e-learning queen's

E·learner

Survival

Guide

Everything you need to succeed in the wild and woolly world of mobile learning, elearning, and hybrid college, K-12, and career courses.
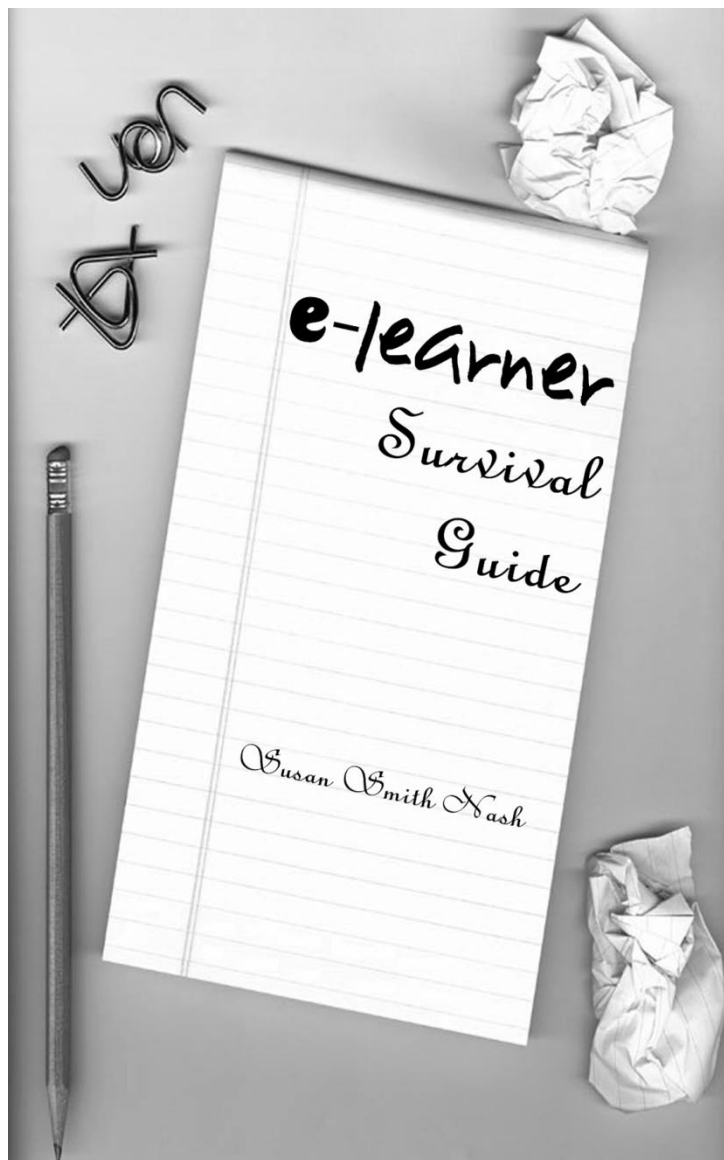
Susan Smith Nash

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Excellence in College Teaching and Learning: Classroom and Online Instruction, was co-authored with George Henderson and published in 2007. *Leadership and the e-Learning Organization,* was published in 2006. Nash is managing editor of Texture Press, also an editor with *JELLO - Journal of E-Learning and Learning Objects.* Her edublog, e-Learning Queen (http://www.elearningqueen.com) has been nominated for several awards. Her most recent book, *Good Deeds Society* (2008), was translated into Slovenian (Klub Dobrih Dejanj) and received recognition in Ljubljana and in schools in Slovenia.
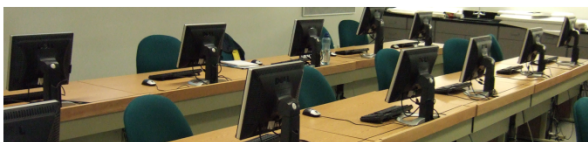
E-Learning Survival Guide
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SYNOPSIS

Susan Smith Nash, Ph.D.

This broad–reaching collection of essays on e–learning examines accomplishments, new directions, and challenges from many perspectives. The essays are arranged in categories, which include e–learning and e–learners, teaching and instruction, student engagement, learning communities, outcomes assessment and institutional leadership, all of which relate to learners and programs from college, K–12, career, to corporate training. Of special interest is a focus on successful outcomes for students and programs, and essays on often–overlooked niches of learners, including generational differences (Gamers, Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y), stay–at–home mothers, working mother e–learners, homeschoolers, bilingual online education and training.

OUTLINE OF PREFACE

What Is This Collection About?

The fact that the demand for online courses and programs has skyrocketed in the last several years does not mean that the growth has been without pain, or that there are not challenges. In fact, just the reverse is the case. The more e–learning grows, the more growing pains there are. There is greater need for a book that addresses some of the practical issues that tend to be overlooked in many books on e–learning and distance learning, or which tend to be presented in manners that are either too narrow or too theoretical for most readers interested in how e–learning applies to them.

This broad–ranging collection of essays on e–learning will appeal to readers who are involved in the following aspects of e–learning:

1. E–learners (college and corporate);

2. Teachers and professors (college, corporate, K–12);

3. Administrators of educational programs (college, corporate, not–for–profit, K–12);

4. Individuals interested in "serious games," video games, simulations for training;

5. Individuals interested in how to best deliver courses to in bilingual formats, or in settings where dual language instruction is necessary;

6. Individuals interested in seeing how e–learning can help with human capital development, for community and national economic development;

7. Women and marginalized economic groups facing a glass ceiling, and interested in how e–learning can help them obtain training and skills for better economic access;

8. People seeking to find ways to bridge generational divides (boomers vs. gamers) for knowledge and skills transfer;

9. Individuals who would like to see how new technologies (mobile technologies, Smartphones, etc.) will impact instruction, learning and assessment;

10. Individuals who are interested in understanding how to assure success in programs using e–learning, and who are interested in cognitive, motivational and instructional elements;

11. Parents of children in public or private schools, or who homeschool their children, who are interested in understanding more about how K–12 students can maximize their learning experience, and the implications for assessment.

Brief Overview of Enrollments in E–Learning

Almost all colleges and universities in the United States offer at least one online course. In the fall of 2006, roughly one in six college students enrolled in an online course, 3.5 million students at a growth rate of 9.7 percent (Sloan–C, 2006).

Corporations and not–for–profit organizations are increasingly using e–learning (which includes mobile learning via portable audio and mobile communications), for providing training and professional development for their employees, members or partners (American Distance Learning Association ADLA, 2007).

The number of K–12 students enrolled in online courses is estimated at 700,000 (Sloan–C, 2006).

At least 250,000 homeschool students are enrolled in online courses (homeschool.com, 2007).

CHAPTER 1

E–LEARNING AND YOU

THINKING ABOUT E–LEARNING? THOUGHTS FOR NEW E–LEARNERS

You may have been considering online courses for a long time, but have not been ready to take the plunge. Everyone likes to feel confident about a new endeavor, and you realize that believing yourself able to succeed is crucial in education. It is easy to feel confident about face–to– face instruction. After all, we have all had many years of experience in that area. However, sometimes the courses you need, the location of instruction and your travel/work schedules make it impossible to take traditional face–to–face courses. Moreover, if you are needing professional development or a certificate, the travel expenses, the time away from work, and the location and timing of the courses can totally derail your professional and academic plans.
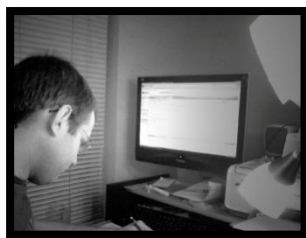
You are left with the most logical option: online courses. Nevertheless, even in a time of widespread adoption of e–learning, many people still have a number of basic questions. Therefore, we will take a moment and address those questions and, in the process, perhaps give you a better understanding of the kind of experience you are likely to have and the way you will learn. Finally, you will have a chance to gain some insight into how special the e–learning experience can be.

What is really so great about online courses?

The benefits are so numerous; it is hard to know where to start. If you have an up–to–date computer, a fast internet connection, and the right software and plug–ins, you are set. You can take the

courses anywhere. If you do not have online access all day, that is often perfectly okay. Most online courses do not require you to be online all the time, and they encourage flexibility. You can download audio and video to experience later. You can read your books and materials offline. The things you will do online involve communication with your professor, downloading information, taking online quizzes, practicing online quizzes and engaging in dynamic, interactive elements (virtual labs, activities, communication). If you have to travel for your job, do not worry. Have WiFi — will travel. You will be able to take your course anywhere you have a computer and an internet connection. You would be amazed how many people log on and do their online courses from their hotel rooms while they are traveling, or going to an internet cafe or coffee shop with connections. You can be overseas, in an airport, or any other place with a connection.

Do online courses cost more than regular ones?

Online courses will often be the same tuition as traditional face–to–face courses. However, there may be a fee for connections and support. On the other hand, if you are taking a course with a lab, your online course may be less expensive because you will not have to pay lab fees or purchase lab equipment. You will just need to have the book and passcode for the virtual lab. If you compare the cost of an online college with a private institution, you may be surprised at how affordable the online courses can be. In addition, many colleges that specialize in distance education for adults also have payment plans and low–cost financing.

How much money am I going to save by taking online courses?

You may think that if you are taking an online course, you will need to buy a better computer than you would need for a regular face–to–face course. The truth is you will need the same kind of computer for your regular courses. The reason is that most courses, online or off, require you to go online for research, to use e–mail, and to access files and instructional materials for your course. Do not forget the realities of getting to face–to–face classes. You are going to save a great deal of money in terms of commuting time, parking, transportation costs and incidentals.

How convenient will it be?

Taking an online course is extremely convenient. Because most courses are asynchronous, which means you can be online any time and can follow a schedule that makes sense to you. You can work according to your own schedule. That said it is important to keep in mind that you really need to have a reliable Internet connection that you can access often. Ideally, you should log on twice a day, even if it is just to check announcements and to see what is happening in the discussion board.

What kind of Internet connections will I need?

Dial–up used to work. At present, dial–up can get in your way more than any course requirements. Wifi is good, although there may be times when it can be problematic, particularly if there are many users and band–width is crunched.

Do I have to be connected to the Internet all the time?

You do not need to be connected all the time. However, some courses need more connectivity than others do. If you have to do activities that are accessible online, but not downloadable, you will need to be online. If this is the case, be sure to plan your day and your proximity to a computer with a high–speed connection.

Will I need textbooks?

Yes. In fact, please do not forget to get your books early, print out your assignments and review what you will be doing. Be sure to map out your work, and have a good sense of how to budget your time and to schedule your study time.

What kind of computer? What kind of computer software?

Be sure to get a computer that has a fast processor (1.0 GHz), plenty of RAM (1.0 GB minimum), storage (80 GB) and excellent drivers.

What kinds of courses can I take online?

You can take almost all kinds of classes online today, even those with labs (natural sciences, etc.). However, some are going to be more relaxing than others are, and some will resonate with your learning styles more than others will.

What kinds of degrees?

You can get arts and sciences degrees, associates degrees, obtain certificates and more.

Does it take me any longer to get a degree online?

In some cases, getting a degree online can take less time rather than more.

Are online degrees respected?

There is no inherent stigma attached to degrees earned online, but many of the most highly advertised and promoted are considered "diploma mills." These should be avoided at all costs, no matter how moderate the tuition may be. What is more important is the reputation of the college rather than the delivery system.

What kinds of things will I do in an online course?

You can expect to read texts, watch videos, listen to audio, take quizzes (practice and for credit), interact on the discussion board, post information in a home page, interact with other people, e–mail your instructor and students, and participate in innovative activities (wikis, mapping, mashups, more).

Who teaches online courses? What happens?

Instructors who have special training in online courses teach them. They often do not develop the courses, but they guide students in discussions, grade papers, post announcements and provide personal feedback.

What is the best way to succeed in an online course?

Follow the guidelines below.

Top Ten Ways to Succeed

1. Sign up early, take courses in correct sequence;
2. Check out entire course, clicking all links;
3. Find timeline and familiarize yourself with tasks;
4. Connect with professor;
5. Have appropriate computer, software and connection;
6. Keep up with reading and tasks;

7. Establish connection with fellow students, keep up with discussion/cooperative tasks;

8. Practice writing activities: paragraphs, short essays, research papers;

9. Practice quizzes, review materials;

10. Perfect online research, writing.

ONLINE NATION: WHAT GROWTH IN ONLINE PROGRAMS MEANS TO THE E–LEARNER

Rapid, unexpected, and often counter–intuitive changes in education arrive before most people realize they are coming. Some arrive when unfortunate students and advisers dismiss them as futuristic fantasies.

New technologies may level playing fields in ways unimaginable half a century before. At present, we can say with some assurance that this applies as much to nations and regions as to individuals.

You must not only make what seem secure choices now, but also be able to learn to adjust to change while learning a profession. An ideal way to manage this is for students to learn to adapt to change as they learn a profession. Fortunately, little can teach you such abilities in a formal setting better than the new technologies and courses now becoming available. With foresight and lack of fear, you can prepare for employment now available, and make transitions easily and even enjoyably.

Below is a break down that educational institutions and research provides, including more objective data, less rhetoric and more deliberation.

In 2007, the non–profit Sloan Consortium published a sweeping five year survey of online learning reports from 4,000 higher education facilities. (Sloan–C, Online Nation, [Needham, MA, www.sloan–c.org/publications/survey/pdf/online_nation.pdf]).   The questionnaires inquired about the nature of online enrollment and programs. The institutions described the level to which they were

currently engaged in online courses and programs, and what they expected in future demand and growth.

In 2006, more than half the institutions surveyed described themselves as either "fully engaged" or "engaged" with a strategic purpose for their online courses and programs. An overwhelming percentage expected the demand to grow.

The results were exceptionally significant and at times included unexpected findings. These have profound implications for currently enrolled and future e–learners.

1. Growth of online courses and programs has been extraordinary. The institutions with the highest levels of growth were the ones with the highest level of commitment to e–learning. They often doubled the number of offerings within the survey period.

2. A large number of institutions claim that online is a part of their long–term strategy.

3. Online enrollments will reach a steady state only when *demand dictates* that institutions stop their expansion efforts and they have stopped adding courses and programs (p. 15).

4. Those institutions that do not consider online programs part of their overall strategy do not have a significant impact on the general number of online enrollments.

Possible conclusions that one can make, but which were not a part of the report, include:

1. Institutions that expect demand to continue to grow will not worry too much about a potentially negative impact of tuition increases. In fact, the market price will tend to increase as demand surges, since there will still be a high number of students who seek high–quality online programs.

2. Engaged institutions will see the future as possessing

   a. Rapid growth in enrollments;

   b. Faster growth of programs with low barriers of entry and with popular programs (Criminal Justice, Public Administration, General Studies, MBA, Allied Health, etc.);

   c. Higher competition as supply starts to outstrip demand.

3. Textbook driven course development: modules will lead to quick development, but institutions will have difficulty with brand differentiation.

4. Standardization of text and outcome assessment in order to satisfy accreditation agencies and State departments of education.

5. How institutions differentiate themselves will change.

Problems with growth:

1. Students not prepared—do not know how to succeed in college.

2. Students and Institutions need more development courses, placement exams and support. What kind of support? Will it really work? Colleges and universities will be under pressure to make sure.

3. Tuition madness—two pronged attack: cost–push and demand–pull.

4. Instructional materials must evolve to meet needs of students:

   a. Text with interactive and web–based quizzes and resources;

   b. Downloadable audio that ties to text and learning objectives/outcomes;

   c. Video clips for key points;

   d. Mobile (download practice tests—any place + any time)

5. Financing must evolve to allow more students to afford college. In addition, more internships, job placement and virtual employment should be involved.

Again, Why now?—Reality!

- We are an "online nation."
- The gap between the "have's" and "have not's" is not as clear as it seemed in older models and concepts.
- If not attended, new fissures may create an insurmountable gap, particularly in times of social change and economic uncertainty.
- The gap has to do with preparation and ability to succeed when entering the program and as one progresses.

- How can we make sure that entire blocks of the population are not excluded from the "online nation?"

- There have been numerous changes and innovations.

- This is a moment to seize. What we do now will shape the future of e–learning. This is a time when the newness of e–learning can act as an exciting incentive rather than a burden. Those of us engaged on all levels can feel some of the enthusiasm of discovery if we do not get in our own way.

ONLINE DEGREES AND PROGRAMS: GROWTH AND MORE GROWTH

What was the most popular degree offered last year?

According to the U.S. Department of Education, more than 90,000 psychology bachelor's degrees were awarded in 2000–2006. By far the most popular, however, was the Bachelor of Business Administration, with more than 350,000 awarded. Furthermore, Business Administration continued to experience high growth.

What does this mean for the online learner? Here are a few thoughts to consider when considering majors, growth and, perhaps most importantly, employment prospects.

According to the Digest of Education Statistics (2007), the most widely awarded bachelor's degrees were the following:

Business Administration	350,000
Social Sciences	175,000
Education	120,000
Psychology	94,000
Communications	90,000
Engineering and Engineering Technology	85,000
Visual Arts/Performing Arts	80,000
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	70,000
Computer and Informational Sciences	55,000

It is wise to look at trends and employment possibilities. Do the majors correspond with emerging job opportunities?

Business Administration

Are all the people who are relying on a bachelor's in business administration going to find their investment paid off? The U.S. economy is largely a service economy. Many of the emerging positions have to do with consumer–associated primary or secondary activities, and involve either direct contact with the product or services affiliated with them. The volatility in financial services, real estate, banking and other markets will definitely have an impact on the number of jobs that are available. There could be an oversupply of individuals with a degree in business administration. Nevertheless, a business degree could be an excellent choice in the right framework. As a foundational course of study that provides individuals with fine–tuned analytical skills, it could lead to the kind of success students expect.

However, the traditional course of study does tend to be rather narrowly focused, and graduates may not have the science and humanities courses they may need in the future to adapt with the times. Writing and communication skills must be a focal point. The math courses (business math) are not as flexible as general math courses, and the exposure to the worlds' cultures, humanities, literature and basic integrative, interdisciplinary thinking could be a bit thin. Business majors should be urged to take more humanities and science classes, including math.

Social Sciences

Social sciences enable the learner to appreciate our changing culture and to gain an appreciation of the different ways that people describe and discuss the world. An interdisciplinary social sciences plan of study could well be the most useful for our changing world. However, one critical caveat is that the job seeker must be willing to go an extra mile, and obtain additional specialized training and education in order to maximize one's earning potential. For example, a social sciences degree coupled with a certificate in an allied health care area could be the perfect combination for a job with responsibility in, for example, services for the elderly or home health care.

Education

Jobs in education are projected to increase between now and 2020. A bachelor's degree in education may prepare a student to teach in schools in the state in which one graduates. If one is taking an online course of study, it is important to shape one's curriculum and plan of study so that it aligns with the state requirements. Many states require a master's degree in order to obtain permanent certification, and most do require specialized classroom management, motivation and pedagogy courses. If an individual desires to be a teacher, it is essential to consult with an advisor and curriculum specialist to make sure that the requirements of a school system, state or teacher's union are being satisfied by one's course of study.

Psychology

Psychology is the perennial favorite of students everywhere. The courses are intrinsically interesting, and they help individuals understand themselves and their worlds. The course of study is well rounded and the learner graduates with a great ability to think, introspect, and to explain the world. Despite the popularity of the degree, it is not a great career choice if one wants to transition directly into a good job that commands an excellent salary and a specialized curriculum. Psychology is a solid foundation and a good platform for many different jobs requiring a general education. It also is an excellent launching point for a graduate degree. Many job seekers decide to supplement their general bachelor's degree (such as a degree in psychology) with a specialized certificate course.

Communications

Communications is a high–growth area, primarily because of the way that communications encompasses not just communication theory and the social sciences, but also includes media studies and Internet/web design. It can also cover professional writing in relation to communications. The key to success in employment is to couple a degree with an internship (virtual or face–to–face) and additional coursework that allow the individual to become a contributing team member in a rapidly evolving environment.

Engineering and Engineering Technology

Although manufacturing, transportation, processing and mining sectors of the economy have shrunk over the last decade, there are still solid gains made by engineers and the need for them remains. Some of the engineering opportunities have to do with new technologies, processes and materials, including nanotechnology. Others have to do with engineering systems and other types of applications that integrate computer technology, communications and engineering.

Visual Arts/Performing Arts

Thanks in large part to the need for graphics in web design and other information technology, there has been a surge in enrollments in visual arts. This trend is likely to continue, and students who enjoy the visual arts will be required to focus on digital art as much as other media. For those who do not major in visual and/or performing arts, they provide some of the most important auxiliary or secondary augmentations to other fields.

Biological and Biomedical Sciences

Although the growth in enrollments has not been high, new concerns with the environment, the world's ecosystems, global warming, genetic engineering and crop sciences, have caused a new interest in biological and biomedical sciences. In addition, technological advances in the treatment of illnesses and research into the function of the brain under the influence of pharmaceuticals have created interest and have opened opportunities.

Computer and Informational Sciences

Despite the boom–bust cycles that have characterized the sectors of computer and information technology, the way that all industries utilize computers and information science more or less guarantees that there will be a continuing demand for specialists, as well as an ongoing interest. The risk in choosing computer and information sciences as degrees is that technologies and methods tend to have a life cycle, and become more profoundly obsolete than virtually any other field. For that reason, anyone who is in the industry, or who is thinking of majoring in these fields, needs to plan to take general foundational courses that will apply to the likely course of change

in technologies in the future. They should then follow that up with ongoing courses throughout their careers and complete certificate courses as a way to demonstrate competence.

WHY E–LEARNING? "PULL" VS. "PUSH" MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

You may be wondering what advantages e–learning has over traditional face–to–face courses.

Of course, you have already identified the major ones: accessibility and convenience. Your online course can be logged into at any time and any place. This is a huge advantage over traditional face–to–face courses held in a classroom or meeting place, especially if you have a busy life that requires travel, family or work commitments.

Further, the convenience of the online course really cannot be matched. None of that is true if you are in a situation where you do not have high–speed internet, or your connection is limited or intermittent. However, assuming that you have a great connection and that it is always available, you are in fantastic shape with an online course. You can log in after the kids are in bed. You can work during your lunch break. You can work from your hotel room, an airport or a restaurant offering WiFi connections. There is truly nothing like it.

However, what about the other benefits? Surely, there is more to life than convenience and access. How about the learning? What about the idea of connecting with other students? How about the intangible feelings you get when you join a college or university community? If you take an online course, will you be missing school spirit, study buddies, lively in–class discussions, and passionate discussions over coffee and pastries at the local purveyor of fine coffee drinks and bakery items?

E–learning has come a long way from its earliest origins. Back at its inception, online programs often offered courses that got the job done, but they were not very exciting. You might write responses to questions for each lesson, then e–mail them to your instructor. You might read online material, listen to audio, then

take interactive quizzes, which were automatically scored and entered in a gradebook. Alternatively, you might watch videos of recorded classroom lectures, and then take a test over the contents of the lecture and readings. Again, the methods got the job done and they pushed content to you, but they were not very exciting.

What has changed?

First, there has been a big shift in the way that people envision online courses. Before, there was always the notion of "pushing" or "delivering" content. Course designers thought that if they could "push" or "deliver" content to the learner, everything would be okay. The leaner would soak up the content, and then respond to it in a way that would reflect how much he or she learned. That might have worked for some learners, but it certainly did not work for all.

The "push" concept of learning, which characterized correspondence courses and some traditional lecture courses, led to high drop–out rates and low completion rates. In fact, it was not unusual for a correspondence course that utilized the "push" concept to have completion rates as low as eighteen percent.

"Push" has turned to "Pull"

Thanks to improved software, high–speed connections, but most of all, to a new philosophy of learning that stresses interaction and engagement, rather than passive receptivity, e–learning is in a new era.

Instead of "pushing" content, the college or university sets up a learning environment that encourages students to interact. They are "pulling" content and responses to each other.

How does the "pull" concept work? First, the student who logs into an online course will find that he or she is required to interact and communicate not only with the professor, but also with other students. Information streams in on demand, which is to say it is "pulled" from the servers.

Second, the student chooses what, when and where he pulls content from. It is a choice. Therefore, there are many ways to customize the learning experience. The sequence and way in which he or she pulls material corresponds to one's own unique learning styles and preferences.

Pulling means customizing

While it is necessary to conform and perform in an online course, a good course is not rigid. It allows the learner to do things in a way that is comfortable. Do you like to interact with your peers first, before you do the reading? Do you like to take practice exams? Do you like to read what others are saying in their drafts? It is all possible in the "pull" model of online courses.

Learning communities are friendly places

The successful e–learning experience is one that creates a sense of a learning community that can be as strong—perhaps even stronger than—the face–to–face experience. You never feel alone and, when you have questions, you can post them at the very moment they arise. You do not have to wait until class.

In addition, you have a chance to frame yourself in a positive way. You are protected emotionally and socially far more than you would ever be protected in a face–to–face course. You may have experienced courses in which you felt pressured to go along with "group think" or to "dumb down" in order to conform to your group or not seem like a freak during in–class discussions. In an online course, you have much more flexibility. Sure, there is common sense, "netiquette" and appropriate behavior; but overall, most people find the online environment to be open and intellectually freeing.

Why e–learning?

In responding to the question, it becomes evident that more questions are triggered. Nevertheless, it is clear that e–learning makes sense, and will make even more sense as time goes on, infrastructure improves in rural areas (more high–speed access), and people are able to do some of the work via mobile learning.

HOW DOES MY ONLINE PROGRAM COMPARE? HOW ARE THEY RANKED?

The "Online College Rankings 2008" of Online Education Database [http://oedb.org—hereafter referred to as OEDb] provides valuable information and insight into established and emerging online

college programs. More importantly, OEDb is causing a serious re–evaluation of the way that colleges are assessed for quality and ranked. Their methodology goes into the heart of the educational experience provided by online colleges in ways that the US News and World Report's college ranking system cannot.

This is not to say that people will stop trusting the venerable US News and World Report's "America's Best Colleges" report. http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/rankindex_brief.php.

Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, mentioned the report's popularity and impact: "If you ever doubt the need or appetite for your mission, consider the U.S. News college rankings. It has been called the "swimsuit edition" of postsecondary reporting. Within seventy-two hours of its release, the U.S. News website was viewed ten million times" http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2007/12/12182007.html.

For many reasons, their rankings will continue to be a guide-line for most people who are trying to compare colleges. The rankings are especially effective for colleges with large on–campus presences and a tradition of residential living, as well as active alumni.

However, the OEDb addresses a world that is largely overlooked by the US News and World Report's rankings. OEDb focuses on the changing world of online colleges and the growing acceptance of, and even preference for, one hundred percent online and/or hybrid (blended online and face–to–face) instruction. The OEDb Online College Rankings reflect today's realities, and they give a glimpse of a technology–enhanced future, in which computer–based distance programs (which includes wireless technologies, Smartphones, digital devices, as well as internet functionality and new Web 2.0 applications).

