaging, challenging, and successful (Treffinger et al., 2008). Knowledge of one's style also enables students to work from their strengths, while developing areas of weakness.

# VIEW: A MODEL AND MEASURE OF PROBLEM-SOLVING STYLE

For this study, we assessed style using *VIEW: An Assessment of Problem-Solving Styles* (Selby, Treffinger, & Isaksen, 2007a, 2007b). The VIEW model involves three dimensions: orientation to change (OC), manner of processing (MP), and ways of deciding (WD). Each dimension is a continuum, anchored by two styles.

OC considers a person's preferences regarding novelty, structure, and authority and includes the explorer and developer styles. Explorers seek novelty and thrive on risk and uncertainty. They find structure (especially when imposed externally) limiting and confining, and prefer to work with authority at a distance. Explorers create many unusual and original ideas that, if refined, might offer innovative solutions (although they may prefer to leave the refining to others as they move on to new challenges). Developers are concerned with practical applications and task realities, using their creative and critical thinking in ways that others clearly recognize as relevant and useful. They find workable possibilities and guide them to successful implementation. Developers are careful, methodical, and well organized, and seek to minimize risk and uncertainty. They are comfortable with details and structure,

which they find helpful in moving work forward efficiently, and with authority close-at-hand. The popular view of creativity as "thinking out of the box" describes an explorer's approach; Developers are more likely to "think better inside the box."

MP involves external and internal styles. Individuals who prefer the external style draw their energy from interaction with others, discussing possibilities, and building on others' ideas. They seek a great deal of input before reaching closure, are regarded as good team members, and often appear full of energy. Preferring action to reflection, they may appear to rush into things before others are ready to proceed or before ideas have been considered thoroughly. Those with an internal style look first to their own inner resources and draw energy from their reflection. They prefer to consider ideas on their own before sharing them with others, embarking on action only after careful consideration. Internals may become engrossed in inner events, ideas, and concepts and might be perceived by others as pensive or withdrawn.

WD considers the individual's preferences when making decisions, includes the person and task styles. Individuals with a well-defined person style emphasize first in their decisions people's feelings, the need for harmony, and positive relationships. Often seen as warm, friendly, and caring, they are quick to become aware of and to respond to the needs of others. They seek solutions or decisions that everyone can "buy into." Individuals with a task style tend to look first at choices and decisions that are logical and can be justified objectively. They prefer making judgments that are based impersonally on well-reasoned conclusions, but they may be perceived (especially by those with a person style) as cold or uncaring.

The VIEW problem-solving style measure (Selby et al., 2007a, 2007b) is a webbased assessment of the model's three dimensions and six styles. For OC, scores range from 18 to 126, with lower scores representing the explorer style and higher scores the developer style. For MP and for WD, the scores can range from 8 to 56. For MP, lower scores represent the external style, and higher scores the internal style, and for WD, lower scores indicate the person style and higher scores the task style. Validity and reliability data for VIEW have been reported by Selby et al. (2007b); additional technical reports and a research bibliography can be downloaded at www. creativelearning.com/problem-solvingstyles.html or at www.viewstyle.net. VIEW has been applied with more than 27,000 subjects worldwide in more than 20 countries, including responses from 3,325 college and university students.

# PROBLEM-SOLVING STYLES OF DISTANCE LEARNERS

The present research involved 112 students enrolled in distance learning courses on creativity and creative problem solving (mostly graduate students) at two U.S. uni-

versities, one in the Midwest and one in the Northeast. The participants' average age was 36, with a range from 20 to 60, and 82 of the students (73%) were female. Although this exploratory study did not involve a random or representative sample, it was an initial effort to study problem-solving styles and their implications for distance learning; it may point the way to promising opportunities for future research and effective practice. Table 1 presents the VIEW assessment results for this sample of distance learning students, and compares the distance learning group's results with those of the higher education group and the total VIEW worldwide database.

As indicated in Table 1 and Figure 1, the average OC scores of the distance learning students (76.1) did not differ significantly from either the larger sample of college and university students (75.95) or the full worldwide database (74.2). For MP (Table 1 and Figure 2), the distance learning group's scores ranged from 10–56, spanning nearly the maximum possible range and their mean score differed significantly

Table 1. VIEW Results for Distance Learners and Other Comparison Groups

	Distance Learners $(N = 112)$	Higher Education $(N = 3,325)$	Master Database $(N = 27,351)$
Orientation to change (OC) <sup>a</sup>			
M	76.1	75.95	74.2
SD	21.1	16.1	15.8
Range (18-126)	28-126	18-126	18-126
Manner of processing (MP) <sup>b</sup>			
M	33.1	30.1	29.3
SD	10.4	9.4	9.1
Range (8-56)	10-56	8-56	8-56
Ways of deciding (WD) <sup>c</sup>			
M	32.3	34.2	35.4
SD	9.9	8.6	8.4
Range (8-56)	8-56	8-56	8-56
	1-		

*Notes:* <sup>a</sup>No significant differences among group. <sup>b</sup>Distance group significantly higher than either higher education or master data. <sup>c</sup>Distance group significantly lower than either higher education or master data.

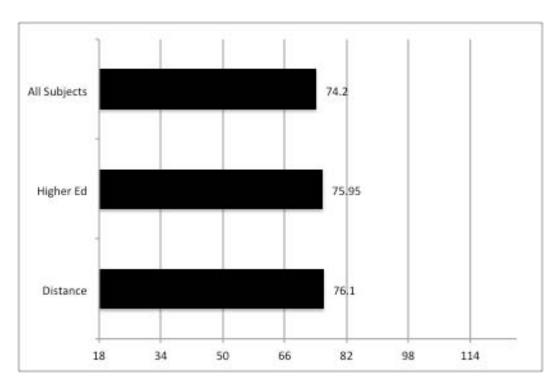


Figure 1. Comparison of groups on OC.

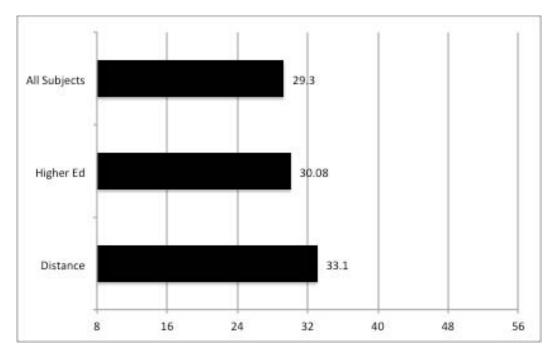


Figure 2. Comparison of groups on MP.

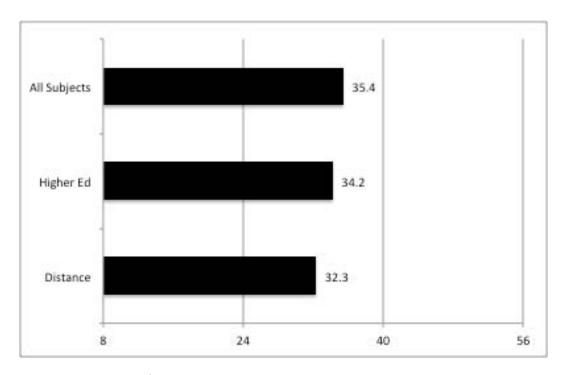


Figure 3. Comparison of groups on WD.

from the other two groups. Distance learning students (M = 33.1) scored significantly higher, or internal in their style preference, than either the higher education group (M = 30.08; t = 3.35, p < .001) or the total VIEW database (M = 29.3; t =4.41, p < .0001). For WD (Table 1 and Figure 3) the range of scores of students in the distance learning group was 9-56 and their mean score again differed significantly from the other two groups. Distance learning students (M = 32.3) were significantly lower, or person oriented in their style preference, than either the higher education group (M = 34.2; t = 2.32, p < .02) or the total VIEW database (M = 35.4; t =3.69, p < .0001).

# **IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTION**

Of course, there may be many reasons why students enroll in distance learning courses. They may need credits to com-

plete a degree, for example, or they might be professionals seeking certification, recertification, or other forms of professional credentialing—or they might simply be interested in learning about the topic or exploring what may be for them a "new" mode of instruction. Instructors must be prepared for diversity of background, interests, and learner characteristics, and be ready to address the same breadth and variety of learner characteristics among distance learning participants—or potentially even greater variety than they might encounter in any other instructional setting. Each of the three problem-solving style dimensions (OC, MP, and WD) has implications for instructional differentiation and effectiveness. Based on experiences with the students with whom we have worked in distance learning courses, we will share several implications for each dimension.

# **ORIENTATION TO CHANGE**

In relation to OC, the distance learning group was diverse rather than homogeneous, and included students with welldefined explorer styles, well-defined developer styles, and many students with moderate OC style preferences. If this result is confirmed in additional studies with larger samples, it suggests that students who participate in distance learning courses demonstrate a broad array of learning characteristics and needs. It would be erroneous to assume that students who opt to participate in distance learning are "a certain kind of individual." Distance learning may appeal to explorers

if it initially appears to be a novel way of taking a course or offers opportunities for perceived freedom from the constraints of a traditional classroom setting, and to developers if it appears to be a well-organized, structured approach to practical, relevant content. Table 2 presents some implications of OC differences for instruction.

# MANNER OF PROCESSING

On this dimension, as indicated in Table 1 and Figure 3, there was also a broad distribution of scores, including students with well-defined external and well-defined Internal styles and many students with

Table 2. Instructional Implications of OC

# Students with an explorer style may:

# thrive on a variety of challenges and choices of activities or projects, especially with options that will enable them to go in new or unusual directions; novel options and activities (e.g., short videos or podcasts) may add variety and build interest);

- want the "authority" of the instructor to be available but with greater detachment through distance learning than in a traditional classroom;
- feel "hemmed in" by very prescriptive step-by-step directions or procedure;
- seek ways to redefine or restructure tasks or assignments to make them more personally engaging or interesting;
- work on several tasks or projects concurrently, and need help learning to manage and keep track of their activities;
- give unpredictable responses to tasks or assignments, and ask questions intended to "work around" requirements or take assignments in unusual directions;
- need latitude for their originality while being challenged to demonstrate how their unusual ideas address important course goals and outcomes;
- feel frustration with an abundance of rules, details, and routine tasks, leading to loss of interest and disengagement;
- need support in follow-through, task completion, deadlines, and due dates; even with multiple reminders built into the course, instructor may still need to send out e-mail reminders.

# Students with a developer style may:

- thrive on knowing how new content fits into, and extends, what they already know and can do, and they look for practical, realistic examples and applications of what they are learning;
- value having authority close-by, and ask instructors to review work in process to ensure that "it is what they're supposed to do";
- seek clarity and detail about assignments and projects, and thrive on material that is carefully organized and structured sequentially;
- value clarity of outcomes up front, with knowledge of course expectations and criteria for satisfactory performance;
- prefer structure in which they can work on one thing at a time, and finish one task before starting another; desire a routine, predictable pattern for their work;
- accept tasks and assignments as given, and ask questions to "check back" with the instructor to ensure that they understand the rules, requirements, and procedures correctly;
- give responses to assignments that are rich in detail, accurate, and thorough, although not highly original; correct and complete will be of greater concern than originality;
- feel overwhelmed with too many options or choices and too little direction; may need assistance and assurance that, when there are options, it is not "necessary to do them all";
- need help in "stretching" and looking at a bigger picture.

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moderate style preferences. The students in the distance learning group, however, differed significantly from the other groups, demonstrating a greater preference for the Internal MP style. This result was not unexpected, since we had anticipated that students who opted for a distance learning course rather than a traditional classroom setting might be attracted by the opportunity to work alone rather than to meet socially with a group on a regular basis, and thus would be more likely to have an Internal style. We might hypothesize that the broad range of styles

on this dimension was influenced by the appeal of the content of the course, which for external students might have transcended their natural preference for a course context offering regular group interaction and face-to-face social exchange.

In distance learning, it may be challenging to respond to the need to provide avenues or vehicles for participants with an external style to engage in social interaction; they want to "chat." On the other hand, internals may want "to be left alone," although over time, they can feel

Table 3. Instructional Implications of MP

### Students with an external style may:

# seek opportunities to be actively engaged with other students in varied size groups (pairs, triads, larger groups) in all phases of their work; look for opportunities for networking and exchanging ideas with others;

- value and be active in participating in a "discussion" or interaction site in conjunction with the course, and be active in "social networking" sites;
- prefer projects that involve taking action or doing things, especially in concert with others;
- prefer oral products and presentations (e.g., sharing podcasts or video clips) rather then written
  products or assignments; seek opportunities to network with in video formats (Skype, iChat, Face
  Time, etc.);
- share work in progress early, often, and widely, seeking input and suggestions for improvement and development;
- comment, "I love learning like this but I greatly miss the interaction with others in a 'regular' class":
- be interested in, and excited about, outside audiences and personal connections (live or virtual);
   value your support (or that of peers) in identifying, locating, and contacting groups or organizations with whom to share products or results, and thrive on opportunities to do so;
- need support in doing the reflection and analysis necessary to complete a high-quality project or product, or in receiving input and feedback beyond an immediate circle of friends (or from Internal processors, who may not be prepared to respond early and quickly).

### Students with an internal style may:

- seek projects in which they can work initially (and perhaps for extended periods) on their own; look to print or web resources to identify, locate, and use study resources, rather than seeking out their peers;
- prefer groups made up of friends who are well-known and trusted (rather than groups of relative strangers); share products or results with a close or trusted friend or small group before sharing with larger groups;
- prefer projects that involve conducting their own research, analyzing data, and preparing reports largely on their own;
- prefer projects for which rehearsal and practice are possible before sharing a final product or result, and prefer written or displayed products rather then oral products or presentations;
- share their work with others for review, comment, or evaluation after they have had time to work it through for themselves;
- need support in feeling comfortable to express their ideas (especially if groups include many externals—who will usually be quite ready to "fill the gap");
- work primarily on their own, and communicate seldom with instructors or peers unless they need information or assistance. (Those with task style also tended to "do the job" and then check in on completion, perhaps adding a comment that they liked the class quite a bit);
- be uncomfortable with deadlines that do not allow time for ample reflection and polishing, making them feel rushed or pressured to sacrifice depth and quality.

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comfortable sharing with trusted peers. It may be an error, particularly in a group with larger numbers of internal participants, to demand (or "force") participation or grade on group participation. We learned not to mistake lack of energetic interaction for disinterest in the content or lack of engagement. In the distance learning setting, internals may find an opportunity to pursue sustained learning and reflection without the distractions of externals and the stresses of interaction (especially spontaneous interaction that tends to move too quickly for them). Table 3 presents some instructional implications of MP differences for instruction.

# WAYS OF DECIDING

Once again, as on the other two VIEW dimensions, the distance learning group included a broad range of students, including some with well defined person style preferences, well-defined task preferences, and many with moderate preferences. The significant difference between the distance learning groups and the other comparison groups may in part reflect the high percentage of female students in the distance learning group, since there is a tendency in the full database for more females to have a person than a task style, and the reverse for males. Students who prefer the person style consider personal

# Table 4. Instructional Implications of WD

# Students with a person style may:

# seek projects in which they can address issues of personal or social good, human relationships, or quality of life (in the content of a project and/or the process of doing it);

- enjoy learning about or studying people and their contributions, relationships, and the personal strengths and challenges of those they have studied;
- seek products or ways of sharing their learning that make evident their personal passion and commitment; this may be more important to them than factual detail or formal documentation;
- seek to share results in ways that avoid seeming offensive or confrontational; avoid conflict and disagreement, find it difficult to accept opposing points of view;
- when giving feedback, lead with positive responses, perhaps holding back any concerns or criticisms at all, out of concern for "not hurting others' feelings";
- find it challenging to separate criticism of their work from criticism or "personal attack";
- find it challenging to address limitations or weaknesses in the ideas or products of others, which may lead them to appear (especially to those with a Task style) "soft";
- prefer evaluation that affirms positives and is constructive in sharing needed areas of improvement; be concerned with doing work that will earn the approval and support of instructors and peers.

# Students with a task style may:

- seek projects that involve careful study and review of research evidence, logical analysis of ideas and points of view, and approaching learning tasks in a planful, systematic way;
- enjoy projects in which they can conduct research and study evidence carefully before reaching conclusions or creating products;
- seek ways to present or share data in which the primary concerns are meeting high academic or professional standards or quality criteria;
- seek to share results in ways that are "toughminded" or rigorous, be willing to risk dispute, debate, or even conflict and confrontation; enjoy spirited debate or discussion of opposing ideas;
- when giving feedback to others, lead with concerns and areas that need improvement; may overlook positives or strengths, "letting the chips fall where they may";
- be skillful at detaching criticism of their ideas from personal criticism;
- find it difficult to attend to the personal feelings of others; seem cold, aloof, or even disrespectful of others; lack awareness that others (especially those with a Person style) may consider their approach hurtful or personally "attacking";
- prefer, and expect, detailed, in-depth evaluation and critique of content as well as format or presentation of any product or project.

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interpersonal and dimensions ("the human element") in their learning. Students with a task style enjoy learning that addresses "difficult issues," searching for logical support and objective evidence or documentation—experiences they view as rigorous, intellectually challenging, and complex. They may avoid courses or content that they view as "cute," superficial, or frivolous. Task style learners may perceive distance learning as an opportunity to avoid the "distractions" of interpersonal issues. Table 4 presents some instructional implications of WD differences.

# SUMMARY

In this article, we presented a model of students' problem-solving style preferences and described implications of each style for distance learning instruction. Attention to style differences is an important consideration in designing, differentiating, and delivering instruction, as important in distance learning as in a live, in-person classroom context. We presented data from an exploratory study involving 112 university students enrolled in distance learning courses, comparing their results with data from more than 3,000 other college and university students and a worldwide database of more than 27,000 persons.

Understanding problem-solving style and its implications for distance learning (as well as for effective instruction more broadly) offers many opportunities for future research and development. We need to replicate these studies with larger and more diverse student samples, and expand the inquiry to other student populations and course areas, for example. In addition, in this report we considered only the implications of style differences among students; future research might investigate the influence of instructor's style on the design and delivery of instruction, and the interactions that may exist between the instructor's and students' styles. It would also be valuable to examine the role of style in guiding students in working effectively in teams and project groups, experimental studies of style-mediated instruction, the differential effects of style-based instruction and feedback on student learning and productivity.

