

Shared Practices

Disruptive Innovations Impact SCC

By Linda Venturo, editor

Why would the college embrace tech-centric strategies deemed "disruptive" rather than preserve the comfortable familiarities of status quo? Normalcy does not prick our little worlds with unwelcome challenges; it is the antithesis of disruption. Right?

Not exactly. It sounds like a misnomer to describe scalable, cost reduction strategies as disruptive, but it is not. Let me explain. Disruptive innovations are strategies that have a disruptive impact on something, such as a decision to move from a proprietary course management system (Blackboard) to an opensource system (Moodle).

The move may not prove cost effective at first, and it may cater to a fragment of the faculty population, but as Chris Dede from the Harvard Graduate School of Education explains, "the disruptive product [can be] more nimble and responsive and [it can evolve] more quickly to meet the needs of a broader audience [overtime]"(Fletcher, 2009, p. 6). He goes on to say that "the disruptive innovation can drive out the standard product" (2009).

Think floppy disks and jump drives.

Hopefully, this issue of *The Virtual Educator* will, to some extent, release the potential signs of disruptive innovation from Pandora's Box.

References:

Fletcher, G. (2009, September). Disruptive innovation: Technology may push colleges and universities to turn the conventional education model on its head. *Campus Technology*, 23(1), 6. **TVE**

Web Cams are for more than YouTube...

By Victoria Shropshire, instructor

I teach several courses (for several colleges) that are hybrids (2/3 online, 1/3 F-2-F) or completely online, all of which use technical advances in some way or another. Pre-recorded lectures, films, YouTube clips, interactive web sites, quizzes, forums: all of these technical innovations offer online instructors a variety of positive and creative ways to engage their students and connect with their curricula. Live web-conferencing, however, is a relatively new breed of innovation for many online courses, as not only does it require additional skills and tech savvy, but additional cost and time commitment considerations, for the college, instructor, and student.

ONLINE TEACHING IS TRUE TEACHING

Firstly, it would be irresponsible of me not to clearly assert that regardless of what platform a college uses (Moodle, WebCT, Blackboard), I truly believe that all instructors choose technical element additions to their courses/curriculums with student-centered learning opportunities in mind. The positive benefits to students are unquestionable and, to my mind, far out-weight the negatives. Technological integrations are especially beneficial to students with disabilities, allowing them to participate in ways that they could not in a traditional setting. Students do indeed learn, and they consistently provide me with feedback so that every semester the virtual classroom stays dynamic, interesting, and organic in



Victoria Shropshire with Niece

WEB CAMS ARE FOR MORE THAN YOUTUBE

Many students avoid online learning environments because they fear they will not do well in a classroom without "real human contact"; they need the assurance of a handshake of the professor, a paper syllabus in their hands, and traditional social interaction with classmates. I whole-heartedly agree with Bill Pelz, Professor of Psychology at Herkimer County Community College, who stated that *interactivity* is the key. "Interactivity is what differentiates an effective online course from a high-tech correspondence course"(2). Students with web cams

a way that traditional classes cannot be.

Additional technology involves additional man-hours, and anyone who teaches knows that the dangling carrot of a long Christmas vacation just doesn't cut it some years. Integrating technology and working through the "bugs" (both user-generated and otherwise) isn't difficult, per se, but it's time consuming. And time is one thing most teachers don't have aplenty to spare as it is, so something gives. Instruction can become recycled in a video lecture versus "fresh" or broadcast live, and grading must be given a longer turnaround time than in traditional courses. Often I have spent ten-hour work days doing little more than communicating with students via web cam and email, and doing no instruction or grading. Teaching online takes more energy and time than traditional courses, and those who think otherwise are sorely mistaken. Online teaching is hard and dedicated work, performed by caring educators, but it's important work and we know it. We are helping make college more accessible than ever through technology.

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY CANNOT EXIST IN A VACUUM

I have advanced degrees in English and am a professional writer. I am not the most technologically-proficient instructor in my field, by far; I do not write or edit code, I do not know how to program. I understand what html is/does but have no desire or time to learn it, and the only java in my life comes every morning from my local coffee shop. So how did I find myself teaching online? And hosting web-conferences for my courses? I have cool friends.

I was introduced to online teaching by a colleague to whom I will be forever indebted for instructing and mentoring me, who continues to share innovative ideas and support my online development still. When we met years ago, the college where we worked was not very invested in developing or instructing teachers in pedagogies (theoretical or practical) associated with integrating technology in classrooms, and she was a proverbial fish out of water. She, as many colleges in the nation, embraced online learning, which is getting important recognition and support. In April of this year, President Obama and congressional leaders included \$650 million in the federal stimulus package for enhancing education with specific emphasis on professional development and the best uses of technology(1). But how do students learn these same online platforms? Can we expect them to learn to use new software and technology tools, like web cams, and the curriculum materials all simultaneously?