OEDb also responds to many of the criteria used by important and influential sources of online college information, such as e–learners.com.

In many ways, the criteria used by OEDb responds in a positive way to the remarks made by Secretary Spellings on December 17, 2008, when she called for more transparency in assessing colleges and universities in address to the semi–annual

meeting of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI).

Instead of focusing primarily on acceptance rates, endowments, graduation rates and student satisfaction, the OEDb ratings use the following inclusion criteria:

1. The college must be accredited;
2. The college must be listed in the College Navigator;
3. The college must offer more than one undergraduate degree–granting program online;
4. The college, if campus–based, must offer at least fifty percent of its undergraduate degree–granting programs online.

OEDb ranking metrics include:

- Acceptance rate
- Financial aid
- Graduation rate
- Peer web citations
- Retention rate
- Scholarly citations
- Student–faculty ratio
- Years accredited
- (http://oedb.org/rankings/methology)

Obviously, in the rapidly evolving world of online education, any ranking metrics are a work in progress, since technology advances may undermine certain core assumptions about the validity of a particular metric. Further, the recent sub–prime mortgage crisis has reached into the credit market for student loans, which has had an impact on all student loan lending.

Nevertheless, or because of this, OEDb is blazing an important and refreshing new path in the area of ranking colleges. It also responds to recent critiques of well–established ranking systems, including the U.S. News and World Report's "America's Best Colleges" assessments.

A recent online debate, "Throw the Book at College Rankings" at businessweek.com (http://www.businessweek.com/debateroom /archives/2007/04/throw_the_book.html) calls into question the U.S.

News and World Report college rankings. At the heart of the debate is the perceived desirability of Ivy League schools and "Ivy Plus," and the fact that their perceived desirability encourages many more people to apply than for whom there are spaces. The resulting acceptance rate is, in essence, a distortion, and reflects public opinion and marketing efficacy as well as the number of highly qualified applicants and acceptances.

Further skewing the statistics are ones based on faculty productivity. In *The Dangerous Wealth of the Ivy League*, Business-week.com authors Anthony Bianco and Sonal Rupani point out that the "Ivy Plus" (Princeton, the seven other members of the Ivy League, plus Stanford University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology) have made an effort to dedicate funds to building a base of prestigious, high–recognition faculty members.

Accused of "stealing stars," Ivy Plus institutions have found ways to hire the brightest–shining stars away from budget–pressed public and private institutions. Budgets dedicated to "At Harvard, compensation and benefits accounted for forty-nine percent of its $3.2 billion in operating expenses in 2006–07. Although salary gains have consistently outpaced inflation, it is the addition of new teaching positions that is chiefly responsible for driving up the cost of instruction" (http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content /07_50/b4062038784589_page_2.htm, 2007, p. 2).

Are the faculty members and the bearers of endowed chairs actually working now, or were most of their publications and their seminal research produced before they were hired? The authors of the article suggest that many of the most productive faculty members in Ivy League institutions published the bulk of their work while they were at other colleges. Later, when the professors gained the recognition they had earned through their hard work, the well–funded colleges were able to make them a very nice offer and to achieve their stated objectives of improving the quality of faculty. The productive scholars and researchers deserved to be rewarded for their efforts. So, where is the complaint?

The problem is that when such numbers are used in college rankings, it does not give any recognition to the colleges who supported the faculty members during their formative years, and even into their most successful phases. The rankings recognize the affiliation as it is now. According to the authors of *The Dangerous*

Wealth of the Ivy League, such a system influences public perception (and thus contributions). The rich and the powerful become more rich and powerful.

In this situation, the OEDb's Online College Rankings is a welcome change of pace. One could argue that their rubric could be applied to face–to–face colleges as well as online, since many resources are online and many courses are delivered in a hybrid format, which combines face–to–face and online.

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RECESSION–PROOFED THROUGH EDUCATION: ONLINE LEARNING IN TIMES OF RECESSION, RAPID COST AND TUITION INCREASES, AND STAGFLATION

Conventional wisdom holds that college enrollments surge during economic downturns because there is a low opportunity cost for the student.

In addition, the belief has held steady that as the structure of economies change, individuals return to college in order to retool

and diversity to meld themselves into the new economy. Case in point: during the 1970s, the U.S. suffered from stagflation. Economic change resulted in industrial decline and factories closed. Individuals fled the Rust Belt and moved to Texas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and other petroleum–producing areas and oil fields. During the mid 1980s, the same individuals who had moved from the Rust Belt had to retool and re–educate themselves as the oil boom turned to bust.

Many diversified into service economy jobs or environmental science. Now, thanks to technological change, structural change in the economy, globalization and an economic downturn, colleges and universities are facing new challenges as they seek to create programs, courses, and curricula.

Recession–Proofing Oneself through Education

From a student's point of view, the key to recession–proofing oneself through education is finding programs where there is more demand than supply of practitioners. At the same time, it is useful to look at ways to use one's work experience as a platform for competency, and the degree as a door–opener and proof of a well–rounded education.

From the university administrator's perspective, the challenge is slightly different. One has to accommodate demand for courses and curriculums, rally the resources and subject matter experts, and hope that the demand lasts a long time so that the program is sustainable (unlike certain programs in the past, such as women's study programs at some universities). Ethically, it is important to provide students with solid, well–rounded educations that will equip them to maneuver in a rapidly changing world.

The question now is what should students diversity into in order to have secure jobs in the near future—Health? Computers? Criminal Justice? Business?

Obviously, it can be hard to predict where the new jobs will be. Perhaps the best answer to the question of what degrees will land good jobs is not to try to be a fortune–teller or a Greek oracle, but to build upon the following items:

1. Provide a solid academic foundation that includes communication skills useful for the future (writing, reading, web–based communication);

2. Require students to develop analytical skills, which includes math courses as well as ones that involve problem–solving and case studies;

3. Give support to students who need to develop study skills and success strategies (goal–setting, time management);

4. Create student social networks and support;

5. Make library resources easily available, with on–demand support;

6. Set up work–study, internship, and virtual internship/job placement programs and linkages;

7. Create courses and programs that encourage students to develop adaptive mindsets and to have a community–building perspective to allow one to feel a part of a larger group, cause and mission;

8. Give useful and relevant academic advice, and make much of the academic advising process an online experience;

9. Connect to real–life examples and situations;

10. Encourage students to take psychological and intellectual risks.

Tuition and Cost Increases

In order to help students manage the costs of education, it is important to find ways to help cut costs.

- Offer hybrid or 100% online courses (save gas, time, and transportation costs).

- Make content accessible through mobile devices.

- Create low–speed/dial–up connection–accessible course content.

- Use a single textbook and supplement with readings and web–based content.

- Allow transfer credits to apply toward one's degree requirements.

- Allow a certain number of credits by examination opportunities (CLEP, DANTES, etc.).

- Encourage prospective high school students to take AP courses.

The Future

An effective education program that has the best chance of creating recession–proof individuals includes core competencies, diversification, inculcation of a positive attitude, positive beliefs about oneself, a willingness to engage with the world and the world's peoples, and a "win–win"/"we can do it together" approach to life. Colleges and universities that manage to bring this together will serve their students well.

PORTFOLIOS AND PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENTS: COLLEGE CREDIT FOR LIFE EXPERIENCE

Many courses now accept alternative methods for obtaining credit, which include portfolios and prior learning assessments. Prior learning assessment determines if learning received outside of the traditional university classroom is equivalent to academic curriculum and eligible for college credit. Prior learning assessment applies only to associate's or bachelor's degree programs. Any credit awarded is limited to elective or general education requirements.

Jane ruefully examined her transcript. "Ah, the wages of youthful indiscretions," she thought. "Or, was I simply immature?"

It did not matter at this point. She had to face the fact that years ago she had spent a great deal of time, money and effort in college with very little to show for it. She never thought she would ever have the nerve to go back until she found a program at a college that offered online degrees.

She could transfer her credits, and could take courses online. Even better, they had a portfolio assessment program that allowed her to potentially earn credit for prior learning.

That was a good deal, thought Jane. Even though she had not exactly been a stellar student, she had proven successful in her job. After starting as a cashier at a well–known fast food franchise, she

had risen through the ranks, had been an assistant manager and now a store manager.

In her ten years in managing fast food restaurants, Jane had learned a great deal about managing people and restaurants. While she learned a lot on the job, she had also attended a number of seminars and workshops.

Jane decided to resume classes after finding out about online programs and a special accelerated associate degree in business through her local community college. The courses were eight weeks in length, and she could make progress very quickly. What was perhaps most exciting about the program was that it included a portfolio assessment course, and the opportunity to create portfolios.

Jane was uncertain about the process, so she asked the director of the program to explain it carefully to her.

"It is a fairly straightforward process," said Dextra Ritter, who had been at the helm of the program since its inception.

"You must sign up for the course in how to prepare a portfolio. It is a one credit–hour course, so it is not prohibitively expensive, but it is very useful because you learn how to look for courses in the catalogue that correspond with the life experience that you have. Then, you create a presentation that documents how and where the materials correspond with the course content. You must also demonstrate knowledge, which could be through a certificate that you earned in a workshop, by writing a paper or creating a project."

More details were outlined in a book that was required for the course. It was a relief for Jane, who realized that much of the experience she had gained in the last ten years directly corre-sponded to courses in the college catalogue.

She was able to earn twelve hours of credit through the prior learning assessment/portfolio process in the following areas:

- Management
- Personnel Management
- Restaurant Operations Management
- Conflict Resolution
- Inventory Control

Her counselor recommended that she take exams and earn credit by exam as well. Jane was particularly nervous about that option.

"I have always suffered from test anxiety," Jane explained. "I'm not sure why, but it really does affect me."

Ms. Ritter recommended that Jane sign up for test preparation reviews, and that she start taking practice tests online. "Perhaps the best ones might be the psychology and the American history exams," she said. "You can study for them fairly easily, and the college accepts the courses toward your degree."

Jane was very happy with her decision, and even happier as she approached graduation. When she finally reached her goal, she was surprised to find out that everyone at the restaurant had been cheering her on.

They threw a party to celebrate her achieving her Associates Degree and urged her to go on for her Bachelors. Two other employees, encouraged by her success, signed up for the same program.

"I'm going to keep you really busy, Ms. Ritter," said Jane, smiling.

"That is wonderful! I love working with adult learners!"

TOP 12 INNOVATIONS BY 2025: IMPLICATIONS FOR E–LEARNING

Futurists and analysts at the research and consulting firm, Social Technologies, listed what they project to be the top areas of technology innovation through 2025. The innovations are listed below, with speculations about potential implications for the future of oil and gas production in mature basins.

Yearbook Experts at ExpertClick distributed the explanations; responses by E–Learning Queen and midcontinentoil.com.

1. Personalized Medicine
   a. The creation of an individual's genome map for a retail price of less than $1,000.
   b. The correlation of specific genes and proteins with specific cancers, Alzheimer's, heart diseases and diabetes,

which will allow both physicians and patients to antici-pate, plan for and mitigate, if not cure, DNA–based health challenges.

c. The development of pharmaceuticals to treat gene–based diseases (medical treatments that replace surgeries and chemotherapy).

People with access to such breakthroughs can live longer, work longer. How much will these cost? We will have to see. Transfer of skills can be more long–lived. However, it also sets up possibilities of gamer vs. boomer generation tensions. If the studies are true, gamers really do think differently than boomers and the WWII generation. Gamers are said to be multi–taskers and independent thinkers, while boomers are said to be more linear in their approach to problem–solving. This is a gross generalization, but numerous books and articles have been published, so people are tending to perceive and believe that there is a difference. Perception is an essential dimension of reality, so it will be good to pay attention.

2. Distributed Energy

a. Hybrid vehicles;

b. Advanced electricity storage devices and batteries;

c. Design of new power systems with fuel–switching flexibility.

For all the people who are eager to exploit the undeveloped reserves of gas and oil in mature basins, it might not be a bad idea to diversify into some of the "green" energy sources. The oil in the ground is money in the bank. Save it.

E–Learning: Solar–powered devices (phones, laptops, cameras, mobile devices).

3. Pervasive Computing

a. Very simple and inexpensive computing devices with integrated wireless telephone and Internet capabilities (the worldwide $100 computer);

b. The "semantic Web," enabled by Web data that auto-matically self–organizes, allowing search tools or software agents to identify the relevance of Web pages (not just find keywords on them);

    c.   Intelligent interfaces, in some cases enabled by virtual reality.

This means much better information in the field, and better monitoring devices at the wellhead or in pipelines. Corrosion control, gas compressors, scrubbers, gas conditioning, nitrogen or salt water injection, etc. will be affected. The key is to develop the appropriate chemical processes and technologies to piggyback on pervasive computing.

    <u>E–Learning</u>: It may be hard to find a course that is strictly face–to–face.

4.   Nanotechnologies for innovative materials and fibers—although they have received much attention, the R&D of nanotechnologies is progressing very slowly. However, the experts expect major breakthroughs to occur within the next two decades, including inexpensive ways to produce mass quantities of nano–fibers.

    a.   Nanotechnology in terms of catalytic agents and devices to enhance imaging (downhole logging tools) will probably be the first place for applications;

    b.   Improved performance in chips could expand computing capabilities. In terms of e–learning: there could be a boom in engineering, science and math programs.

5.   Biomarkers for Health

    a.   Individualized, private and self–administered diagnostics, as well as home diagnostic kits that detect early signs of diabetes, heart disease and types of cancers;

    b.   Individualized exercise equipment and regimens for individualized benefits (weight control, blood pressure, blood sugar, etc.);

    c.   Advanced CAT scans, MRIs and brain scans to identify disorders earlier and more accurately at less cost.

How about biomarkers for oil? This could be a breakthrough in terms of developing a better sense of fluid flow through fractures and faults. What is the provenance of the oil? Where is it going? Where did it come from?

Education Online: It is important to provide access to all kinds of programs so that individuals are able to equip themselves to be able to participate in the new economies. Online programs in medicine, biomedical engineering will be in demand.

6. Bio–Energy

   a. High–energy (as measured in British thermal units or Btu) blends of gasoline and diesel with biofuels (beyond the ethanol blends known today);

   b. Biomass production of a methanol that can be used as a fuel for fuel cells;

   c. New discoveries in plant genetics and biotechnologies specifically for energy content.

Genetically modified corn for ethanol is a good idea. However, it may continue to be true that it actually costs more fuel to raise the corn and process it into ethanol than to produce oil and refine it into gasoline. If government subsidies continue, it is probably a given that this will happen. If not, perhaps more ways to fuel municipal turbines using locally generated methane would be the answer.

E–Learning: More online labs and simulations to test new products and procedures. The labs can be online or, onsite, but re-motely accessed.

7. Micro–Flexible Manufacturing and Processes

   a. Advanced computer–aided design and control;

   b. Multiple variable and inexpensive sensors linked with computers;

   c. Expert systems and advanced pattern–recognition soft-ware for very tight quality control.

The implications for the oil field are quite interesting. This could mean custom pumps, custom valves and gauges, and chemical applications for existing wells.

8. Universal Water

   a. Ultra–fine filters (probably from nanotechnology);

   b. Development of energy sources for desalination and purification, including hybrid systems, especially solar power.

This is good, but it does not solve the problem of inland water. In some parts of the MidContinent, the depletion of the Ogalalla is already posing real problems. Drilling requires drilling fluids. Secondary recovery requires injection. Would it be possible to desalinate the water produced with oil and then sell it at a reasonable price to cities and municipalities? Places like Dallas could obtain water from the Barnett Shale. Eventually, the water would be more valuable than the gas.

9. Carbon Containment

   a. Affordable and effective carbon capture, and storage technologies and systems for coal–burning power plants;

   b. New emission controls for transportation vehicles;

   c. Containment systems for methane.

This will be very important in the production of natural gas. It will also be extremely important in gas–powered electricity generators and in refining.

10. Engineered Agriculture

   a. Identification of specific genomes for desired growing and use qualities;

   b. GMOs as the next generation of hybrid plants and crops;

   c. Crops designed specifically for energy content and conversion.

Animal husbandry is probably affected as well. There are undoubtedly consequences and impacts on MidContinent oil. Just how big will the hogs in the hog farms be? What will it do to us to eat this stuff? We have all heard the rumors of what eating growth–hormone laced dairy products does.

E–Learning: New needs for ethics courses, increased data and information sharing, but also a heightened need for individuals to be able to create their own security systems.

11. Ambient Surveillance

   a. Security cameras linked with computers with expert systems/pattern recognition;

   b. Multiple integrated sensors (including remote sensing);

   c. Radio frequency (RF) tags for people and valuables.

There are enormous possibilities in monitoring production. Ethical issues abound in all the possibilities.

E–Learning Implications: No more cheating on tests!

Personalize encryption and security, new kinds of firewalls and access monitors.

12. Intelligent Transport
    a. Organized and coordinated personal transportation through wireless computer networks, information systems, and Internet access;
    b. Onboard sensors and computers for smart vehicles;
    c. Next generations of GPS, navigation, and "QuestMap."

This will help coordinate production on demand and timely delivery of oil field chemicals.

E–Learning: More need to understand how to integrate web applications and to be able to easily create one's own set of mash-ups.

CHAPTER 2

STUDY SKILLS YOU WILL NEED TO SUCCEED IN E–LEARNING

THE BEST WAY TO LEARN IN AN ONLINE COURSE

A well–designed online course will guide you through the course content, the best way to learn the material and to achieve desired learning outcomes. The course will bring together cognitive and behavioral approaches. In addition, self–regulation (motivation, goal–setting, etc.) will be incorporated in a seamless way so that you are learning how to manage time, how to practice for exams and how to plan for achieving outcomes.

There is support for this approach. In 1996, H. Tait and N.J. Entwistle published the results of a study that revealed connections between behavioral, cognitive, and emotional strategies. They concluded that the most effective learning strategies were those that reinforced each other in a seamless, integrative manner. These insights are especially helpful for designers, instructors, and administrators who can develop and guide courses in ways that can naturally incorporate the acquisition of learning strategies.

In fact, a well–designed online or hybrid course can (and probably should) teach learning strategies as well as the course content. Needless to say, achieving learning outcomes requires one to have at least some facility with multiple learning strategies, particularly when learning styles differ. Further, external factors such as lack of access and confusion can create anxiety, frustration, or confusion and can act as barriers to persistence.

Cognitive Learning Strategies

Rehearsal

Rehearsal is not simply a matter of repetition. It involves organizing information so that it is easy to retrieve. In a traditional setting, students often copy notes, or recopy the content. Studies have suggested that this is not particularly effective at achieving deep learning, but it does help students in classification and identification of content.

In an online environment, "rehearsal" tends to be automatic, and is often built into navigation tools, and reinforced by using color, typography and design. Learning activities can also ask students to type categories and to rehearse knowledge. This approach is most effective when it requires students to make connections or to classify and organize content.

One effective way to rehearse knowledge is to take practice tests and quizzes (when available). Another is to share information in the discussion board.

Organization

Organizing involves placing information into a form that aids retrieval. This may involve creating key topics and issues, and building cognitive structures that allow meaningful and individualized classification, grouping and inter–relation. It requires synthesis, evaluation and higher–level activities that can lead to deeper learning though multiple forms of interaction.

In an online environment, if students are required to engage in an instructional activity that requires both rehearsal and organization, they are more able to be flexible in their thinking and to use the information in more than one setting or context.

Elaboration

You may need to describe, define or explain a topic. You are elaborating. This procedure is deeply constructivist in its epistemological underpinnings—that is, the learner's creative participation reaches deeply into the nature of how humans acquire knowledge. It requires students to not only repeat, restate, classify and organize, but to make connections between seemingly unrelated chunks of

information. It may also require making connections between course content and your own knowledge or experience.

An online course may call on you to write essays, or provide brief analyses that require the learner to engage in elaboration. To be most effective, a set of procedures or "guiding questions" can provide the scaffolding needed. Modeling elaboration by providing examples of "situated learning"—learning that places the content within a certain context and asks the student to transform it—can lead to the acquisition of effective learning strategies.

Behavioral Learning Strategies

Interpersonal Help–Seeking

In a classroom setting or traditional face–to–face environment, in–class group work or study groups outside the class provide an easy way to seek help. In an online course you may wish to find answers to questions by using the discussion board, asking fellow students, posting to a wiki, doing research, finding an online tutor, or going to a virtual world or serious game for simulation(s).

Interaction/Social Reinforcement

Interactivity in a face–to–face setting is often most effective when a facilitator moderates discussions and models the behavior deemed desirable. In the online environment, chat and discussion areas can increase effectiveness, particularly since multimedia tools such as video and audio can be easily accessed.

Blogs, collaborative projects and games can be ways of modeling positive interaction, and students can subject their ideas and/or thoughts to "reality checks." One of the most effective methods of achieving social reinforcement in an online environment is to ask students to post a project or paper in order to allow others to see what they are doing and to comment. Establishing a group and facilitating communication with online study buddies can be an effective approach as well, as can instant messaging.

Seeking Help from Written Material

This strategy involves procedures for obtaining information from books, digital resources, and other items. Key strategies involve teaching how to narrow a search, how to recognize the correct

information once it has been retrieved, and how to apply it in an appropriate manner.

The online environment offers many opportunities to coach students on how to retrieve and use information. This can range from the use of a virtual library, or the use of learning objects. In fact, this is one of the best places for learning objects. Small, highly granular objects—interactive maps, online dictionaries, diagrams, guides and flowcharts—can be quite helpful. They can also link with cognitive strategies that involve making connections, organizing and repeating.

Practical Application

These procedures ask you to try things in the real world. Effective learning strategies can be modeled and transferred by using simulations, games and virtual worlds.

Learning Styles and Preferences: Self–Knowledge Can Help in E–Learning

To gain insight into your personality, learning styles and approaches to knowledge acquisition, it is particularly important to look at the work that researchers have done in finding out how people learn. In general, they have found that people tend to have different preferences. Although people learn in many different ways, their approaches tend to be determined by attributes in three distinct areas: Perception, information Processing, and Personality.

Think of it as the "Three P's"—Perception, Processing, Personality.

The following researchers have investigated learning preferences and styles. They have also developed questionnaires and inventories.

Myers and Briggs

http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/styles/jung.html. Built around Jung's personality theory, the Myers–Briggs inventory involves analyzing results to questions that will allow individuals to classify themselves and measure the degree to which their personalities include characteristics such as perceiving, judging, thinking, feeling, sensing and intuition. Individuals can use the information

to help them understand themselves and their relationships with others in work teams, discussion groups, and interactions with the instructor. The approach is very popular in businesses. A question about how much one's personality matters in learning has not been resolved.

Visual—Auditory—Kinaesthetic (VAK)

Take the VAK Survey: http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd /styles/vak.html

Which works best for you—Seeing? Hearing? Hands–on? The VAK is basically a modality–based model that focuses on the three main sensory receivers: Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (movement) to find out which learning style dominates. Modalities are a channel by which human expression can take place and is composed of a combination of perception and memory.

Kolb

Take the Kolb Survey: http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd /styles/kolb.html

The Learning Styles Inventory requires one to look at patterns of behavior and to see how one's approach to learning tends to be active, reflective, abstract or concrete. For Kolb, perceiving and processing are important elements. He tries to find where the learner is on a "thinking–feeling" continuum. He then looks at a "doing–watching" continuum. The result is a matrix that allows the learner to have a good sense of where and how he or she falls within a matrix of learning styles.

- <u>Concrete Experience (feeling)</u>: Learning from specific experiences and relating to people. Sensitive to other's feelings.

- <u>Reflective Observation (watching)</u>: Observing before making a judgment by viewing the environment from different perspectives. Looks for the meaning of things.

- <u>Abstract Conceptualization (thinking)</u>: Logical analysis of ideas and acting on intellectual understanding of a situation.

- <u>Active Experimentation (doing)</u>: Ability to get things done by influencing people and events through action. Includes risk taking.

Honey and Mumford

Take the Honey and Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire: http://www.mftrou.com/honey–mumford.html.

These researchers seek to find one's approach to learning, and to see how it fits one's patterns. The categories of learning styles are active, reflective, theory and pragmatic. Learners who are active focus on "doing," those who are reflective focus on "reviewing," ones who value theory like to "conclude," and the pragmatic learners focus on "planning."

Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences

Visit http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/styles/gardner.html.

In addition to blended sensory–based learning styles, Gardner looks at the ways people process information, how they pull from multiple strengths and, as a result, we use more than one kind of intelligence when we learn. Our society tends to privilege primarily two kinds of intelligence: verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematical. Gardner's theory proposes that "there are at least eight other kinds of intelligence that are equally important. They are "languages" that most people speak, and that cuts through cultural, educational, and ability differences. "

Entwistle

Take Entwhistle's "ASSIST' inventory: http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk //questionnaires/ASSIST.pdf.

What makes Entwistle's approach unique is the fact that the approach attempts to apply concepts to study skills and learning strategies. The goal is to look at "deep learning" as well as surface and strategic approaches.

SELF–REGULATION STRATEGIES

Time Management

Using the calendar function can revolutionize your abilities in organizing and planning your time. You may also wish to analyze the tasks and match the tasks to the chunks of time you have available.

Timed deadlines and disabling access to Instant Messenger, chat, Skype, internet and games may help.

Emotional Control (Anxiety and Concentration)

Effective learning strategies in this area include procedures for minimizing and reducing anxiety, lack of concentration, and frustration. Because of the nature of technology, at times the online environment can create anxiety and frustration, particularly when there are technical difficulties and access is interrupted. Poor design and navigation can create anxiety, while good design, navigation, support and instructional activities can help the learner gain an enhanced sense of self–efficacy and self concept.

Motivation

Part of the face–to–face instructional environment includes procedures to motivate individuals who are not interested in the material, or who do not like the instructional environment. Good instructional design can be very effective in motivating you, or teaching you how to motivate yourself by adding interest, making connections and points of reference to your life, establishing relevance, and instilling a sense of the usefulness and even urgency in mastering the topic.

Comprehension Monitoring

In the traditional environment, these refer to procedures that assess the degree to which learning objectives have been attained, and they help the instructor identify where gaps in learning exist. In the online environment, the successful student has methods of testing, tracking, and checking his or her comprehension of the content and mastery of learning objectives. This often takes the form of e–mailing the instructor to obtain feedback. However, it can also be automated, and students can take online quizzes and/or engage in activities that help them assess whether or not they are on track.

Conclusions

Planning an online course so that it helps guide you and your fellow students in the acquisition of effective learning strategies is a multi–pronged endeavor. It requires a thorough understanding of:

1. The students, their abilities, backgrounds, language, contexts, beliefs, core values and reasons for taking the course;

2. The technological environment, which includes access, hardware, variability of access, complexity of interface, etc.;

3. The kinds of learning objectives that the course of study will generally involve;

4. The instructors, their backgrounds and technical ability, their understanding of effective mentoring and their willingness to adapt to ever–changing technological requirements.

