

Shared Practices

Integrating Courses

by Allan Grant & Owen Gibby

Often an instructor will have a student say, “We studied that in _____ (fill in the blank).” Hearing a chorus of similar comments, the English and Humanities course instructors decided to attempt more integration of courses with similar and overlapping subject content. The first attempt was a pairing of HUM 130 (Myth in Human Culture) and ENG 251 (Western World Literature 1) in the fall semester of 2007. This was a natural plan, as the former treats myth through the ages in many different cultures and the latter sees the literature as an evolving mythology stemming from Hebraic, Greek, Roman, and medieval and renaissance European cultures. Both courses were offered as traditional classroom classes scheduled at the same day and time that periodically met together to consider common themes.

In order to have more than occasional contact between the two classes, the instructors (Owen Gibby and Allan Grant) with great



help from Linda Venturo, set up an informational site on Blackboard with images and text relating to both courses. As scheduling of classes meeting at the same time and finding space to physically accommodate them are real challenges, in the future the site could support additional, related, traditional classroom, web-centered, hybrid, and web enhanced offerings in other disciplines such as History, Anthropology, Sociology, and Psychology. ■

"If you have the ideas, you can do a lot without machinery. Once you have those ideas, the machinery starts working for you.... Most ideas you can do pretty darn well with a stick in the sand."

— Alan Kay

Online Multimedia Tips

by Duane Wesolick

Using multimedia in an online course is a great way to spruce up the class and perhaps even (gasp!) enhance learning! I've used several types of multimedia in various online classes with some success and with varying degrees of effort involved. Some examples include:

Pictures: This is probably the easiest way to have a quick impact. Pictures can enhance the looks of a course and pique student interest and they are very easy to upload in most online systems. You can also make nice course banners!

Audio and Video: These files can be a bit more difficult to use, but you can often simply provide links that take students to the various sites that use such multimedia. I've used lots of audio files of historical speeches with success in my classes. Short video clips are always welcome to students, especially if they are somewhat entertaining.

You can also use videos of lectures (which may be less entertaining ☺).

Timelines: These take some time to put together, but with new software like “Articulate Engage” you can really make some nice ones which include sound effects, pictures, and text in a timeline format. I haven't been using this for long, but it has been a hit so far.

PowerPoints: If they are done well, these are the most time-consuming enhancements you can do, but the payoff can be big (for yourself and your students). PowerPoints can, of course, involve all the bells and whistles—sound effects, pictures, graphs, maps, text, motion effects—and you can also record a voiceover as a sort of lecture to go along with all the dizzying graphics. Whichever media you decide works best for you, please try to take advantage of these (and other) technologies. You, and your students, will be glad you did! ■



Duane Wesolick

T-shirt Design Collaboration

by Linda Aiken

Every year the students in the Graphics Arts department design t-shirts for an SCC curriculum of their choosing. This year Bay Jones designed logos for the Early Childhood program. When Bay presented her designs to Linda Aiken, curriculum program director for the Early Childhood program, a discussion ensued about the best way to have the visuals sent to online students.

If you would like to share one of your teaching practices with your colleagues, please submit a 300 word (or less) summary to Linda Venturo (lventuro@southwesterncc.edu).

Bay proceeded to put her designs on a CD that could be used for distance learning students. Linda, then, incorporated the images in a presentation using Windows Movie Maker. The end result exceeded expectations and has received positive feedback from Bay and the students in the Blackboard classes who viewed the presentation. ■

View T' shirt designs—

<http://apps.southwesterncc.edu/bbcourse/graphictshirt.wmv>

STUDENTvoice

Benefits of Online and Traditional Courses

by Lindsey Weisenauer, distance learning student

Currently, I am a student at Southwestern Community College enrolled in classroom settings as well as online classes; I feel strongly about the benefits of both. As a single working mother enrolled full time, an online class allows flexibility that is highly valuable. In taking online classes, I have learned to better manage my time and become more dedicated towards the motivation necessary to not fall behind with weekly assignments.

I'm learning within the classroom setting that many students my age are inexperienced with computer technologies; I myself feel the frustration at times. Many of us are a part of a generation gap where technology has not been the main influence, whereas the majority of primary educational schools now rely on computers in a daily curriculum. Understanding information technologies is a crucial skill within the job market and is becoming more so in our personal lives.

I feel fortunate with the instructors I have had for the online classes. Each class is set up unique to the teacher, and Blackboard specifically is very user friendly. Instructors for these classes have been proficient with returning questions and grades from completed assignments. The fashion in which instructors implement the discussion boards allows somewhat of a connection to other students forming relationships that help to be successful through the course.

My main complaint of the online classes revolves around the true

Virtual Value

by Matt Lemmens, distance learning student

The extension of access that the on-line class system provides is one of its greatest assets. Many more students have had the chance to participate in the educational process than would have been possible in a traditional setting. A school fulfills its potential when it helps as many people as possible expand their knowledge and awareness of the world. Internet classes are the most efficient

and false questions on the end of chapter tests. Many times a question is vague and could be answered either way. Every test I've taken online I have struggled with what is expected in the true and false category. I would like to see more detail in the question or statement.