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THE VIE@W MODEL INVOLVES THREE DIMENSIONS: ORIENTATION TO CHANGE (OC), MANNER OF PROCESSING (MP), AND WAYS OF DECIDING (WD).

# RICHARD E. CLARK, EDITOR From ■ Arguments, Analysis, and Evidence, Second Edition Foreword by Michael Simonson Charles Schlosser and Michael Simonson, Series Editors A Volume in Perspectives in Instructional Technology and Distance Learning

# Educating the Professional Millennial Student

# What is the Perfect "Blend"?

# Kimberly H. Doey and Julie B. Kincaid

# INTRODUCTION

n today's academic climate, there are numerous delivery format alternatives available when conceptualizing a graduate program. Practitioners must consider many aspects when designing programs and courses. One of the most important factors to consider is how class courses can integrate elements of various formats to best teach the objectives of each course in the most engaging way. Other features to consider and understand are the demographics and characteristics of

the typical student that is admitted into these programs and further, to understand how they best learn. More and more programs are integrating elements of distance education in an effort to keep pace with an increasingly competitive graduate education environment.

Engaging this type of delivery allows colleges to not only reach more students, but also to meet the demands of those students. The choices consist for the most part of traditional face-to-face style learning, larger class sizes within large lecture halls



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with video broadcast to other sites, completely online formats, or blended formats of all of the aforementioned delivery methods. This article will study one particular application that utilizes all of these elements.

As a case example, the Nova Southeastern University College of Pharmacy (NSU-COP) can be scrutinized to determine if the design and instructional delivery methods utilized in this program are the best for its student population. The program will be closely examined to determine advantages and disadvantages from both the student's perspective and the faculty's perspective and will discuss potential ways that the method can be improved upon and what the implications are for the future of the program.

# EXAMPLE OF A DISTANCE EDUCATION APPLICATION

NSU is well known for its use of cutting edge technology and innovative teaching methods. Nova has been a pioneer in leading higher education out of the brick and mortar mindset into the use of less traditional instructional delivery methods. The College of Pharmacy at Nova is one of the programs offered within the university that infuses technology with traditional learning styles to create a blended method that is being emulated by other Pharmacy programs across the country. The NSU-COP offers a doctorate of pharmacy (PharmD) as well as a doctor of Philosophy (PhD) program with a concentration in pharmaceutical science.

There are three locations within the NSU sites: Fort Lauderdale, Florida; Ponce, Puerto Rico; and the Palm Beach Student Education Center in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. Each of these sites has on-site faculty and staff. The instructional delivery method consists of a blend of several methods. The first method employed is live, face-to-face lecture. A professor presents

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the lecture to a live audience at one of the sites, and then is broadcast via streaming video to the additional two sites simultaneously. A facilitator (a PharmD faculty member) is available at the off-site locations to answer questions and provide support. Several introductory courses are taught via a second method utilizing an online platform that allows for discussion, feedback, and testing (Nova Southeastern University College of Pharmacy, 2011). Finally the practical labs and several electives are offered at each location in a traditional. face-to-face format. This arrangement allows learners to interact with the faculty and fellow students at all sites. State-ofthe-art technology is employed at all times as each classroom desk within the lecture halls offer a built in electrical outlet for laptops and an integral push-to-talk microphone. Having this incorporates the use of the latest technology coupled with a live professor that teaches the concepts, engages the students and encourages collaboration. Each year the curriculum is reviewed to assure that the program is making use of the most efficient delivery methods as well as the most effective curriculum design to insure that all students are being taught all that is required to be successful as pharmacy professionals in the field. The program of study consists of a mix of didactic coursework blended with experiential clinical practice coursework.

The professional program grooms the student for leadership and proficiency at each step of the program. The governing body that gives the NSU-COP accreditation is the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE). One of the findings in the most recent report released in 2011 was that in order for colleges to maintain their accreditation there are some areas that must be improved upon, and other areas that must be enhanced to afford active learning for students.

It was concluded that active learning strategies

produce graduates who become competent pharmacists by ensuring the achievement of the stated outcomes, fostering the development and maturation of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, meeting the diverse learning needs of students, and enabling students to transition from dependent to active, self-directed, lifelong learners. (Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education, 2011, p. 19)

The NSU-COP must continue to create strategies that are learning centered. The first part of this process is to understand the student population. Who are they and how do they learn? What is the greatest configuration of learning that this population will respond to? Understanding these concepts and methods will help educators in today's colleges and universities as well as guide them into the future enabling them to teach within the guidelines of the curriculum and effective delivery meth-

ods. Finally, addressing the teaching processes that do not work for the majority should be addressed and redesigned to reach optimal comprehension levels. Completing these steps will lead to a successful program for what awaits us on the horizon once the pieces to the puzzle are in place.

# HERE COME THE MILLENNIALS!

First of all, what is the student population? Who is the typical NSU-COP student? The mean age of an NSU College of Pharmacy student is 24 years old (B. Lyda, personal communication, September 29, 2011). This age falls within the generation category commonly referred to as the "Millennial." What are the characteristics of the typical Millennial student?

As the data in Table 1 suggests, the Millennial student is vastly different from his or her predecessor. These students have never known a world without cell phones

Table 1. Characteristics of Generations

	Traditionalists	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	Generation X	Millennials
Alias	Matures, forgotten generation, veterans	Moral authority	Slackers, Xers	Generation Next, Gen Y
Time period	1900-1945	1946-1964	1965-1980	1981-2000
Influential factors	WWII, Great Depression, Korean War, the move from the Machine Age into the era of technology, religion, radio	Pursuit of the "American Dream" Civil Rights, Vietnam War, sexual revolution, television, Cold War, Rock 'n roll	"Latchkey kids," increased divorce rates, increasing diversity within population, computers	Digital media, "missing milk carton kids," AIDS and STDs, war on terror, school shootings, cell phones to smart phones
Core values	Law and order, family, dedication, loyalty, and sacrifice	Equal rights and opportunity, feminism, conservatism, traditional family values	Global village, balance, education	Impatience, confidence, social, technologically savvy, self-directed
Work ethic	Dedication, "pay your dues," company first	Driven, quality, "workaholic"	Balance, structure, direction, work smarter	Ambitious, tenacious, forward thinking, team oriented, well networked, protected

Source: Wisniewski (2010).

or the Internet. They have fast-paced expectations in terms of communication, feedback and interaction. They have an insatiable appetite for technology and utilize all the latest in technogadgetry. Meeting the demands of these students by keeping them fully engaged in the learning of material through many avenues can be difficult. How do they best learn?

They are tremendously technologically savvy. Most of them boast more knowledge in terms of technology, computers, iPads, and smart phones than do the professors teaching them. They also thrive in a collaborative, team-oriented environment. The Millennial student values mentorship, structure and stability, and collaborative learning. This generation also places a great deal of emphasis on being socially connected and digitally competent. How are challenges the challenges to engage these students met?

Based on the characteristics of the Millennial student, the course design or classroom application that these students would most benefit from would be a learning centered syllabus that lays the framework instructions clear expectations. The course must also offer frequent feedback in many forms, especially with the use of technology. Instrucmust also offer collaborative, interactive learning, opportunities for social learning activities, a variety of technology in instruction and assignments, and simulated case work through concepts such as "Think, Pair, Share" (Lyman, 1981).

NSU's College of Pharmacy distance based students are offered additional opportunities to learn besides just passively sitting and staring at several videoconference screens. One of the learning tools is a collaborative "in class" verbal exposition of applied knowledge called, "Think, Pair, Share" (Lyman, 1981). Third year pharmacy student Merin Enos explained it as an opportunity for students to be trained to have "quick recall" and to be able to think on their feet (or seat). The

professor offers a case study and reads it aloud to everyone. Then, a question about the case is posed and the students will "think" individually about the issue at hand. After a few minutes, the students will pair up with a partner and when called on, one of them will "share" it with the other three sites. "All of my peers enjoy this process because it makes some us realize that maybe we thought our answers would have been wrong when in actuality we were correct and vice versa. I hope we are able to do more of this next semester" Enos. personal communication, November 11, 2011).

# ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES WITHIN THE CURRENT LEARNING LANDSCAPE

There are as many advantages as there are disadvantages when it comes to teaching and learning within the format of distance education. Both the faculty member and the student experience the same issues in this learning design, including the opportunity to create a professional network of life long friends, frustrations with technology glitches, and dedication and commitment, but of course their perspectives are very different.

One of the biggest advantages that students receive by utilizing the College of Pharmacy distance educated program is the number of peers that the students become acquainted with on their home campus as well as at the other two sites. The network of peers that is created by the students in the 4-year program creates many opportunities such as participating in student organizations, learning cultural diversity on and off campus, discovering endless careers that exist in the pharmacy field and the chance to meet lifelong friends who have the same educational and career goals as they do.

Third year pharmacy student Genevieve Hale reflected on the few times that technology [compressed video and videoconferencing] did not work in her classes but she attributed those problems to South Florida storms. "There have been a few instances where the students are ready for class in Palm Beach and the site goes down in Davie. Our instructors back-up plan is to use another form of technology called Tegrity (a video recording system that records the live lecture, for the student to review later) but sometimes that doesn't work either" (G. Hale, personal communication, November 8, 2011). The authors surmise that the Millennial generation has a much lower tolerance for technological glitches than the older (Boomer and Traditional) generation might; yet it is, for the most part, this very generation that is running the technology operations for the Millennials.

An advantage of distance education for students from the instructor's point of view is the ability to serve the students not only as a faculty member but also as an advisor, facilitator, and mentor. In the offsite campus of Palm Beach where all of the interviews were conducted, the facilitator in the class is also the student's instructor so that even when students are listening and learning from a video broadcast lecture being held in a distance site by another professor, an instructor can always be found in the back of the room. After class, the students can ask questions or opinions directly and face to face. The commitment and dedication of the professors is very clear in that students can typically walk in to the office of the College of Pharmacy and be welcomed with or without an appointment.

One of the disadvantages of the professor teaching in an online video broadcast format is not having the ability to "read" face gestures. Since the camera is placed on the person teaching the class, scanning the room to observe student comprehension is impossible for a video broadcast. Catherine Harrington, professor in the College of Pharmacy at NSU remarked, "it is nearing impossible to see if my students are understanding what I am saying. It is then up to

the facilitator who is in the distant site classroom to observe if the students are grasping what is being taught. That, to me, is a big disadvantage while instructing online" (C. Harrington, personal communication, November 10, 2011). Another drawback from the professor's point of view is the student who chooses not to participate in class discussions. This is usually the result of the student not being comfortable or perhaps too self-conscious speaking in to the microphone. In this program, when using the auditory tools, all three campuses participate. It is the instructor who is committed to a successful class who takes notice of the nonparticipatory student and encourages them to partake since this learning model relies on the students' ability to cooperate, work, and learn together.

The flexibility of distance education is one of the many reasons that this format appeals to many. The College of Pharmacy does have a mandatory schedule and mandatory attendance for all classes but one of the advantages is that it saves the student from having to drive the 120 mile trip to the main campus in Davie, Florida. For many pharmacy students who may be managing marriage and children and who live in the Palm Beach area, the benefit of receiving "live lectures" from video technology in the Student Educational Center Lecture Halls provides an opportunity for future pharmacists to attend school in Palm Beach or in Ponce, Puerto Rico, that they would not otherwise have. Even though the sites are considered satellite campuses, pharmacy students are offered the same material as the Davie pharmacy students including computer and pharmacy labs, a Consumer Informatics Center with additional textbooks and professional journals, and the electronic library within the Health Professions Division.

Experiential learning cannot be effectively conducted online, so pharmacy students begin their rotations during their second year of school. The opportunities

that students are given in the real world environment and the ability to apply the knowledge that they gained in school is then applied to practice experiences out in their community, local hospitals, and many pharmaceutical settings. "Having the ability to work outside of the classroom with my preceptors is an amazing experience. I also consider them my professors and they help guide me and teach me while we work side by side. The grades that I receive from them are just as important as the grades that I receive in school. By the time I graduate from Nova, I will have had 3 years of working out in the field-you can't ask for much more than that" (Hale, 2011).

The North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination is an exam "created by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy to help individual state boards of pharmacy assess an individual's competency and knowledge so that he or she may be given a license to practice" (National Association of Boards of Pharmacy, 2011). In order for students to excel in school and be prepared to "meet the needs and challenges of tomorrow's healthcare environment," achieving competencies in the NSU-COP curriculum is critical. "We strive to establish ourselves as a leader in pharmacy education, at both the professional and graduate levels, by continually improving our educational programs, increasing our involvement, and strengthening our service commitment" (Nova Southeastern University College of Pharmacy, 2011). Pharmacy students at all three campuses surpass the North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination state and national levels and these same test scores show that the off-site Pharmacy students actually perform better at the smaller campuses than their counterparts in Davie (Nova Southeastern University College of Pharmacy, 2011).

# **FUTURE IMPLICATIONS**

The road that lies ahead for practitioners in traditional institutions may be difficult to navigate as different teaching and learning formats are introduced in the new digital revolution. Those who insist on resisting innovation and change will be left behind. Embracing technology with the intention of creating the best environments for students to thrive in will be rewarding for all. Present day students known as Millenials will expect and demand to be taught in many embrace learning styles outside of the realm of the traditional classroom. Faculty will need to understand to how to "walk the walk" and "talk the talk" with technology if they plan on preparing a successful road for future pharmacists. The implications of these changes within the practice of education and specifically the professional programs are vast. There will be many challenges as well as opportunities for those who are willing to have an open mind. Unknown variables in life will always exist, but it is how well educators research and prepare for change that will make all the difference.

The blended delivery model presented in this article was intended to serve as a benchmark of technology integration. Other graduate and undergraduate programs can learn, adopt, and enhance their own format to serve the demands of their students. The implications of empowering our students with technology are numerous as its use is not "cookie cutter" and can be applied to most any program. Close attention should be paid to the active learning segment to engage students through collaborative learning since this has proven to be helpful in an increasingly technologically driven environment.

Harvard Graduate School offers educators a look in to the future with a 3-day seminar called The Future of Learning. They sum up their explanation of the future of learning in a nutshell. Their website reads:

The Future of Learning invites educators to examine what, where and how children and adults should learn in order to thrive in the twenty-first century. When teachers embrace learning for the future, they nurture competencies such as expert thinking, collaboration and entrepreneurship. They foster intercultural understanding, environmental stewardship and global citizenship. They invite students to understand complex problems, create quality work and express themselves through traditional and new digital media. Their ultimate goal is to prepare students to live ethical and reflective lives in rapidly changing environments. (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2011)

The future that beckons today's student and entices tomorrow's will use a blend of traditional brick and mortar curriculum and design together with video broadcast and online options. This will provide the challenging concepts and opportunities for students to join forces and to become successful leaders in a competitive global society.

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# **Compass Learning**

# A New Alternative to Credit Retrieval— One School's Perspective

Tina M. Davis

# INTRODUCTION

s a middle school math teacher, I always try to prepare my students for the next school year. Unfortunately, not all students are ready to move on, in which case they fail my class and do not earn their credit. In previous years, students who failed a class during the school year had to either endure repeating the class in summer school, or face the same teacher again the next school year. Due to budget cuts in summer school programs and class size limit restrictions in Florida, a new alternative is needed. The Lee County



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School District in Southwest Florida has found a solution to this challenge. I will highlight how my school, Paul Laurence Dunbar Middle, uses this new technology.

# **BACKGROUND**

The Lee County School District is located in Southwest Florida. This is a mostly urban area. We serve over 82,000 students in 119 schools. This is the ninth largest district in the state and the 40th largest in the nation (Lee County School District, 2011a). We are a fairly diverse district with 48.8% White, 30.4% Hispanic, 15.4% Black, 3.5% multiracial, 1.6% Asian, and 0.2% Indian (Lee County School District, 2011b). We have a graduation rate of 80.3%, which is higher than the state average. About 70% of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch (Lee County School District, 2011c). Paul Laurence Dunbar Middle School is located in Fort Myers, Florida. There are 854 students enrolled, with a 63.47% minority rate. The school offers gifted, standard, intensive, and exceptional student education curriculum. Dunbar Middle has retained its status of being an "A"-rated school for the past 10 years. The teachers and staff are dedicated to keeping Dunbar a school of excellence.

# COURSE CREDITS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

Lee County middle schools have adopted a credit system for promotion to high school. Students must earn three credits each in

language arts, math, science, social studies, and one-half credit in career education. To earn one credit, a student must pass a course for an entire year. To earn the three credits in each subject, a student must pass the subject in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. If a student does not pass the course with a 60% average, the credit is not earned (Lee County School District, 2011d). Due to limited resources, summer school opportunities are not an option for sixth or seventh graders to make up the credit. It is also not productive to have students physically repeat the course by placing them in the same classes as underclass mates. The solution? Assign these students to a "credit retrieval" class where they can complete the necessary material online to earn the credit. Lee County has adopted the use of Compass Learning for this purpose. Students are able to work on the material at their own pace. If the material is not mastered, the supervising teacher can reassign the lessons as needed.

# WHAT IS COMPASS LEARNING?

Compass Learning was founded in 1969. The company envisioned a future where students could learn individually using computers. The company is headquartered in Austin, Texas, employs around 300 people, and has served more than eleven million students (Compass Learning, 2011a). Compass Learning Odyssey is a K-12 software based curriculum. Secondary students can enroll in courses such as language arts, math, science, social studies, electives, and Advanced Placement (AP) (Compass Learning, 2011b). Compass Learning Odyssey helps students develop Twenty-first century skills such as analysis, critical thinking and technology proficiency. These skills are developed through challenging activities that align to critical skills and objectives (Compass Learning, 2011c).

# How Does Compass Learning Work?

The software for Compass Learning is very easy to use. The district enrolls students in the program. Teachers then assign lessons for the students by selecting the appropriate topic and grade level. Teachers can pick and choose the lesson order or allow all lessons to be assigned by the program. Students are responsible for either viewing the interactive lesson or reading the content within, and are required to take quizzes to show mastery of the content. If students do not pass the quizzes with at least a 70%, the teacher can reassign the material for the student to try again. The entire curriculum is online with no direct instruction given. There is no collaboration with other students, no discussion with a distant teacher, none of the interaction one would normally associate with distance education.