Useful Resources

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SECRETS TO SUCCESS IN AN ONLINE COURSE: PRACTICAL STEPS

It is amazing how few colleges and universities provide a simple checklist of things that you should do to maximize the possibilities of your success in an online course or program.

Even though you have completed your online course orientation, and have read all the material your school has given you on online courses, you may still have a few questions about the way things work. You are open–minded and willing to give the online courses a change because they are convenient, affordable and just

what you need. Nevertheless, you are nervous. What are you supposed to do? How will you do it? Will you figure out the way it works before it is too late in the semester?

You are not alone. Everyone who has taken a course has the same questions. Although each program and school is different, there are a few tips and pointers that will help you get started, keep on track and feel good about your course, your program, your fellow students, your instructor and, most of all, your educational plans and your future.

Here is a list of activities and pointers for being successful with your online course.

1. <u>Log in Early</u>. Find out what your username and password will be, and where to find the portal or access point to your course. After you log in for the first time, be sure to review the entire course at least two or three times. Click on all the links and go to all the pages. Then, do it again. You will be happy you did. You will feel more comfortable and confident.

2. <u>Acquire Texts before the Course Begins</u>. Have you ever waited until the last minute to buy your books, just to find out that the bookstore is sold out? Granted, textbooks are expensive, and everyone would like to delay the purchase. At the same time, though, it is best to get the books early to assure yourself that you will have them for the first day of class. Ideally, when you log into your course, you will have your books at your side, and will be able to review the readings and the required work.

3. <u>Know the Mechanics of the Course—How Does It Work</u>? Chances are your course will be hosted on one of the most popular course or learning management systems. You may be using Blackboard, Angel, or Desire to Learn. Alternatively, you may be using Moodle, which is the open–source learning management system preferred by many schools who wish to host their own solution and not pay the fees required of some learning management system providers. Then again, you may use a proprietary product. In any case, be sure to go through the orientation. One of the things you will need to do early in the game is to download the proper plug–ins so that the elements in your learning

management system actually work. Otherwise, you will likely be frustrated at a time when you least want new frustrations.

4. <u>Introduce Yourself Early</u>. It is a great idea to introduce yourself as early as you can in the discussion board area. If your course allows you to create a homepage or to post photos of your pets, your interests and landscapes from your vacation, please be sure to do so. You will be amazed at how friendly the space becomes, and how close and bonded you start to feel with your fellow students.

5. <u>Check in Often</u>. Some people think that checking in once every few days is sufficient. Not a good idea! You may miss an important announcement and, more importantly, you may start to feel isolated. If you check in often, read the discussion posts and announcements, you will feel a part of the group.

6. <u>Required Work—Familiarize Yourself Early</u>. As you go through the course, be sure to print out your required work. Create a little timetable for yourself and map out your own travel, work, family and other time–eating obligations. Budget time for work, study and posting.

7. <u>Find out Professor Expectations</u>. What does your professor expect? Are deadlines rigid? Will the drop box shut off at 11:59 PM on the day things are due? Find out early, and work in a pro–active manner. Adjust yourself to the requirements of the course.

8. <u>Due Dates—Use Them for Planning and Goal Setting</u>. Once you have mapped out your requirements and matched them with schedules, you can set out timelines, milestones and "to do" lists. This will help you set goals. You will be amazed at how comfortable you feel with things once you have started to hit those milestones, one after another. You will feel confident. You will start feeling what educational psychologists call a strong sense of "self–efficacy." Great job!

9. <u>Keep Up With Readings</u>. Nothing is worse than falling behind. One of the easiest ways to get in a trap is to fall behind in the readings, and then try to do the work without actually reading the assignments. Not only will you have nothing relevant to say in the discussion board threads that

have to do with the reading, you will be bored when you read others. So, keep up and keep involved.

10. <u>Practice "Active Reading"</u>. A great way to motivate yourself to do the readings is to perfect your own style of "active reading." What is active reading? It is a way that you read and think so that you are creating categories in your mind, and you are relating the reading to your own experiences, prior readings and the beliefs you have developed. As you read, think of what you will have to write for your course. Do not be afraid to start jotting down notes or outlines for papers or short essay questions.

11. <u>Pay Attention to Announcements</u>. It is easy to overlook them. However, the professor has posted them for a reason. Be sure to read them and to follow any links or suggested readings.

12. <u>Inform Your Instructor Ahead of Time of Problems</u>. Will you be deployed? Will you need to travel for work? Do you have a vacation planned? Let your professor know ahead of time. Then, if you can, try to work ahead.

13. <u>Turn in Work Ahead of Time</u>. Rather than begging for extensions, take the pro–active route and turn in work ahead of time. If you do turn in work, let your professor know. Do not expect instant turnaround, though. The professor may need to grade your work with the others at the actual due date. Be patient and flexible.

14. <u>Develop Back–Up Plans for Turning in Work</u>. What do you do if your internet is down? What if you have firewalls in place where you are temporarily working from and you cannot access your learning management system? Find a way to turn in your work, even if it is via e–mail, so that you can make your deadlines. Work with the professor to find out the best approach. If you discuss contingency plans with the other students in the Discussion Board, it may give them and you new ideas, and suggest leadership to the group, and foresight and initiative to the professor.

15. <u>Post Early and Often in the Discussion Board</u>. The more you post, the more comfortable you will feel with your fellow students. You will learn a lot from each other. Be sure to be willing to respond to questions and demonstrate a helpful, supportive and upbeat attitude. You will be

amazed at how you will feel. You will start to develop a good, solid sense of affiliation and belonging.

16. <u>Fellow Students and Peer Review—Very Valuable</u>. One of the most engaging and interesting aspects of online courses is the fact that you will really have a chance to see the work of others, and to review, respond and learn from each other. Share ideas, but be sure to keep a thick skin. Sometimes people think they are being humorous when they are not.

17. <u>Know Where to Turn if You Need Help—Mentors, Study Buddies and Tutors</u>. Check out your college's resources. Make sure you are aware of all the support that is available if you find yourself in need of help.

18. <u>Assessments and Quizzes—Any Practice Exams or Example Papers</u>? If you can find a place to do practice tests or quizzes, it may be a great way to feel comfortable with the course content. You may be able to practice for your exams and quizzes. Often the textbook is the provider of the practice materials.

19. <u>Log In—Use Your Virtual Library and Online Resources</u>. Your college or university has invested money, time, and human resources in developing virtual libraries and resource bases. Be sure to check them out and visit the sites often. They will help you as you work on essays and research papers.

20. <u>Use a Building Block Approach for Writing Papers</u>. Waiting until the night before is not a good idea. Do not procrastinate! Start mapping out your strategy for writing a paper (essay, term paper, research project) and develop a building block approach that works for you.

If you follow all these suggestions, you will find your experience with online courses to be much more positive than you might have imagined. As you encounter friends and family who may be nervous about taking online courses, feel free to share your "lessons learned" and success strategies. Work together/Win together!

Finishing What You Start: Successful Completion of Your Course, Your Degree

While there are many "college success" guides, many of them do not precisely address the challenges confronted by the e–learner. Even if they do, they may be addressing the e–learner of 2002, and not 2008 or later, whose distance institution, along with environment, technologies and materials, have changed dramatically in an ever–evolving, unfolding approach to learning.

Some of the "eternal verities" of learning success still hold true, albeit with modifications.

1. <u>Set Long–Term Goals</u>. Your long–term goals may involve earning a degree. At the same time, they may involve goals of slightly shorter time span. For example, one long–term goal may be to complete all your courses for the term. You should not set too many goals, and the goals you do set should have relevance to your overall life plans, career objectives and more.

2. <u>Do Not Forget Short–Term Goals</u>. Your short–term goals should mesh nicely with long–term goals. For example, a short–term goal may be to finish reading the materials for the unit at least two days before the due date. Be sure to reward yourself, and to give yourself a positive affirmation when you do.

3. <u>Manage Your Time</u>. Time management is not possible if you do not have any idea what the real time requirements are for the various tasks you must do. One of the first items of successful time management must involve assessing the required tasks and then measuring time on task. Plan your time accordingly. Be realistic.

4. <u>Keep Yourself Financially Solvent</u>. If you have to work too many jobs, the implications are clear. You will have no time for studying. In addition, there is significant stress associated with financial insolvency, which may undermine your relationship with your family and your key supporters. Find ways to reduce overhead, and try not to fall prey to debt traps.

5. <u>Have Supportive Family and Friends</u>. Surrounding your-self with people who share the same goals, values and be-liefs about the transformative potential of education is very important.

6. <u>Take Enough Courses to Make Progress toward Your Goal</u>. Obviously, you want to make sure you are taking enough courses to reach your goal. As you map out the progress toward your degree, make sure that you understand just where you will be at the end of each term. Pace yourself, and make sure that you remind yourself that you are mak-ing precisely the kind of progress you need to be making. Balance and equilibrium cannot be underestimated in this case.

7. <u>Do Not Sabotage Yourself With Too Many Courses</u>. One of the quickest ways to fail is to over–commit, and start having incompletes and bad grades. Not only will you fail to make progress, you run the risk of being suspended for lack of satisfactory academic progress.

8. <u>Find Appropriate Rewards for Large and Small Successes—Reward Yourself</u>. Think of appropriate extrinsic and intrin-sic rewards and line them up for yourself.

9. <u>Understand Your Learning Preferences</u>. Are you a visual learner? An auditory learner? A kinaesthetic learner? Most of us are a combination of several. If you understand your learning styles, you will be able to develop study strategies that play on your strengths and position you to do well in your assessments, and in demonstrating mastery of learn-ing objectives.

10. <u>Build On Your Strengths</u>. Not only is it important to build on your strengths as they relate to learning preferences, but also as they relate to your unique inventory of cognitive, emotional, relational and community assets. Do you have a strong learning community? If so, work it. Make sure that you are letting yourself stay connected and to build on the force of many.

E–Learning Success Strategies Can Help You Complete Your Course to the Best Advantage

1. <u>Good Advising</u>. Try to guide your own path, when possible. Stay in touch with your advisor. Self–advise when possible.

2. <u>Good Assessment</u>. Find practice exams, quizzes, and assessments in order to be on target with your tests. Do not distract yourself by taking practice quizzes from the wrong edition of the text, or by reading extraneous materials. Focus on what you will be required to master.

3. <u>Good Team</u>. Make your education a family affair with your children, spouse, parents and siblings. Develop a support system

4. <u>Good Mentoring</u>. Develop an excellent relationship with your instructor. Find study buddies.

5. <u>Good Community</u>. Make sure that you participate in the discussion board area. Introduce yourself, reach out to others, and provide appropriate and supportive feedback.

If one could distill all of the points to one of primary importance, it might be "Invest in yourself!" You might be surprised at the strength of that mantra. Invest in yourself in all ways, every day. If you do not see an immediate dividend for your investment, do not worry. Continue to invest, and you will eventually receive the rewards if you stay focused and maintain dedication. By investing in yourself, you will automatically visualize the end goal and the desired results of your investment. In many cases, that could be a degree, a job and a better life.

THE E–LEARNER MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED: DEVELOP A CHECKLIST

Why do students who seem to be off to a great start in their online courses seem to crash and burn? How is it that the students you thought would never make it actually graduate early, and with great grade points? The answer is not an easy one. Why? Achieving success in an online program is much more complicated than it may seem at first glance and it may not be as easy to find out success strategies, especially if you have not established contact

with fellow students and you do not have a friend or acquaintance that is going through it with you.

The way to stay in school and to succeed in your online program is to plan and to self–monitor. To do so effectively, you will need to be able to identify the various aspects and elements of your course, your program and your life. Here is a checklist of elements that will help you succeed in your courses. They will also allow you to work on all the aspects of your life that relate to your academic career to make sure that your progress is smooth, filled with benefits and profoundly motivating to you.

Curriculum Planning

1. Work closely with your advisor;
2. Take courses in the correct sequence;
3. Do not skip prerequisites;
4. Take the correct number of hours, and manage your load;
5. Balance courses (find correct balance of easy/hard)
6. Make sure you have core competencies in writing and math;
7. Take accelerated courses with caution and planning;
8. Avoid Incompletes ("I"s);
9. Purchase your books early;
10. Buy the correct books.

Interaction

1. Establish positive communication with your instructors;
2. Connect with classmates, share information with them;
3. Seek mentors, study buddies and tutors early;
4. Find ways to obtain information about registration, advising, library resources and support services.

Career Planning

1. Choose a major you care about;
2. Make sure your major connects to your career goals and interests;

3. Take virtual internships when possible to gain experience in your career area;

4. Investigate credit for experience (portfolio).

Financial Planning

1. Take out as few student loans as possible;

2. Credit by exam when possible (CLEP, DANTES, Excelsior)

3. Credit for portfolio when applicable;

4. Investigate and apply for scholarships;

5. Check out specifically local programs for financial assistance.

6. Check out similar company–specific programs, but be careful regarding possible long–term commitments and agreements that may go along with these.

Infrastructure and Technology Planning

1. Purchase a good computer with sufficient capacity;

2. Make sure you have a good connection;

3. Use mobile devices to communicate as much as you can (check e–mail, send messages, post to discussion, listen to lectures and watch videos);

4. Make sure you have the software you need;

5. Keep up to date with plug–ins (Flash, Java, JavaScript, etc.) needed for your software;

6. Familiarize yourself with the learning management system. Be sure to go through any training that is available;

7. Ask around, shop around, and otherwise search out a good computer repair and maintenance technician. The goal here is to make sure you can truly rely on affordable support and assistance when you need it.

Study Habits, Study Resources

1. Create a study environment that fits your lifestyle;

2. Set goals;

3. Manage time effectively;

4. Adjust your study habits to fit your learning preferences and styles;

5. Visit your virtual library and resources often;

6. Investigate tutor centers;

7. Use simulations, serious games and virtual worlds (Second Life, etc.) when it helps;

8. Avoid distractions.

SLEEP AND THE E–LEARNER

College studies and sleep deprivation have gone hand in hand for as long as anyone can remember. Movies such as *The Paper Chase* and television series such as *Undeclared* show traditional college students imbibing every form of coffee and caffeine known to humankind in an attempt to stay awake, enhance their perform-ance, and to get the edge they need to do well on tests. Invariably, students are shown failing miserably on their exams after missing too much sleep.

However, how much truth is there to popular representations of college students and sleep deprivation? What has science shown us about sleep, sleep deprivation and performance for courses, including online courses?

Sleep researchers have found that the brain requires sleep in order to stay healthy. All stages of sleep are important, but many have found that REM, or "rapid eye movement," sleep is perhaps the most vital. It is, in fact, critical for the brain because it, in essence, "resets" or "tunes" the brain so that it processes neurolo-gical signals effectively. Individuals who have interrupted sleep cycles, either from sleep deprivation or from physical conditions such as sleep apnea, will feel the effects of a lack of good, solid REM sleep.

Additional research has yielded additional interesting insights about sleep, sleep deprivation and cognitive functioning.

Subjects having one night's total sleep deprivation show deficits on certain tasks, and show impaired cognitive functioning (Blagrove, et al., 1995). However, students who suffered from long–term sleep deficit, and who lost only a few hours of sleep per night, showed no significant performance deficit. However, those who experienced

long–term sleep length of only four or five hours per night had impaired performance.

Additional research has shown that sleep deprivation results in loss of cognitive functioning. Sleep–deprived subjects were:

1. Less able to ignore interfering information;
2. Less able to perform effectively on a paper and pencil trail–making test;
3. Less able to focus;
4. More likely to be easily distracted;
5. More likely to lose motivation due to sleepiness.

Will drinking massive quantities of coffee or energy drinks help keep a person alert, even if they have missed some sleep? A recent study published by J. E. James and M. A. Keane sheds new light on the relationship of caffeine, sleep, and wakefulness. They conclude that yes, caffeine does enhance cognitive functioning. However, they suggest that the relationship is not as straightforward as was believed in the past. The reason for the confusion was the fact that the older studies never took into account caffeine withdrawal. According to the study, caffeine leaves the system within five hours. Before that first cup of coffee in the morning, most will not have had coffee for a sufficient period for caffeine to leave the system, which means that individuals will be going through withdrawal. Therefore, their first coffee will effectively get them through the withdrawals but, in order to have enhanced perform-ance, one would need to drink more coffee.

What this means for the individual who wants the maximum impact from coffee is that it is important to have that first cup of coffee in order to overcome the headache, sleepiness and sluggish-ness that characterize caffeine withdrawal. Essential caffeine increas-es the number of adenosine receptors.

While ingesting many caffeinated beverages (energy drinks, etc.) may be one strategy for dealing with sleep deprivation, the more prudent approach would be to try to take a multi–pronged approach to sleep management and studies.

1. Budget your time. Try to work in good sleep time;
2. Avoid "all–nighters" at all costs;

3. If sleep–deprived, study in an environment with few distractions;

4. Do tasks requiring the most focus while well charged up on sleep;

5. When faced with tests and tasks, strive for more sleep;

6. Realize that caffeine does provide a stimulus; however, if one drinks a great deal of caffeine, one will definitely experience withdrawals after five hours. So, avoid caffeine withdrawal when having to perform cognitive tasks.

High–quality sleep is essential to effective cognitive functioning. However, the effects of missing one or two hours of sleep are perhaps less than one might imagine. Conversely, missing an entire night of sleep has more dramatic effects on cognitive functioning than one might suppose. Thus, manage your work, your sleep time and your tasks in order to maximize performance by coordinating task with alertness levels.

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THE BEST POSSIBLE DISCUSSION BOARD EXPERIENCE

One of the best ways to motivate yourself to stay in a course is to feel that you are a part of a learning community, and that there is someone to turn to besides your professor for guidance, support and feedback. Online, that community can form in many places, but the best place is often the discussion board area or forums, which involve all the individuals taking the course, not just a few.

For course developers and instructors, it is useful to have an understanding of how discussion boards "have the unique capacity to support higher constructivist learning and the development of a learning community" (Levine, 2007). A learning community generally consists of a group of individuals who are studying the same course and for the same purpose. Further, establishing a learning community is vital in e–learning (Garrison, 2007).

According to S. J. Levine in his article on online discussion boards that appeared in the journal, *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (2007), certain conditions must be met in order for an online learning community to form via discussion boards in a class.

Condition One

The social climate must be supportive. It has to be a climate conducive to learning. Levine points to Malcolm Knowles' ideas on androgogy and learning (Knowles, 1980), in which Knowles discusses the fact that adult learners need to feel connected to other like–minded peer partners. What this means in operative terms is that the atmosphere should be positive, and the discussion board questions phrased so that they encourage individuals to share and not simply type in the "right" answer.

The instructor can do a lot to make sure that the social climate is supportive. One excellent way to do so is to make sure that there is a place to ask questions and to seek clarification. It is important to give individuals a chance to ask questions in a non–punitive environment, and to encourage the sharing of information. Asking questions in the discussion board area and seeing the instructor post responsive, supportive replies is one of the best ways to help students build confidence, develop a sense of self–determination and a pro–active "I can do it" attitude.

Condition Two

Introductions must be made. According to Levine, if a discussion board does not include a meaningful introduction, and does not set out rules for interaction, there can be problems as learners fail to interact in a purposeful manner.

Introductions can do a lot to help "rehumanize" the discussion board area. They are particularly effective in giving a sense of who is taking the class and why. It also provides an opportunity to share information that helps establish common ground, even if that is as seemingly insignificant as the fact that you and another person may have a certain type of dog or cat. What is occurring, among other things, is a sense of affiliation, which can be dynamically motivating. People have needs for affiliation and an online environment can be isolating, unless things are done to help reduce the sense of apartness or isolation.

Condition Three

A guide must be involved, and the discussions should include meaningful feedback by the instructor or guide. The discussion board is a balancing act. An instructor should be careful not to dominate or co–opt discussions. The idea that one's every response is being judged and/or criticized can stifle discussion very quickly. An overbearing instructor presence can also lead to reduced risk–taking and originality with respect to the types of responses being offered.

On the other hand, if the instructor is not present, there may be a sense of "why am I doing this?" even if the discussion participation is a graded item. If the instructor does not post responses, the learners may wonder if they are on the right track and if their responses will count at all toward their grade.

Perhaps the worst consequence of a lack of instructor presence is the sudden lack of a referee or student advocate. What happens in the case of a cyber bully? What happens when the student brings up inappropriate subjects or topics that could be construed as harassing or demeaning? The presence of a guide helps individuals combat such problems.

The discussion board can be the heart of the course, and can be the place where students feel the most empowered and inspired.

Innovative and pro–active approaches to developing learning communities by means of discussions can also include:

1. Posting drafts and outlines of papers and assignments;
2. Posting responses or overviews of assignment–related articles, books, movies, etc.;

3. Relating experiences in one's own life to the discussion or topic being addressed;

4. Connecting the topic under discussion to a current event item;

5. Posting questions for fellow students that are related to the topics and learning outcomes.

Future discussion board approaches are likely to change with the increasing popularity of handheld devices and multi–functional phones. Discussion boards can incorporate more text–messaging posts, audio posts and image/video posts.

The obvious benefit to posting via cell phone is the immediacy and truly mobile nature of the interaction with fellow students. The downside is that some multimedia posts may be too large, or inappropriate. These issues can be resolved by the instructor.

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HELP! MY ONLINE COURSE IS IMPOSSIBLE— WHAT DO I DO? TWELVE SANITY–SAVING TIPS

The new online course—the one that had so much promise—blew up on launch. Okay, it was not a literal explosion, but everything that could go wrong in a course did go wrong. The online environment is not a perfect world, but we expect perfection; after all, it is driven by the latest technology, is it not? The flawed online course can make or break an individual or a team. It is all in how you approach the challenge. There are things you can do to help turn a negative experience into a positive or, at the very least, be strategic and control the amount of damage that can ensue.

Twelve sanity–saving tips for dealing with a nightmare online course:

1. <u>Stay calm</u>. This is perhaps the most important first step. If you feel the panic and frustration mount, and you start to feel completely helpless and alone in your situation, tell yourself "I can do this!" Remind yourself that you will survive the worst–case scenario because you are going to develop a plan that will accommodate even the direst outcome. Start looking at options and examining possible mid–semester courses to take, just in case you have to drop the course or, worst case, you fail it and you need to pick up an additional class in order to keep your minimum number of hours to maintain eligibility for student loans, etc.

2. Stay positive and develop a contingency plan. Find out what the very last day might be to drop the course. Find out if you can take a course that begins in midterm or between terms in order to maintain your eligibility for loan and scholarship programs. If all the courses are equally disastrous and you are not getting the kind of support you need, you may consider looking at other programs. However, before making the change, be sure to see if this situation can be resolved.

   Even though online courses have gained widespread acceptance, the truth is it is a field that is still changing rapidly. Technology, new approaches to learning management systems, new ideas about effective instructional strategies and new requirements by institutions make the field one that is characterized by rapid change. Unfortunately, change is not always completely smooth or painless. However, the challenges and pain are worth it in the end, and you will feel doubly proud of yourself as you receive your degree. Do not give up!

3. <u>Communicate with your fellow students</u>. You may start feeling a sense of isolation. However, as you communicate with them (e–mail, chat, discussion board), be sure to keep from falling into the "apocalypse trap." Acknowledge frustration, but do not let yourself convince yourself it is the end of the world. Use the time with your fellow students productively. Share experiences and think of solutions.

4. <u>Make sure you have all the right books and instructional materials</u>. Be sure to do a careful inventory of all the materials needed for the class. Print out the syllabus and line up the readings with the calendar. Usually this is the place where the most confusion can be found. If the reading, the course activities and the assessments do not line up, ask your instructor for an alternative assessment. For instance, you could ask if you may write a research paper instead of taking the quizzes (assuming that they are not lining up with the course materials).

5. <u>Bookstore problems? Seek alternatives</u>. Textbooks change editions often. Bookstores often lag behind in obtaining sufficient numbers of copies. Even worse, departments may lag behind in updating the course so that it corresponds to the new instructional materials. If this is the case, be sure to contact the department and see if there is a way to obtain PDF copies of the chapters you need. Also, see if the text-book company will supply the department with tests and quizzes that correspond to the new edition. Although editions overlap, there is always new material, and old material that has been discarded. Having the right edition of the assessments and quizzes is critical.

6. <u>Create a learning community by forming "study buddies"</u>. As you communicate with others in your course and you start to think about ways to survive this nightmare, be sure to form supportive alliances. You might think of getting a "study buddy," sharing drafts of your papers, etc, and informing each other of the places to find practice exams, etc.

7. <u>Communicate politely with the college if there are technical issues</u>. E–mail is a harsh medium. Your message will come across as curt, abrupt, rude and even offensive if you are not careful. Granted, you are writing in the heat of the moment, and you know you are right about how messed up the course is. However, attacking people and putting them on the defensive never works. Be sure to communicate politely and make clear lists of issues. Do not send a 2,000–word e–mail. Be succinct. Maintain a calm, courteous tone. Maintain a sense of humor (if possible).

8. <u>Beta version</u>? Let the department know about the flaws in the course. Chances are the course that blew up was in beta form. You just happened to be the lucky one who found the flaws. Of course, that privilege is not always one you would want, and it comes with real consequences with respect to your grade point. Therefore, even though it is not fair that the guinea pig pays, you have to work beyond that negative feeling and think about positive change. Maintain a list of problems with the course, and document every flaw. Your information will be most helpful for students in the future.

9. <u>Avoid the "blame game" and be solution–centered</u>. What usually occurs in an organization when something terrible has happened, and it affects numerous departments, is a vast ping–pong game of blame and scathing remarks unless someone has the foresight and sufficient leadership acumen to stop the ping–pong ball of blame from bouncing from desk to desk. None of that kind of negativity is necessary. Keep the pioneer spirit going and realize that online education is new and that everyone is a participant in a grand, wonderful new venture that will bring hope and access to people who formerly did not have the chance to take courses. It is normal for "snafus" to happen. Keeping a positive attitude is definitely the solution.

10. <u>Prioritize</u>. Find out what matters most and focus on it. Look at the gradebook. What are the graded items? This is a fantastic way to prioritize. Do not let yourself get distracted by busy work or the little things that are time consuming but do not count for much.

11. <u>Learning Management System (LMS) problems</u>? If it is an LMS problem (Blackboard, eCollege, WebCT, Angel, D2L, Moodle, etc.), back up often and make copies. Copy and paste your discussion comments in a word document. Keep your drafts, peer reviews and final copies of papers. Save copies of your papers and, if possible, do a screen shot of your graded assessments. It is good to have a backup in case you need to prove your point.

12. <u>Do not browbeat your professor</u>. Chances are your professor is feeling as much frustration as you are, perhaps even more since his or her e–mail is likely to be filled with

angry and frustrated notes from students. Be polite, kind and supportive. Try not to send more than two or three e–mails per day.

THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF MOTIVATION

Motivation has a neurobiological component. This probably does not come as any surprise to you. After all, when something fails to stimulate you, you tend to become bored. Likewise, when something piques your interest, you are likely to be motivated to engage with the task, whether it is physical or cognitive.

In fact, educational psychologists, including the seminal theorist Robert Gagne, have placed stimulation at the very beginning of instruction. For Gagne, the first of the nine "events of instruction" that he identified is the need to gain one's attention. Gaining the learner's attention occurs through a stimulus.

Many instructors and instructional designers suggest that the best way to stimulate attention is to capture one's interest through a physical or emotional stimulus, which could range from flashing lights to an intriguing story. However, it is important to keep in mind that cultural differences can make the difference between a positive stimulus and a negative one.

Individuals make appraisals of the stimulation. Cultural factors come into play, as well as context, history and local practice. What is stimulating in one situation, for one place or program, can be tedious and overplayed in another.

Motivation does not happen after the stimulus. It happens while the stimulus is taking place. According to the research of J. Schumann, motivation occurs as an aspect of stimulation, and the appraisals of stimulation that accompany it.

For Schumann, there are five dimensions:

1. <u>Novelty</u>. It is important to make sure that the information being presented has a degree of novelty, and that responses and information are, at least to some degree, unexpected.

2. <u>Pleasantness</u>. The presentation of the information and the way in which students interact with the material should be

attractive, and the experience should be pleasant (not unattractive, ugly, or stressful).

3. <u>Goal/Need Significance</u>. The instructional material, the e–learning experience must align with the learner's overall goals and desired outcomes.

4. <u>Coping Potential</u>. When presented with materials or instructional tasks, the e–learner must feel competent, able to overcome challenges and successfully cope with anxiety and/or ambiguity.

5. <u>Self and Social Image</u>. The e–learning experience, which includes instructional materials, instructional activities, collaborations and interactive tasks, should reinforce a positive sense of self and encourage the formation of a supportive, friendly learning community. This is most often achieved in the discussion forum area, or with interactions with the instructor and students via e–mail, chat, blogs and shared images (podcasts, video, images).

The appraisals of the stimulus are a part of the individual's value system, which means that one should be aware of the context and situation in which there are neurological stimuli. The degree of effectiveness has a great deal to do with the way in which the values align with the stimuli. Thus, there are qualitative as well as quantitative aspects of motivational neurobiological stimulation. The findings can be applied to online learning, study and instruction.

To be effective as an e–learner, it is important to learn how to use neurobiological stimuli to your advantage. Some of the most effective ways involve Web 2.0 approaches, which include extreme interactivity with the web and data sources, and proactive, engaged and purposeful interaction with other people who share the same learning goals.

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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: EMERGING IDEAS ON KNOWLEDGE TYPES

The wide popularity and adoption of Web 2.0 applications, with the information sharing, repository development, social bookmarking, community tagging and community–built information bases, makes an understanding of information, knowledge and knowledge development vital. Otherwise, the information and knowledge collected and combined can collapse into chaos. Perhaps the most obvious knowledge management concept when looking at social networks (wikis, bookmarking, etc.) is to look at knowledge as a social construct. However, this may not be the most useful for purposes of classification for retrieval, and for ranking knowledge from the point of view of usefulness or commercial viability.

Therefore, as a result, several ideas about knowledge and knowledge management have emerged. A brief overview may be helpful, along with a list of useful references for further study. In a recent article, Maria Jakubik (2007) discusses knowledge and knowl-

edge management ideas. Further, her article, which was published in the *Journal of Knowledge Management*, includes flowcharts that trace the evolution of ideas, as well as a diagram that relates the four emerging ideas to each other.

Jakubik identifies four categories of knowledge management ideas: ontological, epistemological, commodity, and community.

1. Ontological. The ontological perspective suggests that knowledge is concerned with the nature of reality. Criteria of measurement and evaluation have to do with understanding the nature of the knowledge and the "reality." Is it external? Objective? Ontological views of knowledge look at two subcategories:

   a. Social

   b. Individual

2. Epistemological. The epistemological view looks at knowledge management from a scientific perspective, and seeks to develop systems of classification that incorporate the logic(s) of science, including a "grammar" of science. Is the knowledge explicit? Is it tacit?

3. Commodity. In this case, knowledge is an asset. As such, its value depends on its utility. Instead of relying on the logic(s) of science, one would look at economics, particularly microeconomics.

4. Community: Perhaps the most commonly addressed in contemporary discussions of knowledge and knowledge management, this view suggests that knowledge is a function of community interactions. The underpinning concept is the social construction of reality, and the notion that knowledge is socially determined. While this is undoubtedly useful as a knowledge management philosophy, there are limitations, particularly when needing to create classification schemes that respond to an object's usefulness.

Knowledge Management (KM) is a dynamic, quickly evolving field. As collaboration, peer review, sharing and modification occurs in web applications, and information manipulation and retrieval, then it will be necessary to develop more schemes and to refine them in an ongoing way.

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USING FEEDBACK TO AVOID THE DAMAGING EFFECTS OF STUDYING FOR MULTIPLE CHOICE TESTS

When you study for a multiple-choice test, are you reinforcing facts, or are you focusing on the misinformation that you have been presented in the form of "lures?" You might not even realize that you are privileging the false information as you study. However, when you take the test and get the results, it becomes terribly clear. Perhaps it does not matter in practice tests or weekly quizzes. However, in high–stakes tests such as midterms, finals, placement exams, exit exams or credit–by–exam situations, the fact that you have focused more on the wrong answers than the right ones can be devastating.

Although multiple choice testing is ubiquitous in online and face–to–face assessment and evaluation, and strategies for studying for tests abound, the fact that the testing form itself can be damaging, with unintended negative learning consequences, is often poorly understood. One way to combat the problems is to make sure that adequate feedback is built into the testing and the practice testing process. Having feedback helps students differentiate between the correct answer and the attractive "lure" which, in a multiple–choice setting, has been designed in order to masquerade as a correct answer when, in fact, it is misinformation. Students who have not studied at all, or who have only limited exposures to the text, are likely to guess the wrong answer or calculate based on shaky misinformation.

Taking a test can improve the retention of material being learned. In ideal circumstances, the individual has the opportunity to use a battery of techniques to classify knowledge, place it in context, organize it within learning objectives and strategies, and to practice recall by means of classification tools. The tools are largely cognitive, which means that they help you manage your mind and memory. For example, before taking a practice multiple–choice exam, it is good to have a list of key terms (perhaps in the form of flash cards), learning objectives and pullouts that can be in the form of an outline. Summaries of narratives and information that helps

learners tie the course content to the form of assessment are helpful as well.

Recent research has shown that a proactive approach to knowledge management is critical. It is very important to classify information, place it in categories and create schema that tie it into the course objectives.

1. Do not take a practice multiple–choice test without studying first. You will be likely to fall prey to the "lures," and you will not have enough base knowledge to be able to correct the misinformation and the erroneous impression.

2. Do not take a practice multiple–choice test that does not offer feedback. The best practice exams will point you to the passages in the text that correspond to the answers. They will provide good reinforcement of the correct answers. You will be able to explore the course information, and details in a way that will help you gain a fuller understanding of the material and the overall objectives.

3. Develop your own practice questions, but do not create "lures." Once you know that you will be faced with a multiple–choice test, be sure to anticipate the content that will be covered. Draft possible questions and review them. Do not create possible false answers, but instead develop questions that allow you to create one short answer, which could be one of the options in a multiple–choice test.

4. Find a virtual study buddy and then use all available modes of communication for feedback. One way of getting feedback that will work in the absence of a robust practice test situation that has built–in feedback is to use a study buddy for practice questions. This is quite easy to do. You can create review situations online using a chat program or internet telephony (Skype, MSN). Using video chat can work as you ask each other questions. If this is not possible, at the very least, you can ask a fellow classmate to help you puzzle out some of the more perplexing passages or parts of your course.

5. Do not fall into the "belief in correctness" trap. Even if you think that you know all of the responses, be sure to check each one. One of the problems with "lures" is that the misin-

formation often reinforces the student's belief in his or her own correctness, even when the knowledge is not correct.

6. Reinforcement can occur in many ways. Take stock of your own preferences and find a way to reinforce your study techniques. You may wish to reward yourself. If you are a kinesthetic learner, you may wish to take as many keyboard–based practice exams as possible, and you may wish to type up your correct answers. If you are an auditory learner, you may wish to record a podcast that provides key points, and then listen to them as much as possible.

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HELP! I CAN'T DO THIS ON MY OWN: CREATING A LEARNING COMMUNITY IN YOUR ONLINE COURSE

A feeling of working in complete isolation used to be something that characterized online courses. However, those times have changed, thanks to the design of the learning management solutions, the course instructional strategy and the presence of all kinds of collaborative tools that are built into the experience. In a typical class, you will have discussion boards, instant messaging, home pages, wikis, blogs, social networking sites and other ways of sharing information with your fellow classmates. The bottom line is that you can easily be part of a social network, and a solid and robust learning community.

- <u>Reaching out to classmates</u>. Your fellow classmates may be the closest friends you will have while you are taking your online course. You can ask each other questions and share insights about the course. Furthermore, you can review the assignments and clear up any ambiguities that may exist.

- <u>Collaborative activities</u> (peer review, discussing notes, looking at drafts, discussing where to find things, discussing practice quizzes and exams). You may be at a loss

about what to do collaboratively. You certainly agree that it is important to have a learning community, and it is good to have study buddies. How do they work? Your professor can help set up the course so that it is easy to collaborate with others. You can review fellow classmates' papers (peer review), you can discuss your notes, respond to movies and audio in the course by posting in discussion boards, and you can show each other where to find practice exams and quizzes.

- Posting home page. One common critique of online courses is that they tend to be dehumanizing. An excellent way to "rehumanize" the course space is to create a home page, within the confines of the course management system, for the specific course you are taking. If your fellow classmates do so as well, you will have a better sense of who they are and what their interests are. It is amazing how effective it can be to share photos of your pets. People really do connect through their dogs and cats, and even Burmese pythons!

- Twitter & instant messaging connections. Instant messaging can be overdone. However, in today's environment, it is great to be able to get a notice immediately of issues that can affect your health and welfare. For example, if you are taking hybrid courses, with a component on campus, it is helpful to get a notice of last–minute safety concerns or campus closures. It is also a great way for professors to send out notices to students and timed reminders to complete certain tasks.

- Ways to communicate—social networks. Sharing FaceBook, MySpace, LinkedIn information, can be helpful to you when practical and appropriate. In these environments, you can go into more depth and share information that might be considered a bit irrelevant or tangential to the actual course. Furthermore, you can develop a sense of affiliation, and develop increased confidence in what you do.

- Sharing files via e–mail. The mechanics of sharing files can be rather elusive to some students. It is really a matter of practicing. The key is to share information in several different ways. Share via e–mail, posts to discussion boards, and posts to other shared resources sites (wikis, blogs, etc.).

- <u>Sharing links to resources</u>. Most courses will require individuals to do at least some degree of online research. You can do so by linking to online resources, or showing the path to online library archives. In either case, it is good to explain the rationale for using the database. How did you choose that database? Why is it effective? How do you plan to use the articles? These are critical questions.

E–Learning Survival Skills

Whether you are new to e–learning, or have taken numerous courses over the years from different institutions, it is always good to look at the courses you are taking and to map out a strategy that will allow you to complete the required work and to succeed.

Learning Objectives and Structure of the Course

1. What is the topic of the course? What are the goals of the class? How long does the course last? When is work due? List the overview and create a calendar for yourself.

2. What are the primary learning objectives? What are the main activities? Reading? Discussions? Writing? Problem solving? Research? Make a list.

3. What instructional materials are used? Make sure you have obtained them and they are organized clearly. Books, articles, presentations, graphics, videos, etc.

4. What kinds of collaborative activities are you expected to do? Look ahead in the course syllabus and gain an idea of what you are supposed to do.

5. How will you be assessed? How will it be determined that you have achieved the learning objectives?

Overview Your Study Habits, Self–Regulation

1. What are your study behaviors? What are the best times, places and situations for you to study?

2. When do you create timelines and set deadlines? How do you set goals for yourself?

3. How do you know if you have actually learned something? Do you remember it? Do you apply the knowledge? Are you able to generalize from a specific case and apply as an analogue? Does the place you are in make a difference?

Learning Preferences

1. How do you most readily perceive information? Do you prefer visual, auditory, touch or kinaesthetic?

2. How do you manage information in order to remember it? How do you manage information you will be using to solve problems? How do you process information? Do you like to organize it in categories? Spatially? Time–sequences? Chronologically? By colors?

3. How do your emotions factor in your learning? Feelings of confidence? Acceptance by peers and professor?

4. How does your personality play a role? What type are you, and how do you approach people, groups and places?

Your Day–to–Day Approach to Learning

1. <u>Cognitive processing</u>. The way you tend to receive, store, and retrieve information.

2. <u>Patterns of learning</u>. Your approach, your behaviors and the place/context where you tend to learn.

3. <u>Adaptive responses</u>. Adjustments one makes in order to accommodate less than ideal situations and contexts.

Conclusion

Taking an integrative approach to the course content, along with how you learn, is very important. The secret to a successful plan is to plan ahead. At the same time, do not overreact to unexpected deviations from expectations. Maintain maximum flexibility in order to adjust to the requirements of the class.

DEALING WITH DISTRACTIONS

Listen to http://www.beyondutopia.net/podcasts/distractions.mp3.

It never fails, the most disruptive thoughts, news, events and crises seem to occur just as you are preparing to study for your final exam or finish a big term paper. How do you deal with distractions? Here are pointers and suggestions to help your focus, to feel good about yourself, and to believe in your ability to succeed.

1. Listen to your thoughts. Find out when and how you respond to external news or triggers. If your thoughts tend to be about people, places and social comparisons, recognize that. Try to replace the thoughts with those that relate to your task: process, procedures, and short–term goals.

2. If you find yourself feeling helpless and telling yourself that you are not able to do anything to protect yourself against change, reassure yourself that your feelings and thoughts are normal. However, there are ways to protect yourself. One is to study, and keep steady with your plans to improve your life and your future. Remind yourself that statistically speaking, education is the best approach.

3. If you find your thoughts and feelings racing ahead, and you find yourself predicting negative outcomes and doomsday scenarios, recognize that you may be feeling anxious. Racing thoughts and random, negative associations that respond to feelings of being threatened are very understandable given the situation. Reassure yourself that the racing thoughts are simply racing thoughts. You do not have to act or react to them.

4. Recognize that cognitive interference tends to occur in one or more spheres of cognition. There may be a visual trigger, which will trigger thoughts and emotions. One way to respond to the visual triggers is to switch learning strategies and move more toward alternative modes. For example, you may focus on audio and kinesthetic, which can help you keep track. Write notes. Listen to lectures. Watch videos.

5. Do what you can to place yourself in a situation that minimizes interference. When the cognitive interference occurs, sort out the task–related thoughts and the non–task related

thoughts. Set aside the non–task–related thoughts, and tell yourself you do not have to react to them.

6. Realize that some decisions are fear–based and some are not. Evaluate your actions or the thoughts about the actions you are thinking about taking. Are your thoughts racing? Are you telling yourself you need to change your major? Make a list of pro's and con's. Sleep on the decision.

7. Recognize when decisions need to be made quickly and when they can be postponed. If you are studying for a test, you need to continue to study, even if your emotions are surging and you are feeling a fight–flight response. Channel the fight–flight into the fight at hand: the test. Use adrenaline to sharpen your focus on the task–at–hand rather than to let it distract you.

8. If your intrusive thoughts share characteristics of perfectionism, make sure that you recognize this, and the destructive nature of perfectionism. Develop a strategy for rewarding yourself for achieving small goals and milestones, commend yourself for completing tasks, and avoid comparing your performance to others or a quality standard. Simply pat yourself on the back for showing up and doing it.

9. If you find you are engaging in behaviors that are ritualized and to the point of being incapacitating, it might be helpful to employ some of the strategies used by those with obsessive–compulsive disorder in order to liberate yourself from the tyranny of a compulsion and to reintroduce choice into your life.

Self–regulation may not sound very glamorous, but if you have a good sense of how and where your mind tends to go as you study, you will definitely benefit. Learning how to work with intrusive thoughts can be helpful for your online studies, and later in your workplace and at home.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE IN AN ONLINE COURSE

"We had started calling the program the "The Revolving Door," because things had gotten so bad. Students would take a few classes, disappear, and then reappear. We never had any idea why." Kelsen, the manager of the department's online programs was describing the situation in the office. The tension in her voice was notable, and she twisted a piece of paper in her hands.

"It didn't make sense. Enrollments were at an all–time high, we were getting all sorts of positive publicity, and we had been approved for an increased budget. We had money for more activities, online textbooks, faculty training. But, the students did not seem to be happy. "

Why is morale bad when online courses are getting better and better? Many institutions experiencing a boom in their online course enrollments are confronting this issue. Because of the rapid growth and rate of change that characterize most online learning programs, morale within the student body may be very low. No one knows about it until it is too late. Vroom's expectancy theory helps explain it, as does the concept of "psychological climate." This article explores the theory and applies it to the online learning program.

For many years, V. H. Vroom's 1964 classic, *Work and Motivation*, has been pointed to as a model for how the expectations that individuals have of their workplace, their coworkers and their employer can deeply influence motivation. In the second edition of *Work and Motivation,* Vroom writes, "The choices made by a person among alternative courses of action are lawfully related to psychological events occurring contemporaneously within the behavior" (Vroom, 1982, pp. 14–15). In other words, there are psychological "laws" that govern the way a person feels and acts.

Kelsen's experience supported what Vroom found. "It starts with students starting to e–mail their advisors. They start by blaming the recruiter. Later, they say it is not like the experiences they have with FaceBook, MySpace, and their iPhones. They were hoping for something like the things they were used to."

"In the past, though, students had low expectations. They were always happy, perhaps because they found the courses better than they thought they would. Now, in the age of iPhones and Black-Berry, everyone thinks they should be able to access their courses any time, any place. They also expect raw, spontaneous video clips, like the ones you might find in YouTube."

Vroom goes on to articulate his "expectancy theory." "The force motivating a person to exert effort or to perform an act in a job situation depends on the interaction between what the individual wants from a job (valence) and the degree to which he or she believes that the company will reward effort exerted (expectancy) on that job with the things he or she wants. Individuals believe that if they behave in a certain way (instrumentality), they will receive certain job features (Vroom, 1982)." This definitely helps explain why it is so important not to arouse expectations unnecessarily. If managed well, expectations can be huge motivators, and can connect to one's behavior and/or performance.

Recent studies have expanded Vroom's expectancy theory, and have pointed out that expectations have a great deal to do with how the "psychological climate" is formed in the workplace, classroom or even virtual meeting space. The psychological climate, which can be positive or negative, is made up of various aspects that contain expectations. Lawler and Suttle (1973) developed various categories of expectations, and many researchers, such as Darden, Hampton and Howell (1989) and Sims, Szilagyi and

McKerney (1976), further connected them to leadership qualities. According to Litwin and Stringer (1966), leadership style is critical in managing expectations and one of the most important determinants of psychological climate.

In 1988, researchers Good and Sisler conducted a study of individuals in retailing to determine the components of psychological climate. Here are the resulting categories:

Note that these can also apply to online learning.

- Role clarity
- Role harmony
- Task autonomy
- Task variety and challenge
- Task importance
- Role assignment

When Kelsen heard the description of psychological climate, she gave a wry smile. "Yes, that is precisely it. We have a very toxic psychological climate. I am not proud of it, but that is what it is. I'd like to know what to do. "

She also related to later studies. For example, Woodard, Casill and Herr (1994) completed a study that required employees to rank the components of psychological climate and to assign relative importance to each one. The results are strikingly applicable to the management of an online program team that includes support staff, administrative personnel, faculty and administration. Here they are, with comments that make connections between the original results and apply them to the online learning organization:

1. <u>Role Assignment</u>. Team members are given sufficient time and training, and resources are provided to perform an assigned task so that it is clear what outcome is expected of them.

2. <u>Role Harmony</u>. Students receive information about what is expected of him or her in the execution of the job, and it is compatible with job expectations. Later, when detailing the behaviors involved in the performance of the job, expected behaviors are consistent with the employee's understanding of the job. The expectations, requirements, and desired

outcomes are clearly spelled out and updated regularly. Models of successful behaviors and outcomes are provided.

3. <u>Role Clarity</u>. Expected role behaviors have been clearly defined to the employee, and everyone involved has the same expectation.

4. <u>Organizational Identification</u>. In reviewing his or her role in the organization, the student believes his/her organization performs an important function and, in doing so, offers unique opportunities for growth and reward, resulting in the fact that the employee takes pride in the organization. Risk–taking is encouraged and, if an idea does not work, team members are encouraged to explore how their expectations were different from the outcome, and how lessons learned can help salvage or repurpose the results.

5. <u>Leader Goal Emphasis and Work Facilitation</u>. The instructor encourages and stimulates individuals to become personally involved in meeting learning goals by stressing high performance standards, creating an atmosphere that rewards high performance and then participating in the work himself or herself, therefore setting an example. The leader does not co–opt or deliberately outperform the individuals.

6. <u>Job Challenge and Variety</u>. Individuals are encouraged to use their skills and abilities in their work, and their initiative is rewarded as they engage in a wide range of behaviors while accomplishing the learning goals. Students are encouraged to share their unique approaches, and to heighten a sense of affiliation and accomplishment through sharing their experiences.

7. <u>Leader Trust and Support</u>. The instructor takes the time to become aware of the needs of the subordinates, and does not co–opt or distort what the e–learner is saying to him or her by misinterpreting, ignoring or punishing open communication. The supervisor is both aware of and responsive to the needs of his/her subordinates.

8. <u>Workgroup Cooperation, Friendliness and Warmth</u>. The atmosphere in the online course is open, and relationships are characterized by cooperation, sincere friendliness and warmth.

9. <u>Management Concern and Awareness</u>. The organization attempts to assess and respond to the student's needs and problems. This is done frequently, and response times are quick.

In conclusion, the idea of psychological climate can be a break-through strategy for online learning organizations and online courses suffering from low morale, high turnover, low retention, low course completion rate, loss of coordination, communication and teamwork problems, despite experiencing huge growth and financial success.

Kelsen said that her next step was to try to develop a strategy for cleaning up a bad psychological climate. "I'm afraid it is not going to be easy. I'm going to do some research and give it a shot, though," she said.

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"Two studies supported the self–determination model in that workers' perceptions of their supervisors' autonomy support and the workers' individual differences in autonomous orientation independently predicted the degree to which the workers were able to satisfy their needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness on the job which, in turn, predicted the workers' performance ratings as well as their well–being, indexed by vitality, and the reverse of anxiety and somatization." (Deci, et al., 2001).

"Self–determination theory posits that there are innate psycho-logical needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness, which implies that satisfaction of these three needs would promote motivation and well–being in all cultures." (Deci, et al., 2001).

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INSTRUCTOR–LEARNER BEHAVIORS EXPLAINED BY LEADER–MEMBER EXCHANGE THEORY

Does it surprise you that your online instructor is able to relate to you as closely as an individual learner? It sometimes feels almost like a tutor relationship. It is much closer and more effective than the traditional classroom, where it is typical to see a professor holding forth to a large classroom, or a streaming media "talking head" beaming out through your monitor. In an online course, your instructor has the ability to establish a high–quality one–on–one relationship with all members of the course, as well as an impersonal larger relationship with all the members as a whole.

How does this happen? Does you instructor clone herself? Does she create an automated avatar–bot that interacts with you as though it were your instructor?

The truth is that the nature of the learning space and the way that you interact are what make the difference.

What you will see is one–on–one relationships crop up simultaneously. These are "dyadic" relationships, and they work. In fact, one of the most remarkable attributes of online courses is, as opposed to face–to–face courses, the fact that the instructor is able to establish a productive and highly functioning set of one–on–one dyadic relationships with the individuals in the course, as well as with the group as a whole.

Let us step back a moment and see how this works. As you take the course, as a student, you will notice that you have essentially two levels of relationships with the instructor. First, there is

the sense of protected anonymity you have as a group member. You engage as a faceless group member when you read announcements and posts in the discussion area and interact with course content.

On the other hand, there is the relationship you have when you interact in e–mails, assessments and one–on–one chats, and when you interact in small groups that are targeted and personalized.

What makes a dyadic relationship a good one? How does it happen? Why are these dyadic relationships so important?

They are important because the relationship you establish with your instructor will determine how you feel about the course and the confidence you have. Establishing trust and maintaining an atmosphere of fairness are vital.

It does not happen immediately, though. It is a step–by–step process that occurs in stages.

- <u>Stage 1</u>. Instructors and learners (leaders and followers), as strangers, test each other. What behaviors are most comfortable?

- <u>Stage 2</u>. Instructors and e–learners define what they are supposed to do. This helps shape and refines roles.

- <u>Stage 3</u>. As roles reach maturity, the relationship attains a steady pattern of behavior. Leader–member/Instructor–learner exchanges are difficult to change.

The important key factor is to remember that the relationship is forged by behaviors that develop over time. The level of trust, and the freedom and range of communications are unique, and can be explained by the Leader–Member Exchange theories (Liden and Maslyn).

Robert C. Liden and John M. Maslyn's book, *Multi–dimensionality of Leader–Member Exchange: An Empirical Assessment through Scale Development*, explores the process. Liden and Maslyn show how the leader/instructor can establish "partnerships" with a large number of followers. Each member in the partnership feels special, and the relationship the instructors establish is unique and responsive to the individual needs of that student.

Once a relationship has been solidified, it is very difficult to dismantle. It will be glued together by the power of expectations, past behaviors and interactions, and the expectation of continuity.

If you are a student, you are going to feel a strong bond with your instructor, and you will trust him or her. If you have the chance to study with him or her, rather than other (and unknown) instructors, you will do so. You want to keep the relationship going, and you appreciate the fact that when you interact with him or her, you do it one–on–one, and you feel acknowledged as a person and affirmed as a valuable human being.

It is easy to overlook the value of the "warm fuzzies" and to not appreciate how one–on–one dyadic relationships between student and instructor make one feel better as a human being. However, in a situation that can be as potentially isolating as an online course, these can be of vital importance. Feeling a sense of belonging and having a solid relationship can definitely be the difference between feeling alienated or being motivated and filled with an "I can do it" attitude.

STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO MAINTAINING A GREAT GPA

It is important to keep a good grade–point average in order to obtain scholarships, maintain benefits, demonstrate satisfactory academic progress, and to stay in good standing for tuition reimbursement and military programs.