Students learn differently and require what is most beneficial in their process of digesting the material and actually understanding it. Personally, I do better in a classroom setting where I can participate in the stimulating discussions that occur more sporadically. I have gained better understanding of critical thinking skills thanks to the time spent with professors. I find it challenging to not meet the professor even once for the duration of an online class. Meeting a professor in person helps to give me a better understanding of what is expected and what to expect. I seem to retain more from the classroom setting over a longer period of time. Also, I find it highly distracting in the classroom setting where computers are available and students roam online or type while the teacher is giving instruction. I admit, I've been tempted to check my e-mail or Myspace when it is time to work on Educo as a class.

Overall, online classes and classroom time are both valuable tools towards gaining a better education. I hope as computer technologies advance, we do not lose touch with the interactions that keep us connected on a personal level. Teaching is an art, no matter what the form. As long as the instructor fulfills his/her obligations to the students and staff and shows a passion for learning, both methods can be successful.

Thank you for interest in the opinion of the student; I hope this will be of some help. ■

way of fulfilling this ideal. No building is ever large enough to house all those that want to learn. No teacher's voice is loud enough to carry to all those that want to listen. The internet has the potential to make the size of the schoolhouse an infinite space. Virtual space can allow all those who want to learn the opportunity to do so.

In my experience, the internet classroom has removed many of the impediments to learning that the traditional classroom is burdened with. Life does not lessen in complexity when a

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student decides to further one's education. However, on-line classes have flexibility in schedule that bends to the lives we live. Careers, children, or physical impediments no longer play the dominate role in the choice to go to school. In this way the virtual blackboard has been a great liberator to many unable to attend traditional classes. On-line courses create a learning environment that is free from many of the subjective vices that might otherwise color our perceptions. There is but one way to judge the merits of the ideas presented on-line and that is by the quality of the work submitted. Fears of bias and social misconceptions



Battling Rising Software Costs

by Ryan Schwiebert

Purchasing software has become an increasingly expensive venture. Basic word processing software such as Microsoft Office and Word Perfect are not only expensive, but they regularly need to be upgraded for a fee. Software packages such as Adobe Creative Suite, which includes Photoshop and Dreamweaver, are even more costly. This is largely because much of the software industry has begun to treat their software releases as a service. In such a model software is not really owned in a permanent sense, it is instead provided for an unspecified period of time. If you want to keep up with the latest versions of the software, then you are required to pay regularly for upgrades. Unfortunately, these increasing software costs frequently erode our ability to purchase additional computers, servers, projectors, and other critical hardware. If these rising costs have an effect on our institution, imag-

ine the burden they likely place on our students.

Without the Internet I would not have been able to move through the process of my own education as quickly as I have. Availability and access to classes through the on-line system has given me the power to choose when, how, and at what pace I have gained new knowledge. The technology that has made this system possible is a boon to the community hungry for knowledge and needing educated individuals to point the way into the future. ■

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Believe it or not, there are many free and open source alternatives to almost every commercially available software package. In some cases, this free software is even better than its commercial counterpart. That is not to say commercial software does not have its own distinct advantages. Simply put, sometimes the best software for the job costs money, and there is no substitute. What is important to recognize is there are many choices and trade offs we must consider when making these software selections. Just because we have always used something or someone else is using it, does not make it the right choice for every situation.

In future editions of this newsletter, I will occasionally showcase some of the newest and most useful free and open source software packages. Many of which we already use here at our institution. I hope this providing this information will help you better understand the possibilities available to you and your students. ■

Blackboard

What Is - Messages?

Messages is an internal e-mail system in Blackboard; therefore, all e-mail (synonymous with messages) correspondence stays within your Blackboard course. By default, it offers you an Inbox and a Sent folder, but you can also create additional folders to help you organize your messages. You can move messages from one folder to another. Messages can be sent with attachments.

Since this is an internal e-mail system, all e-mails will be preserved in your course and can be retrieved later if needed. If you decide to use the Messages tool, then it is suggested that you do not use it in conjunction with Send Email. Send Email sends e-mails to student Webmail accounts and faculty Groupwise accounts. Trying to manage two e-mail systems will increase your workload. Students are introduced to Messages during Blackboard orientations, and they seem to really like the convenience it affords. ■



DISTANCE LEARNING COMMITTEE UPDATE

by Dennis Keough, director of distance learning, committee chair

The Distance Learning Committee at SCC meets several times a semester to discuss applications, practices and trends that are relevant to distance learning. The Distance Learning initiatives at SCC include not only our online offerings, but also our Interactive Television Network, "Community Link". This spring we are offering 254 online courses in our curriculum division serving over 2600 duplicated* students. On our ITV system we are

currently offering 49 course sections serving over 300 duplicated students.

To support these courses and students a whole host of people and resources work behind the scene to make sure your learning experience at SCC is a fruitful one. Please check back to this column soon for continuing updates.■

* duplicated students will be counted two times if taking two courses