# **COUNTY INITIATIVE**

Lee County schools have been using Compass Learning for 4 years. All 24 middle schools use the program. Students in the Alternative Learning Center (school for students with behavior problems) and homebound students (students who are home schooled due to health issues) use E2020. Although the county is pleased with the program for credit retrieval, they feel it is not rigorous or comprehensive enough to use for initial credit of a course. By utilizing this online program for credit retrieval, it prevents students from overwhelming the Florida Virtual School system.

# ONE SCHOOL'S PERSPECTIVE

At Paul Laurence Dunbar Middle School, 21 students are enrolled in Compass Learning. The students are assigned to a "credit retrieval" class that meets in a computer lab where each student works on their own lessons at their own pace. The supervising teacher monitors the students'

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progress and assists them as needed. This teacher can reassign a lesson if the student does not master the content. Students are allowed an entire year to make up the credit, but most can complete it in one semester. Some students may have to earn credit in more than one subject, which may take the entire year. When a student completes the course, the student is moved to an exploratory class at the semester change. If a student is doing poorly in other classes, the student is kept in the credit retrieval class and is then used as a study hall for the student to work. Earning the credit in an online class is proving to be more beneficial than repeating the course with the same teacher again.

# **CONCLUSION**

Compass Learning Odyssey has given middle schools in the Lee County School District a choice for earning lost credit. Using the program instead of mandating that students repeat the course in a classroom saves time and money. Students can earn their lost credit faster than taking the class again. Taking the class online saves the district money.

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# Using Web 2.0 Tools for Feedback in The Classroom

# **Christine Anderson**

# INTRODUCTION

he 2011 classroom environment is very different compared to classrooms a few years ago. Technology has provided an innovative way to engage students and incorporate peer interactions, transforming the learning environment to reflect mobile learning systems. One of the critical components of instruction is the ability for an educator to understand whether or not his or her students comprehend the learning targets of a lesson. Technology offers educators a way to receive that immediate feedback, which is critical to changing instructional practices and increasing student achievement.



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Reducing the amount of time that students are off task is an ongoing task for most educators. Classrooms consist of varied learners that need lessons differentiated based upon their skill level. Understanding if a student comprehends the task at the time when concepts are being learned is imperative to helping the child succeed at a level beyond the minimal requirements (Ashton, 2001).

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Arafeh, Levin, Rainie, & Lenhart, 2002), teachers today have not learned to change their teaching practices to depict the way students today learn naturally. Students communicate at home through social media with their peers. These interactions occur frequently. Therefore, this type of learning is a way that students could connect with one another for collaboration purposes. As students' interests vary so does their group. Social networks change to match the curiosity of the child. Students are already comfortable using the Internet. In fact, this is the way that they would probably do best in school, due to the familiarity of online programming (Solomon & Schrum, 2007). Inevitably, change does occur in the classroom but it is difficult to adjust our way of teaching and move forward with this generation.

Williams and Chinn (2009) discuss the importance of educators to teach differently to the "net generation." These students have a different expectation of the classroom environment and mode of learning. Traditional ways of teaching are not empowering to these students. The sit

and get method of teaching and learning is not as productive as the engaging technology environment where students are challenged and encouraged to succeed through interactive activities. Net learners are students who process information differently. These students are used to the collaborative engagement atmosphere filled with technology-rich experiences; therefore, it is important for teachers to reflect this understanding and infuse technology into daily lessons to provide a balanced approach to teaching and learning.

# **INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY**

The evolution of technology over the last decade has greatly impacted the educational system by transforming an environment that consisted of chalkboards, overheads, desks, and slates into mass virtual communication and information highways that promote higher-level thinking. In addition, technology tools are being used for educating individuals by fostering inquisitiveness and creating highly effective collaborative learning communities (Saettler, 2004).

The use of iPhones, iPads, and iPods has created an instant messaging center for our students to research information at the touch of a button and respond in a meaningful manner. Students are creating digital stories to demonstrate learning and gather information through the use of survey tools to present research to their peers. In addition, Web 2.0 tools used have given students the opportunity to showcase their learning in an engaging and motivational manner (Troutner, 2010).

# **FEEDBACK**

According to Marzano, Pitler, Hubbell, Kuhn, and Malensoki (2007) feedback provides the evidence that educators need to understand student learning. Once the classroom teacher has taught the lesson, feedback gives them the information to see

if the students have learned the standards to be successful with grade level curriculum. Feedback has to follow certain guidelines to be effective in the classroom. The feedback for the teacher needs to be corrective in nature, timely, specific to the criterion, and enable students to give input to see reflective understanding of content (Marzano et al., 2007). It would not benefit a child to receive the information regarding how he or she did on a unit test well into the next unit. If this information is given in a timely manner the student can correct his or her errors and continue to build upon past experiences.

Productive feedback is not only in the form between the teacher and student. Peer feedback is just as valuable. When students critique one another's work they are broadening and developing their reviewing and improving writing skills (Hsiao & Brusilovsky, 2011). Peer feedback is sometimes even more beneficial to the learning environment because when students respond to and explain material they are gathering more information to push into memory. In doing so, they are getting the content in a variety of ways and explaining what they have learned through productive feedback. Peer feedback is a way for students to give meaningful reactions to content.

# **REASONS FOR FEEDBACK**

There are a variety of reasons to implement time for feedback in the classroom. Feedback offers a way for teachers to increase student learning, engage students, enhance student achievement, help students stay on task, provide better outcomes on tests, improve student understanding, and monitor independence. Educators can then utilize this information to inform them of any changes that they need to make in curriculum and/or instruction. When receiving this information it is critical that feedback gathered from the student, and what is done with that feedback, occur in a timely manner to be effective in helping students be successful in the learning environment (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2011). Another form of feedback is assessment. When students take quizzes or exams the teacher is able to identify what skills the student needs assistance with to move on to the next lesson (Stupans, Scutter, & Pearce, 2010). The teacher is also able to see if reteaching needs to occur.

# TOOLS FOR FEEDBACK

There are many types of Web resources that educators can use in the classroom to gather immediate feedback, including quizzes, games, and simulations. Many of these resources incorporate higher order thinking skills such as problem solving, collaboration, and planning. Some of these tools allow the student to try the task over and over again until mastery is achieved. Another benefit of using these online tools is the way they engage students in the learning process. Some tools encourage students to keep moving through the levels to promote growth in knowledge. The activities are usually grade appropriate or skill level dependent where the students can enter a level based on their prior knowledge and ability level. Teachers can also monitor the student progress to ensure that learning is occurring (Marzano et al., 2007).

# **E-PORTFOLIO**

According to Barbera (2009) an e-portfolio is a detailed way to get information using critical and creative thought. By using this mode of assessment the student is able to continuously improve using higher level thinking to reflect and discuss on his or her thought pattern. In addition, the teacher, student, and parent are able to see this improvement over a period of time. An e-portfolio lends itself to in-depth collaboration from teacher-student and

peer interactions. This is a formative way to evaluate students that actively engages the student in the improvement of their own learning.

# **EDMODO**

Edmodo is another way for students and teachers to give feedback to one another. Students enjoy this mode of learning because it looks like the popular social network, Facebook. The teacher is able to post a question, quiz, or an assignment for the students to respond to. In the case of a question, multiple students can respond to the teacher's question and also they can build on one another's response. This type of collaboration is highly engaging. The students are given direct feedback based upon his or her response.

Edmodo provides the student and teacher with immediate feedback. The teacher, for example, may load a quiz on a story the class has read in reading class. The students are able to go on and access the guiz and receive feedback from the classroom teacher in a timely manner. Students can use Edmodo as a warehouse for their assignments. The teacher is able to grade the assignments, download the grades to an Excel spreadsheet, and load the information into his or her grade book. Students are also responding to stories in an online literature circle format that equips the students with perspectives from all learners within their group.

Teachers can load the student technology expectations for their grade level onto a Google form that is then placed on Edmodo. Students can take the quiz and the teacher can gather the information to teach technology skill deficits. The students are given feedback based on how well they did on the quiz and is provided with extension activities to work toward mastery.

# **GOOGLE DOCS**

Google Docs is another collaboration tool that can be used for feedback. It can be

used with students across a distance when gathering notes to complete an assignment. Administrators can use this tool to provide feedback on district documents that explain initiatives. This information can be gathered and then the document can be changed to reflect the true learning occurring in the district. Students can use the presentation tool to create a Google PowerPoint and other classmates can add or respond right on the slides. The teacher can also go into the presentation and edit, comment, or view the information.

# **WIKIS**

Wikis can be a great source to provide unlimited input from students for continuous improvement. Student can utilize this tool to create a group project on a difficult subject matter. The teacher and students are able to see what tasks each participant has completed on the project and how the parts fit together to create a comprehensive document (Marzano et al., 2007). The teacher is also able to go into the wiki and provide feedback to the students while they are completing the assignment. There are many free wikis that educators can use in their classroom with their students. Wikispaces, Peanut Butter Wiki, and High School Online Collaborative Writing are a few that allows students and teachers the opportunity to collaborate with one another for meaningful feedback.

# STUDENT RESPONSE SYSTEMS

Student response systems are handheld devices that offer the teacher immediate feedback while teaching. The students are anonymous in the collection pool. The teacher is able to identify the students based on the number that is correlated to the device the students are holding. The feedback collected is based on what questions the teacher puts into the system, specific to the learning task. The students are able to hold the device and as the teacher moves through the lessons the students

are able to weigh in on opinions by clicking on the designated letter that corresponds to the questions while the teacher is presenting. The teacher is then able to understand the ability levels of the students and then either move on or reinforce concepts (Marzano et al., 2007).

### SUMMARY

Recently introduced technologies can be used to provide students with meaningful feedback that and can help transform twenty-first century classrooms into mobile learning labs. In addition, technology provides educators with a means to attain knowledge and communicate with others across the global community.

Educators need to be equipped with the skills necessary to cultivate a rich, productive, and reflective practice throughout the learning experience (Wilhelm, 2007). Therefore, teachers need to focus on different delivery strategies and methods that will target all students.

Technology can be utilized in order to monitor individual progress. In addition, it can also be used as a tool to engage the learners by incorporating interactive components to a lesson to enhance the learning experience (Branch & Merrill, 2011).

The importance of offering students the opportunity to use Web 2.0 tools they are comfortable with can bring about authentic learning opportunities for productive feedback. Students and educators learn by doing. The more engaging, collaborative, and productive the feedback is the more the student will comprehend the information and succeed in the learning.

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THE MORE ENGAGING, COLLABORATIVE, AND PRODUCTIVE THE FEEDBACK IS, THE MORE THE STUDENT WILL COMPREHEND THE INFORMATION AND BE LIKELY TO LEARN.

# A Closer Look at Distance Learning in the Kansas City, Missouri School District

# **Shelley Brown Cooper**

# INTRODUCTION

ow, in a failing school district, does an administrative leader-ship team implement a district-wide distance learning program? Which district level management decisions were made? In short, how and why did Phase II of a transformation plan become a reality?

# BACKGROUND OF KCMSD SCHOOL DISTRICT

It is necessary to gather a historical perspective of the large, urban, majority-



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minority Kansas City, Missouri School District (KCMSD) in order to understand the recent transformations that have taken place. Very few school districts have experienced as much turmoil, controversy, and bad press as this district. It has "shrunken from 22,000 students in 2008 to 17,000 students in 2011, and has had more than two dozen superintendents in the past four decades" (Sulzberger, 2011). It has held provisional accreditation since 2008 and lost state accreditation January 1, 2012 (About KCMSD website, 2011).

According to the About KCMSD website, the racial composition is now 63.3 African American, 25.4% Hispanic, and 8.6% Caucasian. It is considered a Title 1 district due to its 80.3% free and reduced lunch popu-(http://www.kcpublicschools.org). Discipline reports are reported to be above the state average. Discipline incident reports state wide are 2 incidents per 100 students. In the KCMSD, the rate is 8 incidents per 100 students. The dropout rate is 16. 9% for the district compared to 3% statewide. Composite ACT scores are 21 for Missouri students and 16.5 for students in the KCMSD (Missouri Comprehensive Data System, 2011).

The Missouri Comprehensive Data System (2011) reports discouraging statistics for the KCMSD because it failed to meet Missouri State Improvement Plan levels in both mathematics and communication arts for Grades 3-12 during the 2010-2011 school year (Missouri Department of Ele-

mentary and Secondary Education, 2011b). In addition, acceptable attendance levels and graduation rates were not attained in 2011. While most school districts' scores improved, the 2011 scores were lower than those reported in 2010 (Missouri Department of Elementary School Education, 2011b). Escalating Adequate Yearly Progress targets that are required under the federal No Child Left Behind law for student achievement will increase by 8 percentage points annually, on a pace to reach the federal goal of 100% proficiency by the year 2014 (Missouri Department of elementary and Secondary Education, 2011).

# TRANSFORMATION PLAN

However, despite its numerous shortcomings and hardships, there was a plan. As a result of the district's drastic situation, John Covington, former superintendent of the KCMSD, has implemented a two-step transformation plan that has infused extensive technological advances into the school system during the 2009 through 2013 school years. Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, virtual, online, and distance learning opportunities were created on the high school level. Digital portfolio assessment practices for all grade levels were to be used to promote studentcentered learning. In addition, Covington incorporated student-centered and project-based learning in newly developed technology rich classroom environments (2009, p. 7).

KCMSD's mission and focus toward ensuring student readiness for the workforce has increased the district's emphasis on infusing technology in student learning, teacher preparation, administration and data management, resource distribution and technical support. The strategic planning leadership team was charged with implementing this new technology initiative throughout the district operating under demanding demographic constraints.

Covington's team developed the plan in an effort to revive a failing district and improve its chances of regaining its state accreditation. The plan is entitled The Transformation Plan: Phase I and Phase II. The transformation plan consists of five key initiatives to be executed from 2009 through 2013. It plans to create a system of student-centered learning; preparing college, career and workforce ready graduates; revolutionizing the district workforce, transforming the environment and cultivating communication (Covington, 2009).

Phase I of the transformation plan took place from 2009 through 2010 and focused on operational issues. Phase II, slotted to begin during the 2011 and 2012 school years, involves right-sizing the buildings and staff by cutting costs and unnecessary or antiquated programming. Covington uses the term "right-sizing the school district" instead of "down-sizing" to describe cutting the budget by more than \$50 million to provide a balanced budget and saving the KCMSD from bankruptcy (p. 4). Over half of the district's 64 schools were closed and nearly 1,000 employees were eliminated. During Phase II of Covington's transformation plan, the district plans to "right-size" the school district and "implement a rigorous and relevant prekindergarten-12th grade system of studentcentered teaching and learning" (Covington, 2009). One important tenet of this phase of the transformation plan involves building "technology rich classroom environments." As part of this technology initiative, massive changes were implemented during the 2011-2012 school year including a 3-year initiative:

Equipping classrooms with interactive white boards, video projectors, classroom computers, audio systems, DVD players, and document cameras. Distance learning labs will be installed in each of the seven high schools and the Foreign Language Academy. In addition, a second lab will be added to each high school and

Carver Elementary School (Covington, 2009, p. 4).

Transformation Plan Phase II's five key initiatives are focused on producing more college, career and workforce ready graduates by providing additional technological learning opportunities. The plan specified implementing "virtual, online and distance learning" activities in order to provide KCMSD's students "access to a wide range of courses from advanced placement to fine arts to foreign language courses that they can access anytime, anywhere." Distance learning labs were specifically identified due to their ability to allow for virtual learning experiences, expand students' abilities to take college and dual-credit courses, and provide educational experiences not available in traditional classroom settings (Covington, 2009).

# **DISTANCE EDUCATION**

The distance learning goals provided by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2011a) dictate that "distance learning should enable students to achieve their educational goals by delivering academically sound courses and educational support services that are flexible, responsive and innovative. In addition, the distance learning courses should provide the same academic standards, criteria, quality, and content as traditional onsite programs" (p. 2). Also, the recent loss of accreditation by the KCMSD might possibly impact the implementation of the distance learning program within the district. Further study is needed to examine the implications resulting from the loss of accreditation on new curriculum efforts within a school district. In light of a possible state takeover, procedures are needed on how future planning will be conducted to proceed with the distance learning initiative within the KCMSD.

Distance education has a history spanning over 160 years. Simonson, Smaldino,

Albright, and Zvacek (2012), Moore (2007) and Rice (2006) trace the innovations in this educational method from correspondence, radio, television through present day video conferencing and Internet techniques.

Simonson et al. (2012), Moore (2007) and Smith (2009) describe the benefits of distance learning as the instructor and learner can be separated by time and space; instructor expertise can be utilized by many more students worldwide, regardless of either participant's location; collaborative activities can be explored via distance education and learning environments are no longer dictated by logistics. Simonson et al. (2012) also notes that distance education can "supplement existing curricula, promote course sharing among schools, and reach students who cannot (for physical reasons or incarceration) or do not (by choice) attend school in person" (p. 138). Harrison (2005) reports several reasons for the pursuit of distance learning in the K-12 school system, namely: the course is not available locally; to resolve timetable conflicts; to meet diploma requirements; for program enrichment; course required, and to improve grades (p.

While it is difficult to estimate the scope of K-12 distance education, virtual schools have had a national impact for many years (Moore & Anderson, 2003). Virtual schools are present in Florida, Arkansas, Mississippi, Iowa, South Dakota, Kansas and many more (Simonson et al., 2012). Participation in K-12 distance education is more prevalent in rural areas due to lack of qualified instructors and potential low enrollment in more sparsely populated school districts.

The strategic planning conducted by the leadership team included a multitude of details: funding acquisition, facility design, construction, equipment purchases, staff training and development to curriculum design and evaluation. Leadership teams must seek funding for distance education

programs. Increased use of the federally funded Star Schools Program has been cited as an example of supplemental distance learning with urban K-12 learners. However, some researchers claim that rural schools are more likely to achieve equity objectives through distance learning than high-minority and low-income schools (Tushnet & Fleming-McCormick, as cited in Moore & Anderson, 2003). Leadership teams in Iowa, Mississippi and Alabama sought Star Schools funding to assist in their distance education programs (Three Statewide Approaches to Distance Education, 2000).