Here are a few tips:

1. <u>Plan the sequence of your courses; do not take things out of order</u>. Unfortunately, your college may not offer the courses you need when you need them. We have all done it. We have taken organic chemistry before we finished the prerequisites. Hubris is not a good thing in an online degree program. If you find you are out of your depth, the frustration you feel could be compounded by a sense of isolation and fear. It is much better to take your time, take the courses in sequence, and remember that each course provides scaffolding for the next. Even if you are a quick learner, trying

to learn an entire semester's worth of work in a week or two is enough to give anyone a mild case of hives. I learned the hard way that prerequisites exist for a reason.

2. <u>Budget your time</u>. Despite all the hype, all–nighters and cramming for tests do not work. Research has shown that it is much better to miss a few hours of sleep each night for a week than to go a full night without sleep. Cognitive performance is extremely impaired when one goes a night without sleep, while it holds steady at mild sleep deprivation. What this suggests for the strategic student is that when you have deadlines for graded, "high stakes" events (tests, term papers, etc.), plan your study time and use it productively. Practice your tests. Review materials. Expand outlines. Create annotated bibliographies for the "literature review" section of your research papers.

3. <u>Do not take too many courses at once</u>. Manage your workload. If you must take enough courses to be considered a full–time student, then aim for that level. It may be tempting to take more courses in order to graduate sooner, but unless there are extremely compelling reasons for you to risk being overloaded, it is important not to do it. So, even though you may be tempted to take five or six courses when all you need are four to maintain your full–time status, remember that it is better to graduate a semester later than to burn out and not graduate at all. Furthermore, by being stressed out and over–committed, you stress out your team at home (your family). It is important to keep the big picture in mind. Having a happy, "in your corner," family is vital in online programs.

4. <u>Ideal mix of courses (one easy, two mediums, one hard)</u>. A large part of motivation involves having a sense of mastery. If you feel in control of the content, able to perform at the level you desire, and when and where you need to perform, you will be much more able to build on your success. The best approach is to plan your semester so that you will be sure to have experiences that will reinforce your sense of mastery and accomplishment. At the same time, it is important to challenge yourself so that you have a strong belief in your own ability to rise to challenges and accomplish the academic goals you set for yourself.

5. <u>Check out "RateMyProfessor.com" and "Pick–a–Prof"</u>. While the online ratings sites are not completely reliable, they can give you an idea of whether or not a professor has left a great impression with his students. The negative impressions can be a bit misleading—remember that anyone can register. I have heard of ex–spouses logging in and posting spurious stuff on the site. So, read the comments, but also be sure to confer with your advisor and to find out what he or she has said about a particular professor. A professor who is flexible and sensitive to real–life work, family and deployment issues will give you a great deal of peace of mind.

6. <u>A degree is like an 18–hole golf game—sometimes you bogey sometimes you birdie</u>. If you have an unexpected shock at the end of the semester, and your grade did not turn out as you expected, do not despair. Did your professor receive all the work? Was there a mistake? Do not be afraid to ask. At the same time, do not give up. Analyze your performance and the circumstances. Is there something you can take away from this, something to be learned? What are the lessons learned? List them. At the same time, the grade surprises can work the other way. You may receive a higher grade than you expected (or even felt you deserved). Do not let it go to your head. Stay humble. Be grateful. Continue to work hard and focus.

7. <u>Do people really look at your GPA at the end</u>? Perfection is an unhealthy goal; the goal is 3.0 or better: The ability to be realistic about the situation, to look at the big picture and to keep focused on the overall goal, rather than getting distracted, is a gift. One way that students are not realistic is that they aim for a perfect 4.0 grade–point average. This may be possible in easy programs, or in programs that allow you to pick the grades you put on your final transcript. However, having a perfect 4.0, while laudable, is not the most important thing, especially for adult students who have years of practical experience. Even professional schools, which may intimidate prospective students by claiming they must have a perfect straight 'A' average are not always as rigid as they seem. Keep a balanced life, a good focus. The key is to graduate with a "winning," but

not necessarily perfect, average. Determining what will "win" future employment may be difficult, but perfectionism can cause you to trip on yourself and fail.

ONLINE PERSONALITY TESTS: KNOW YOURSELF, KNOW HOW TO SUCCEED

For the first time ever, users can take the complete Myers–Briggs personality type assessment, verify their types and receive a high–quality interpretation at one place, completely online through CPP, Inc. at http://www.mbticomplete.com. While personality tests have been widely available on the Internet for years, some of the more complicated, more statistically valid ones, have been costly or have required one to hire an expensive service for evaluation of the results.

For decades, individuals, corporations, the military and other organizations have used personality tests, usually in the form of questionnaires, or "inventories," to determine an individual's personality profile. Matching a personality profile with a job can result in a better "fit" between the tasks and an individual's interests. Creating teams with individuals who have complementary personality traits can lead to enhanced productivity. Finally, supervisors and fellow team members can begin to understand, and have more tolerance for, trait differences.

Perhaps the most widely known and commonly used personality type indicator is the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator, which was developed years ago by a mother and daughter team of psychologists. It has been used to help individuals better understand themselves and others, communicate more effectively, and lead more fulfilling personal and professional lives.

While there is no doubt that the MBTI has had enormous positive impact on the workplace, and has improved efficiency, morale, team–building and even conflict resolution, it is useful to take a step back and ask a few questions:

1. Can an instrument based on self–reporting ever lead to real self–awareness? Will the individual ever be able to advance past the level of self–awareness they had the moment they took the inventory?

2. Is there built–in bias due to assumptions about personality that are strongly influenced by individual or cultural prejudices, norms and expectations? For example, does a test–taker from one culture understand introversion to be something different from a person from a different culture?

3. Can using inventory results lead to labeling and stereotyping, which could result in individuals being "stuck" in a role or a label?

4. Are we restricting ourselves unnecessarily with the MBTI? Are there yet undiscovered "off–label" uses that could help organizations and individuals with conflict resolution, career programming, training, education, marketing and distributed project management? With the availability of the inventory, and the ability to take it online and receive a high–quality interpretation quickly, the possibilities have been expanded.

Perhaps one of the most valuable aspects of personality type indicators is that they can lead to enhanced self–awareness. Self–awareness is always desirable, because without it, it is difficult to develop cognitive strategies for change. Further, without self–awareness, it is difficult to understand differences in responses, and it is difficult to establish empathic relations.

Keep Yourself Engaged: Click, Vote, Express Yourself

You have probably seen the "clickers"—the little electronic audience response devices that let you cast a vote during a presentation and have it tabulate automatically. You probably noticed, too, that you were instantly transformed from a passive observer to an active participant, and you felt more engaged and interested. It was good to be able to express your opinion, and it was intriguing to see how fellow audience members felt.

Now, electronic voting and polling (audience response measures) are gaining popularity.

Why and how is electronic voting used online?

First, let us look at the "how." Individuals can cast their votes synchronously while in a webcast or chat. Programs such as Elluminate® incorporate polling capabilities. Other software provides the ability to vote synchronously or asynchronously. Examples

include Turning Point®. It is possible to use cell phones to dial numbers to cast votes. The dial–in technique is an older one, but it works well in certain situations. It is also possible to text–message a response, but that is a bit harder to tabulate.

Now, let us look at the "why." Audience polling and/or voting is excellent for increasing student engagement. Students feel enthusiastic about being part of a group, and it seems to reduce emotional barriers to joining the group.

- Audience polling allows one to vote anonymously. Thus, participation without penalty also assuages social anxiety and encourages a supportive, accepting social climate.

- Polling creates less anxiety than anonymous posts on a discussion board because the responses are channeled into prescribed options (yes, no, choice from list of options), and there is less chance of harsh, abusive or inappropriate posts.

- Click your way to a good grade. Audience response polling also rewards engagement by giving "participation points." Roll calls and attendance can be taken immediately.

- You can practice tests, quizzes and other assessments, and thus practice the test–taking process as you review the material.

- You can review material with a group and instantly check your results.

Electronic Voting Systems: 2002 vs. 2006

In 2007, V. Simpson and M. Oliver published the results of a study in the *Australasian Journal of Education Technology*. In it, they looked at the way that electronic voting systems were used in education in 2002. They returned in 2006 to compare and contrast the technology and its usage.

For Simpson and Oliver (2007), the electronic voting systems were a good way to boost student engagement, and to encourage active, participatory learning.

In addition, Simpson and Oliver viewed electronic voting systems as one way to overcome the problems inherent in a lecture–based instructional strategy. For them, the lecture, whether it occurs in a face–to–face classroom or via readings online, presents

the same problem: it is a passive approach, and emphasizes content delivery rather than cognitive engagement and learning.

They articulate the goal of finding strategies to address the problem of lecture–dominated online learning: "Lectures are still seen as the dominant form of teaching and are associated with the tendency to emphasize content transmission over student engagement" (Simpson & Oliver, 2007, p. 188).

Simpson and Oliver did not visit virtual classrooms, nor did they survey students. Instead, their investigation involved a literature search that covered indexes of journals and scholarly publications, as well as web–based search engines.

In 2002, the study found that electronic voting systems were often used in science and engineering disciplines. In 2006, articles had also been published on the use of electronic voting systems in economics, management, psychology, philosophy, medicine and statistics.

In 2002, electronic voting systems were used mainly in large groups. In 2006, large groups still prevailed, but small groups were also beginning to use them. The electronic voting systems helped students and instructors know more about themselves and each other.

One major benefit that electronic voting system providers rarely mention was that polling can be done to help instructors attune to the students.

What Simpson and Oliver found was that the systems helped the lecturers increase their understanding of the students and gauge effectiveness.

On the student side, the systems helped them understand the material, check their knowledge, gain an idea of instructor expectations and helped mastery of difficult materials.

With more robust infrastructure, electronic voting systems will be even more viable, even in mobile devices, handhelds and Smartphones. In conjunction with mobile learning, electronic voting systems could be a perfect way to incorporate authentic learning, with clear connections between course content and the real world.

Reference

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"Chunk" Your Way to an "A"

A good online course that is facilitated by a good instructor will contain items that help learners prioritize, organize and identify key elements in the material to be learned. In other words, instead of having an inventory of a million little pieces of knowledge scattered randomly throughout one's brain, the course design and the instructor will help develop ways of organizing knowledge. The cognitive file cabinets or organizational schemes are called "chunks" by educational psychologists (Gobet, 2005).

According to F. Gobet (2005), there are several effective ways to utilize the notion of "chunking" in an online course. His findings showed that effective chunking would allow the individual learner to optimize learning and to develop effective learning strategies for the future. It also allows the learner to effectively organize knowledge so that they align with the desired learning outcomes.

In short, chunking involves directing learner attention to important features, and it can be done in a number of ways. Instructors who know how to help students develop chunking techniques usually do the following:

1. Teach from simple to complex;
2. Move from the known to the unknown;
3. Clearly identify elements to be learned;
4. Focus on a limited number of standard problems;
5. Avoid distracters;
6. Organize information in central filing systems or databases.

Chunking applies to course development and design as well. It can be extremely useful for the instructional designer to look at the content, learning outcomes, and start building a course by follow-

ing a certain number of procedures that help learners (and instructors) develop cognitive shortcuts and (eventually) the "expert" eye.

1. Segment curriculum into natural components;

2. Perform a task analysis and follow successful models.;

3. Make sure that the course includes opportunities to provide feedback.

This concept profoundly influences the way in which one might approach learning, and awareness of how the mind makes meaning, how the mind organizes knowledge and the relationship between the organization of knowledge and its retrieval.

- <u>How is chunking one of the mechanisms of learning</u>? Chunking involves taking a large number of random pieces of knowledge or information, and organizing them into categories and easily identified patterns so that the knowledge is manageable.

- <u>How does chunking reinforce the role of feedback in learning</u>? An instructor or expert's feedback guides the way that patterns and categories of knowledge are developed.

- <u>How does the order in which materials are presented facilitate chunking</u>? This is perhaps one of the most important aspects of chunking. Materials must be presented in the way you would like the information to cluster or chunk together. Presenting information out of sequence, or randomly attached to inappropriate categories or classification schemes, will lead to confusion.

The interesting thing about chunks and chunking is that the way a person chunks is what makes the difference between an expert and a novice. Chunks tend to be the cognitive shortcuts that experts use to be able to recognize key features of a problem, using perceptual cues (the "professional eye") and to maximize efficiency in problem identification and solving.

A good teacher knows how to help students prioritize, organize and identify key elements to the point that the students become adept at pattern recognition, and thus can create their own schemata or "chunks."

Reference

Gobet, F. (2005). Chunking models of expertise: Implications for education. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 19*, 183–204.

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND E–LEARNING: CAN THEY HELP YOU SUCCEED?

Popular social networking sites do not seem, at first glance, to have much in common. One seems to be all about self–expression and building bonds with people with shared interests, while the other seems to be about self–discipline, self–improvement and goal–attainment. However, the two can go hand–in–hand, with the result that students can feel the sense of belonging that comes with a community, and can also share and receive useful information about colleges, courses, professors and even work.

At the same time, it is possible to spend all one's time on a social networking site that has little or nothing to do with one's stated educational objectives. So, when deciding when and where to connect social networking with academic endeavors, one should keep a short checklist in mind:

1. <u>Keep it practical</u>. What problem do you hope to solve by connecting with other people? Identify the specific issue or question you have, and then make that the subject of your posts and your communications.

2. <u>Focus your interests</u>. Time wasting begins with distractions. While some distractions are productive, and intellectual exploration and development are important, it is also true that one can spend a lot of time on social networks without much reward. If you try to focus your browsing and social networking, and keep your overall goals in mind, you may find that you will avoid the time–wasting activities and focus more on those that will actually bring rewards.

3. <u>Understand the motives of fellow networkers</u>. Keep in mind that the audience for your social networking posts has certain expectations, which is to say that they have their own reasons for joining the network. Do they want to

share information about professors? Are they sharing links to sources of practice quizzes? Are they sharing information about online writing centers? To be effective, one must perfect the art of "listening" online.

There are literally thousands of social networking sites. If one includes discussion boards and blogs, tag cloud providers and feed-sharers, the number quickly jumps into the thousands.

Without going into tag–based, or blog–sharing types of social networking, here are a few huge blockbuster sites that will help you establish a community of people with shared interests.

- MySpace—http://www.MySpace.com—This is perhaps the most popular social networking site for certain demographic groups. It is a popular place for artists and musicians as well, because it is a perfect venue to post demos, virtual exhibitions, photos and news. Some people become obsessed with seeing how large their networks can be. That seems to be a clear case of quantity over quality but, on the other hand, when the networks are active, the posts can be a lot of fun.

- FaceBook—http://www.facebook.com—This is an excellent place for college students to network. It seems to be an excellent way to share information about universities, programs, courses and professors. In fact, pickaprof.com and facebook.com have connected to make reviewing professors and courses easier. Pickaprof.com even allows students to make their schedules known so that friends can register with them.

- LinkedIn—http://www.linkedin.com—LinkedIn is a career and employment networking site, which is quickly out-stripping monster.com and other conventional job sites in terms of buzz and energy. It quickly suggests that the "six degrees of separation" concept may actually be something like four, or even less, when one starts looking at interests in common. It seems to be an excellent way to keep in touch or to find lost contacts. The sense of anomie engendered by the aggressive competitiveness of some people who seem bent on having networks of thousands could be construed as intimidating rather than welcoming.

- <u>RateMyProfessor.com</u>—http://www.ratemyprofessor.com— This is an amazingly user–friendly and popular tool where students can post their experiences and evaluations of professors. While the information can be helpful and in general terms reliable, it is easy for students to forget that in an online course, the professor is not always in control of the way the course is developed, administered or offered. If major glitches occur due to textbook changes, course shell updates or learning management system crashes, the student's experience is likely to be quite negative. Conversely, students may have had a great experience with the course but, unbeknownst to the student, the department or college has made structural changes, and the new course is not as user–friendly. Another caveat and word to the wise—it is not uncommon for departmental politics to creep into ratings. In other words, not all the posts are necessarily from students. Some may be bogus posts from friends, colleagues or the professor down the hall who is jealous because he or she did not get tenure. It is not a particularly common occurrence, but it happens. Therefore, like any posts and evaluations, buyer beware!

And now for the research…

A recent article published by M. Anderson (2007) looks at how social networks on the Internet are being used in real–life situations to problem–solve and to gather information. The study also specifically looked at how Internet–based social networks are influencing organizational behavior. The study included seventy-seven MBA students in an executive–level IT class in the year 2000 at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management.

The following questions were asked:

1. Do network size and tie–strength lead to more information gathering? The actual network size was measured by the number of contacts. The effective network size was the number of members who actually knew each other.

2. Agency and motivation question—Do some people benefit more from social capital opportunities? The goal was to link personality and social networks. The study concluded that social networking can be a great way to gather information.

However, there must be:

1. Sufficient motivation;
2. A clear goal in mind;
3. No redundancies.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that "actionable knowledge" can be derived through social networks. When utilized in an efficient manner, it can lead to immediate progress on a current assignment or project.

In conclusion, yes, social networks can work for you. To maximize the benefit for your e–learning endeavors, be sure to focus your networking and make sure that specific questions and issues that you have remain at the center of what you are doing online.

Reference

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Web Encyclopedias, Dictionaries, and Articles: Where are the Free Web–Based Research Sources and Premium Library Services?

As you start to work on your research papers, you may find it to be rather confusing. Do you just Google everything on the web? Will your results be adequate? Ideally, your research will involve a combination of free web–based search and premium content. Furthermore, if your college provides access to databases, encyclopedias, and dictionaries, which ones do you use? The options are dizzying, and many are not reliable. Here is a discussion of well–known databases and their content.

Free Web–Based Research Sources and Databases

All of the databases and research sources listed below have free search, and some free content. Some may ask you to pay for premium access.

- HighBeam Research—http://www.highbeam.com/. High-Beam is a premiere online library where you can find research, facts and articles. Some articles are provided free of charge. Content is derived from newspapers like *The Washington Post* and *The Boston Globe*, magazines like *The Economist* and *Newsweek*, and journals like *JOPERD* and *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*. HighBeam also provides an in–depth online library of reference works. Research online dictionaries, including *Webster's New World Dictionary*, *The Oxford American College Dictionary*, as well as encyclopedias from Britannica and Columbia.

- FindArticles—http://www.findarticles.com. This is a particularly useful and complete source for business, technology and reference sources. Many articles are full–text, but each page is on a separate webpage, which makes it difficult to print out or save. You may purchase articles.

- Britannica Online—http://www.britannica.com/. *Encyclopaedia*, respected and thorough. Britannica.com includes a portion of the contents of the venerable print edition. The database also contains reviews of 125,000 reference sites, related books and current articles from magazines such as *Discover*, *The Economist* and *Newsweek*.

- MSN Encarta (Atlas, Encyclopedia, Dictionary, Quizzes, K–12, Adult Learning)—http://encarta.msn.com. This free encyclopedia from Microsoft contains 17,000 articles and more than 2,200 photos, illustrations, maps, charts and tables. One may also access the World Atlas and the World English Dictionary, a "talking dictionary" replete with audio files.

- Encyclopedia—http://www.encyclopedia.com. Offers more than 50,000 articles from *The Concise Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia* (3rd Edition). Encyclopedia.com offers 170,000 links, including cross–referenced articles and other sites. It is possible to access articles and images from the *Electric Library*. Some articles require one to pay a fee.

- Pathfinder—http://www.pathfinder.com/pathfinder/index .html. Search and connect to the websites of the publications/websites of Time–Warner (*Forbes*, *Time*, *Fortune*, *Sunset*, *People*, *EW*, etc.).

- Wikipedia—http://www.wikipedia.com. A popular source, but please, **please** use with caution. Do not cite Wikipedia in serious academic papers. Anyone can add to Wikipedia, and the information is often biased or incomplete. Use Wikipedia as a starting point, but do not trust it.

- Ask—http://www.ask.com. A search engine, but it also includes a number of dictionaries and encyclopedias. Its search engine is sufficiently different from Google's to yield unusual and refreshing results.

Art References

- Olga's Gallery—http://www.abcgallery.com/

- Artchive—http://www.artchive.com

- Artcyclopedia—http://www.artcyclopedia.com/

Government Statistics

These sources are free.

- FedStats—http://www.fedstats.gov. Statistics from more than one–hundred federal agencies. The portal contains a searchable database.

- ChildStats—http://www.childstats.gov. The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (Forum) is a collection of twenty-two Federal government agencies involved in research and activities related to children and families. The Forum was founded in 1994 and formally established in April 1997 under Executive Order No. 13045. The mission of the Forum is to foster coordination and collaboration, and to enhance and improve consistency in the collection and reporting of Federal data on children and families. The Forum also aims to improve the reporting and dissemination of information on the status of children and families.

- USAgov—http://www.usa.gov/Topics/Reference_Shelf/Data .shtml.

Your School's Virtual Library

These are covered by your library/online information access fees and tuition. Granted, tuition and fees are soaring, but at least you are getting some benefits for your money spent.

Funk and Wagnall's New World Library

Indexes over 25,000 records, covering an array of topics. Entries include various images and brief biographies. Full text available.

Britannica Online (Library Edition)

Includes the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*, as well as a multimedia database. Full text available.

Europa World Plus

Access the online version of the *Europa World Year Book* and the *Regional Surveys of the World*. Includes political and economic information for hundreds of countries and territories. Full text available.

Gale Virtual Reference Library

Access encyclopedias, almanacs and specialized reference sources for multidisciplinary research. Search multiple resources at one time. The reference library includes titles such as *Contemporary Authors*, *Dictionary of American History*, *Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia*, *Something About the Author*, and many others. Full text available.

Grove Dictionary of Art Online

Over 45,000 articles on the visual arts from prehistory to the present. Full text available.

Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians

Comprehensive dictionary of musical scholarship. Includes links to musical web sites around the world. Full text available.

Hoover's Pro

Provides company and industry information for public and private U.S. and international companies, from small to large. Materials indexed include data from Hoover's, Dun & Bradstreet, Mergent and Wegener. Full text available.

LexisNexis Primary Sources in U.S. History

Access to historical research through the electronic publication of a wide range of primary sources and essential reference information. This suite of web services provides new opportunities to carry out comprehensive research more easily than ever.

LexisNexis Academic: Newspapers/Current Periodicals

Access to full–text documents from over 6,000 news, business and legal publications, using a variety of flexible search options.

Political Handbook of the World

Contains country profiles covering natural history, government and political parties, as well as profiles on intergovernmental organizations, development banks, and the agencies and specialized bodies of the United Nations. Full text available.

ProQuest Criminal Justice Periodicals Index™

ProQuest Criminal Justice Periodicals Index™ is a comprehensive database of U.S. and international criminal justice journals. The database provides research support for students interested in careers in criminal justice, law enforcement, corrections administration, drug enforcement, rehabilitation, family law and industrial security.

ProQuest Literature Online

Students can find explanations, definitions and contextual material through a cross–searchable reference shelf that incorporates key academic textbooks such as *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* and *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Furthermore, bibliographic, biographical and secondary information sources provide lists of works, author information and narrative biographies.

ProQuest Nursing & Allied Health Source™

ProQuest Nursing & Allied Health Source provides users with reliable healthcare information covering nursing, allied health, alternative and complementary medicine, and much more.

Oxford English Dictionary (OED)

Provides full text access to the *Oxford English Dictionary* online. Includes definitions, etymologies and quotations.

Smithsonian Physical Tables

The ninth revised edition of the *Smithsonian Physical Tables* is comprised of nine-hundred one tables concentrating on a broad scope of common physical and chemical data. The information can be of use to scientists and engineers, and to those involved with physics in its larger sense. Full text available.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Provides access to encyclopedia articles on issues related to the field of philosophy. Full text available.

World Almanac

Encyclopedia covering American culture, politics, technology, economics, environment and other topics. Entries include facts, statistics and biographies. Sources include *The World Almanac* and *Book of Facts*, *The World Almanac of the USA*, *The World Almanac of US Politics*, *The World Almanac for Kids*, and *The World Almanac Knowledge Source*. Full text available.

FREE ONLINE MATH REVIEWS: AUDIO, VIDEO, INTERACTIVE

Students who are taking math courses online often find that their books and online tutorials leave something to be desired. Fortunately, there are many online videos, many of which are free. Furthermore, there are many sites with solved problem sets, animation and voice–over. Here is a brief list of ones that are particularly effective.

Video

- Algebasics—http://www.algebasics.com/. Audio with synched voice. The instructor's voice offers solutions and guidance. This is by far my favorite of the basic algebra sites I have found.

- <u>Online Math Learning</u>—http://www.onlinemathlearning .com/algebra–help.html. Videos include problems solved on a whiteboard, with synched voice.

- <u>Your Math Teacher Help</u>—http://www.youtube.com/profile _videos?user=yourteachermathhelp. Videos on YouTube, primarily of math teachers who demonstrate the problems using dry erase boards. It is helpful, but the lessons are not organized in any particular order.

- <u>Khan Academy</u>—http://www.youtube.com/user/khan. academy. Great videos! Absolutely outstanding.

- <u>Wild Trigonometry</u>—http://www.youtube.com/watch?v =ZYWHfvij94U&feature=related

- <u>MathTV</u>—http://www.youtube.com/user/MathTV

- <u>YourOtherTeacher</u>—Pulley demo. http://www.yourother teacher.com/wbDemo.html?vName=4ywwfim2si&sID =21512.

- <u>Engineering Dynamics</u>—http: //www.youtube.com/watch ?v=6nP7k8–klo&feature=related. Work/energy problem.

Text–Based Problem Sets and Solutions

- <u>Purplemath</u>—http://www.purplemath.com/modules/ and http://www.purplemath.com/modules/ordering.htm

Solved Problem Sets, Some With Audio and Animation

- <u>AlgebraHelp</u>—http://www.algebrahelp.com/

- <u>AlgebraHelp Lessons</u>—http://www.algebrahelp.com/lessons/

- <u>Algebra Review in Ten Lessons</u>—http://www.math.uakron .edu/~dpstory/mpt_home.html

- <u>QuickMath: Automatic Math Solution</u>—http://www.quick math.com/www02/pages/modules/algebra/index .shtml

- <u>Algebra Solver</u>—http://www.sosmath.com/algebra /algebra.html

- <u>Introduction to Algebra</u>—http://www.mathleague.com /help/algebra/algebra.htm

- <u>Algebra Solutions</u>—http://www.gomath.com/algebra.html

- <u>MathPages</u>—http://www.mathpages.com/home/ialgebra.htm

- Word Problems: Algebra Word Problem Solvers—http: //www.algebra.com/algebra/homework/word/
- Solving Algebra Word Problems—http://www.onlinemath learning.com/algebra–word–problems.html

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College Credit By Exam

Obtaining credit through exam is a great way to earn college credit quickly, save money and time, and avoid demotivating yourself by being stuck in courses where you are repeating material you already know.

You may not believe it, but there are people who have earned entire degrees through college credit by exam programs. While getting an entire degree via exam is not very practical for most people, it does give you an idea of the vast array of exams that are available, and the potential.