Professional development and student tech support are the keys! It is not and should not be a hiring requisite that a Film Studies instructor have a degree in Information Technology! You must have not only colleagues who can train and support you, but guide and support your students as well. Students must be oriented and supported in the use of educational platforms (like Blackboard, WebCT and Moodle). The integration of web-conferencing into these platforms requires no less.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE GETTING IT RIGHT

Community colleges, due to both increased enrollment and affordable price tags, are in my opinion, well ahead of the curve than many 4-year schools for online learning in my particular disciplines (English, Writing, Humanities). Southwestern Community College (Sylva, NC) and Guilford Technical Community College (Greensboro, NC) are both

communicate in a controlled environment (similar to that of a traditional classroom) in which academic objectives are discussed and learned. It is very important that Netiquette parameters are clearly defined, (they should be in the syllabus) but once these are established, web cams give students a comfortable way to connect and learn.

I find that online students often bond earlier and deeper than students in traditional courses. To some extent, this is due to the absence of appearance-based factors that can inhibit self expression and create stereotypical expectations. Opponents to web cams say that this injects these possibilities into the classroom, and they are, to some extent, correct. However, every class is not broadcast, there is never a time when someone will have a "surprise" web conference (a terrible virtual pop quiz?); students choose the times and dates when they will engage or participate, feeling control over this element of the course to a large extent. This freedom also allows them to schedule a quiet space without spouses, kids, or dogs distracting them when they participate in seminars via web cam. I have also had working professionals dial into web conferences from hotels as they travel for work. Again, the benefits far outweigh the negatives.

Having multiple opportunities to engage is important too. In my ENG 114, I offer a dozen or more seminars over the course of the semester, with attendance of two as the minimum requirement, but have found that the average student attends three or more. Research conducted by the SUNY Learning Network since its inception in 1995 has consistently identified quantity and quality of student-student and student-professor interaction as having a strong positive correlation with student and faculty satisfaction(3). Students who are taught in a comfortable structured environment are more satisfied with their learning experience (and dare I say it, learn more?), and integrating web cams is a great way to create this in an online course. These same students present professional reports via web cam at semester's end and peer support and attendance has yet to be what I would call "shabby".

NOT WITHOUT ITS FAIR SHARE OF ISSUES

However, there is always a risk of having academically strong students (in a writing-concentrated curricula like mine) whose lack of computer skills do, in fact, cause a negative impact on their grade in the course. And some students require a level of assistance that is well beyond their professor, which again is where the need for a well organized, efficient, and student-centered DL department is clear. Distance Learning professionals are often saddled with finding creative alternative ways for students to accomplish these web-conferencing course objectives, should the platform not meet the classrooms needs (limits on participants, cameras, or microphones for instance) or students have persistent accessibility issues. SCC's Distance Learning professionals handle student cases individually, often providing one-on-one tutorials with students. They are invaluable to instructors, as we have neither the time or training to provide this assistance to students. Psychology professors, for instance, should not have to teach students how to convert and post a document, or how to operate their web cams.

Class size is a also real issue these days. Due to college banner enrollment, a down economy, budget constraints, and hiring freezes, (just to name a few causes!) when an instructor finds the course cap has been raised from 22 to 30 or more, then how does this professor schedule thirty 10-15 minute mock interviews via web cam in a given week? If you are like me, and teach multiple courses for multiple colleges, this is a considerable strain on even those with above-par time management skills. Also, a DL coordinator will be expected to communicate directly with students to help trouble-shoot technology hiccups, which increases the demands on them as well.

exceptional examples of institutions who understand, value, train, and support online pedagogies and those who implement them. Technology has changed the dynamics of the traditional classroom, but access, proficiency, and support matter more.

For example, GTCC provides in-depth training and has extensive online community resources (they use Moodle) including FREE instructor/student orientation courses that must be completed for employment/course enrollment in Expository Writing. Speakers and video players are required for students to watch online tutorials, as many students prefer watching instructions to reading them. Web cams and PRONTO, an instant messaging system used campus-wide, give students multiple ways to stay connected. Students feel they have more of a relationship with their instructor because they can IM them, and instructors can have conversations with students regarding their grades one-on-one via email rather than in the hallway or in an intimidating office space. Since I am an adjunct, I have no office, so this allows me great freedom from having to arrange such meetings (unless a tall latte is involved). Isn't technology great?

Another example is my ENG 114 course at Southwestern Community College (they use Blackboard). SCC has an exceptional Distance Learning department, which has helped me integrate a web-conferencing platform to my Professional Research and Reporting course. Web conferencing enables students to have (via web cam) F-2-F interaction with me and fellow classmates. It also provides a unique venue for mock job interviews and professional presentations (both course requirements) to be conducted live, with real time feedback. Students feel engaged in this class in a way that simply recording a lecture (likened to watching a clip on YouTube) can't. They can ask questions and see facial expressions, which is most helpful in courses where mock job interviews, for example, are a part of the course curriculum.