Moore and Anderson (2003) reported that the federal government has seen educational technology and distance learning utilized as tools for use in education reform and school improvement efforts, such as group-based videoconference courses. These funds are geared more toward high-need school districts and lowincome populations (p. 685). The KCMSD recounted unacceptable results in math, communication arts, and attendance and graduation rates. Its population consists of more than 80% eligible for free and/or reduced lunches. While distance learning technologies are far more commonly used for student enrichment in K-12 schools than for direct K-12 instruction, the superintendent's decision to implement distance learning opportunities throughout the district would provide additional avenues to address low test scores and declining graduation rates (Clark, 2003, as cited in Moore & Anderson, 2003).

After studying the literature, the KCMSD's strategic planning leadership team collaboratively suggested offering Advanced Placement courses within the distance learning labs at the six high schools (McBeth, 2011). The majority of courses taught via distance education in most high schools are Advanced Placement courses. The respective state boards of education mandate the requirements for Advanced Placement courses. English, U.S.

history, biology, chemistry, physics, calculus, and selected foreign languages were offered via distance learning at the majority of the high school's distance learning labs (Bral, 2007; Henly, 2009; McBeth, 2011; Sabatino, 2008; Smith, 2009; SREB, 2006).

Many of the decisions made by these areas with statewide distance learning programs provided guidance to the KCMSD's strategic planning leadership team. Specifically, South Dakota, Oklahoma, and Iowa began offering distance education in their schools. In 1996, South Dakota initiated the "Wiring the Schools Project" by wiring of all K-12 schools within the state allowing for high speed Internet and videoconferencing (p. 5). This initiative resulted in the Digital Dakota Network that linked every school building to a compressed video network. Oklahoma participated in the Star Schools Assistance program in 1988. It was selected to participate based on its status of being underfunded and disadvantaged (Martin, 2009). This early initiative equipped 35 schools with equipment necessary to participate in satellite-based programming: TVRO satellite C/Ku band antenna and receiver, television/monitor, videocassette recorder, TV/VCR cabinet and cordless telephone (Martin, 2009, p. 53). The purpose of this telecommunications project is to improve instruction at the elementary and secondary school levels, primarily in the areas of mathematics, science, and foreign languages (Martin, 2009, p. 51).

Berg (2002) posits five elements of distance education: physical separation; administration by an educational organization; frequent use of various media, including print, video, film, computer and audio; communication between student and teacher, synchronous or asynchronous; and administrative focus on the nontraditional learner (p. xvi).

Boschmann (1995) insisted that two fundamental steps take place when designing and building a distance learning lab: establish a design team and listen closely to the faculty and students. In addition, permanent and portable technologies need to be determined, along with distribution of electronics (p. 34). Designing a distance learning laboratory consists of three categories of design decision making.

Environmental design is related to the project's architect. Technology design focuses on integrating audio, optical, video and computer technologies into one system. The third category, interface design, deals with ergonomics and human-technology systems. (p. 39)

When the distance learning labs were being built, the leadership team needed to utilize the expertise of the Facilities Management Department as the numerous design and construction issues were considered. Boschmann (1995) advise that four categories need to be considered when contemplating designing an electronic classroom: (1) when, where, and how people learn; (2) what and why they learn; (3) the evolving role of faculty; and (4) the future of the institution itself. The classroom must allow for interactive discussion, flexible model of student-teacher interaction. Access to information is an integral part of the design therefore, it must encourage learning that must be allowed to continue across time and place by expanding information resources and communication outside the classroom. The distance learning labs will allow for individuals to continue the learning process at different times, at different paces, and at different places, even when they happen to gather in the same place at the same time.

Three additional major categories of design must be considered when creating a distance learning facility: environment, technology, and interface. The environmental design project architect considers comfort factors, projection screens, lighting, writing boards, acoustics and audio systems, ergonomics, and ADA compliance (Americans with Disabilities Act). Technol-

ogy design focuses on integration of multimedia, audio, video, optical, and computer technologies into one workable system. The design team should also consider whether the equipment is user-operated, expandable, reliable, upgradable, capable of handling multiple platforms, mainteand secure. Interface nance-friendly, design issues deal with ergonomics and human technology systems. In other words, can the equipment interact with humans and operate with other forms of technology. The human technology interface should be simple to operate and accessible to tech support 24/7 (Boschmann, 1995).

# **PLAYERS**

The key players involved in the KCMSD's Strategic Planning Leadership Team are the superintendent, the executive director of instructional technology (technical), the director of secondary schools (curriculum), the manager of instructional technology (academic), the director of guidance and counseling (scheduling), and the director of facilities management (construction).

# **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Definitions of major concepts: distance learning, synchronous education, distance learning lab, distance learning facilitator, codecs, student-centered learning.

- Distance learning: Institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors" (Simonson et al., 2012, p. 7).
- Synchronous education: live, two-way interaction in the educational process; occurring simultaneously and in real time. Teachers lecture, ask questions, and lead discussions. Learners listen, answer, and participate (Simonson et al., 2012).

- Distance learning lab: classroom providing instruction utilizing two-way, full motion video and two way live audio broadcasts to and from a remote location with a certified teacher acting as a facilitator (Moore & Anderson, 2003).
- Distance learning facilitator: certified teacher, trained as a distance learning instructor in a technology-enhanced, distance learning classroom
- CODECs: "A coder-decoder ... is used to convert analog signals, such as television, to digital form for for transmission and back again to the original analog form for viewing" (Schlosser & Simonson, 2010, p. 110).
- Student-centered learning: Students take ownership of their learning and show mastery through hands-on, project-based education (Covington, 2009).

# BUILDING THE DLLS (COSTS/ EQUIPMENT + FACILITIES)

Each of the six KCMSD high schools located within the KCMSD contain distance learning labs with the following equipment: theater seating, CODEC, two interactive whiteboards, multiple monitors and microphones, document cameras, COWS (carts on wheels) with 33 laptops loaded with Microsoft Office, Rosetta Stone Spanish, and Rosetta Stone French. These schools are: East, Northeast, Southwest Early College Campus, Paseo Academy of Fine and Performing Arts, Lincoln College Preparatory Academy, and Central High Schools.

The Implementation Team's planning begins six months prior to the beginning of the next school year. Microsoft Project software that performs computerized Gantt charts assists the implementation team in designing, construction, ordering supplies and installation of equipment. The approximate cost of each distance learning lab is \$160,000-\$190,000 (Anstaett & Brenneman, 2011).

# **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Sabatino (2008) offers suggestions for classroom management techniques to be utilized when teaching K-12 students at a distance. Since videoconferencing and virtual environments offer the greatest potential for interactivity, classroom management is critical to optimum learning (Sabatino, 2008; Urban, 2006).

# TRAINING FACILITATORS

New facilitators should be brought in and taught the Tandberg (videoconferencing) format. However, when facilitators are temporary, or if the Tandberg system needs to be revised, adjustments will be made accordingly. It is necessary that the full installation of the new system and the control boards are supervised to ensure they are installed correctly (Anstaett, 2011).

# **SCHEDULING**

Six to 8 weeks prior to the beginning of school, the implementation team begins reevaluating and revising the distance learning lab facilitator training classes. Facilitators must be hired and trained on the job skills necessary to fulfill the facilitator's responsibilities. The teachers are assigned to labs and will complete training in ample time before schools. If necessary, training on the previous system might be necessary until the new system can be completely installed. Training documents should be developed to instruct teachers in running the document cameras, microphones, CODECS, computers, ENO interactive white boards and other equipment utilized in the distance learning labs (Anstaett, 2011; Brenneman, 2011).

Information technology trainers and the distance learning lab managers should work together in classrooms with facilitators and teachers to assist as they entered this new method of delivering education. Teacher reassignments and scheduling changes were made to accommodate the

changes in curriculum and staffing. Additional construction and installation requests were made and are in the process of being completed. The labs are expected to be completely operational and identical in most design details. At that time, all teachers and facilitators will be provided additional and extensive training. The teachers have been the stable foundation for most of this (Anstaett, 2011; South Dakota Department of Distance Education, 2003).

#### **TEACHERS**

Several teachers are participating in the distance learning lab program by teaching the following subjects: Advanced Placement literature, Advanced Placement biology/chemistry/physics, French I and II, Spanish 3 and 4, calculus, and accounting.

#### SUCCESSES

All of the distance learning labs were open on time, according to the transformation plan. Students are able to take courses not offered by their local schools. Budget constraints were adhered to. Students can enjoy a state-of-the-art facility. Students can receive extrinsic motivation by learning in a separate setting from their peers.

#### **CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS**

Various distance learning lab hardware and equipment installation are not fully operational. Bell and assembly schedules periodically experience conflicts. There is concern that Advanced Placement courses will be discontinued and replaced with International Baccalaureate courses that are more holistic and very expensive. The state of Missouri pays for students to take the Advanced Placement examination to earn college credit. Some teachers would like to see a dual credit opportunity for students to get high school and college credit simultaneously. Communication between

facilities needs to be better defined. More teacher and facilitator training is needed for troubleshooting equipment and software.

#### STATE TECHNOLOGY PLAN

The KCMSD's Technology Plan includes the installation of one additional distance learning lab in each of the district's six high schools by August 2012. One-to-one mobile/tablet devices are also planned to increase technical expertise within the student population.

#### **FUTURE PLANS AND EXPECTATIONS**

The distance learning labs will be used to initiate relationships with students in New York, England, France, and Spain. Neighborhood connections will commence as afternoon and evening programming is started in the distance learning labs. It is hoped that the increase in academic rigor will aid the KCMSD in raising its standardized test scores.

#### **EVALUATION**

An evaluation of the results of the combined efforts of the strategic planning leadership team and other departments will determine the success of the distance learning labs. Simonson et al. (2012) discussed the importance of evaluation as "part of the plans to move from traditional face-to-face instruction to distance education" (p. 348). In this work, Simonson (2012) describes an evaluation of distance education programs using five steps: reactions (Did they like it?); learning (Did they learn it?); transfer (Will they use it?); results (Will it matter?); and return on investment (p. 349). These evaluation steps will provide insight into the success of the new technological initiative.

The AEIOU Evaluation approach by Fortune and Keith (1992, as cited in Simonson et al., 2012), provided program evalua-

tion specifically for distance education implementation projects. The five components of the AEIOU approach provide "formative information to the staff about the implementation their project and summative information about the value of the project and its activities (p. 353). Accountability (A) asks "Did the project planners do what they said they were going to do?" Effectiveness (E) asks "How well done was the project?" Impact queries "Did the project, course, or program make a difference?" Organizational Context (O) poses "What structures, policies, or events in the organization or environment helped or hindered the project in accomplishing its goals?" Unanticipated consequences (U) inquires "What changes or consequences of importance happened as a result of the projects that were not expected?" (p. 353).

These questions will provide insight into the processes, methods and decision-making activities utilized by the strategic planning leadership team while developing a distance learning program within the KCMSD.

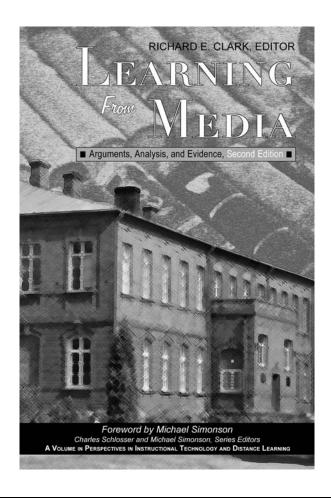
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# **E-learning Support**

### A Library Perspective

#### Sunem Beaton-Garcia, Christianne Casper, and Judi Tidwell

#### INTRODUCTION

he library is traditionally a building found directly in the center of campus and is the ever-evolving hub of student activity. Gone are the card catalogs and journal stacks to be replaced by online catalogs and databases that can be accessed anywhere and anytime. How are libraries addressing the needs of students we never see? How can we help e-learners and at the same time transform our libraries into a valued service in a "self-service" society (Patkar, 2009)?

#### **OUR DISTANCE LEARNER**

The term "distance learner" may conjure up for some an image of a student in a rural locale remotely logging into classes, perhaps without ever setting foot on campus. That is not necessarily the case of our students. Students who take online courses are generally referred to as distance learners, or e-learners. But not all students who take online courses live at a distance from the college or university. Local students may choose to become distance learners simply because they like



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the convenience or flexibility of the online environment. In fact many of these students often come to the library and use its resources.

This is the case at our institution where most of our students commute to campus while taking an online or hybrid course during their program. The college offers a variety of e-learning options where students can choose from blended or fully online courses.

Currently there are five associate and four certificate programs that are offered completely online (Broward College, 2010). In order for these students to reach academic success they must have access to the same library services as those who attend on campus. In fact, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools requires that e-learning classes be equivalent to oncampus classes in instructional standards and resource access (Educational Support, 2009). Our students expect equal access to the information they will need to be successful in their studies.



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## PRODUCTS AND PROGRAMS FOR E-LEARNERS

Most online learners are unlikely to walk into the library building on campus; thus their institution's library may be invisible to them (Raspa & Ward, 2000). So how do we become visible and fulfill our promise to give our online students a complete library presence?

A shift toward virtual campuses from brick and mortar institutions has resulted in the creation of digital and virtual libraries (Dougherty, 2009; Ralph & Stahr, 2010). The librarians, in collaboration with the Learning Resource Center at Broward College have developed many different tools and approaches to address this challenge.

First is an online tutoring service called Smarthinking. Broward College students have 24/7 access to the services of Smarthinking, which is a subscription service that provides live support and feedback on assignments. The tutors of Smarthinking are former educators who provide assistance with accounting, mathematics, sciences, nursing, Spanish, and writing assignments. Since the college offers free tutoring on-campus, this is a great alternative for online learners.

Second is the library's participation in the Ask-a-Librarian service. This website allows libraries to provide virtual reference assistance. The service has grown and continues to meet the demands of its users, such as with the recently added texting service. The hours are especially convenient for distance learners as it is open much later than our library, providing assistance for those who need help in the late evening. In addition to regular morning hours they are open until midnight. Questions submitted after midnight are answered the next day.

The third approach is the creation and adaptation of all library pages for web optimization. One of our most technically savvy librarians developed a mobile version of the library website and its services. This is a great way to get the library's

resources into the hands of the students regardless of their geographical location.

Fourth, we recently offered our first eopen house for our e-learners. While we had a more limited response than expected we have since formed a stronger connection with faculty who teach online, as this is the most effectual way to reach these students. From this interaction recorded the sessions for future instruction and also to give us a benchmark for improvement. Using Wimba software for this session allowed us to use screen captures along with Powerpoint to illustrate while we spoke to the students and each other.

Next we acquired LibGuides and Campus Guides (for our multicampus college) which are products developed by Springshare. This is the latest approach for develpopular research guides oping pathfinders. LibGuides can be used to help students with subject-specific topics, or they can be more assignment driven. These tend to be very popular with the students because they provide precise instructions on where to locate information from many sources and in various formats. They also serve as reinforcement and handouts for library instruction. This sophisticated product is widget friendly and allows embedded images and video, podcasts, and links to documents and websites. While this program could be considered a bit pricey it is highly customizable and has enjoyed widespread use among libraries. If LibGuides is out of the question for your library there are other alternatives. Products like Koonji are multimedia friendly and allow blogrolls, RSS feed, embedded video and works well with Amazon and Google maps. The free bookmarking site Delicious has also been used for creating great research guides. While the strength of this product is linkrolls it combines them with RSS feeds and Feed to Java Script in order to output into a compelling list of resources onto any website (Kroski, 2007).

Last, we are creating modules for our new learning management system called Desire 2 Learn. The college made the switch to this LMS due to its easy integration with mobile technologies and ease of use in collaboration with all student services. As the college's LMS, this will be the primary tool for teaching and learning. It only makes sense that the library must establish a presence there if we are to reach students. Faculty has the option of customizing their courses to include modules created by the librarians.

#### LIBRARY ONLINE SERVICES

There are many library services available to our on-campus students. How do libraries offer these as a service for our distance learners?

#### REFERENCE

A distinctive feature of libraries is the ability to provide reference assistance. Therefore, it is crucial for libraries that serve distance learners to offer some form of virtual reference. Options could include a statewide partnership, like the aforementioned Ask-a-Librarian, or perhaps a local help desk. Smaller institutions may benefit from a consortium or statewide cooperative desk as they typically provide longer coverage hours, and flexibility for limited staff. Conversely, some libraries may opt to embed a widget for instant chat messaging such as Meebo, Chatango, or Plugoo on their library websites. This may give students a more personal experience and offer a more customized reference service. Regardless of which system is chosen, students should have a way to communicate with the library and receive reference assistance.

As discussed, virtual reference or chat reference can also take place in an e-mail and SMS (text messaging) format. Mobile technologies have evolved sufficiently so that conversation naturally takes place in these forms. Library users may feel more comfortable texting or e-mailing their questions. Some cooperative desks have this feature already built-in. Others may resort to using services like Text-A-Librarian, Google SMS, and Twilio. And last, virtual reference assistance could include voice over IP, video or cobrowsing using programs such as Skype and Windows Live Messenger, both available as an application for most smartphones.

#### **DOCUMENT DELIVERY**

Another library service we can make available to our distance learners includes making print journals, magazines, and newspaper articles available through document delivery. Most libraries have an interlibrary loan department whose mission is to obtain materials from other libraries for their patron use. In the case of distance learners this department can make local or print materials accessible by scanning and e-mailing these items to the student.

#### SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES

Distance learners may also depend on the online availability of special collections and archived items. Documents, images and keyword searchable video can be digitized to make these items accessible.

#### VIRTUAL TOURS

Last, the use of virtual tours is a great way to make students feel like they are part of the library even though they may be far away. A simple script and still shots can be set to music through programs like Animoto. For a more sophisticated output many libraries have created video-based library tours. The range of creativity is endless. One trend is to offer library tours via mobile technologies and augmented reality. Through the lens of their smartphones the library can be a brand new experience with superimposed text and graphics. Many of the resources we have mentioned

are free. All it takes is the will and initiative to make our libraries more welcoming to our distance learners.