The cost of credit by exam can vary widely. It can range from $60 for CLEP to significantly more for others, depending on the test and where it is administered.

Be wary of exam preparation courses and services. DSST offers officially endorsed exam preparation courses, which would pro-bably be effective. The prices start at $169 per course. However, it is clear by reading the cautionary notes that there are numerous entities, some legitimate and some not, that claim to be able to prepare you to take an exam. Be careful.

Keep in mind that taking a CLEP test is not something that should be approached lightly, even though it is tempting to go in and wing it just to see how you will do. This is often the case in the military, where it is not very easy to get the exam preparation materials, and not convenient to lug around a stack of heavy, bulky textbooks. If you really want to pass the test, you will need to study.

However, how can one study for a test? There are numerous "study tip" websites and guides. Many are absolutely outstanding, including the one prepared by Thomas Edison: http://www.tesc .edu/students/tecep/prepare.php. It is easiest to boil it down to a simple acronym:

MAP Your Exam Strategy

Make Mental File Cabinets—Start looking for the key terms and key concepts as you read. These will be the memory triggers, as well as organizing principles for your mind. Be sure to think of causal relationships as well, and be able to discuss the concepts you are encountering.

Active Reading—Think about how the details relate to the main concepts as you read. Make a list of main concepts and keep them at your side. Jot them down in the textbook, too. Do not let yourself be distracted by inconsequential details or sidebar stories. Remember that they are examples, but are not the actual main issues.

Plan and Practice—Buy appropriate study materials, and budget sufficient time to study in a setting that allows good focus and concentration. Plan for the exam by simulating the test environment. Let yourself become anxious and develop strategies for dealing with anxiety as well as time constraints. The more you practice and plan, the more confident you will be.

Here is a preliminary list of exam providers and their offerings:

- <u>College–Level Examination Program (CLEP)</u>—There are thirty-four exams in all, primarily in core or general education areas, but with some specialization. CLEP exams are $60. Study guides are $10. CLEP helps students save time and money. Twenty-nine hundred colleges and universities grant credit for CLEP exams. *The CLEP Official Study Guide, 18th Edition*, is the only study guide that contains sample questions and answers for all thirty-four exams. It also includes information on earning credit through CLEP and exam–taking tips.

- <u>Excelsior Exams</u>—Forty exams, with free study guides. Prices for the exams vary. Practice exams are $60 for a set of two exams.

- <u>TECEP Exams</u>—Offered by Thomas Edison State College. Students may study by ordering the corresponding textbook, which is available through the online bookstore. Tests may be repeated only once. If the student fails an attempt, he or she must wait three months before taking the test again.

THE SKILLS YOU NEED TO SUCCEED: FREE ONLINE SOFTWARE TRAINING

How are your online software skills? If you are uncomfortable with the most commonly required software programs—MS Word, Excel, Adobe Acrobat, Powerpoint, Photoshop, Corel Draw and Dreamweaver, your academic progress may hit a brick wall, especially if you are required to create projects, write reports and collaborate with fellow students. In addition, you will definitely need to be able to download and use the plug–ins you will need in order to do quizzes, view videos, listen to audio, download content, upload files, and fill out interactive forms and surveys.

You may even find that if you are not able to use some shareware such as the audio editing program, Audacity, and cannot use iMovie or Windows Moviemaker to edit films to upload and share, you may not be able to meet the requirements of some more interactive courses, such as communications.

How can you get those skills? While it is true that many community colleges and technical centers offer face–to–face courses, it is often difficult to find the time to take the courses, and they may even be rather expensive.

Fortunately, there are many courses and tutorials available for free that allow individuals to obtain training on the software programs they need.

Many of the more basic tutorials on commonly–used programs are free. More complex tutorials, higher–level skills and more complex programs often require a learner to pay a modest monthly fee to obtain access to the courses. In either case, the fact that such programs are available is a huge relief for many. Granted, the quality varies, and many are not designed as well as they could be and are not ideal for all learning styles, since some are simply demos that do not allow interaction or practice while taking the training. However, the key to making sure you have learned something is to try it out in real life. The training tutorials, even if boring, can be made more engaging if you take the time to stop for a moment and practice what you have learned.

Here is a brief list of some of the best sources on the web for free and low–cost online software training.

- Atomic Learning Training Videos—http://movies.atomic learning.com/k12/freetrial/
  - Tutorials—http://movies.atomiclearning.com/k12 /tutorials. Access, Acrobat, Appleworks, etc.
- LearnThat—http://www.learnthat.com/
  - Excel 2007
  - Vista
  - Macromedia 2004 MX Flash: http://www.learnthat. com/computers/learn–1774–free_flash_mx_2004 _training_tutorial.htm
- VTC Online University—http://apex.vtc.com/welcome.php
  - Free demos and online: http://apex.vtc.com/demo.php
  - Movie title tutorials: http://apex.vtc.com/alltitles.php
- Lynda—http://lynda.com/
  - Learning @ Your Own Pace: http://movielibrary.lynda .com/html/modListing.asp#titleListing
  - Online Tutorial Library: http://movielibrary.lynda.com /html/index.asp
- U. S. Small Business Association—Free Online Training
  - http://www.sba.gov/services/training/index.html
  - http://www.sba.gov/services/training/onlinecourses /index.html
    - Courses in English: http://www.sba.gov/services /training/index.html
    - Courses in Spanish: http://www.sba.gov/espanol /Biblioteca_en_Linea/
- Computer Training Courses—http://www.trainingcenter.com/
  - Computer Courses List—http://www.trainingcenter.com /signup/signup.asp
- DevShed—http://www.devshed.com/
  - Open Source Web Development Tutorials
  - E–Seminars: http://www.eseminarslive.com/
- GCF LearnFree—http://www.gcflearnfree.org/
- InfoPackets—http://www.infopackets.com/windowstutorials .htm

CHAPTER 3

TECHNICAL WRITING FOR THE NEW "GREEN CAREERS"

View the podcast at http://www
.beyondutopia.net/podcasts/tech–
writing–1.mp3.

Do you have the writing skills
you need for the new "green ca-
reers?" Keep in mind that new
"green jobs" require a blend of busi-
ness, technological and mental dis-
ciplines, together with an understanding of culture, multiple
generations and social contexts. Chances are if the only writing
courses you have taken are two first-year composition courses, you
still lack the skills you need to be able to perform effectively in the
new workplace, which will be very skills-focused. You will be
required to write both business–based and technical documents,
ranging from letters and memos to technical reports, full-fledged
proposals, specifications and manuals. One of the most important
courses to take, even if you have to take it as an elective or pay ad-
ditional tuition, is a solid, well-rounded course in technical writing.

How is technical writing different from writing for the hu-
manities or social sciences? The key difference is that technical
writing tends to be task-oriented. Either it addresses the task of
reporting results of research and projects, or it creates a plan for
action (through a plan, proposal, letters, memoranda).

CHARACTERISTICS OF TECHNICAL WRITING

Accurate, Concise, Direct

While all good writing should exhibit these qualities, because most technical writing documents respond to a specific rhetorical exigency and an urgent need for persuasive discourse, it is vital to get your message across quickly. The data must be organized in a way that makes sense and does not confuse. Often decisions involving millions of dollars rest on the way that a technical document is read and interpreted, so it is in your best interests to make sure you get the message and the numbers across clearly, quickly.

Practical and Implementable

Technical writing results in multi–purpose documents. Your letter or technical report may also be used as the foundation of guidelines or future proposals or reports. Proposals, if accepted, will be used as the foundation of contracts, scopes of work and deliverables.

Concise

There is no benefit in providing too much information, or too many details. If you do so, you run the risk of confusing your reader, or worse having the focus on less important supporting details. If you have supporting tables or reference documents, put them in an appendix. Keep the main message clear and concise.

Thorough and Complete

While being concise is a virtue in technical writing, being incomplete is not. The consequences of leaving out critical data can be quite severe. It is important to make sure you have included all the relevant and necessary material. Be sure to create a checklist of what you need to include. Sometimes, when responding to a formal Request for Proposal (RFP), it is good to make a list of the specific points they want you to address in your proposal, and to use them to double–check your document to make sure you have included them.

Effective Use of Graphics/Visuals

It is tempting to avoid using visuals because of the perceived notion that they take too much time to create. However, visuals do not have to be elaborate. Your visual presentation of data can be as simple as a text–based table. Use them when appropriate and you want to get your message across quickly. Visuals are an excellent way to draw attention to certain messages or data that you want your reader to pay attention to.

Grammar, Syntax, and Punctuation—Consistent and Correct

Incorrect grammar, syntax and punctuation will degrade your technical document by damaging the ethos, and by distracting your reader. It is vital to maintain an ethos of technical competency, which applies to the mechanics of writing and document construction, as well as to the actual task that your paper addresses. Be sure to proofread carefully. It is often useful to have a second set of eyes review it for errors and for final formatting, particularly if the document provides instructions or proposes a project or sale.

Written for Specific Use and Targeted Audience

Know your audience. Respond appropriately to the rhetorical situation, which means you should have a good understanding of what your goals are, how you would like your audience to act after reading your document and what kind of background/context you will be entering. Be sure to understand the needs of your audience. Try to empathize with them, and to make their concerns your concerns. Finally, gain an understanding of the values, beliefs and potential prejudices of your audience. If you fail to understand them, you run the risk of inadvertently offending or alienating them.

Well–Organized

Make sure that you arrange your document in a logical way that conforms to the expectations of your audience and/or conventions. A well–organized document has all the information the reader needs at his or her fingertips, and he or she can locate the pieces she needs at a moment's notice. If you take the time to organize your document, you will find that it is more effective because the key details are in the forefront in the reader's mind. You are more likely to persuade the reader to act and to follow your recommendations.

Engaging

The need to arouse your audience's interest is often overlooked in technical writing. The temptation is to present "just the facts" and forget that the readers are human beings and not optical scanners. If you have taken the time to get to know your audience, you will understand what their needs are. With that in mind, you will be able to attract and hold their attention, and they are more likely to start responding to your points on a deeper level. Instead of a cursory skimming of your document, they may read it carefully, relate it to experiences they have had in similar situations, and to compare what you are presenting to other similar documents they have read in the past. Once you have captured their attention on a deeper level, you have a much higher likelihood of success.

Types of Documents

Here is a brief list of the types of technical documents you are likely to encounter, and be asked to generate in the new multi–disciplinary workplace that brings together business, technological and ecological concerns.

- Proposals and Specifications
- Technical Articles
- Papers
- Abstracts
- Letters
- Memos
- Manuals
- Documentation

A Look to an Empowered Future

An ability to write across the disciplines is critical to your success. Because so many of the documents that you will be required to read, write and respond to in the new multi–disciplinary workplace will address technical concerns, you are well–served to take a technical writing course. In addition, it would not be a bad idea to take a professional–writing or business–writing course. However, due to the heavy emphasis on the acquisition of projects involving technological skills and scientific research, your first choice should be technical writing.

STEPS IN STARTING AND BUILDING A PLAN FOR CREATING EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS

Every presentation you make has one overall goal or general purpose: to inform, to persuade or to entertain. Keep in mind that your goal or purpose will determine how you construct your presentation, and the tactics and strategies you will use.

Step 1: Invention—Finding a Topic

To begin, start by listing all topics that come to mind. Do not evaluate them; do not censor yourself. Keep in mind that brainstorming is a process, and you have probably been engaged in it on a mental level before you actually commit words to paper or the computer. Once you set down the ideas, you can start to focus your thinking and evaluate options.

Step 2: Evaluate Possible Topics

Evaluate possible topics in terms of five areas:

1. Yourself and your expertise;
2. Your audience;
3. Available resources;
4. Preparation time;
5. Time for the presentation.

Step 3: Topic Selection

As you select among the topics, be sure to select one that is appropriate for yourself, the audience and the situation. Also, make sure you can find enough information to present a well–researched speech.

Step 4: Align Purpose with Desired Audience Response

Your specific purpose—what you want to achieve—merges your general purpose and topic with the response you seek from your audience. As you work on choosing a topic, you will frame the specific purpose.

Step 5: Wording for Your Thesis/Topic Statement

Phrasing the thesis is a crucial step in topic development. Your thesis flows from your specific purpose and indicates how you will achieve the objective of your presentation. Written as a single declarative sentence, the thesis captures the essence of your presentation by incorporating the main points you plan to address.

Step 6: Develop the Topic: Themes and Categories

Developing your topic starts with brainstorming for ideas associated with that topic. The next step is to identify themes and group them by category. These categories become the main points of your presentation and suggest the thesis—the essence of what you will cover.

Step 7: A Working Outline

Your topic, general purpose, specific purpose, thesis and main points form the basis of your working outline.

Step 8: A Tentative Plan for Your Presentation

The working outline provides a tentative plan for your speech that may change as you learn more about your topic and audience. This early work gives you a solid foundation for analyzing your audience, researching your topic, identifying appropriate supporting materials and determining the best way to organize your ideas.

SUMMARIZING AND ABSTRACTING INFORMATION

There are many places where the ability to write concise, clear summaries can help you both academically and professionally. As you take an online course, you will need to be able to write summaries of the papers that you have written, develop abstracts of articles, and create summaries for annotated bibliographies and research notebooks. At work or in the case of professional activities, you may need to summarize meetings or teleconferences, provide project updates, or describe a new product or procedure.

Your Audience: What Do They Expect?

The first step is to recognize who your audience will be and what they will be expecting. Perhaps more importantly, you will need to recognize what they need. What is the purpose of the summary? Will you be using it to record notes and observations that relate to your topic and interest area as you conduct online research for a paper? Will people be reading it in order to make decisions?

In all cases, be sure that your summary possesses the following qualities:

- Accurate
- Relevant to the purpose of your summary
- Clear
- Concise
- Effective level of detail (numbers, statistics, etc)

Guidelines for Summarizing Information

1. Print a copy, or create a file on your computer that you can mark up/mark on.

2. Read the entire original article at least once. What is the author's purpose in writing the article? What are the key findings? What is the overall view?

3. Reread the article. This time, highlight the sections that are most important to the reader's understanding of the point of the article.

4. Create bullet points that encapsulate the meaning of the paragraphs. Avoid including items that would be too lengthy. Do not include lengthy background, technical details, examples, explanations and anything not essential to the overall meaning.

5. Expand the bullet points into sentences in your own words. Start to build a draft. The draft may be too long, but you can edit it later.

6. Edit for conciseness. Once you have a useful draft, find ways to trim the word count.

   a. Delete prefaces;

   b. Omit unnecessary words;

  c. Bring together related ideas and rephrase them to emphasize important connections.

7. Check your version against the original.

8. Rewrite your edited version.

9. Use the appropriate style to document your source. Cite the full source below any summary when not accompanied by its original.

Once you feel comfortable creating summaries, abstracts and annotated bibliographies, you will find that you have trained your mind to classify, organize and synthesize information. You will also see how you are starting to practice active reading, which more fully engages your mind and allows deeper learning. Creating abstracts and summaries will help you write long reports, and to organize information as you plan your projects.

WHEN TO USE VISUALS IN YOUR REPORT, PRESENTATION, OR E–PORTFOLIO

What is the quickest way to "Death by PowerPoint?" Put together a presentation that consists only of bullet points. Conversely, a presentation or report that consists only of visuals may seem superficial and confusing. So, when should you use visuals? How should they be placed for maximum impact and effectiveness?

What Is a Visual?

In general, a visual is anything that is pictoral, graphic or semiotic. A visual can be composed of text (a sign, etc.). Visuals are graphics that may include diagrams, drawings, photographs, charts, graphs, figures and more.

When to Use a Visual

Think of your overall goal or objective in writing your report or creating your presentation. Then, consider your audience. What will they relate to? What will they expect? What will resonate with their values and beliefs?

Keep in mind the following purposes of visuals:

- Instruct or persuade;
- Draw attention to something immediately important;
- Provide information quickly;
- Engage the audience;
- Keep the audience focused;
- Provide accurate information concisely;

Audience Perspective

As you prepare your visuals, and determine where to place them, it is useful to keep in mind the following questions that your audience will have as they approach the material.

- Why is the visual here?
- What does it tell me?
- Which aspect of the visual is most important?
- Where, exactly, should I focus?
- What do these numbers or statistics mean?
- What should I be thinking or doing?
- Where does the graphic begin? Where does the information end?

How Visuals Work

Make the abstract concrete. Your audience can more easily relate the content to their own experience.

- <u>Analyze relationships</u>. If the visuals appear on the same page, or next to each other, it is easy to discuss how they relate to each other. The relationships can be grasped at a glance with skillful use of design, color, pattern, and placement.
- <u>Facilitate comparisons</u>. With visuals, it is easy to discuss to things, particularly when you locate them side by side.
- <u>Emphasize key points</u>. You can make key points clear using visuals.

- <u>Transcend language barriers</u>. It is possible to create visuals that can be communicated across language and cultural differences.

What Types of Visuals to Consider (from Lannon, 9ᵗʰ Ed.)

- <u>Tables</u>. Tables display data (as number or words) in rows and columns for comparison.

- <u>Photographs</u>. Photographs can help document a place, person or thing, and they can help emphasize the application of a concept in real life.

- <u>Graphs</u>. Graphs translate numbers into shapes, shades and patterns by plotting two or more data sets on a coordinate system.

- <u>Maps</u>. Maps or grids are very helpful when discussing locations, demographics, and even the results of data mining (for example, for marketing).

- <u>Charts</u>. Charts depict relationships without the use of a coordinate system by using circles, rectangles, arrows, connecting lines and other design elements.

- <u>Graphs</u>. Graphic illustrations are pictorial devices for helping readers visualize what something looks like, how it is done, how it happens or where it is located.

Maintaining Effectiveness with Visuals

After you have analyzed your goals and objectives, and have determined where and when to use visuals, be sure to let another person look at your presentation or report. Peer review can be quite helpful as they can help you gain insight into how diverse learning styles and preferences can be accommodated by using visuals. You can also get an idea if your visuals are of the appropriate complexity.

REPORT WRITING CHECKLIST

If you are taking a technical course that requires you to learn about different types of equipments, procedures or technologies, chances are you will have to write a technical report. In order to be effect-

ive, it is a good idea to develop a checklist of the elements you need to be sure to include in your report.

What Is a Technical Report?

A technical report documents the results of your work. It is an important product because it presents information resulting from weeks, even months of work. The work is evaluated based on the report, and so the report needs to be clear, well organized, and contain the depth of information needed and required.

Understanding the Reason for Writing the Report and What You Want To Accomplish

What is the rhetorical situation? (Your audience? Their expectations? The context? Background or history of this document and what you are trying to accomplish?)

What is the primary exigency? (What makes this urgent? What need are you addressing? If there are desired action steps, what are they?)

What kind of report are you writing? Select from the following types of reports.

- Annual or Quarterly Reports. Financial reports or progress reports that are created and disseminated on a regular basis, at predetermined times. In addition to formal financial reporting, other reports may include production statistics and bank statements.

- Progress Report. This is a summary of the activities accomplished in a specific period of time, recorded and compared with timelines. It identifies milestones and discusses places of deviation from stated goals.

- Research Report. This report summarizes the results of studies, research, experiments or data gathering. The work may have been done in a lab or in the field.

- Field/Operations Report. Information gathered during reconnaissance investigations, inspections of installations or equipments, or plants (pilot plants, turnarounds, etc).

- Recommendation Report. Information submitted to management in order to make a request for action, or form the basis of a decision. Purposes may include funding deci-

sions on research programs, projects, land acquisition or capital investment, or acquisitions/divestitures.

- Feasibility Report. A document that presents information that relates to the potential feasibility or viability of a project, venture, commitment or activity. The report includes comparisons, analyses, discussions of costs and benefits, and presentation of alternatives and preliminary budget estimates.

What kinds of sections should you include in your report?

1. Cover and title page
2. Abstract
3. Table of Contents
4. Executive Summary
    a. Goals and objectives
    b. Main activities
    c. Main results
    d. Recommendations
5. Introduction—a brief overview
6. Why important
7. Discuss previous work
8. Research method
9. Key results
10. Body
    a. The reasons for the work
    b. Primary research question
    c. Theories/literature review
    d. Research method
    e. Equipment
    f. Research procedures
11. Results
    a. The experimental data
    b. Observations
    c. Analysis/algorithms/methods of analyzing the data
    d. Discussion of the potential significance of results

e. Discussion of the potential problems in the analytical approach

f. Comparison with other similar investigations

g. Generalizations, potential problems

12. Conclusions and Recommendations

a. Be sure to relate these to the abstract and the primary purpose for writing your report.

13. Nomenclature

a. Not necessary unless specialized nomenclature is used.

14. References/Works Cited/Bibliography

a. Use the appropriate style guide (Chicago, ABA, etc.)

15. Appendices

a. Better to include data here than in the body of the report

The technical report is a document that lends itself to outlining and good planning. You will benefit from developing a checklist and being sure to follow it carefully.

PROPOSAL WRITING CHECKLIST

A proposal may be one of the most valuable documents you will ever learn to write. After all, writing a successful proposal could change your life in a very positive way. You could be awarded a grant or a contract, or you could travel to distant places to involve yourself in research or field investigations.

What Is a Proposal?

A proposal is a plan of action offered for acceptance or rejection. The proposal may be informal or formal, and its form may range from a letter to a formal document written in response to an RFP (Request for Proposal).

Your Rhetorical Goals and Reasons for Writing

What is the rhetorical situation? In other words, what is the exigency (the urgent need)? Who is your audience, and what are their values, beliefs and needs? What are the rhetorical constraints?

What are the situational elements, or the context, that may limit or constrain your ability to persuade or spur the reader to action?

Flowchart Approach

As you develop your proposal, it is useful to use a flowchart approach and respond to the questions that appear below.

What kind of proposal are you writing? What is the rhetorical situation, and the reason for writing it?

If it is a formal proposal, which of the following elements do you need to be sure to include?

- Title page
- Table of contents
- Executive summary
- Introduction
- Background
- Discussion
- Project organization with timetable
- Budget
- Qualifications and experience of personnel
- Summary
- Appendix

Who is your prospective client? What are the goals of the project they want to have done? Do you know anything about their budget constraints or financial situation? What are their most urgent needs?

- How can you fit your ideas and abilities into your client's needs?
- How can you solve the technical needs in a way that shows your understanding of the client's critical needs?
- What are the critical factors that evaluators use in assessing proposals? Make a list.
- Does your proposal address every element mentioned in the RFP? Make an RFP checklist at the front of your proposal and let the reader know where in the proposal each RFP element has been addressed.

- Are you using graphics and visuals to illustrate your points?

- Make a list of the documents you will need (representations, certifications, letters, affidavits, etc.) and put them together in a folder.

- Have you prepared an outline of your proposal?

- Are you using headers in order to highlight every important point in your proposal?

The Sequence

In general, the best approach to writing a proposal is to create the document using the following sequence:

1. Identify the urgent need—the exigency—and identify/ address it;

2. Develop a broad understanding of the needs the person or entity you are addressing the proposal to;

3. Pinpoint the desired results, and map the best and most likely way to achieve your goals or obtain the desired results;

4. Develop a set of steps to start building the elements of the proposal that will match your audiences' needs with the desired action;

5. Remember that your document is, in many ways, a sales document, and you must persuade your audience that your approach is the most effective.

Individuals who know how to write successful proposals are deeply respected and valued in their organizations. So, even though you may be writing a proposal in order to satisfy the requirements of a course, do not forget that the experience could be quite practical.

SPECIFICATION WRITING CHECKLIST

If you are taking engineering courses or technical classes that correspond to the new "green jobs" or "green energy" careers, chances are you will have to write a specification, or "spec," about a piece of equipment, a system, or a product or building.

What Is a Technical Specification?

A specification is a description of work to be done. Your specification can be for equipment, a building or a system. When you write a precise specification, you will be helping the creation of a product, building, system or piece of equipment that will do what it should do.

Flowchart/Checklist Approach

As you develop your specification, it is useful to use a flowchart or checklist approach and respond to the questions that appear below.

- What kind of specification are you writing? What is the rhetorical situation and the reason for writing it?

- What is the problem that will be addressed?

- What are your customers' or clients' requirements?

- What are the basic functions of the piece of equipment or system? What can you do to break them down into things that you can measure?

- How can you best expand on the requirements?

- Are you using clear, technical language?

- Are your descriptions precise and concise?

- Are you thorough (but not too detailed)?

- As you review the specifications, is it clear how the equipment:

  - Responds to the client's needs;

  - Has different parts that relate to each other;

  - Functions to efficiently do what the client needs it to do?

An Integrated Approach to Functional Writing

Technical writing does not have to be intimidating. Keep in mind that you are engaged in "functional writing" that serves a specific purpose, and will allow individuals to function more effectively in their jobs. The focus is on the function, and clearly providing the elements to make sure that the core objectives are accomplished. While it may seem to be a bit tedious or mechanical to construct

and follow a checklist, the practice will serve you well, particularly as you begin to internalize the process, and become more analytical and precise.

USING STATISTICS TO SUPPORT YOUR RESEARCH

Statistics can provide excellent evidence for your paper. However, unless they are used appropriately, they can undermine your argument, and can even be destructive. Here are a few guidelines for using statistics in your paper.

The key is to be aware of how statistical reasoning occurs, and where it might be faulty. Faulty statistical reasoning can be harmful. It can lead to causal relationships or conclusions that are unwarranted, inaccurate or deceptive. Even if the presentation of the statistics is compelling, and even if the source seems to be reliable, they can be inaccurate. As you analyze, keep in mind when/how you might be making errors when analyzing data.

- The Manipulated and "Sanitized" Statistic. Numbers can be manipulated to make the facts seem to conform to one's agenda. For example, the College Board manipulated the SAT scores in 1996, and it made it appear that math and verbal scores improved when, in reality, the performance was about scene.

  Sometimes numbers are needlessly precise and hard to read. In that case, you need to put it in a form that it is easier to decipher and compare.

- The Meaningless Statistic. Exact numbers can be used to quantify something so inexact, vaguely defined or difficult to count that it could only be approximated. The exact number looks impressive, but it can hide the fact that certain subjects (domestic abuse, eating habits, use of narcotics, shopping and sexual preference) cannot be quantified exactly because respondents do not always tell the truth, because of denial, embarrassment or merely guessing. On the other hand, they respond in ways they think the researcher expects.

- The Vagueness of the Average. What does "average" really mean? If you ask a statistician, you are likely to get much

more information than you ever wanted or needed. If an article claims to be reporting an average, they could be talking about the mean, the median and the mode. Confused already? That is exactly why and how people use the term.

Most people are going to think of "average" as a kind of middle point or blend. Since that is the common perception, unethical or just unaware writers may use the word "average" when it is not really the right term to use. They are hoping for that warm, fuzzy, comfortable feeling you get when you hear the word "average."