And finally, the cost of the additional equipment bears mentioning. Students may deliberately avoid a class where a web cam is required, as who needs \$40 added to the cost of their semester? Distance Learning and Student Services at SCC have been wonderful in addressing this issue, as the LAC and library on that campus have found web cams to loan to students as well as increasing the availability of computers with web cams in labs on campus. With coordination and communication, we've had great results.

NO LONGER ANIMAL HOUSE

College in America has been transformed, and technology has played a major role in that change. Every college issue from financial aid to dorm room safety has connections to modern technology, and I believe it to be irresponsible not to integrate these same technologies into the classroom, both on-site and online. Colleges need to encourage and support instructors in their efforts, be patient with ever-present challenges and support students in learning and using this tech to improve their education and their lives. Indeed, I believe that removing it would put them at a severe disadvantage in the marketplace, both nationally and globally. It is our responsibility to show students that web cams are for more than just YouTube.

References

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(2) Pelz, Bill. "(My) Three Principles of Effective Online Pedagogy". *JALN* Vol 8, Issue 3. June, 2004.

(3) Garrison, D.R., Anderson, T., and Archer, W. "Critical Inquiry in a Text- Based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education." *The Internet and Higher Education* 2(2-3): 1-19, 2000.

(4) Firth, Becky. "Teachers Teaching Teachers: Through the Teacher Leadership Project, educators are getting a hands-on look at how the use of technology can improve student learning." *The Teacher Leadership Project*. April 2007. www.ciconline.org **TVE**

A Model Online Learning Experience

By Barb Putman, dean of Arts & Sciences

English 114, Professional Research and Reporting, is a required course in many programs at Southwestern. In addition to composition and research competencies, the course includes oral communication competencies. At SCC, the oral communication competencies are taught and assessed through units on interviewing for a job and presenting the final research project.



Several years ago, Toni Knott, on behalf of the English department, developed a hybrid ENG 114 course that requires only two face to face meetings, one with the instructor for

for each face to face event.

The hybrid modality has worked effectively for several years, but in order to stand behind our commitment to offer programs fully online, we needed to find a way to offer ENG 114 in a fully web-centered modality. With the more widespread availability of videoconferencing technologies, we decided we were ready to try a web centered ENG 114 course. With the assistance of colleagues in distance learning and IT, we considered a few different methods to achieve the face to face competencies in a virtual environment. We chose DimDim for our pilot in summer 2009 because of its reasonable cost and relative ease of use. DL staff worked with the instructor to set up her computer and orient her to the software. We attempted to communicate with students about the need for a web camera and software download/test by adding a note to the online schedule. Since it was a pilot, the DL director emailed each student before the class started to explain the technology requirements and to offer assistance. As the semester began, the DL director trained students individually and helped them test their DimDim connections.

The pilot showed us several issues that we need to continue working on as we add the course modality to the regular general education course rotation such as communicating with students and advisors early and often about the technological expectations of the web-centered section, providing technical support and coaching for students, and providing alternative means for



Barb Putman

a mock job interview and one with classmates

for the final oral presentation. Our hybrid ENG 114 instructors typically offer several meeting date, time, and location options

accomplishing course objectives as special cases arise. The disruptive innovations we have incorporated in this class are not flawless and need continuous monitoring and improvement, but they are allowing us to offer a required course in a modality that is necessary for many online students and programs while maintaining the integrity of the interactive elements of the course. Thanks to the patience of our instructor, distance learning staff, and students, the web-centered English 114 course is on its way to becoming a model online learning experience. **TVE**

D.L. Committee Update

Spring 2010 Update

by Kirk Stephens, distance learning committee chair

I think the 2009-10 academic year represents a bit of a paradigm shift for distance learning at Southwestern Community College. Originally, we thought of DL as a new methodology to be implemented. Transitionally, we managed DL as one segment of our student customers. Currently, I think we all recognize DL as an integral element in education—a philosophy that permeates every program and service at Southwestern.

As Chair of the Distance Learning Committee, I have three goals for the committee: **vision, advocacy, and stewardship**. Part of the August meeting was used to discuss our vision and the mission for DL. Members agreed the committee should advocate quality distance learning offerings; advocate the support of distance learning in all functional areas of the college; and focus on the broad goal of promoting distance learning rather than management and oversight of individual courses or instructors.

Obviously, the idea of advocacy was at the forefront of the discussion. The committee continues to search for new methods to promote DL, recruit and empower instructors, and improve the student experience. Every school, large or small, has finite resources.