# STUDENT ACCESS AND THE DIGITAL LIBRARY

Access to resources becomes an issue when students are geographically separated from their libraries. Whether it is a remote learning site or physical limitations, students are entitled to access library materials. Just like our local students, distance learners require access to library materials and resources in order to complete their assignments. Happily the twenty-first century library and its resources are no longer a brick and mortar building but can be accessed wherever the user is located. This means library materials can be accessed on any device that has Internet access.

#### **EBOOKS**

Students tend to associate books with research. In fact most reference questions begin with "I need a book about ..." Ebooks are wonderful additions to the library as these can be accessed remotely and are easy to use once the patron is authenticated. For many libraries a sizeable portion of the collection development funds are being designated toward these resources.

E-books are becoming more sophisticated with features like highlighting, insertable comments, and the ability to convert text to hyperlinks making this a very popular resource for distance learners. But what about books that are not available electronically?

Most libraries will mail books to students who are in a different geographic location. There has been some debate as to library policies regarding shipping out materials. For example, some use the determining criteria of how many miles from campus does the student need to reside to determine if they will provide a mail ser-

vice. Regardless, best practices dictate that distance learners should receive the same services and benefits as those who attend face-to-face classes on campus.

#### **ARTICLES**

Access to articles in journals and magazines are mainly through library subscription to databases. Students who approach the reference desk are made aware of this but how do we communicate this to our distance learners? A prominent link for elearners on the library page could be very useful. The same link could be made available to all online instructors for the purpose of being added to their learning management systems. An additional strategy is to create a way for our collection to be integrated into the student's workflow. This can be achieved by using a browser add-on, like Lib X for Firefox, which will alert the user if the library owns resources on that page (Gibbons, 2007).

#### **FACULTY SUPPORT**

Meeting the needs of online users begins with meeting the instructor's needs. Most instructors will agree that library services are necessary for student success. However, they are not always aware of the services that libraries can provide, especially for online courses. Thus, the first step is to conduct an assessment of the course and its assignments. If the online services are well known and are not being used it is imperative to find out why and how to improve the service for better effectiveness and efficiency. Sending a survey out to all faculty directly seeking feedback is an excellent way to not only determine the needs, but also the level of awareness of current services as well as an opportunity to create interest about online services (Thomsett-Scott & May, 2009).

Once feedback has been collected regarding faculty requirements, online services need to be developed or enhanced to meet these needs. One option is to provide

an embedded librarian. Staffing permitting, a librarian can be provided access to the online course with a discussion thread dedicated to library research questions. The librarian can monitor this thread providing responses and feedback to students' research. A quick turn-around time would be necessary in order to make this effective and for students to feel confident that questions are being reviewed quickly and efficiently. Other effective tools for online support are tutorials. The tutorials need to be clear and to the point; if too long students may become lost or lose interest and if muddied with details students will not follow through to the end (Thomsett-Scott & May, 2009).

Additional services include preparing resource guides that are subject specific, establishing direct article linking, and links to a web page for library services. Librarians can also provide live virtual orientations via Live Classroom, Wimba, or Elluminate. One of the most important options and probably the most overlooked, is providing contact information for a librarian on the course homepage. Being able to contact a specific person at the library (either by phone, e-mail, or in person) is extremely valuable for students and will help them feel more comfortable coming to the library for assistance.

Once the services and programs are available, marketing is the next major step. Instructors who are aware of library services are more likely to include library and research assignments in online courses (Thomsett-Scott & May, 2009). Librarians can promote these services when collaborating with faculty on projects, during departmental meetings, and at faculty meetings. Librarians need to be seen on campus, and visit faculty during office hours to discuss new services of interest. Email, library workshops, brown bag lunches, and online newsletters are also useful for advertising new online services. Also working with the campus or college instructional technology department will

ensure that library services will interface well with online courses and will also provide another outlet for marketing these services to faculty.

As with all services and programs, evaluation is of the utmost importance. Making sure that all services are meeting the faculty's needs for online courses means periodically re-evaluating these services. Surveying not only faculty but also students to see if services are being used, why (or why not), how they are being used and ways to improve should all be a part of the process. Instructors should be contacted each semester to review and revise the library services offered within the online courses. Syllabi should be reviewed to ensure that all library links, articles, and contact information are accurate. Communicating with faculty shows a commitment of support from librarians to the online community.

It is not enough to develop online resources for instructors; librarians must also market these services showing how the online programs can enhance the course and improve students' learning experience. Beyond marketing the services, regularly evaluating and updating these services is necessary to stay relevant to the online course. The online community has needs separate from the general academic community and librarians need to be involved within the online community to continue to meet the information literacy needs of students.

#### CONCLUSION

The library is no longer just a brick and mortar building; in essence it is wherever the user is and can be accessed at a time and place convenient to him or her. As the needs of our users change, libraries and library servicesmust also continue to evolve and grow in new directions. Only then can we remain relevant and useful to our users.

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# A Solution to the Educational Crisis in Nevada

#### James S. Jensen and Michael T. Kazek

# THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN NEVADA

he outcomes of a poor educational system in Nevada are having a drastic impact throughout the state. This ripple effect stagnates economic growth and development. The consequences drill down into the funding structures of the educational systems. In this article that negative effect is reviewed with possible solutions using a distance education approach. Further, it is to outline the

need for continuing innovation through collaboration among higher education, K-12 districts, and charter schools. Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval has said, "It's time for a fundamental change from the ground up and the top down" (Sandoval, n.d.). Nevada schools and districts do not have legislative barriers or laws to constrict the use of distance education. In fact, based upon this past legislative session of July 2011, laws have been enacted to legitimatize and develop this way of providing



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access to this type of education in Nevada (Rheault, 2011). Why is this so important in Nevada? Simply put, the current system is failing to reach to all students.

Nevada education ranks very near the bottom of all states in educational achievement. In 2009, no other state performed worse than Nevada's eighth-grade students in reading (Educational Alliance of Washoe County, 2011, p. 18). Nevada has only 17 school districts in a state of 110,540 square miles. Most of the population resides in Clark County with 1.9 million of the state's 2.7 million residents (Nevada Legislature, 2011). Clark County boasts a staggering 313,000 of the 436,000 students in Nevada (Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau [NLCB], 2011, p. 12). Nevada has two major urban centers: Las Vegas, in Clark County, and Reno/Carson City, in Washoe County. Five counties have less than 4,300 students but encompass a land mass totaling that of West Virginia. Districts face an increasing dilemma with a decline in per-pupil expenditures. Programs and courses have been cut, class sizes have increased, and teachers have been terminated under the provisions of reduction in force. These districts are slow to reform their brick-and-mortar thinking. As Nevada finds itself at the top of the national dropout rate with a dismal 51.3%, it is attempting to find alternative and cost saving measures to traditional K-12 education.

#### A VICIOUS CYCLE

There is a vicious cycle developing in Nevada. Nevada has one of the highest unemployment rates at 14.3% and a projected budget shortfall of \$1.5 billion in 2012. The state constitution requires a balanced budget, which will create havoc with state legislators. Nevada is ranked 47th in the nation in overall business rankings. While the tax climate is very favorable, businesses are looking at other factors such as new business start-up or in reloca-

tion (Educational Alliance of Washoe County, 2011). What does this mean for Nevada? Poor economic stability leads to loss in job creation, which leads to lack of revenue, which leads to decreased per pupil spending, which leads to a decline in education standards which leads to unfavorable conditions for new business, and the cycle continues. Schools receive much of their funding through the property taxes that are levied. The state of Nevada has seen a drop in the median home value of over 60% with 16,000 homes still held in reserve by banks in Clark County.

In August 2011, schools in the Clark County School District were mandated by district officials to inform parents of the pending loss of programs, activities, and courses on their websites. Many of these courses were Advance Placement and Honors due to the rather low enrollment in them, which also makes the statement that student achievement is significantly poor. In 2008, of the Nevada freshmen entering high school only 47.6% graduated in 4 years. Of those, only 26.4% entered college, with a mere 9.7% earning college degrees. This is less than half of the national average of 20.5%. This lack of K-12 and higher education graduates will result in a shortage of educated workers that the state will need by 2016.

## THE NEED FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

To solve these issues is to fundamentally change the way education is offered and delivered to students in Nevada. In the rural areas, which constitute the majority of the state, education needs to be accessed fairly and equally to all students regardless of location. Students in Nevada are dropping out of school at an alarming rate. In recent years, due to the economic recession, many high school students have taken jobs in service areas to support their families. Just over half (52.4%) of freshmen do not finish high school (NLCB, 2011, p.

28). State laws do permit districts a perpupil apportionment for any student 19 years of age or younger. The immediate need is to collectively approach dropouts with a plan for them to finish their graduation requirements. Distance education is the medium by which this can happen.

Nevada is a state that is primed for an infusion of distance education. Only four districts have programs to provide education in this fashion, but on a very small scale. In reviewing The Learning Network all of the factors currently exist (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 188). Students, peers, an technology instructor, content, another important piece, infrastructure, are needed for success. Superintendents have been actively engaged this past year with online curriculum companies such as Advanced Academics, K12.inc, and Pearson Learning, to seek programs and platforms that will work for their particular district. While distance education is not a new concept, school boards appear to be a little more skeptical in its offering to their students. In a recent Nevada Association of School Board Convention, Jamie Vollmer, author and keynote speaker, presented Vollmer's First Rule of School Restructuring: You cannot change a school without changing the culture of the surrounding town. This refers not just to the school board members, but to all citizens in the community (Vollmer, 2010). This culture is described by Rogers as part of diffusion of innovation. Diffusion is the process in which innovation is communicated (Rogers, 2003). Further, Rogers refers to this as a change with a degree of uncertainty resulting in a form of social change. In 1996, South Dakota Governor William J. Janklow's vision of providing a digital network of distance education to the entire state was also met with skepticism. Janklow was convinced that the stakeholders would fund and promote this form of education to connect all parts of the state if the theory of diffusion was followed. Working with the South Dakota Alliance for Distance

Education Project Leaders, the project was successful (South Dakota Department of Education, 2003).

#### **DISTANCE EDUCATION**

Distance education is the answer to some of the educational problems in Nevada. The students of this state need choices in their education. They need an individualized education that meets their needs in pacing, in variety of course offerings, in flexibility of schedule, and easy, 24 hour accessibility. They need curriculum that addresses their learning strengths and weaknesses. The students of Nevada need a choice that is not fully available with the current system.

Some charter schools as well as a few private schools and various higher education institutions offer distance education in Nevada. Even some high schools in the major school districts of the state offer limited options for distance education in Nevada. However the great majority of students here are unaware of their choices and options in this field. Nevada needs greater exposure to this option and greater adoption of it. The students of this state need this choice from a wider range of educational sources. They need this option as a possible solution to the problems that are plaguing the state education institutions as they currently exist. The question remains then as to how this might be accomplished. The answer is that Nevada needs to go through the process of diffusion as outlined by Rogers (2003).

# A DIFFUSION MODEL FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

Rogers defines diffusion as "the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system" (Rogers, 2003, p. 5). This definition points to four main elements observed in every diffusion process. The first element is the innovation,

which for Nevada would be distance education. This innovation has many advantages that traditional education lacks. These advantages, which have been outlined in many studies and reports, provide reason for serious consideration of mainstream adoption in Nevada-most importantly by its leaders and then by all stakeholders involved in the approval and implementation. The educational and governmental leaders of this state must be made aware of these advantages and studies so that they might make informed and intelligent decisions regarding this model of education. Rogers outlines the characteristics of an innovation as being; relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. When attempting to get distance education in Nevada adopted by leaders and followers alike, those outlined characteristics will need to be considered and addressed. The possibility of reinvention of the innovation will help as well. Distance education can be reinvented to meet best practices and improve success, even during implementation (Rogers, 2003).

The second element in Rogers' definition of diffusion is communication channels (Rogers, 2003). This is where Nevada needs some help. Current providers of distance education in Nevada have some interpersonal channels and even a few mass media channels, but these segments do not have a singular voice in the state and are often found in competition with each other. This competition and separation is counter to the idea of expanding distance education to all K-16 students in the state. A solution to this roadblock will be discussed in the following section. If student achievement is the overriding goal of all educators and the several providers of this innovation believe that this is a solution, then collaboration for mutual benefit and improvement should be sought. Nevada's distance educators should come together with the intent to diffuse distance education to every student who demands it and its advantages.

Time is the third element of diffusion that needs consideration (Rogers, 2003). The very process of adopting this innovation will take time and will have both indiand institutional barriers overcome. In the time it takes for leaders, practitioners of education, students, parents, and businesses to adopt this model of education for Nevada, up-to-date distance education research, its current adoption and use in other locations, its growth, and its success will be supplied and revealed to all stakeholders. A vision of how it will be successful for the struggling students in Nevada needs to be prescribed as an answer to many student ills. All advantages of this will need to be made clear until individual leaders in government and education can evaluate for themselves, make an affirmative decision, come up with a plan for implementation, and commit to its full adoption. Considering the stark facts about Nevada's educational failures, the rate of adoption may be more urgent than normal timelines, but only if the picture is clear and concise in both an effective model of implementation and in expected results.

The final element of the diffusion process is the social system or systems involved (Rogers, 2003). Ideally, in Nevada, a top-down approach to seeking this adoption of distance education should be used. Once the influential leaders are on board, other social systems involved in this process for persuasion and acceptance or even desire and demand of this innovation should be brought into the diffusion process. In trying to avoid an authority decision as a last option in this process, Nevada needs to work at getting a collective decision in the adoption and implementation of distance education for the students in the state.

# STATE CHAPTER OF THE UNITED STATES DISTANCE LEARNING ASSOCIATION

Prior to beginning the process of diffusion of distance education in Nevada, the current practitioners need to come together, collaborate, and lead the effort. They need a unifying voice. Currently there is no organization to provide that unity or to champion this option in Nevada. They each work separately to promote this model and provide it to the students. There are many obstacles to this new form of education that would be better met together than apart. The United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA) can help unify the various providers of distance education in the state. With that support, collaboration, and the unifying presence of USDLA, the process of greater exposure and eventual mainstream adoption of distance education for the students of Nevada can begin.

The USDLA offers many important benefits to national members in general but it also has specific benefits for state chapter members. In taking advantage of these benefits, Nevada providers will have a newfound unity for those who participate and will be better positioned to take the lead in diffusing this model to its students.

USDLA is a nonprofit distance learning association whose purpose, among other things, is to support research, development, education, and training in distance education. This organization offers support to its state chapters in many ways and can help provide some important needs for current distance education institutions. Further, it will help them to go through the steps needed to expand in the state without some of the obstacles that are now present. They offer leadership and a solid history of experience in the field. Advocacy is given for this model backed by research and firm results. They provide the most up-to-date information and policy available in distance learning across the nation. Continual state support, recognition, and partnerships among education, business, healthcare, and government entities are given. Access and equity to lifelong learning through distance education is another listed benefit from USDLA (2005).

#### CONCLUSION

Nevada students need support and a clear path for access to distance education. USDLA can help current providers of distance education lead the charge and get the state on the path to the future of education as others have and are already doing in this country. Leaders, educational and governmental, need to overcome the poor record currently in the state on education and give these students the chance to achieve their potential. The tool needed to accomplish this reality is distance education. The steps are clear; (1) Bring USDLA to Nevada, (2) Unify and support the current adopters of distance education here already and give them a voice, (3) Begin the process of diffusion with government and educational leadership to help pave the way for adoption by all stakeholders in Nevada, (4) Deliver to these students the choices they demand in education so that they may accomplish all that they desire to in their futures.

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ROGERS (2003) DEFINES DIFFUSION AS THE PROCESS IN WHICH AN INNOVATION IS COMMUNICATED THROUGH CERTAIN CHANNELS OVER TIME AMONG MEMBERS OF A SOCIAL SYSTEM.

### One of a Kind

### A Hybrid Doctorate in Physical Therapy

#### William E. Lance

#### **BACKGROUND**

he intent of this article is to acquaint the reader with an exciting new program being offered by Nova Southeastern University at its Tampa (Florida) Student Education Center, the Hybrid Entry-Level Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) Program.

Nova Southeastern has had a presence in the Tampa area for almost 30 years, primarily offering graduate degree programs in education, business, and psychology. In 2009, after moving in to a new campus facility, the university began to explore ways to enhance the growth of programs in Tampa. With the nationwide growth in

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the health care services industry, NSU's Health Professions Division saw Tampa as a logical area for expansion of their programs. As a part of that expansion, the hybrid DPT program was introduced to the Tampa Student Educational Center.

# HYBRID ONLINE INSTRUCTION: WHAT IS IT?

Hybrid instruction, a combination of online and traditional classroom instruction, is one of the latest trends in higher education. The word "hybrid" generally brings to most people's minds a car that runs on a combination of gas and electricity. For those of us in higher education, the word hybrid means something very different—the relatively new model of hybrid instruction.

In order to be effective, hybrid instruction must be a carefully planned blend of both traditional classroom instruction and online learning activities. Hybrid classes do, indeed, combine the best of both formats of instruction (Singh, Mangalaraj, & Taneja, 2010). Students are still able to make a meaningful connection with their instructors, as well as their classmates, but they are no longer required to travel to campus on a regular basis in order to attend classes because a significant portion of the classwork can be completed via the Internet.

For instructors to make their classes ready for the online/hybrid format, many must adjust their class's content. Lecture materials are usually the first part of the curriculum that needs to be modified.

Many instructors find that, in doing so, they are often making their materials more effective than they were in their traditional classroom instruction. More than likely the reason being that rather than having students sit in a lecture hall taking notes, instructors can teach through more activity-based assignments such as case studies, self-tests, tutorials, and online group projects, all of which takes place over the Internet (Poirier, 2010).

There are still individuals in higher education who are against the hybridization of learning, but there are several obvious advantages of hybrid instruction ("How to Succeeed, 2009). From a facilities standpoint, it cuts down on traffic on campus and frees up valuable classroom space. Some important educational benefits are how hybrid courses help improve writing and computer skills (Renes & Strange, 2011). Hybrid classes have been shown to encourage self-directed learning, time management, problem-solving, critical-thinking skills in those who participate in the programs (Cole & Kritzer, 2009). While these additional benefits are certainly important, one "elephant in the room" remains: Does hybrid instruction allow for quality subject-matter knowledge similar to that of traditional classroom instruction, especially in such a hands-on field as physical therapy?