Question all reports that use the word "average" and, if you write a report that uses "averages," please be sure to go into an appropriate level of detail about the data and the method of analyzing the data. Your reader will appreciate your clarity and your honesty.

- <u>The Distorted Percentage Figure</u>. Percentages are often reported without explanation of the original numbers used in the calculation. Another fallacy in reporting percentages occurs when the margin of error is ignored. The true figure lies, based on estimated sampling errors, in a survey within this margin.

- <u>False Ranking</u>. This happens when items are compared based on poorly–defined criteria. Unless we know how the ranked items were chosen and how they were compared (the criteria), a ranking can produce a scientific–seeming number based on a completely unscientific methods.

- <u>Drawbacks of Data Mining</u>. Many highly publicized correlations are the product of data mining. In this process, a software program searches databases and randomly compares one set of variables (for example, buying habits) with another set. From these countless comparisons, certain relationships or associations are revealed (perhaps between green tea frappuccino drinking and pancreatic cancer risk). One retail company performed a correlation between diaper sales and beer sales, presumably because young fathers go out at night to buy diapers. The retailer then displayed the diapers next to the beer, and reportedly sold more of both.

- <u>The Biased Meta–Analysis</u>. In a meta–analysis, researchers look at a whole range of studies that have been done on one topic (for example, the role of high–fat diets to cancer risk). The purpose of this "study of studies" is to decide on the overall meaning suggested by these collected findings.

  o Selection bias

  o Publication bias

  o Head counting

A Few Concluding Thoughts

Using statistics can be one of the most compelling ways you can find to support your case and to create a persuasive document. Your report will be more credible with the appropriate use of statistics. However, if you are not examining your sources and their claims, you may unconsciously incorporate distortions, bias and hidden agendas.

Even worse, if you do not look closely at how you use and interpret the statistics, you may appear to be deliberately obfuscating facts. The bottom line is that the faulty use of statistics may impugn the legitimacy of your work. So, as you do your research and write your reports and term papers, do not be afraid to ask questions and to refuse to use bad numbers.

REVISION QUESTIONS: LOGIC TESTS

As you prepare to revise your paper, be sure to look beyond grammar and syntax. It is definitely a good idea to make sure that your writing displays a command of proper grammar, punctuation and style, but even the most elegant prose will not correct problems with the logical arrangement of your work. Further, the quality of your evidence and the support for your arguments must be of high quality, and readily verifiable. If it is not, you may lose credibility with your readers and your paper will be largely ineffectual as a persuasive document.

Here is a quick checklist of items to consider when revising your paper and reviewing it for logic and content:

- <u>All the evidence and data are correct</u>. Make sure the information that you are using to support your paper is correct. One way to assure the validity is to use peer–reviewed journals and publications. Use the correct citation for your discipline, which also lends a certain gravitas. Do not be afraid to question your sources. Keep in mind that press releases that report results of research are simply providing a synopsis. You are much better off if you find the original report and the publication, and you cite from that document.

- <u>No information has been deliberately or accidentally omitted, oversimplified, or distorted</u>. While it is always useful to interpret events, or to provide a brief version of things, keep in mind that if your data is incomplete, you may be appear to be uninformed or worse. For example, if you do not oversimplify a discussion of why legislation designed to protect an ecosystem is being voted on, you may appear to be biased. Furthermore, if your information is incomplete, you may lead someone to make poor decisions because they do not have the entire story.

- <u>No sources have special vested interests</u>. Granted, it is hard to know who and what may lurk behind the information you are reading. There could be bias, spin and a desire to influence your actions. If your sources are clearly biased, and they have an agenda or an ulterior motive in providing certain information, you must either disclose the potential bias or discard it altogether. For example, an article on Attention Deficit Disorder authored by the manufacturers of Ritalin, a medicine commonly prescribed to children suffering from ADD, would be perceived as being having a vested interest.

- <u>Examples and cases are representative of the general condition(s) or situation(s)</u>. Make sure that your examples and cases are coherent. Do not mix apples and oranges. Avoid outliers and statistically irrelevant cases.

- <u>Data are presented with appropriate background information or discussion so that they are meaningful to readers</u>. If you present data without sufficient background or con

texts, you run the risk of confusing your readers. Your evidence may not support your case in the way you want it to do so.

- <u>Sources have expertise in the area being discussed</u>. One of the quickest ways to lose credibility is to cite sources whom, upon closer investigation, really know nothing about the subject matter. If your rhetorical strategy is to argue from authority, you will fall short.

- <u>Visuals are presented without distortion of any kind</u>. Be sure to present visuals accurately. Do not Photoshop, do not crop, and do not enhance or exaggerate colors. It is important to keep images as accurate and credible as possible.

- <u>Nothing is criticized for something that is not part of its nature or function</u>. Avoid spurious criticisms or critiques. Irrelevant criticisms will be distractions and will not help the argument

- <u>Causes and effects are clearly differentiated and not mistakenly assumed because of a sequence of events</u>. Be sure to clearly connect cause and effect, and do not make specious claims about the reasons for an effect. Confusing causes and effects can undermine the logic of the argument.

A well–constructed argument will satisfy need for support and evidence, and will avoid logic flaws or problems. Keep in mind that an expository essay and a research paper will need to satisfy more stringent requirements than others types of academic writing (the short essay or the personal essay).

CHAPTER 4

WRITING AND RESEARCH SURVIVAL

BUILDING BLOCK APPROACH TO WRITING TERM PAPERS

How many times have you waited until the night before to write your term paper? You probably have already found out that it is a big mistake. You are desperate and, even though the deadline that looms ahead can motivate you to finally get started, you are in panic mode. All you want to do is grind the thing out and never write another paper—ever.

Unfortunately, you cannot avoid writing essays and term papers in college. In fact, you are going to write many papers, and it will become increasingly difficult to successfully write a paper if you have procrastinated. Face it. You are going to have to come up with an approach to writing papers that you can use in all your courses.

One strategy that works is to use a building block approach. It is possible that you have already used it many times in your academic career, but you were not aware that was what you were doing. A building block approach is a step–by–step process that allows you to plan ahead and to write your paper one step at a time. It also allows you to stop along the way and share your outline, drafts and ideas with peer reviewers, fellow classmates, or even friends and family. With the building block approach, you have time, in addition to a conceptual map of what you are doing. You know where you are at each stage.

Using a building block approach is also a good way to avoid unintentional plagiarism. Waiting until the night before, and running out of time to write your paper, often leads to poor use of references, and makes it tempting to copy and paste chunks of the articles rather than integrating the information into the argument. What can result if one copies and pastes chunks is a "patchwork quilt" effect, with big swatches of "borrowed" text stitched together with a sentence or two of transition. It does not matter if you are citing sources. The end result is a paper that is often seventy or eighty percent borrowed. Your paper should never consist of more than fifteen or twenty percent cited sources.

Building Block Approach: The Steps

1. <u>Identify a Topic, Start Proposing a Thesis Statement</u>. This may seem obvious, but you might be surprised how often this step is overlooked. A general area of investigation is often proposed, but not an actual topic, and certainly not a research question that can be clearly articulated and focused on. As you start to identify a topic, be sure to list at least five or six possibilities. They will help you.

2. <u>Propose Alternative Thesis Statements</u>. Make sure that your thesis statement takes you in the direction you want to go. Do not block yourself in with a boring or predictable topic. At the same time, be sure that it is narrow enough that you can define and refine it.

3. <u>Brainstorm/Invention Stage</u>. This is often called the "invention" stage of writing papers. It is best to try several approaches and tactics. For example, you may like to create lists of questions that come to mind as you think of your topics. Do not block the flow, and do not censor. Do everything you can to continue the flow and get it going. Other approaches include free–writing, free–association, clustering and mind–mapping.

4. <u>Narrow Thesis</u>. After the invention stage, be sure to look at your thesis again. Does it really reflect your interests? You might think about doing some preliminary research and finding if you will be able to find articles that support your paper, which you can use as evidence, support or background/contexts in your paper.

5. <u>Look for Sources</u>. After you have an idea of your research problem, begin to look for articles that provide support and background for your thesis. You may actually do this step earlier and narrow your topic based on the information you find. At any rate, be sure to look at the following areas and to find articles that you can use in the following ways:

    a. Definitions of key terms;

    b. Background and contexts;

    c. Important historical foundation;

    d. Supporting evidence and details for your points;

    e. Counter–arguments and other sides of the same story;

    f. Illustrative case studies;

    g. Examples;

    h. Other work in the same area.

6. <u>Build Outline</u>. Once you have your sources, a thesis statement or topic, and an idea of the way you want to explore and structure your paper, it is good to start building a robust outline. Your outline will allow you to see how well you are supporting your argument, providing evidence, and giving useful examples and case studies.

7. <u>Add to Sources</u>. Once you have developed your outline, start plugging in your research. Where will you put your supporting data? Where are you missing support? Where do you need to do more research? Where do you need to change your approach? You may even need to reshape your argument, or recast your primary thesis/topic/thesis statement.

8. <u>Structure that Begins with Engaging Opening</u>. Now is a time to start thinking about the emotional appeals used in arguments. How will you engage the reader? How will you capture their interest? One of the best ways is to start with an engaging opening.

9. <u>Where to put the Definitions, Background and Contexts</u>. Many people mistakenly think that they need to start with a definition. They also think that a Webster–based definition is somehow interesting. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. The best approach is to put the defi-

nitions and background information in the second or third paragraph.

10. <u>Evidence and Support</u>. Evidence and support can best be organized in the body paragraphs.

11. <u>Topic Sentences for Body Paragraphs</u>. Be sure that the topic sentences in your body paragraphs tie in well to the thesis statement and create a sense of logical progression.

12. <u>Body Paragraphs that Work</u>. Your body paragraphs work if they show support for your primary thesis in many different ways. They should provide statistics, case studies, examples and background. More importantly, they should include your personal analysis. You may even wish to share your personal experience.

13. <u>The "Value Added"—Your Personal Analysis and View</u>. Do not forget that what makes your paper original is the fact that you are sharing your own ideas and thoughts. In the end, your analysis, viewpoints and mindsets are what will give your paper a unique cast. Your original analysis is what makes your paper valuable. Never think that simply regurgitating the thoughts of others is more valuable than providing your own ideas, analysis and interpretation. Certainly, people may disagree with you, but is not that the whole point of writing? Engage your readers, pique them, provoke them and make them think. You will establish a "conversation" with them—it will be wonderful!

14. <u>Conclusion</u>. Your conclusion does not need to be a simple wrap–up or a restatement of your thesis. Instead, it should advance your argument, and look to the future. Give the reader something to think about. Then, make sure there is something to keep them coming back for more, such as a follow–up, another set of articles or another analysis in which you show your unique skills and prowess.

You can see that if you use a building block approach, you are not really going to be able to wait until the night before. However, as complicated and onerous as the process may seem, once you try it, you will find that a building block approach is painless—perhaps even fun. In addition to giving you a sense of control (and freedom) in the writing process you will find that, after you use the approach several times, it will become second nature. You will internalize the

process, and will be able to build papers in short order. Much of the work you can do in your mind, even before you sit down at the computer for the first time.

LOOK AT YOUR TERM PAPER SOURCES VERY CAREFULLY

There is an art to conducting a literature review or gathering information for your research papers. Perhaps the biggest challenge does not lie in finding articles, but in evaluating the information they contain. Before incorporating the data into one's paper, it is important to take a close look and determine if the information is complete, appropriate, unbiased and accurate. Here are a few important points to consider.

- Be Aware of Bias. If an article appears in a peer–reviewed journal, students often assume that the information presented is complete, and the argument is neutral. It is essential for students to learn to read critically, and to be able to detect signs of bias and distortions. Bias does not necessarily make an article, or the results of research, less useful for the student; but it is important to be able to explain how and where the information or claims made by the source could be supporting a particular claim or worldview. The idea that all articles and arguments reflect a certain politics is often eye–opening to students, and notion of embedded hegemonies and discourses that serve to preserve and protect dominant positions (and powers) should be discussed, particularly in topics that bear on human relations, gender studies, international relations, sociology and cultural studies.

- Seek the Primary Source of Statistics and Studies. Using a web–based search engine such as Google, or a database such as Lexis–Nexis that contains a large number of newspaper articles, can yield excellent preliminary results if one is seeking statistics or the results of research to provide evidentiary support for a position made in one's primary thesis. However, it could be a bit risky to use the information from the newspaper source, since it could have been

slightly distorted or mistyped (Scrivener's Errors, etc.). Even worse, the information is often gleaned from a press release, which was created with a definite agenda in mind, resulting in potential skew or bias. The best approach is to use the newspaper articles. After finding who conducted the research and where the results were published, go to online information repositories and obtain the actual report. Many times, the result will be housed on the web-site of the organization that is publishing the results. This is many times the case with government agencies, not–for–profit organizations and think tanks.

- <u>Identify Second–Order Derivatives of Primary Research: Use as Points of Departure</u>. A reference to a published report or statistics can be thought of as second–order deri-vatives of primary research. While these may be useful, the information can be confusing, especially if the article con-tains a combination of original research and other peoples' findings. Sometimes it is not easy to determine that an article is referring to the results of studies contained in other published reports. While reading the article, it is often useful to develop a diagram that lists the research, the dates and the names of the primary researchers. If several studies are being mentioned, it is important to be able to differentiate them. Once the second–order derivatives have been identified, make a list and start to construct a brief annotated bibliography. If the results are to be quoted or used in one's own paper, it is important to obtain a copy of the original report.

UNINTENTIONAL PLAGIARISM:
IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU

Every day, throughout the e–learning world, online students re-ceive the dreaded message, "I'm sorry, but your paper has been flagged by our plagiarism detecting program as having problematic content."

It is a deliberately vague statement, intended to protect the in-stitution and the instructor, but the meaning is clear.

Imagine for a moment that you were the recipient of that message. Your first reaction might be shock and disbelief. Something is terribly wrong with your paper. Wrong? How could that be? You feel your heart pound and your skin tingle. What happened? You tried very hard with this paper. You were very careful to do outside research for this paper, as required by the instructions. When searching for information for your paper, you went to your favorite places on the Internet, and they looked very good to you. You listed the URL at the end of the paper. Furthermore, you were very careful to use five or six sources, not just one. What went wrong?

Students often unintentionally plagiarize when they write their term papers. The ways that this happens are numerous; it is important to recognize each one. It is also important to understand how popular plagiarism detecting programs like TurnItIn.com work. How and why the results they yield can be illuminating and frustrating.

Varieties of Unintentional Plagiarism

Here are a few:

1. <u>Patchwork Quilt</u>. After students have completed their on-line research and have written annotations for their bibliographies, it is tempting to weave them together to create one's paper. While it is always a good idea to use references and outside sources, the problem with using too many block quotes is that the integrity of the paper can be compromised. The result can be a patchwork quilt of block quotes, with as much as ninety percent of the paper consisting of material gleaned from sources. This will register as plagiarism. One should never have more than fifteen to twenty percent of direct quotes or block quotes.

2. <u>Wikipedia—"Wiki–cosis"</u>. Wikipedia should never be used as a source in an academic paper. The information is not reliable, and it can be incomplete and biased. It is amazing how many people consider Wikipedia authoritative. Granted, it is a good place to start, but it should be used as a point of departure. The over–reliance on Wikipedia can lead to something one could consider "wiki–cosis"—toxic levels of incomplete and inaccurate information derived

from Wikipedia. It is easy to spot a paper that has information that has been copied and pasted from Wikipedia. The block of text will have a pale blue background.

3. <u>Link–Only Citing/Insufficient Citation</u>. Some students think that it is sufficient to simply create a list of links at the end of the paper. They may or may not set off their quoted material in block quotes, and they may fail to put quoted phrases or sentences between quotation marks. Needless to say, this will be flagged as plagiarism.

4. <u>Block Paraphrasing/Word Substitution</u>. Realizing that they cannot just copy and paste entire sections of papers, some students simply substitute certain words and create close–to–the–original paraphrases. Often they fail to cite the source, using in–text citations and a reference at the end of the paper. While summaries and overviews of a work or a source can be useful, to copy the structure and argument of the block, and to change the wording only slightly, is not considered academically appropriate.

5. <u>Encyclopedia Article Template</u>. Some people turn to online encyclopedias for their term papers. For example, they may select the life and times of William Shakespeare as their topic. They then go to *Encyclopedia Britannica* or another online source, and they copy the structure, reproduce the argument and paraphrase the ideas without giving any credit at all, except for perhaps a listing at the end of the paper. Why is this not acceptable? A paper written by the student should contain the student's own ideas and own analysis.

6. <u>Son of Son of Source</u>. Many blogs and news sources regularly copy material from wire sources or from each other. The student may not realize that the citations are incorrect, and that it appears that they are deliberately obfuscating or masking the original source of ideas. Try to find the provenance of an idea or a citation when looking for information and checking out sources. Peer reviewed journals will more clearly present idea provenances than will newspaper articles or blogs.

Dirty Tricks that will Ping Plagiarism Detecting Programs

1. <u>Peer Reviews</u>. This could be unintentional. Depending upon where the discussion boards occur, and whether or not they are password protected, individuals' work and drafts could end up in search engine results. Since plagiarism detection programs spider the internet, it is likely that a draft or paper posted there as a part of a peer review process will show up. It is possible it would appear to be authored by someone else if the peer reviewer is the one doing the posting.

2. <u>Frenemy</u>. Do you have a friend who is into playing tricks by "punking" you? You may have an enemy/friend to whom you have e–mailed your paper. You may have asked them to look at it and comment on it. You may simply have wanted to share. Whatever it was, if they took your paper and posted it on their blog, on the web or somewhere else, it is possible it would show up in search engine (and plagiarism detection) programs.

In Conclusion

It is possible that a large percentage of online learners have inadvertently created documents that could be flagged as problematic by plagiarism detection programs. Thus, it is crucial to know the pitfalls, as well as the proper procedures for citing materials in research papers.

RESEARCH PAPER LIFESAVERS: THE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Building an annotated bibliography that contains thorough and consistent descriptions of articles found in one's research is an excellent way to approach a term paper or research project. The benefits are often unexpected, and the annotated bibliography can be a way in which one becomes truly engaged with the topic, and thus intrinsically motivated to do a great job. It also builds a sense of confidence and control, leading to enhanced self–efficacy and an "I can do it!" attitude toward term papers.

Build an Annotated Bibliography

Collecting articles and writing short descriptions about the articles that one collects in one's research endeavor can be helpful. It is important to include a brief overview of what the article is about, what information it presents, the purpose of the article, and the objectives of the writers. For maximum effectiveness, it is good to connect the article to the primary thesis or research topic, describe how the article sheds light on the research problem, and provide useful information or perspective.

After putting together the bibliography, it is useful to go through, identify where the gaps are and highlight which authors' works are most useful. This is an excellent strategy for building a literature review and for exploring ideas in–depth. It also gives a sense of the development of intellectual threads and strands.

Evaluate the Authority of the Article

Many students assume just because they found the article in a database that includes academic or scholarly articles, that all articles have the same weight and can be considered to carry solid authority.

- Article can be an op–ed piece (and the student may not realize it).
- Article may represent only one side of a complex controversy.
- Article may be a "light" view of a complex or timely topic found in something like a professional organization's monthly newsletter or publication; for example, an overview of how workplace dynamics have changed with the advent of new WiFi cell phones.
- The publication may not be quite in keeping with the focus of the paper or the research question, which could lead to erroneous or flawed assumptions or conclusions.

Trace the Provenance of Ideas

Once key articles and ideas are found, students would be well served to go back and search for other articles by the same author(s) in order to trace the history and evolution of a particular set of ideas or views about a specific topic. While it may not be possible to trace back to the actual moment when a certain idea or paradigm shift

occurred, and trying to locate that specific moment and article could actually be misleading or over–deterministic, the willingness to gain a bit of historical perspective can be quite useful.

Try to find the articles by a single author in which he or she mentions the same concern or issue. The articles can be placed in a separate folder. The emergence of some ideas, and the fact that some ideas within the "trace" have been discarded along the way, can be useful. Why was a certain path followed and another abandoned? Seeking answers to those questions can provide insight into some of the deep–seated issues and controversies within a research question or problem, and can lead to fruitful inquiry.

Create "Idea Clusters"

In addition to tracing the work of an author on a single idea or concept, it is often useful to bring together "idea clusters" and to create a diagram that maps out the relationship of ideas in your research problem that are closely related to others. In analyzing works cited, sections of articles, and published studies and reports, it is often able to connect names and articles with the ideas.

The "idea clusters" can be used to investigate certain aspects of a research problem and to look at other parallel or divergent research paths.

BUILDING A RESEARCH PAPER: EVALUATING AND USING SOURCES

Seek the Primary Source of Statistics and Studies

Using a web–based search engine such as Google, or a database such as Lexis–Nexis that contains a large number of newspaper articles, can yield excellent preliminary results if one is seeking statistics or the results of research to provide evidentiary support for a position made in one's primary thesis. However, it could be a bit risky to use the information from the newspaper source, since it could have been slightly distorted or mistyped (scrivener's errors, etc.). Even worse, the information is often gleaned from a press release, which was created with a definite agenda in mind, result-

ing in potential skew or bias. The best approach is to use the newspaper articles as a good first step. After finding who conducted the research, and where the results were published and when, go online to online information repositories and obtain the actual report. Many times, the result will be housed on the website of the organization that is publishing the results. This is many times the case with government agencies, not–for–profit organizations and think tanks.

Identify Second–Order Derivatives of Primary Research—Use as Points of Departure

A reference to a published report or statistics can be thought of as second–order derivatives of primary research. While these may be useful, the information can be confusing, especially if the article contains a combination of original research and other peoples' findings. Sometimes it is not easy to determine that an article is referring to the results of studies contained in other published reports. While reading the article, it is often useful to develop a diagram that lists the research, the dates and the names of the primary researchers. If several studies are being mentioned, it is important to be able to differentiate them. Once the second–order derivatives have been identified, make a list and start to construct a brief annotated bibliography. If the results are to be quoted or used in one's own paper, it is important to obtain a copy of the original report.

Evaluate the Authority of the Article

(See above)

Be Aware of Bias

If an article appears in a peer–reviewed journal, students often assume that the information presented is complete and the argument is neutral. It is crucial for students to learn to read critically, and to be able to detect signs of bias and distortions. Bias does not necessarily make an article or the results of research less useful for the student, but it is important to be able to explain how and where the information or claims made by the article's author could be supporting a particular claim or worldview. The idea that all articles and arguments reflect a certain politics is often eye–opening to students, and notion of embedded hegemonies and discourses

that serve to preserve and protect dominant discourses (and power) should be discussed, particularly in topics that bear on politics, economics, human relations, gender studies, international relations, sociology and cultural studies.

Create "Idea Clusters"

In addition to tracing the work of an author on a single idea or concept, it is often useful to bring together "idea clusters" and to create a diagram that maps out the relationship of ideas in your research problem that are closely related to others. In analyzing works cited sections of articles, published studies and reports, it is often able to connect names and articles with the ideas. The "idea clusters" can be used to investigate certain aspects of a research problem and to look at other parallel or divergent research paths.

Build an Annotated Bibliography:

Collecting articles and writing short descriptions about them can be particularly helpful. Include a brief overview of what the article is about, what information it presents, the purpose of the article, and the objectives of the writers. Be sure to connect the article to the thesis topic and describe how the article sheds light on the research problem, and provides useful information or perspective.

RESEARCH PAPER SHORTCUTS: FIVE STEPS

Perhaps one of the most anxiety–producing tasks in courses (including online) is the research paper. One of the primary reasons learners fear and loathe the research paper is because they tend to procrastinate and then try to write the entire paper in a single sitting.

If one bit of advice could be taken to heart, it would be "draft, redraft, revise and craft" your paper. What exactly does that bit of advice mean?

Step One—Define Your Topic

Step Two—Narrow Your Topic

Step Three—Research with Annotated Bibliography

1. Annotated bibliography first

2. Online Articles (Databases, Online Repositories)

3. Web–based:

    a. Find Articles—http://www.findarticles.com

    b. Google Scholar—http://www.google.com/scholar (some may cost money)

    c. Google Books—http://www.google.com/books (some are free)

    d. Government based databases and repositories of articles and information

4. Subscription–based: Your library will probably have the following (one or more):

    a. Wilson Proquest

    b. Gale

    c. EbscoHost

    d. Questia

    e. Reference materials

5. How? Which articles to include in the annotated bibliography? Developing criteria:

    a. Organize the articles

    b. Definitions

    c. History of ideas/work in the subject

    d. Main concepts and ideas—articles that illustrate it

6. Outline a strategy for organizing, focusing, and assuring complete coverage

    a. How to align the main idea with your ideas and the primary history of it.

Step Four—Create a Great Outline

1. Avoid the old five–paragraph rigidity—here are elements to include:

    a. Introduction

    b. Thesis statement

    c. Definitions and background

    d. Historical contexts/theoretical foundations

e. Advance the primary thesis—what is the position? Elaborate…

f. Elaborate and explain.

g. Advance the primary thesis.

h. Cases and examples…

i. The other side of the story

j. Conclusion (advance the primary thesis)

Step Five—Revise with a Clear Eye

1. Identify where you change topics or change directions

2. Eliminate superfluous elements

3. Note where you need to add definitions or supporting details

4. Expand with case studies or examples

If you follow these steps, you are likely to create a research paper that you enjoy and feel proud of, rather than falling into the trap of procrastinating and then writing something that is derivative of something one can find on the Internet in a "term paper for sale" website.

HOW TO WRITE SHORT–ANSWER QUESTIONS FOR ESSAY TESTS

Online courses require students to demonstrate that they have achieved learning objectives in a number of ways. In some cases, you will be asked to take online quizzes that show you are able to identify concepts and master the content. In other occasions, you will need to conduct online research in order to write a research paper that shows an in–depth understanding of the topic or a problem related to the course. In yet in other cases, you will be asked to:

1. Review the Question

a. Make sure that you understand the question.

b. Reread the question and pause a moment to reflect.

c. Jot down the main concept.

    d. What is the concept that the question is testing? How does it relate to the course, and what it is testing?

2. Review the question again—what exactly is it asking?

    a. What kind of information do you need to provide?

    b. How can you succinctly demonstrate your understanding?

    c. Which specific details and information should you provide?

    d. Keep in mind that you may be graded on the specific information in the instructional material.

    e. Include dates, names, place names, people and texts.

    f. Consider the material you have reviewed in the course.

    g. Think of the connections between the question and the material you have covered.

    h. Narrow your focus and eliminate material that takes you on an unproductive path.

3. Response–Centered Notes

    a. Jot down the key idea.

    b. Make a bullet list of evidence and examples.

    c. Do not be in too great a hurry to write your paragraph.

    d. Remember that precision is important, as well as being concise.

    e. Wordy, vague and imprecise answers will not yield a good grade.