Our third task, as a committee, is to evaluate the impact of DL on existing services, personnel, and processes. In many cases, IT solutions and process changes will absorb the increased demand for services. In other areas, the college may need to shift resources. Our immediate task for Winter and Spring will be to reexamine the application and registration process for distance learners.



Kirk Stephens

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who works so diligently to make Distance Learning a success at Southwestern—Linda Venturo and Dennis Keough, Information Technology and Student Services, members of the DL committee, and of course, the faculty. **TVE**

Distance Learning Committee Members: Kirk Stephens, *committee chair*, Scott Baker, Pam Bell, Thom Brooks, Scott Cline, Dale Hall, Dennis Keough, Debra Klavohn, Gene Norton, Barbara Putman, Ryan Schwiebert, and Linda Venturo

Workshop Opportunity! *Efficient Course Design*

Move your course content (PowerPoints, PDF's, video, animations, simulations, and more) to SCC's *Content* server.

Learn how to:

- access the Content server
 - upload files
- design an integrated Blackboard/Content server course

December 4, 2009 (Friday)

10:00 AM Founders Hall 125

Patty Wall & Linda Venturo, *presenters*

TechTalk

Moving Forward with College-wide Standards

by Ryan Schwiebert, director of technology services

There are several recent examples of our application of such college-wide standards. First, as you should already be aware starting spring 2010 we are requiring all faculty, adjuncts, staff and students to use their college-provided email account for



Ryan Schwiebert

Traditionally our college has adopted educational technologies in a relatively reactive manner. A need would arise and then technology was evaluated to fulfill that need. Though some effort was made to ensure this additional technology fit well into the current environment, it was not the first priority in the decision making process. This philosophy actually

served us well during our early stages of technology development, but our needs are rapidly changing. As a result, we have begun to change our technology philosophy to be more proactive about our decision making process over the past few years.

At the center of this new philosophy is a need to establish firm standards on what technology should be selected, what formats it should support, and how it will best benefit everyone affiliated with our institution. These considerations are not taken lightly because at their core is an underlying requirement to make technology seamless and easy to use for everyone involved.

college related communication. Though some may initially believe this is inconvenient, I think it will prove to be more beneficial in the long run. This policy change will help us to be compliant with FERPA and improve security, but there are other benefits. From a user standpoint we have taken the guess work out of how to best contact anyone affiliated with the college. Students no longer have to guess what address they should use to contact their instructor, and instructors know exactly how to contact their students even before they have met for the first time.

Another example of such standards is our implementation of the college's virtualization project. Up until now, it has been difficult to provide our instructors and students access to the software they needed at the times and locations they required. Virtualization removes this road block and allows us to deliver a desktop with all of the required software to a student, instructor, or even computer lab on demand without technicians having to work on the transition and delivery. Ultimately this project will also allow us to deliver these desktops to individuals in their homes or offices over the Internet, removing the requirement of purchasing and installing costly and complicated software.

As you can see, a lot of thought has gone into our evolving decision making process. It is designed to keep the core needs of our stakeholders in mind and to make the use of technology easier. Though the transition to this educational technology philosophy may seem inconvenient in the beginning, I think you will agree it will ultimately be worth our effort. **TVE**

blog: <http://blogs.southwesterncc.edu/ryans/>
Web site: <http://www.southwesterncc.edu/support/index.htm>

Distance Learning Newz

Illegal Course Content Sharing - *Be Informed!*

Several new content *sharing* sites are popping up that allow students to upload and download course materials (tests, answers, documents, etc.) for a fee. Check them out.



<http://finalsclub.org/>



<http://www.notehall.com>



<http://www.coursehero.com>

Blackboard
new version
new changes
Release 9

New Release - Blackboard Learn Release 9

- coming December 16, 2009 -

To preview Blackboard's newest release, Blackboard Learn Release 9 (next step toward Blackboard NG).

**A
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<http://www.notepig.com>



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New Tools and Features in Release 9

- [Overview of New Web 2.0 Interface](#) **NEW**
- [Blog Tool](#) **NEW**
- [Journal Tool](#) **NEW**
- [Notification Dashboard \(Homepage\)](#) **NEW**

Redesigned Tools and Features in Release 9

- [Assignment Dropbox](#) (new options)
- [Discussion](#) (management)
- [Grade Center](#) (management)

Printable Handouts

- [How to Use Blog Tool](#)
- [How to Use Journal Tool](#)
- [How to Use the Notifications Dashboard](#)
- [Understanding the Change from Bb Release 8 to Bb Learn \(Release 9\)](#)

For further information, read [Blackboard's Understanding the Change from Blackboard Suite Release 8 to Blackboard Learn TVE](#)

Other resources to check out

- [Google Sites](#) - free, user friendly Web page creation
- [Mahara](#) - open source e-portfolios

To submit an article to *The Virtual Educator*, contact Linda Venturo

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