Even though it is still a fairly new concept in distance education, many instructors are reporting good success with hybrid courses. Cole and Kritzer (2009) report that students in most hybrid program are required to do more work on their own. This kind of active learning seems to result in better test performance and subject mastery. Students in hybrid programs are also more likely to participate in group discussions. Collaboration online with other students is fostered because there is not only ample opportunity to prepare a response, but also because they are not physically speaking in front of a group. Hybrid class participants tend to be more outgoing and responsive because they are speaking online versus in a classroom setting. Even though students seem more confident about being involved with discussions online, it is important to keep in mind that it is because of the actual on-campus classroom component, and the face-to-face interaction that takes place there, that students are more likely to find success in a hybrid course than in a strictly online class (Fox, 2010).

Along with the obvious academic advantages, hybrid courses are making it easier for many people to get a quality education. Since hybrid programs require only limited on-campus attendance, it means these kinds of college programs are now more accessible to more people in more places.

# HYBRID ENTRY-LEVEL DOCTOR OF PHYSICAL THERAPY PROGRAM AT NSU/TAMPA (HEDPT)

The HEDPT Program is a recent expansion of NSU's main campus (Ft. Lauderdale, Florida) Physical Therapy Program, and offers the same curriculum in a unique combination of online and on-campus instruction—the hybrid model. The faculty and staff are experienced professionals with extensive clinical and educational backgrounds who are excited to use technology in order to bridge the gap of distance and time. In the HEDPT, both the online and on-campus institutes are planned to be engaging and dynamic so that all students are active participants in the learning process.

The inaugural class of a unique hybridlearning program in physical therapy began in May 2011 at the Tampa Student Educational Center of Nova Southeastern University, with students combining onsite instruction with online classes.

Twenty-three students enrolled for the first semester of the 4-year hybrid entry level program, which culminates with a doctorate degree in physical therapy from NSU's College of Allied Health and Nursing. A second group of students will start the program next year, according to college officials.

It's one of the first programs of its kind in the nation, according Mary Blackinton, associate program director of the NSU physical therapy program.

"Most professional education in the medical field is steeped in the tradition of face-to-face learning," said Dr. Blackinton, a physical therapist since 1983 and an educator in the field for the past 16 years. "We've taken the theoretical part and the introduction to skills and are delivering them using online technologies."

So what happens in the NSU hybrid education model? According to Blackinton (M. Blackinton, personal communication, November 1, 2011), students are given reading assignments and resources, and then asked to apply the information in either a case, paper, project, or quiz. Often, the information in a text is supplemented with digital media such as Tegrity video, Powerpoint slides, YouTube video, or email from the faculty. This helps tell the student what the faculty thinks is important. The assignment of the week is designed to help students learn the material. When the students submit assignments, they receive feedback, which is designed to further help with the learning. Learning is an iterative process that occurs through interaction with information, faculty, and classmates. "The role of the faculty moves from the "teller" of the information to the "stacker" of the information—using a combination of resources and feedback to stack the learning deck, so to speak," says Blackinton.

Another aim of the program developers was to serve students who work and have family responsibilities, and therefore do not always have the ability to attend college classes during traditional hours.

"This format also allows students to live in other places and come here for four intensive days a month," Blackinton said.

And the hard work will pay off if today's salaries for physical therapists are any indication. The typical salary for a graduate in the field is between \$60,000-\$100,000, Blackinton added.

"This innovative program provides qualified, nontraditional students such as working adults the opportunity to become physical therapists," Blackinton said. "Our blended learning design creates a strong, interactive learning community supported by the outstanding technological resources of NSU."

Blackinton states that the goals for NSU's graduate physical therapists are to:

- practice competently and collaboratively in all aspects of patent/client management as defined by the *Guide to Physical Therapist Practice* across the lifespan and in all practice settings;
- assume the roles of administration, delegation, supervision, management, and consultation to ensure autonomous practice that is safe, ethical, and legal;
- engage in health promotion, wellness, and disease prevention activities for patients, clients, and the community at large using appropriate educational and change strategies;
- contribute to the body of knowledge in physical therapy and apply an evidence-based approach to patient/client management; and
- demonstrate cultural competence in providing services to all populations, including the underserved.

The program maintains a new student orientation webpage that helps students prepare for an orientation in Tampa as well as for becoming a student at NSU. The site includes links to important documents such as the new student checklist, instructions on obtaining an NSU e-mail account, equipment and book lists, a tentative 4-year aca-

demic calendar, and a schedule for the orientation. There are also links to the American Physical Therapy Association so that students can sign up to become a student member (a program requirement), links to hotels in the Tampa area who offer NSU HEDPT students discounts, and links to other NSU resources. Representatives from the admissions department, NSU bookstore, card services, student affairs, financial aid, and the College of Allied Health and Nursing administration attend the orientation in order to greet students and their families in Tampa. Obviously, students in the HEDPT program receive a comprehensive introduction to their studies.

The HEDPT program is for individuals who want more flexibility in attaining their DPT degree because of financial, geographical, and/or family demands. This unique hybrid program combines the best of both worlds in that online learning for flexibility plus face-to-face campus-based classes at the Tampa SEC once per month (4 days each month) are combined for instruction, practice, and feedback on hands-on skills.

The curriculum includes the same courses as the main campus traditional program, but it is distributed over 4 years instead of 3. The fourth year of the program consists of full-time internships in all areas of physical therapy practice. The total tuition for the 3-year program is prorated over 4 years for the HEDPT program so that the total cost is the same.

#### **ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS**

This program is an expansion of the Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) approved NSU entry level DPT curriculum offered on the main campus in Ft. Lauderdale. The program admits students who are self-directed learners interested in online learning, comfortable with technology, and who want flexibility in attaining a DPT degree. Renes and Strange (2011) have

indicated that this is the type of student who typically thrives in the type of environment the HEDPT students will be exposed to. The prerequisites and other entrance requirements are the same as the Ft. Lauderdale program.

Students apply to the Nova Southeastern University HEDPT program through the Physical Therapy Centralized Application System (PTCAS) at www.ptcas.org.

The entry-level doctor of physical therapy program selects students based on cumulative grade point average, prior academic performance, work experience, references, interview, completed application and recommendations. The general requirements include:

- a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university;
- a minimum of 2.9 cumulative grade point average on a 4-point scale;
- a minimum of 2.9 prerequisite and science grade point average on a 4-point scale and a grade of C or better in each of the prerequisite courses;
- completion of all required coursework before matriculating into the PT program;
- the three recommendations (one must be from a physical therapist) on the required PTCAS evaluation form;
- previous experience acquired in the field of physical therapy on the required PTCAS experience form (optional but highly recommended);
- Graduate Record Examination scores from the Educational Testing Service no later than March 1 of the entry year; and
- a phone or in-person interview when all other requirements are met.

#### THE WHITE COAT CEREMONY

The white coat ceremony symbolizes the transition of physical therapy students into the profession of physical therapy, and is based on the tradition established by Hippocrates who administered an oath to stu-

dents before their medical studies began. Faculty participate by "coating" each student and together they recite the physical therapy oath. A symbolic torch is lit, representing the park of intellectual curiosity that remains in the heart of physical therapists throughout their lifetime. Students also profess their commitment as physical therapy students to the Code of Ethics and Core Values of the American Physical Therapy Association.

The 23 physical therapy students from NSU's Tampa Student Educational Center took part in the ceremony on Saturday, October 22, 2011. Students were ceremonially cloaked with their white coat by faculty from the physical therapy program. A celebration followed at the SEC with a motivational charge delivered by keynote speaker Diana Ickes, who is recognized by the American Physical Therapy Association as an emerging leader in the profession.

"The White Coat ceremony marks the special day these students recite the oath of commitment to the physical therapy profession and to the communities in which they will serve," said Richard E. Davis, dean of NSU's College of Allied Health, which runs NSU's physical therapy programs. "This special day conveys to the students the importance of caring as well as curing," he said.

Blackinton added that the 23 students of NSU's new Hybrid Entry Level Doctor of Physical Therapy Program represent a diverse group of individuals engaging in a new and exciting method of physical therapist education that combines online and in class learning.

The students range in age from 22 to 38; reside in nine different counties in Florida; and hail from four other states (Maryland, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin). The majority work at least part time, some work full-time.

#### **CLINICAL EXPERIENCE**

Clinical experiences are the culminating activities in the HEDPT program. Melissa Riba, assistant professor and clinical director of the Tampa program, facilitates these activities. The clinical experiences come in two forms. The first part starts in the second year of the program and is referred to as integrated clinical experiences. These are activities that take place during the 4-day weekends on campus. The second part includes three traditional internships that span the fall and winter semesters of the fourth year of the program.

#### STUDENT REACTION

Student reaction to the innovative HEDPT program has been very positive. A common reaction is voiced as surprise in the camaraderie that is developed. The students work together so closely, both online and on-campus, that special relationships quickly develop. They have a feeling that although they are at an off-campus site, they have the feel of being part of a larger entity. Also, the opportunity to maintain full-time and, more frequently, part-time employment during the first 3 years of the program is a large plus. Balancing a job, school, and a family life is a challenge, but is doable for many of the students.

#### CONCLUSION

Blackinton sees the future of the HEDPT program as being a very bright one. She has pledged that the program staff will continuously learn everything they can about hybrid education and to make this program a leader in hybrid education for health professions programs. The staff has accepted an invitation to present at the American Physical Therapy Association's annual conference about hybrid education. They are passionate about doing educational research about the processes that occur in hybrid education in professional schools such as physical therapy. Research

questions dealing with topics such as how much debt students leave a hybrid program with versus a traditional program are being considered.

"I think," says Blackington, "that we owe it to our students and to our profession to do good research, to use good pedagogy in whatever we do, and to continually evaluate ourselves and make our program stronger and better."

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HYBRID INSTRUCTION, A COMBINATION OF ONLINE AND TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION, IS ONE OF THE LATEST TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

### Go Ahead ... Be Social

# Using Social Media to Enhance the Twenty-First Century Classroom

#### **Shantel Marie Scott**

#### INTRODUCTION

ook around. The days of an education that solely includes a chalkboard, desk, paper, pencil, and a textbook are slowly disappearing. In their stead, classrooms are coming alive with moving, constantly updating technologies. Look around. The students who walk into vour classroom are entering "connected." Many are arriving with knowledge of how to collaborate, create, and discuss in a variety of online formats. Look around. The definition of literacy no longer simply means the ability to read and write. Educators in the twenty-first century are charged with the responsibility to teach students to read, write, and function responsibly in a digital world. It is the role of the educator to preserve important elements of the past while simultaneously embracing the tools of the future. If this charge sparks an overwhelming sense of anxiety, consider this—the basic tenets of education have not changed. In fact, a quality education has always included the ability for students to make connections and build relationships. The challenge here is simply to draw a stronger correlation between the digital literacy skills that the students already possess and the traditional classroom environment.



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#### **A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE**

It is crucial to understand what it means to be connected in the twenty-first century. Being connected refers to one's level of self-directed access to the wealth of knowledge that exists in the world. Today, there are a wide variety of outlets to the greater world to foster this connection. Whether it is with a cellular device, Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, YouTube, LinkedIn, or one of the many other applications that exist to connect people with knowledge, the one thing that is apparent is that being connected is in many ways a social activity. Merriam-Webster defines social as "tending to form cooperative and interdependent relationships with others; living and breeding in a more or less organized community"

("Social," 2011). Students from the Net Generation, also known as Net Geners, are definitely different from students of past generations. These students see the world from a social perspective. This social perspective does not discriminate between purely social activity for entertainment purposes and social activity for learning. In fact, "Net Geners assume continual, constant access to computers, the Internet and each other, via phone, text or some other still-emerging technology. Those factors have changed how Net Geners act and even how their brains function in some areas" (Tapscott, 2009, p. 6). A consistent access to technology has hardwired many students to learn in a way that connects them with other people and the greatest body of knowledge, the Internet. Students who are born into the Net Generation expect those connections to form interdependent relationships that can be categorized into groups that can be future sources of specific information. The guestion that educators should ask is whether or not current teaching methodologies align with the social perspective on learning that social media tools are offering.

#### WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

"Social Media integrates technology, social interaction, and content creation using the 'wisdom of crowds' to collaboratively connect online information. Through social media, people or groups can create, organize, edit, comment on, combine, and share content" (Rubin, 2011). According to Mayfield (2008), social media shares most or all of the following characteristics:

- Participation—Users of social media are active participants. The format encourages contributions and feedback.
- 2. Openness—Most social media encourage sharing of information.
- 3. Conversation—Social media is often seen as a two-way conversation.

- 4. Community—Social media allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively based on common and specific interests.
- 5. Connectedness—Social media readily makes use of links to other sites, resources, and people.

There are seven key social media outlets that are frequently used. Rubin (2011), a representative of the United States Office of Innovative Technologies, provides some insight on the various types of social media:

- Blogs: A blog is an easy-to-update website or webpage where authors write regular entries in a diarylike format. The most effective and interesting blogs allow readers to engage in conversations with the author and other readers.
- Social Networks: Social networking sites are websites that connect people. In these online communities, people can join (for free) and, at a minimum, establish a page with their profile. The most popular are MySpace and Facebook, which also have groups, which are feature-rich chat boards for members. A popular professional social networking site, LinkedIn, offers sections for jobs, service provider recommendations, and questions. All allow users to find people they know among the members, or look for other members with similar interests or affiliations. These sites make it easy to establish networks of contacts.
- 3. Microblog: As its name suggests, microblogging is writing extremely short blog posts, kind of like text messages. Microblogs often house posts that are about happenings of the moment. Twitter is currently the most popular microblog service and lets users post entries up to 140 characters long.

- 4. Wikis: A wiki is a type of collaborative workspace, it is a collection of webpages that encourages users to contribute or modify the content.
- 5. Video: Short videos are used to communicate all kinds of information by way of websites and popular online video-sharing services. YouTube is a widely popular tool for video-sharing.
- 6. Discussion Forums: Discussion forums are places for online communities to discuss topics of common interest. Posts are organized into related threads around questions and answers, or community discussions.
- 7. Photo Sharing: Photo sharing has become a key part of the social media landscape, since photos can now be so easily shared on sites like Flickr.

## EDMODO: SOCIAL MEDIA FOR THE CLASSROOM

While it is necessary to embrace online tools, it is not feasible and quite naïve to suggest that students should be set free on the Internet and told to learn. The suggestion here is to use the ways that students might prefer to learn, create, and interact as a tool to enhance the content that is being learned. With this approach, perhaps the perception amongst students of tools, such as Facebook, that are primarily used for social entertainment, can be changed and "exploited in formal learning" (Poellhuber & Anderson, 2011). Imagine the potential for learning that exists if a child learns about history by following the President of the United States on Twitter or a science assignment to "friend" a major corporation, such as Intel, on Facebook and enter an idea for the next big innovation. What about English coming alive in real time as students follow Terry McMillan's blog? The possibilities for listening, watching, evaluating, reflecting, thinking, collaborating, connecting, personalizing, planning, and finding a voice seem endless. Everyone knows, however, that there is no technological innovation,

especially in the classroom, that is not accompanied by conflict.

There is currently some debate as to whether Facebook and other social networking tools that students use in their personal lives should also be used, without change, for educational purposes—this may be like mixing one's work life too closely with one's personal life. But the ability Facebook provides to connect people with people of particular groups and to see their frequent comments, as well as to reply to those comments, is potentially a very important one for education and should be explored, and thought about, by every teacher. (Prensky, 2010, p. 123)

Edmodo is a tool that marries the benefits of social networking with a safe, controlled environment that educators can allow students to freely operate in. Essentially, it is like Facebook for education.

At the time of its second birthday in May 2011, Edmodo had acquired 2 million users and are continuing to grow. In an interview with EdTech Digest, Edmodo cofounder Nic Borg explains what Edmodo is and why it was created. Borg explains,

We live in a connected world where students and teachers depend on technology and online resources in their day-to-day lives.... Edmodo provides classrooms a safe and easy way to connect and collaborate, offering a real-time platform to exchange ideas, share content, and access homework, grades and school notices. (Rivero, 2011)

#### CAPABILITIES OF EDMODO

So, you might be wondering what Edmodo actually does. It is a platform rich in useful features for education. Benefits for the teacher/student include:

 Accounts can be created for teachers, students, and parents and is available for all schools and user friendly enough for all grades.

- Mobile Access—Edmodo creates an anytime, anywhere learning environment because it can be accessed from any computer or device with an internet connection and also offers free applications (apps) for Apple and Android devices.
- Peer Connections—Educators have the unique opportunity to create professional learning networks with likeminded individuals to collaborate on activities or share content.
- 4. Classroom Management—Tools are available to post homework, assign quizzes, organize groups, turn-in and grade assignments, update the calendar, reward students, create a library of uploads, and monitor discussions to name just a few. All of this can be completed at the click of a button.
- 5. Cost Savings—It is a free service.

#### **EDMODO IN ACTION**

At Manalapan High School in Englishtown, New Jersey, a handful of teachers

are beginning to embrace Edmodo as a social networking tool that gets students interested in learning. Jessica Medler, a Spanish teacher, speaks on the ease of use of the program, "Students were easily able to navigate this program immediately because they recognized the navigation as that of something similar to Facebook.... When I realized this, I knew I had won the attention of my students!" (personal communication, November 29, 2011).

Sharing Information. Medler continues to share what a great tool Edmodo can be to create and assign quizzes and share information. On one occasion, Medler required her Spanish I to post videos of popular American commercials that are translated into Spanish (see Figure 1). Students were then able to view each other's postings and listen to and practice understanding the Spanish language being spoken in a recognizable and authentic way.

Engaging students beyond the classroom walls. In an English classroom, students were assigned to read an article for home-

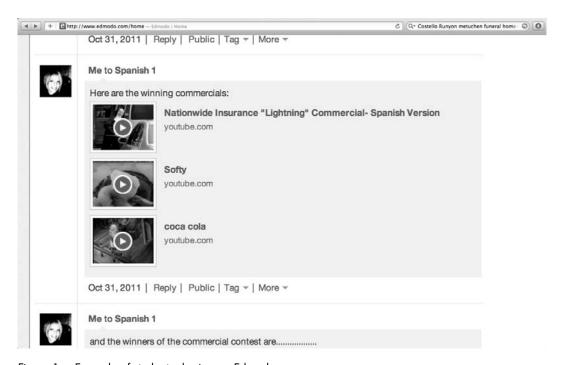


Figure 1. Example of students sharing on Edmodo.

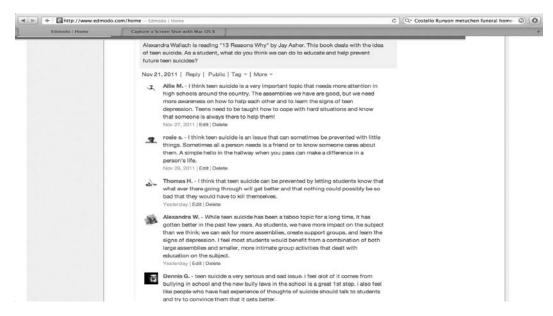


Figure 2. Example of a student discussion occurring in real-time.

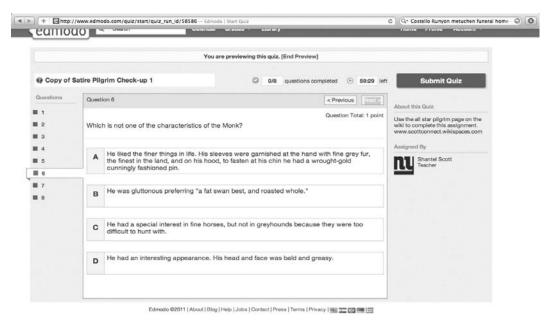


Figure 3. Example of the quiz creation screen on Edmodo.

work. Students then were asked to post a response as they read. The result is a real-time discussion (see Figure 2) that helps students see other perspectives and create meaning.

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Immediate Feedback. A History teacher assigned a short quiz to be completed online to assess student knowledge of the Middle Ages and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. The quiz features (Figure 3) possesses

teacher controls that can allow for students to receive immediate feedback after completion of the quiz.

Edmodo in Action. Perhaps the best feature of Edmodo is that the program helps teachers maximize the benefits of an educational social network. The Help Center houses a library of ideas for integrating Edmodo into the classroom environment. The Help Center also offers webinars and other opportunities for professional development.

#### CONCLUSION

In a world where students thrive on the amount of time they spend connected each day, a profound shift must occur in the traditional classroom environment. Students in the Net Generation do not want to be lectured to; they want to have their opinions valued, they want to follow their own interests, they want to create, they want to connect with peers to express and share opinions, they want to share control, they want immediate information, and most importantly, want an education that is not just relevant, but real (Prensky, 2010) While some educators might feel tempted to dismiss this list as unrealistic, it would be a huge mistake. In fact, these requests are far from unrealistic. Students can make these requests because they know that the possibility exists. Social media is already providing students the opportunity to learn in this way. The problem is that most students access social media for entertainment purposes only. The mere format and variety of social media provide free opportunities for educators to engage students in a method of interaction and learning for which they are already accustomed. Edmodo is in the business of offering educators the platform to leverage the full potential of the social network for educational purposes. After all, with more than 800 million active users (Facebook, 2011) and 144 million tweets posted to Twitter in a single day (Twitter Blog, 2011), it is clear that social media is not going away. The question is whether or not educators will partner with it to offer the most well rounded education to their students.

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# Why Faculty Resist

#### Stephen C. Ehrmann

ave you ever heard the phrase "resistance to technology" used to imply that some faculty are irrational dinosaurs? I have, and I don't like it. In my experience, most such resistance is quite reasonable. The following story about online discussion in real time suggests what worries these instructors.

Visualize a scene from the late 1980s. In these days, there are no online chat rooms yet, no texting yet, and very little e-mail is yet written by college students. "Writing" is something that most students do in

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order to get grades. They face a big leap from casual, personal, oral conversation to formal academic writing, and many trip on that hurdle.

In a handful of classrooms across the country, however, students and their instructors sit behind the big monitors of computers connected through local area networks. No one speaks. The only sound is the clicking of keyboards. Students and their composition instructors are typing into what will someday be called a chat room.

In these computer labs, academic writing in real time is being used as an intermediate step to help students make the jump from casual oral speech to formal essays. Instructors hope that, when students "talk" about academic topics by writing to each other, they will learn to express their academic ideas in text to a real audience. Students can then use the transcript of the conversation as they write formal essays. This grant-funded project is called "English—Natural Form Instruction" and will later be renamed "Electronic Networking for Interaction" (ENFI).

Let's move forward in time a month or two to a meeting of the faculty involved in this experiment. It's midway through the first semester of this experiment. Today, the director of the ENFI project, Professor Trent Batson of Gallaudet University, has gathered about 15 faculty members from seven participating colleges and universities. As the program officer monitoring this grant, I am sitting in the circle of chairs and listening.

The discussion has been going on for an hour or so. An English faculty member at the New York Institute of Technology has just turned to her colleague Marshall Kremers and said quietly, "Marshall, you should tell your story." He responds equally quietly that he doesn't want to. She insists, so he reluctantly begins to explain what happened in his classroom.

Marshall explains that, on the second or third day of class, some of his students veered off topic, writing profanity and obscenity instead. His objections were simply lines of text that were quickly shoved up and off the screen by the flood of student expletives. He didn't feel comfortable getting up and speaking: this was an educational experiment where talking was barred. So, when his objections didn't stem the tide, Marshall walked out of his classroom. He returned later but this cycle of student profanity and faculty retreat were repeated a couple more times before the rebellion ended, Marshall now reports to us. He concludes in a puzzled, rueful way, "I don't know what I did wrong."

There is a long silence.

Then one of the other faculty in the circle says quietly, "Well, something a bit like that happened to me." One or two other faculty agree that what Marshall described resembled things that had happened in their classrooms, too.

Diane Thompson, a codirector of the project from Northern Virginia Community College, joins in. "I've seen this phenomenon also. Marshall, this is the first time you've taught this way, but it's my third time, and I've had time to think about it. We say these new technologies are 'empowering,' and we assume empowerment is great. But think what happens when powerless people get power. Think about the French Revolution. People break windows!"

"But that's not altogether bad. After all, the most important ingredient in a successful composition course is energy flowing into the process of writing. That's what you had, Marshall. The challenge here is not how to crush a rebellion. It's how to channel the energy!"

Suddenly the discussion ignites as faculty exchange ideas about how to "channel the energy." I sit silently, enjoying the conversation, but also with a sense of déjà vu: where have I heard this kind of exchange before?

Then I remember. A decade earlier, in the 1970s, I had been at The Evergreen State College, a nontraditional institution with full-time interdisciplinary programs instead of courses. Instead of each faculty member teaching two courses a quarter, teams of faculty teach only one interdisciplinary program at a time, often lasting a full academic year. Similarly, students each take only one such program at a time. Instead of grades, Evergreen faculty write about what students have learned; in these full-time programs, faculty know their students quite well. Seminars are far more common than lectures, even in science. In full-time programs such as these, it's easier for faculty to be spontaneous and reorganize what they're doing, because they and their student are completely dedicated to this one program. In these and other ways, Evergreen was (and is) unlike anything that its new faculty members had ever seen.

And at Evergreen I'd seen many faculty blushing as Marshall Kremers had blushed: ambushed by unexpected problems with their students, faculty new to Evergreen would feel ashamed. At Evergreen, as with ENFI, experienced colleagues would quickly reply, "Don't be so hard on yourself. That's just the kind of thing that happens in a place like this. Here's why it can happen. Here's what you might have done to trigger it. And here are some thoughts about what you might do to respond."

Why did such discussions about teaching problems happen so often at Evergreen?

First, such problems hit novice faculty frequently because Evergreen was so different from any place they'd taught before: unfamiliar settings and actions produce unfamiliar problems. The second reason for the frequent sharing of such bad experiences was novices had a safe setting in which to confess: Evergreen teammates have to depend on one another, and meet frequently to talk about what's going on in their programs. Third, when the novice exposes a possible personal failing, teammates are likely to have seen the problem before or heard about it from previous teammates: Evergreen teaching issues don't vary much from year to year. Because teaching teams were remixed quite frequently, insights about how to respond spread with amazing speed across the college.

So now in 1987, as I listen to the ENFI faculty talk excitedly about "how to channel the energy," I realize this conversation is like, and unlike, those at Evergreen. In both settings, new situations lead to new problems for novice faculty. In both places, the ambushed faculty are a bit ashamed to talk about the problem.

But there are differences between the two situations, too.

First, Evergreen itself doesn't change much from year to year. But technology does change and, more importantly, what faculty and students do (with the aid of technology) changes. So, for technology users, unfamiliar problems can emerge frequently.

Second, at most institutions faculty don't normally work in teams. There are far fewer opportunities to have conversations in which faculty feel comfortable revealing their teaching difficulties.

Finally, technology training (note the title) is usually led by young technology experts, not experienced faculty. The instructors are unlikely to be aware of such

teaching problems. And, whether workshops are led by staff or faculty, the leaders are usually enthusiasts who want to paint online learning in the most positive possible light.

No wonder many faculty resist teaching online, or do so in a way that's very safe, and that closely resembles how they teach in classrooms! It really is risky to change what you're doing in a course. What's worse: everyone around them is pretending that faculty are not in any danger. No one is preparing faculty to cope.

It's 2012. We understand the challenges. So how should we prepare faculty to respond to the inevitable pedagogical problems they'll face when they take advantage of online technology to reshape their courses?

First, just as we did in 1987, experienced and novice faculty ought to talk about what can go wrong. And participants need to feel safe enough to confess what might just be stupid mistakes. You can't tell until you share, as Marshall Kremers discovered.

Second, notice that the ENFI discussion produced more than just concrete responses for the classroom (e.g., different ways to "channel the energy"); it also produced deep conceptual insights into the underlying causes (e.g., "Think about what 'empowerment' really means, Marshall."). In fact, when I've told the story of Marshall Kremers in the decades since, listeners sometimes come up with new analyses of the underlying issues, each of which suggest different ways to respond.

Kremers' students may have erupted because, in real time writing, the novice's timing is usually off; by the time a comment is prepared, the conversation has moved on and the painfully written comment is ignored. Irritation builds until some students explode. Response: try discussing the problem with students and asking them how to deal with the irritation.

Martha Kanter, under secretary of education, recently likened the ENFI students' empowerment to "experiments" performed by students of B.F. Skinner. When their professor moved to the left of the lectern, students secretly agreed to look interested and ask questions. When their professor stood to the right of the lectern, they would instead sit silently and feign boredom. By the end of the term, the story goes, their professor was habitually standing in the left corner. After telling this story, Kanter suggested that the ENFI students' profanity was a deliberate attempt to manipulate the professor. Suggested faculty response: recognize the joke, laugh, and ask students to describe examples where writing has subtly influenced people.

So there are at least three possible causes of the ENFI disruption: empowerment leading to anarchy; irritability caused by the mechanics real-time discussion; and empowerment leading to student attempts to manipulate the professor. Each analysis suggests fresh options for transforming a threat into a learning opportunity.

The 1987 discoveries occurred almost by accident. Today, to help faculty teach online, we can arrange such discoveries intentionally, while reassuring faculty that we have their backs.

First, collect some stories of pedagogical problems that can arise when courses are taught online (e.g., Ehrmann, 2009). Each story should describe what happens up until the problem, and then stop. (The Kremers story would end with Kremers lamenting, "I don't know what I did wrong.")

Second, invite a group of faculty, both novice and expert, into a seminar to discuss a few such stories. Ask participants whether they have had similar experiences. Ask how they explain the causes of the problem, and how they would respond to convert the problem into an opportunity.

Once the seminar has discussed two to three cases, invite participants to volunteer their own most challenging moments in teaching online, or their concerns about what might happen in the future. Analyze those new cases in the same way: what might cause such a problem? How might you respond?

My second suggestion stems from an aspect of the real time writing that I haven't emphasized yet: many of these ENFI faculty had previously met. They already had a track record of talking about teaching together. Similarly at Evergreen novices had already had many conversations with teammates about teaching before they had to confess a failure. And during such earlier conversations, faculty have learned whom to respect about this particular teaching issue: other faculty listened attentively to what Diane Thompson had to say about empowerment because they already knew Diane was a seasoned authority on ENFI.

Unfortunately at many institutions, many faculty haven't had a history of talking about teaching problems with colleagues. So they may not feel safe admitting problems to colleagues, or know whose advice to respect.

So let's look for ways to foster routine discussions about online teaching and its problems. That's not easy. Many faculty have little time or patience for such discussions. Unless the conversation produces a quick payoff, many faculty will simply exit and not return.

I see at least two good options for organizing compelling, useful conversations about teaching and its dilemmas.

One strategy is to create faculty learning communities that each explore a different issue of teaching online (e.g., how to foster and maintain deep discussions among online students). Miami University has been a leader in organizing such FLCs. (Center for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and University Assessment, 2012)

The second option is to encourage structured, brief conversations among faculty who teach pretty much the same course online to similar students. In that setting, participants will share terminology and assumptions: they can launch immediately into substance and immediately understand responses because they all speak the same language and face quite similar problems. Such a conversation could cover many useful tips and painful problems in a relatively short time.

In extremely large courses, these conversations could be among section leaders. More often, it makes sense to organize online conversations among faculty who teach the same course but at different institutions (e.g., via Skype or Blackboard Collaborate). If participants already know each other from professional meetings and/or because the institutions are near to one another, so much the better.

When such a discussion begins, a leader would ask who would like to introduce something interesting or distressing that has happened in the course in the last week or two. After a brief (3 minute?) description, the moderator would invite discussion of similar experiences, relevant resources, and possible next steps (up to 7 minutes?) making sure no one takes too much of the time. When the assigned time (30 minutes?) is over, the session adjourns until next time (next week?). "Leave them wanting more" is a good mantra for organizing sessions like this.

Your institution's online learning program can help by scheduling sessions at times that work for the greatest number of faculty and, if attendance begins to lag, checking to see if setting a new time would help. No stipend ought to be necessary

(and few of us could afford to pay one) but hosting occasional parties for participants would be a good idea.

Such online conversations across institutional line can produce a very beneficial side effect: once faculty develop a history of talking about teaching, teaching improvements, insights, and resources are likely to be shared across institutional lines. (Ehrmann, Gilbert, & McMartin, 2006). Institutional leaders in online learning are likely to be those institutions that import good ideas faster than anyone else.

The landscape of online learning is changing qualitatively, as Patty Dinneen and I described in "Beyond 'Comparability,'" published recently in this space (Ehrmann & Dinneen, 2012). To spread such striking new approaches to the organization of teaching and learning, however, we first need to prepare faculty to face the dark side of innovation.

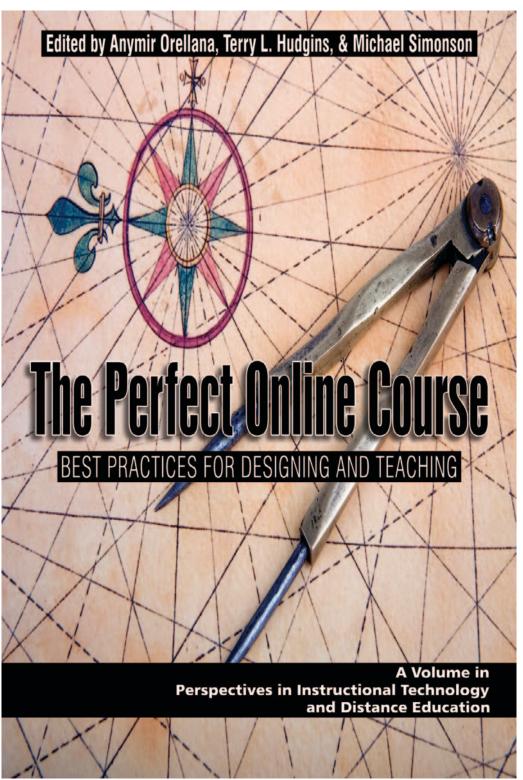
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# Keeping Online Groups Dynamic, Motivated, and Enthused!

#### **Errol Craig Sull**

any distance learning courses have group—teamwork— assignments as part of the course curriculum. And even if not required group assignments are a great way to introduce or reemphasize the importance of group

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dynamics in the professional setting. The rogue or lone decision maker is becoming more of an endangered species, with decisions, products, legislation, outcomes, and proposals more often than not resulting from group discussions, interactions, and decisions. We have an opportunity to meet the challenge of fostering productive group dynamics through the distance learning environment.

Yet setting up and maintaining a productive, engaging, enthusiastic, and "all for one, one for all!" team setting can be tricky; there are many obstacles that will be encountered and possible resistance to the group model from some students. However, a solid approach that is well thought out and implemented can result in exciting and interesting distance learning groups. These suggestions will help:

# EMPHASIZE AND EXPLAIN TEAMWORK—WORKING ON AN ASSIGNMENT AS A GROUP—EARLY

Many students have never taken an online course or have not had one where teamwork was employed, thus many aspects of it will be foreign. It's very important that you

discuss teamwork, broadly, in your first posting of the class, but also follow this with another posting that only emphasizes and explains teamwork—this one-subject posting lets students know how important it is and they will not lose it amongst other aspects of the class. Be sure to use the active voice and active, involved verbs—this "feel" only adds to the overall importance you place on teamwork and its value.

# BE SURE YOU SET UP INDIVIDUAL GROUP/TEAM DISCUSSION THREADS

This is important, for several reasons. First, it fosters group interaction—the more involvement with one another in a group the more the students will work as a group, and the ultimate end assignment of the group will be the better for it. Second, it offers an area where external excuses—such as, "I e-mailed him but received no response," "I called but failed to connect," or "We e-mailed, but now we have to contact the others in the group—don't exist, as all in the group are part of the class. Third, by having a place to discuss the group project each person is more inclined to be involved for all can see who is/is not contributing. Of course, remind the students these group discussion threads are part of overall class participation, and thus the more involved in the group the more it helps their grades!

# GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF A GOOD WORKING GROUP SESSION

Students need to know that their teamwork responses cannot be merely "I agree," "That's cool," "Nice job," and the like—yes, short responses can certainly be part of group work, but the ideal teamwork thread will have all team members involved, each offering substantive posts (both proactive and reactive), and about 30% short reactive postings. Copying and posting a previous team's thread that offers what you seek in your class will give them a nice guide—so much more effective than simply your

description! Of course, be sure to explain why the posts arte good, where areas were not so good (and why), and what was the end result of that group's efforts. (IMPOR-TANT: Be sure to block out or leave out any names of students.)

### HAVE EACH GROUP SELECT A GROUP LEADER

It is important there be one person who has the responsibility for coordinating the group with all facets a group sometimes needs: following up on individual assignments, motivating the group and individual members who may be slacking, sending in progress reports to the online instructor (important for the instructor and as a component of group dynamics), and setting deadlines for components of the group project. Too, the group member must be willing to let the instructor know if someone is not pulling his or her weight.

# REMIND THE GROUP EACH MEMBER SHARES THE FINAL GROUP GRADE

This is an important feature of helping to motivate and engage all members of a group to be active, for a member's grade can be negatively impacted if he or she does not contribute as much as other members of the group. And while the instructor can see the involvement—or lack of it—in group discussions the full extent of work going on behind the scenes in putting together the group project will only be known by the group members, thus it is important to have a group leader who can take charge—and who has no problem in motivating members when necessary and letting the distance learning instructor know of any problem members.

# BECOME AN ACTIVE PART OF TEAMWORK

You cannot be merely the "teacher observer," but rather you need dive in as

well: respond to some of the posts, offer suggestions, give kudos when appropriate (but never chastise one student "in front" of the other team member; rather, do this in a private e-mail), make sure to redirect a group when it appears to go off track. Yes, they are functioning as an autonomous unit, but your presence is important for information, motivation, direction, and enthusiasm. By doing this, the students can see that you walk the walk, not just talk the talk—and a combo of your presence and what you offer will truly help enthuse them to stay active in teamwork!

# GIVE EXAMPLES OF GREAT GROUP WORK RESULTS FROM "THE REAL WORLD"

So many examples from the corporate, governmental, and educational worlds exist where a good OR poor decision, product, rule of law, et cetera have come about—and often the reasons why the group efforts did or did not work are also given. Posting these to your students remind them that what they are doing is not simply an exercise in the class for a grade, but rather an important part of everyday professional life. Also, it reminds them of benefits the classroom teamwork offers on the outside, including working together, new ideas coming out of group interchanges, interacting with varied personalities, overcoming hurdles, and making team decisions. And don't be shy about offering those bad examples —it's just as important for students to understand what can happen when a group does not effectively work together, especially when the reason for the failures are listed.

# ASK STUDENTS TO POST EXAMPLES OF THEIR EXPERIENCES IN PREVIOUS GROUP WORK SETTINGS

A great way to get students more involved in a class, and to bring a team in a class to life, is to ask students for their group involvements in other classes and on the job. Here is where the examples you post are greatly expanded and brought to life in a way you can't, for as students contribute their stories—complete with the plusses and minuses that came out of their group experiences—it offers more ideas for all groups, reminds the class members of real-world experiences in teamwork, and makes for a greater camaraderie in the groups. (As where to do this: in a general discussion thread or as a thread in each group discussion.)

# POST A LIST OF TEAMWORK PROBLEMS—WITH POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

There will be a variety of teamwork problems that pop up: team members not contributing, being too bossy, using negative language, personally attacking other team members; technical difficulties with postings, late postings, misunderstanding posting requirements or procedures; students who complain about their teamwork grade, about other team members, or your comments regarding their team postings—the list goes on. By posting a list of these, and your suggestions for each, at the beginning of the course you will cut down—tremendously—on student "teamwork e-mails" to you!

# WHILE IT IS IMPORTANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ALL MEMBERS IN A GROUP BE ESPECIALLY AWARE OF THOSE STUDENTS WHO MAY BE CONTRIBUTING AS MUCH

No group will begin with equal over-thetop participation and enthusiasm from each group member; one or more may be shy, hesitant about working in a group, or simply unaccustomed to sharing ideas. When these students contribute it's important to pick up on an item in their posts and use them as a positive example for the group—this instills more confidence in the "shadow" students, thus resulting in more engagement and contributions on their part.

# USE GROUP WORK "GENIUS" FROM STUDENTS TO MOTIVATE THE CLASS

Scour the team postings regularly and gather those that extend beyond that one team but can benefit the entire class—in teamwork or any other areas of the course. Two items are accomplished: first, students will love to have their "genius" team postings used for the entire class as great examples; second, you will be demonstrating the importance of teamwork—and both are great motivators!

#### MAINTAIN A LIST OF TEAMWORK "NUGGETS"

These will be items you harvest from groups throughout the course that are so golden they can be used from course to course to demonstrate great ideas that came from group work; to motivate students in teamwork or another portion of the course; and to offer suggestions, insights, and info for this, that, or another course portion. I have so many that they are broken into categories—including "Great Metaphors and Analogies"—and they prove very helpful as motivational or information "dust" sprinkled throughout a course.

# BE SURE TO OFFER SUBSTANTIVE RESOURCES FOR GROUPS

Beyond your opinions and observations on postings during group work, be sure to post websites, anecdotal info, hardcore info, and the like that is specific to the teamwork approach in creating a product, solving a problem, or developing a proposal. Not only does this show you are actively interested in teamwork but you are also going "the extra mile" with solid items that can make a team's efforts—whether it a team project or a team discussion—better.

# Answer All Teamwork Questions Within 24 Hours

In most online courses, student questions to the instructor are usually not posted in a teamwork thread—but this will not prevent students from doing so. Often, these are spur-of-the-moment, emotion-filled questions—the kind that necessitate the quickest of responses. Be on the lookout for them—and let your students know that all questions, comments, et cetera posted or sent to you will receive a response within 24 hours. (Don't single out teamwork: if you do, you are inviting students to post questions to you there!)

# STAY 100% ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKING IN GROUPS

You never, ever want to give the appearance you are a "rah! rah!" supporter of teamwork because it is your job or only for the first part of a course; students quickly pick up on this. Group work—properly executed group work—is a crucial component of any class, and you must remain its most ardent cheerleader not only in words but in deeds ... from day one to day last of the class.

Remember: A building is only as strong, functional, and elegant as its structural components allow it to be.

### **Ask Errol!**

#### **Errol Craig Sull**

ummer is coming up, and while more traditional schools have "summer vacation," not so for the distance learning courses—no matter the season they continue to teach students. This also means instructors will continue to run up against obstacles, conundrums, barriers, hiccups, and challenges in their online classes, and thus another edition of my column. Have a distance learning question? Drop me an e-mail at ErrolDistanceLearning@gmail.com—I'll be glad to help out of I can!



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Meanwhile, here is an interesting mix of subjects ...

Okay, you are going to think this is too basic to answer, but I'm hoping you'll feel sorry for me! My question has to do with time management—I teach at three schools, and that equals five to seven online courses each session. And I need add I'm married with two children, have a full-time job selling real estate, and am on a softball team. There are times when my courses seem to get away from me because of my several involvements—any "secrets" to managing my time?

While your question may initially seem basic—there are "tons" of websites devoted to time management, as well as books and articles galore—you touched on one of the biggest challenges distance learning instructors encounter. Many who teach online simply forget about the importance of managing their time, almost as if it doesn't apply to courses delivered through a computer—but this life skill counts big time, especially because of the many areas in an online course where time management is crucial: posting grades, responding to student e-mails, sitting in on departmental and/or schoolwide webinars, grading assignments, monitoring discussions and chats—the list goes on.

But while I may have made you feel a bit better for asking the question I haven't answered it, so here goes: there is no one golden nugget that can tame time. It's individual, of course, that is, what remains a time management problem for one person may be easy for another. Yet there are a few major items that go a long way in helping anyone teaching online keep his or her time in check: (1) Organize—if there is a platinum suggestion this is it, for online teaching can't be done helter-shelter or by the seat of one's pants. Keep a daily schedule of what is due when-on your computer or on paper—and check it often. (2) Have a neat desk—the messier one's desk the more one will forget notes, due dates, responsibilities out of class, et cetera. (3) Partition off time for teaching, family, other work, and play—when you set yourself a schedule, even one that is general, you'll have an easier time teaching because you'll know that's your time to do just that (at least the major stuff, such as grading—you do need check your class e-mail several times a day). Try these—you'll begin to master time :)

I'm getting tired of trying to stay in step with what seems like a constant release of software I use to teach online. For example, just when I finally got comfortable with Windows 7 I've read that Windows 8 is coming out this fall; and likewise I just bought Office 10 at the beginning of the year, but now I've learned that Office 12 is also coming out in the fall. Is there any way I can just feel comfortable with what I have, and not worry that I will be left behind the software 8 ball?

Software and hardware updates are a combination of continual technological advances and efforts to keep or improve a market share by a manufacturer (such as Microsoft or Apple). And one can easily feel "out of the loop" if he or she does not have the latest piece of software—or the most current piece of computer hardware (whether that be in the form of a PC, laptop, tablet, or smartphone). But unless you are required by your school to use a certain type of software (and in nearly all cases

where this happens the school provides free copies of the upgraded software to its instructors, and usually its students) there is no need to panic: you are fine with what works for you!

You mentioned Windows 8—the beta test version is out now, and feedback has it offering major problems for those who use a PC. And let's not forget Internet Explorer 10, soon to be launched—if past IE releases are any indication this update will not interface with many schools and applications in its initial debut. As for Office 12, well, no huge changes there, but changes, certainly, and some online instructors might like (I'll be reviewing it in a future "Try This" column). So, the ol' bottom line is this: if your software—and hardware perform well and do all the functions you need for your distance learning classes there is no reason to update. (And by the way: new releases are notorious for having bugs, resulting in a slew of patches from the manufacturers to fix the problems.) Certainly, keep an eye out for reports and feedback on new releases: what comes out as new usually ends up being the next standard (with some exceptions: remember Microsoft's Vista?).

Your suggestions in this column have been great, and I've used many to great success in my online classes—thanks! But I've run up against an obstacle for which I just can't seem to find a cure. Trying to help my online students as much as possible with their weekly assignments I post many resources throughout the course, even offering samples of what I expect from them and sending out mass e-mails to my students each week with a reminder of the areas on which to focus for these assignments. But it seems I was naïve in thinking this would result in my full class including all parts of the assignment! I'd say, on average, my classes have at least 20%-30% of students who turn in assignments that are incomplete—any suggestions?

We like to think that all our students read every one of our resources, posts, and e-mails we liberally distribute throughout the course. But that is in the Land of Nirvana, and teaching online brings us some students who just want to do the minimum of work with the least amount of effort, have other responsibilities outside of class that get in the way of their putting in more class time, or just don't care very much about earning a good grade. We as dedicated and enthused educators are not magicians; it is rare that we will reach each person in our courses in a manner that makes us feel totally satisfied with all students' efforts. (There is a caveat to this: smaller class sizes and graduate-level courses tend to have greater overall student success.)

What you have shared with me is great—you are doing some marvelous things to help your students. I do have two suggestions, and the first is in direct line with the heart of why we are able to teach courses online: technology. With more and more students tuned in to the many facets technology offers in communication, the use of audio and visual such as PowerPoint, Prezi, and YouTube can get students more engaged in a course. Also, be sure reality-based education is a part of your course, that is, always transitioning your subject into the professional world where it is applied, needed, and expected; often, when students are reminded of a subject's importance to "the real world" it can spark an interest of doing better in a class because they realize it can help their stature and productivity on the job.

When there is a facultywide project I'm the person who others—fellow online instructors, as well as administrators—know can always be counted on to get the job done, to make sure there is no slack, to have a finished project be perfect. This is my nature—I'm enthusiastic about these types of team efforts, but again and again I find others are

willing to not give 100% because they know I always will. Often, this results in my doing the bulk of the work, yet with all on our committee or in our group getting equal credit. I write nice e-mails thanking and congratulating all on a team effort well done, but beneath the surface I'm angry that some folks just take me for granted, knowing if they don't do all of their assigned task I'll make sure it's completed. What should I do?

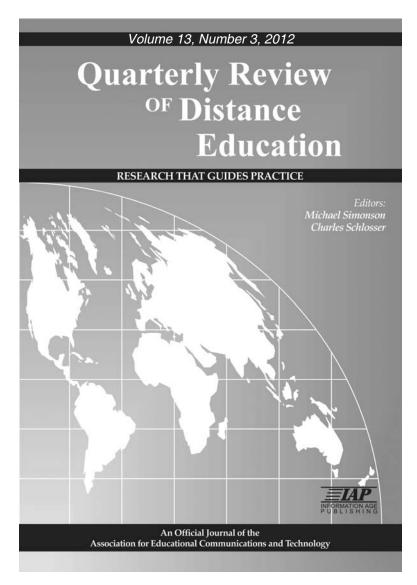
Your situation is one not peculiar to distance learning, of course, but the environment of distance learning can easily foster such a scenario in that there are no physical get-togethers, no working lunches, no face-to-face strategizing sessions. Thus, as a deadline draws near and a project is not complete there is often a silent void that is usually filled by at least one person in the group. The more this person takes over so a project can be completed in a quality manner and on time the more that person will be used for that role. It's a human nature type of thing.

So, what to do? It depends. First, if you are in an authoritative position you can certainly use your title to get others involved. But beyond that-when all in your group are equal or you are somewhat lower in the hierarchy—the best you can do is know what your efforts are doing for the school, for the students. Complaining will not do much to help you, and it might even hurt in class assignments. The next time you are asked to be part of a group project in an online environment at your school take your same friendly attitude, but be a bit more specific in going over who is responsible for what part of the project. (And, yes, people in your position have been known to purposefully ease up on a project, knowing without their full effort the end result won't be stellar, believing his or her worth will finally be noticed. But it's not a good thing to do-such an approach can backfire in numerous ways.) The bottom line: it's who you are to give as much as

you do to a project—take your joy from what you help to accomplish.

Remember: The more we read, watch, and listen on how to realize our goals of

creating the perfect cole slaw, barbequed ribs, and strawberry mousse the closer we will come to achieving it—yet doing it on our own will slow down or stall the pace.



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the process of distance education implementation and the artifacts needed to support the move. Certainly, research is needed in this area.

At this point it has become clear that the following two components are needed when an organization plans to infuse distance education as a mission-central approach:

- 1. First, an academic technology/distance education plan is needed. This plan includes the following components:
  - · vision statement;
  - mission statement;
  - guiding principles;
  - · definitions;
  - goals;
  - policy development processes;
  - timeline;
  - policy review and faculty guidance;
  - · references; and
  - resources.
- Next, a process for diffusion and implementation of distance education is needed. This process includes these components:
  - development of a sense of urgency by the organization's leaders;
  - identification and empowerment of a powerful planning group;
  - identification of a clear, widely understood and agreed-on vision
  - identification of those willing to act on the vision;
  - development of plans to guarantee short term successes—successes that are widely publicized;
  - agreement on the process to combine successes; and
  - development and adoption of successes into models for additional implementation.

At the heart of the plan and process is the role of stakeholders, especially teachers, professors, and trainers. Certainly, leaders can and must support the transformation process, but those expected to implement changes—the teachers, professors, and trainers—are the groups who will promote or limit success.

The ingredients of a successful, distance delivered academic program include:

- committed and strong organizational leader;
- assessment and statement of need:
- technology plan with a detailed program for implementation of distance education;
- steering committee led by faculty that includes stakeholders such as students, staff, administrators, and alumni;
- detailed timeline;
- formative and summative evaluation plan;
- course design model, such as the unitmodule-topic approach;
- full-time faculty person to implement the plan;
- instructional designer with media production skills;
- provision for a help desk for students and faculty;
- distance education policy manual for use by students, faculty, and most important, support staff;
- course management system and media production facilities and equipment;
- templates for syllabi and course components;
- budget.

And finally, it is important not to be overly worried about the many small decisions that must be made, for as Thoreau said, "Our life is frittered away by detail ... simplify, simplify."

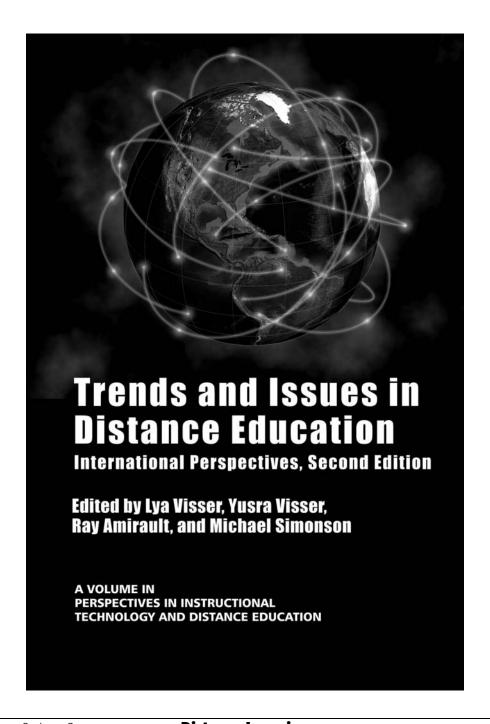
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# Designing the "Perfect" Online *Program*

#### Michael Simonson

he Perfect Online Course" was described by Orellana, Hudgins, and Simonson (2009). This book of readings clearly presented issues central to course design such as time, organization, production, evaluation, and accreditation. It is an important planning document for the distance educator.

Since then, best practices for course design have become much more widely



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understood. However, Orellana, Hudgins and Simonson's book did not explain how to design the "perfect online *program."* Developing an entire program to be offered at a distance is considerably more complex than designing an online course.

Schools, universities, and organizations are moving quickly to offer classes, programs, and training at a distance. Most seem to be gradually making the transition from traditional offerings to distance education by first trying parts of classes, then individual courses, next blended courses, and finally entire distance-delivered programs.

Documenting the process of transitioning from traditional offerings to distance education has not been a priority of those involved in this process. It seems that "trial and error" is the favored approach, rather than a more reasoned process supported by applied research. There are some guides available, if not all in one location. For example in 2005, Simonson wrote about the eight steps for transforming an organization, with the primary purpose of the transformation being the move to distance delivered offerings. And, in 2012, the development of distance education policy and plans was described. What is missing is a combination of the two approaches—

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