4. Start to Formulate Answers

    a. As you do so, you might follow the steps listed below:

        1) Main Idea: Be sure to create a clear thesis statement that includes the main idea.

        2) Evidence: List the evidence to support your thesis or main idea.

        3) Be sure to discuss how the evidence supports it.

    b. Organize your thoughts clearly

        1) Create a logical arrangement and presentation of the data.

       2) Do not jumble unimportant with important infor-
          mation.

   c. Use clear, short sentences

       1) When possible, make sure your sentences are clear.

       2) If they are short, it is often easier for the instructor
          to assess them.

       3) Make sure your sentences are grammatically correct.

5. Conclusion

   a. Make sure your conclusion is clear and that it relates to
      your main idea.

   b. Make sure it connects to the thesis and the evidence.

   c. Please be sure to remember that your conclusion should
      advance the primary argument.

Before you take the test, be sure to practice by formulating possible questions and answers. Try to take a practice exam in more or less the same conditions under which you will be taking your primary exam. After you take the practice exam, look at your answers and evaluate them for clarity of the thesis and main idea, thoroughness, relevance, evidentiary support for the primary thesis and solid conclusion. Return to the text and your instructional materials to make sure that you are not overlooking something, to include only the most relevant information, and be sure that it is arranged in order of importance.

Short answer exams can be challenging, particularly when you are working with extreme time pressure and in harsh conditions. However, the short answer exams are perhaps the best place to demonstrate your grasp of the concepts, as well as a deeper understanding that allows you to synthesize information and to relate it to current issues or personal experience.

CONNECTING REAL–LIFE ISSUES AND WRITING COURSES: A FEW SAMPLE TOPICS FOR ESSAYS AND RESEARCH PAPERS

A great way to motivate yourself to conduct research, and to write with true enthusiasm and passion, is to select writing prompts that

relate to everyday life and occurrences, and which give them an opportunity to express their point of view. Engaging yourself in issues you care about, and making sure the topics are current and up–to–date, helps you avoid the problem of clichéd responses, stale statistics and a flat emotional appeal. Furthermore, guiding yourself away from clichéd, standard prompts may help eliminate copying, pasting and retrieving canned papers from repositories.

1. <u>Human Encroachment and Animal Maulings</u>—Why are so many people mauled by bears, etc each year?

   a. Opening (use an illustrative example). Show an example. Follow with a thesis statement and overview.

   b. What is going on? What is the problem? Describe it. Use current examples, and cite sources. The examples should be real. If they are composites or hypothetical examples of what could have likely occurred, be sure to mention so.

   c. What is the extent of the problem? Provide statistics and examples, using reliable sources, and try to obtain the original statistics, not a watered down version from an excerpt or press release.

   d. What are possible explanations? Provide two sides of the story. What do you think?

   e. What can be done? Describe possible solutions. What are some communities doing? Do you agree? What would you do?

   f. Conclusion (more than a summary). Restate what you believe to be the most urgent aspects of the situation, and the most pressing moral or ethical dilemmas. Discuss what you think would be the best approach to dealing with the problem.

2. <u>When Pets Become Predators</u>—What happens when "cute" and "exotic" pets are released into the "wild" (aka the neighborhood) by their overwhelmed owners?

   b. The Nightmare Scenario (worst case situation!) Opening, an illustrative example. Show an example. Follow with a thesis statement and overview.

   b. What is going on? What is the problem? Describe it. Use current examples, and cite sources. The examples

should be real. If they are composites or hypothetical examples of what could have likely occurred, be sure to mention so.

c. What is the extent of the problem? Provide statistics and examples. Use reliable sources, and try to obtain the original statistics, not a watered down version from an excerpt or press release.

d. What are possible explanations? Provide two sides of the story.

e. Common Responses and Solutions. What are communities doing? Do you agree? Why or why not?

d. Ethical Dilemmas. What are some of the issues?

e. The Ethics of the "Easy Answer". Is the easiest, most expedient solution the most ethical one? Why or why not?

f. What might happen in the future?

g. Conclusion (more than a summary). Restate what you believe to be the most urgent aspects of the situation, and the most pressing moral or ethical dilemmas. Discuss what you think would be the best approach.

3. <u>The New Homelessness in America</u>—Mortgage Crisis Consequences on Families

a. The Faces Behind the Statistics. Did you know...? Opening, an illustrative example. Show an example. Follow with a thesis statement and overview.

b. What is going on? What is the problem? Describe it. Use current examples, and cite sources. The examples should be real. If they are composites or hypothetical examples of what could have likely occurred, be sure to mention so.

c. What is the extent of the problem? Provide statistics and examples. Use reliable sources, and try to obtain the original statistics, not a watered down version from an excerpt or press release.

d. What are possible explanations? Provide two sides of the story.

e. Common Responses and Solutions. What are communities doing? Do you agree? Why or why not?

f. Ethical Dilemmas. What are some of the issues?

g. The Ethics of the "Easy Answer". Is the easiest, most expedient solution the most ethical one? Why or why not?

h. What might happen in the future?

i. Conclusion (more than a summary). Restate what you believe to be the most urgent aspects of the situation, and the most pressing moral or ethical dilemmas. Discuss what you think would be the best approach.

4. <u>New Homelessness in America</u>—The Pet Face of the Crisis (Princess Chunk, etc.)

a. "Left Behind". It is not a very nice place to be … if you are a cat, dog, ferret or iguana. Opening, an illustrative example. Show an example. Follow with a thesis statement and overview.

b. What is going on? What is the problem? Describe it. Use current examples, and cite sources. The examples should be real. If they are composites or hypothetical examples of what could have likely occurred, be sure to mention so.

c. What is the extent of the problem? Provide statistics and examples. Use reliable sources, and try to obtain the original statistics, not a watered down version from an excerpt or press release.

d. What are possible explanations? Provide two sides of the story.

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g. The Ethics of the "Easy Answer". Is the easiest, most expedient solution the most ethical one? Why or why not?

h. What might happen in the future?

i. Conclusion (more than a summary). Restate what you believe to be the most urgent aspects of the situation, and the most pressing moral or ethical dilemmas. Discuss what you think would be the best approach.

CHAPTER 5

WEB 2.0 AND E–LEARNER SUCCESS

WEB 2.0 AND ONLINE COURSES: SEA–CHANGES IN THE WAY WE LEARN

The change in the way e–learners are starting to approach their educational experience is not really about the technology, even though that is definitely the core. What it is really about is how to learn with and from each other. Peer reviews, immersion, collaboration, sharing, instant messaging, subscribing to feeds and mashing up are some of the activities that characterize the Web 2.0 experience.

Here is a brief overview of some of the Web 2.0 applications that e–learners are using to help them get the information they need to succeed in their courses, choose good programs and network for jobs.

Social Bookmarking

Individuals use social bookmarks to tag and share web pages they find interesting. These bookmarks can be saved privately, and can be in a combination of public and private domains. The allowed people can usually view these bookmarks chronologically, by category or tags, or via a search engine. Social bookmarks are often the reason why a video on YouTube goes "viral"—it is an amazingly efficient way to share information.

Sometimes online courses encourage students to bookmark and share sites, especially if they are commenting on current events in the discussion board or need to write a research paper.

- Del.icio.us

- Digg.com

- StumbleUpon.com

- Furl.com

- Reddit.com

Social Networking

Many already have an account with a social network, and have developed a presence on the web. The most popular by far is MySpace, but FaceBook is popular among college students. Ning.com has become popular with educators because of its flexibility and the ability of individuals to create their own new networks.

Twitter allows individuals to social network via cell phone.

Some colleges and universities have established their own social networking programs. This is a bit risky, though, because the content shared can be problematic.

Social networking, however, can be invaluable within a course, or where and when peer reviews, tutoring and collaborations are used.

- MySpace.com

- LinkedIn.com

- FaceBook.com

- Bebo.com

- Reunion.com

- Plaxo.com

- Ning.com

- Twitter.com

- Imeem.com

Wikis

Wikipedia is by far the best–known example of the collaborative repository of information. The experience of sharing one's ideas and expertise is deeply engaging, and many programs have found that

giving students a chance to share their knowledge and to build an in–class wiki is a great way to encourage and engage individuals.

- WikiSpaces.com
- Wikipedia.com

Podcasts (audio and video)

Podcasting involves being able to subscribe to feeds and to listen to mp3 files. Audio files are increasingly useful to students who would like to listen to chapter reviews and review questions as they commute to work, drive to campus or walk the dog. Instructors who post videos and audio often find that their students appreciate it a great deal.

- Odeo.com
- YouTube.com
- Google.com/video

Blogs

Blogging allows students to keep journals and to comment on fellow students' work. It can also be used for a portfolio as a showcase for work.

Many learning management programs accommodate the need for blogs, and allow one to include a blog in the course space. Some have a built–in blogging program, which is convenient, but often not ideal, because learners may want their work to live on past the last day of class.

- Blogger.com
- LiveJournal.com
- Xanga.com

RSS Feeds/Aggregators

Aggregators, where one can subscribe to RSS feeds, allow learners to obtain blog, wiki and other informational updates as soon as they appear. This is a great way to be able to keep up–to–date effortlessly.

Serious Games

Serious games are online games that have a "serious" or education-al purpose. They often include simulations and role–playing. What all serious games have in common is the desire to learn something about a topic and to be able to replicate it. The Serious Games Initiative is probably the most well known, and is focused on uses for games in exploring management and leadership challenges facing the public sector. Part of its overall charter is to help forge productive links between the electronic game industry and projects involving the use of games in education, training, health and public policy.

Virtual Worlds

Virtual worlds are computer–based simulations that allow individuals to enter them and interact by means of avatars. They are often used in training employees in policies and procedures. Perhaps the most popular educational use is the learning and practicing of languages, especially English language instruction. There are other educational uses for them, and they are often used by organizations that would like to make individuals aware of their environments, products and services.

Virtual worlds include:

- SecondLife.com
- There.com
- ActiveWorlds.com

Mashups (pull info plus amenable mashup spaces)

The term "mashup" can be used to describe integrated web appli-cations. It can be used to simply denote when programs and materials are blended together in ways not necessarily intended by the designers. Yahoo Pipes is a program that allows individuals to pull together programs. Many portal programs and start pages, such as iGoogle, make it easy to bring together web applications in a single space.

- iGoogle.com
- Bebo.com
- NetVibes.com

Web 2.0 applications are likely to expand as time goes on, and more benefits to students will present themselves. The best applications in the e–learning space will be the ones that piggyback on behaviors that students are already engaged in outside the classroom. That is one reason why mobile learning (using new WiFi–enabled cell phones) is predicted to boom.

WHY MOBILE LEARNING? IN THE FUTURE, ALL COURSES WILL INCLUDE SOME MOBILE ELEMENTS

You have probably heard about mobile learning, and have even wondered how you can use your iPod, cell phone, PDA, or other portable device to work with your traditional face–to–face class or your online course. However, you may have a few questions about how and why mobile learning is starting to edge its way into almost all learning solutions.

Access

Online access requires high–speed connections. Dial–up does not suffice. It is just a fact. As a result, the gap between the digital "haves" and the digital "have not's" is just getting wider and wider. What can you do about it? In a time when small municipalities are feeling budget crunches, and when companies lock down their access with firewalls and barriers, what can individuals who do not live in areas with high–speed internet do? Some go to hotspots where you can buy access on–demand. That is not always an ideal arrangement. Who wants to park in a Java Shack all day? What if the Java Shack is closed when you need access? Mobile devices have more flexibility than ever. For example, a BlackBerry with "edge" computing or an iPhone with the new card can give you high–speed satellite access from almost anywhere. Other services such as Cricket also supply affordable, innovative high–speed access solutions. Mobile learning helps you hop, skip and jump over the digital divide.

Connectedness

Being connected to the network, logged in, etc., is more than a condition, it is a feeling. Think about it. If you feel you can connect to fellow students, read materials from your course or take practice exams, any time and any place, you feel great. You are part of a group, and you know that if something wonderful pops into your mind about what you are studying, you have someone to share it with—now. In addition, if you are feeling lost or alone, you can simply log in, text in a message and you will have a response within a few minutes.

Convenience

Waiting in a long line at the post office? Bored while waiting to see the dentist? Instead of flipping through *People* magazine or mind–zoning to the nearest planet, you can be productive and log into your courses, read announcements, listen to lectures, watch small videos, read text and post comments to the discussion board.

Low Cost with the Right Data Transfer Plan

Before logging into the internet from your cell phone, make sure you have a good plan that allows unlimited data transfer for a fixed cost. It is never fun to have massive surprises, such as huge charges, on your monthly bill. It only takes a minute, and it can save you hundreds of dollars. Most providers offer a variety of relatively inexpensive monthly plans, which are well worth it.

Future Hybrid Programs

At this point, many colleges and universities make certain pieces of their online courses available for download and replay via portable devices, which is a form of mobile learning that is easy to use and work with. For example, you may listen to lectures or watch snippets of videos. You do not even really need to use a cell phone—you can use your iPod, mp3 player or other portable device that you have plugged into your laptop that has a high–speed connection.

In the future, hybrid courses will consist of face–to–face and mobile, or e–learning and mobile learning, rather than simply blending e–learning and face–to–face. It is likely that mobile learning will have a place in all learning solutions.

USING YOUR CELL PHONE TO SUCCEED IN YOUR ONLINE COURSE

It is difficult to purchase a cell phone that does not have a built–in camera, data storage and a way to play podcasts, both audio and video. It is also increasingly likely that your textbook will offer lots of downloadable content designed to provide access to instructional material, even as you drive your car, ride your bicycle, sit in the subway or go on a walk around your neighborhood. Your textbook may offer content in a standalone way, or in conjunction with Windows mobile. In any case, you can listen to mp3 lectures, watch brief videos, take online quizzes, watch digital flash cards, take true/false quizzes and more.

Downloading course content from your textbook provider or course simply kick–starts the process. Uploading content from your cell phone adds a level of interactivity that is not really matched by your laptop.

Two critical developments have made this possible:

1. Increased Functionality of the Phones. It is actually quite difficult to find a cell phone that does not have the ability to take photos, download audio files, download videos and more.

2. Better Coverage and Access to WiFi Networks. Many also have web browsing capabilities and WiFi access. The early BlackBerry, SideKicks, Palms, etc. were often problematic because of the fact that they did not have the ability to access all available digital networks.

The number of ways you can use your cell phone to succeed in your classes is expanding every day. Here are a few that are possible now.

- Buy Digital Package (unlimited digital transfers). Digital transfer packages have dropped dramatically in price. This is more or less the starting point for everything.

- Learning Community via Universal IM Programs. Twitter and other programs make it possible to e–mail individuals via one's cell phone. You can use Twitter, or a program like

it. You can also e–mail from your phone with a single e–mail directed to multiple people in your address book.

- <u>Download Notes</u>. Professors often post lectures and notes on the internet. These are easy to download via cell phone. Both professors and students are comfortable with this application.

- <u>Forward E–Mail to your Phone E–Mail</u>. Being able to forward e–mail to one's cell phone increases access, interactivity and collaboration.

- <u>Listen to MP3s</u>. Download speeds will continue to increase, and cell phone service providers have made it convenient to use iTunes and other mp3 repositories/vendors (such as Amazon, etc.). It is also easy to upload audio files for convenient download, making interviews, lectures and recorded teleconferences quite accessible.

- <u>Watch Videos (Educational and Shared by Professor)</u>. Uploading and downloading flash videos from YouTube, Google video, and other video hosting providers makes it easy, convenient and affordable to download videos that are relevant to one's class.

- <u>Take Notes While Reading/Post Them/E–Mail Them to Yourself</u>. One can take notes on the notepad function and then e–mail them to one's self.

- <u>Post On Blogs (When Possible)</u>. Some interfaces make it quite simple to post to discussion boards, wikis and blogs. The key is to not have too many steps involved, but a direct link to the posting process.

- <u>Work Your Social Network (FaceBook, LinkedIn)</u>. It is possible to receive an automatic e–mail when individuals update their FaceBook and/or LinkedIn accounts. It is also possible to update and post directly from your cell phone to the service. This is vital in creating a learning community with individuals in your course.

- <u>Post to Gcast and Create Instant Podcasts</u>. Gcast.com and Odeo.com, among others, make it convenient and almost effortless to record a podcast directly from one's phone.

- <u>Administrative Updates</u>. Your college or university can e–mail security alerts, registration, admissions and financial aid information, calendar information, graduation informa-

tion, speakers, student life information and more. This can help you plan your study times effectively, as well as enroll promptly in order to reserve your place in class.

New Developments in Mobile Learning

American InterContinental University Online has taken mobile learning several steps forward by making it possible for students to check grades, post and read announcements, interact with elements of their learning management systems, as well as downloading instructional content.

AIU uses the iTouch to provide the new services, as well as downloadable podcasts, videos, presentations and lectures that have been a mainstay of mobile learning. Their convenience, affordability and, the fact that they accommodate multiple learning styles, has made many programs eager to provide at least some elements of one–hundred percent online, hybrid/blended, web–enabled or even face–to–face courses. Keep in mind that the courses can work with the iPhone, a regular iPod and some mobile phones.

This is an exciting breakthrough. Certainly, it is good to be able to have access to the gradebook and announcements. However, there is a bigger issue at stake. AIU is using technology and tools the way that people use them in the real world, instead of trying to impose a technology on people just because it was convenient for the institution or the service provider. Therefore, educational products, learner needs and habits are in alignment.

Here is a demo: http://youtube.com/watch?v=3fcUMWqiLCs

Some learners have immediately embraced AIU's iTouch/iPhone courses, especially if the technology fits their lifestyle. Student Chris Hawley writes:

I use AIU Mobile anytime I am away from my home computer, including while I am running at the gym, stopped at a traffic light, taking a break at work and in many more scenarios. I will even use it when I am at home since I generally have my phone by me more often than my laptop.

Chris did not mention what kind of phone he has, but it would not be very surprising to learn that he is accustomed to using a phone with the ability to instant message, retrieve information from the Internet and download information.

While the demo was for the iTouch, it is important to keep in mind that the mobile courses work on the iPhone and other data–transfer enabled cell phones.

The demo for review included three criminal justice courses, all of which allowed one to test the way in which the announcements, gradebook and the learning objects were presented. At the same time, it was possible to test the way that e–mail and access to iTunes worked when in a variety of settings.

Unique aspects include taking advantage of the iTouch's ability to allow individuals to have on–demand interaction (download and communication) wherever one has access to a robust WiFi connection.

- View gradebook
- View and post announcements
- Access school e–mail
- Download, view and listen to podcasts, presentations and videos

Using an iPhone or an iTouch offers numerous benefits.

- Interactive
- Larger viewing screen
- Scalable texts and graphics
- Can download via computer using iTunes
- Do not have to have a cell phone with a data plan

iTouch/iPhone downsides:

- Cannot scale all the screens, which means it is hard to read some of the text
- Limited memory and storage

Additional benefits:

- iPhone and data–transfer–enabled cell phone compatibility
- Anytime, anywhere access

Aligning user needs, real–world habits and patterns is at the heart of the success of Web 2.0, and it is gratifying to see the philosophy start to extend to mobile learning. This will not only enhance usability, but will also allow students to feel more comfortable with the process. Students will feel motivated and be able to focus on the content, instead of feeling frustrated by the technology or lack of access. Using iTouch– and iPhone–based mobile learning represents a positive integration of user needs, technology habits and learning preferences.

American InterContinental University (AIU), established in Europe in 1970, awards Associate, Bachelor's and Master's degrees in a variety of disciplines. The AIU network includes seven campuses: AIU Buckhead (Atlanta, GA), AIU Dunwoody (GA), AIU South Florida (Weston, FL), AIU Los Angeles (CA), AIU Houston (TX), AIU London (England) and AIU Online (based in Illinois).

E–Training Enhances Banking Profitability and Employee Effectiveness

New developments in e–learning are enabling corporations to find new ways to train and support employees to enhance the organization's effectiveness, efficiency, productivity and profitability.

As a result, the nature of training has changed. Instead of being considered a one–time event to be completed upon hiring, training is now viewed by the organization as continuous, ongoing and flexible. Furthermore, in an environment that requires offices and people to coordinate from different parts of the globe across time zones and cultural differences, the new approaches to online training and support can assure consistency and continuity.

To illustrate this it is helpful to look at a case that represents the experiences of many banks that have made it their goal to increase value–added services in order to maximize revenue streams and build customer loyalty.

A Success Story—24/7 Banking

ABC Bank wanted to offer its customers the opportunity to call in and speak with a live banking associate in order to conduct a wide range of banking functions twenty–four hours per day, seven days per week. By offering this service, ABC Bank would be able to provide their best and most complex services for which they charged a fee that was, while modest, an important revenue source for the organization. In addition, they could gain new customers and assure customer loyalty.

The idea was not without risk, however. Processes and procedures constantly change, and the customers who called in would be vulnerable to complicated problems or need urgent, time–sensitive assistance.

In the past, ABC Bank was hesitant to offer the services. They realized that if their employees were not highly trained, and did not offer the highest quality of service to their customers, the entire corporate image could be damaged. On the other hand, by being able to open accounts, research transactions, conduct transfers, and work with legal documents such as escrow, letters of credit and trust documents, the bank could have a significant edge over the competition.

ABC Bank wanted to make sure that 24/7 banking service employees had the same information and access to databases as those used in all the branch locations. Furthermore, upper management wanted to make sure that if 24/7 customers had questions outside of normal business hours, the 24/7 banking center employees would be able to find accurate answers to complex questions and provide them in a secure environment.

Hybrid Training Solution

A hybrid web–based training solution and ongoing support database provided the ideal solution for the bank. The first step was to provide online content modules to enable the employees of the 24/7 banking service to obtain the training in an efficient and cost–effective manner.

The delivery of the training was of critical importance. In the past, the employees were issued a procedures manual and then asked to click through a PowerPoint presentation.

However, that would not be sufficient for 24/7 banking training because the employees would need to be able to perform more tasks. Furthermore, a static presentation is simply ineffective for employees who have different learning styles and who need hands–on practice, or who may be auditory or kinaesthetic learners.

Modules in a Web 2.0–friendly LMS

ABC Bank's management decided on a multi–pronged approach. The learning modules, available on–demand and repeatable as needed, consisted of multimedia presentations and audio presentations that could be downloaded and listened to on portable devices such as an iPod.

Using a platform such as Haiku (http://www.haikuls.com) or Nfomedia (http://www.nfomedia.com), the courses were easy to assemble and could incorporate Web 2.0 interactivity.

They also provided interactive practice and review, and "smart" assessments that immediately diagnosed where a learner needed further reinforcement, practice and training. After diagnosis, the program automatically directed the learner and opened access to additional content modules.

Quizzes and Reviews via Cell Phone/Blackberry

After initial training, weekly interactive quizzes and reviews were made available. They were enjoyable and affordable—the links to content were provided via e–mail and appeared in an instant message in the corner of the employee's screen.

By using software for mobile learning such as Hot Lava (http://www.hotlavasoftware.com), it was possible to design and develop mobile learning components very quickly.

Review Documents in Repository

A repository of FAQs was made available, and it utilized a convenient key word search so that employees would have answers to their questions readily available. The FAQ pages had links to the training modules so that individuals would go back and review the specific training elements as needed.

With a multi–pronged approach to e–learning, continuous availability of content modules and support information, ABC

Bank was able to launch 24/7 banking and obtain positive feedback from customers. In addition, the volume of fee–based banking services increased dramatically, making the 24/7 banking one of the most profitable branches in the entire enterprise.

Webinar

Using Elluminate, Adobe Connect and Webex, ABC Bank is able to bring employees together to review and update new procedures.

Virtual World Role Play

In the future, ABC Bank will expand its e–training by making it possible for employees to role–play and engage in interactive simulations. They have already developed a world in Second Life for customer service.

In the virtual world, employees design their avatars and then practice greeting customers, making sure they follow a certain bank–prescribed protocol or checklist of behaviors. Did they greet the customer by name? Did they offer new services? Did they explain the new services?

Leadership and Vision

By using a customized approach to e–learning and training, and integrating the new techniques and technologies to meet the unique needs of the organization, companies will enjoy the added benefits of enhanced communication across the organization. Individuals in a position of leadership will find it is much easier to assure that employees across the organization feel a sense of commitment and personal dedication to the company mission and vision. Furthermore, employee morale and motivation are enhanced as individuals feel empowered and eager to share ideas about how to enhance profitability, respond to customer needs, develop new business and to propose process improvements.

WEB 2.0 & THE ONLINE LIBRARY: PARADOXES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ONLINE LEARNER

The fundamental premise of Web 2.0—openness, interactivity, information–sharing, and networking—is fundamentally at odds with the old notion of library information, which was perceived by many users, for better or for worse, to be about:

- Tight control of access (making sure it was equitable and predictable);

- Veracity and reliability of data (peer–reviewed journals and monographs were most highly esteemed);

- "Authority" (only people with proper levels of "authority" were considered competent enough to comment);

- Responsible use (citing and using sources properly, es-chewing anything borrowed, reused or reconfigured in a manner not sanctioned by academic tradition).

Instead of collapsing in an extended meltdown, most libraries have responded by embracing—to the degree that they are able to (at least at this point)—the new concept. It has worked, and makes one think of the early days of digitized texts when libraries underwent a sea–change and started developing policies, procedures and protocols for e–books, e–journals and other digital assets.

For the e–learner, the road to the Web 2.0–influenced academic library is fraught with contradiction and double standards. While information sharing via Wiki and collaborative sites is encouraged, even embraced in an enthusiasm that verges on hypomanic, professors regularly pronounce that Wikipedia is not a reliable source, and one should avoid citing it.

So, how far does one go in trusting collaborative information? When can one use web–derived open–access information, and when can one not? How does one know if and when a source of data is reliable?

Web 2.0 ideas and philosophies have profoundly influenced the way in which one might obtain and disseminate information. One might wait for the dust to settle down but, in reality, that is not

likely to happen any time soon. After all, the web is in a state of "perpetual beta," constant experiment and testing. The very nature of technological change assures that the instant one might start feeling comfortable is the moment to throw cold water on oneself, and realize that the sense of comfort and competency simply means one has fallen behind and has probably missed the spawning of at least one generation of innovation.

Before going any further, it is useful to clarify that there are no absolutes when it comes to Web 2.0. There are no standards and no tests. It is a concept and an ideal rather than a series of compliance measures. There are no fines or penalties for failure to adhere to the principles. In fact, most seem to embrace the notion of Web 2.0 as a way to say "collaborative and interactive web–based stuff" instead of static retrieval and transmission of information.

That being said, the doors are open wide for alternative ways to obtain and share information. At the same time, there are new ways of assessing and pronouncing upon the ultimate fealty of data, information, images, etc. While there may still be hoaxes, one should not trust every image on the web. It is only to say that in an open environment, there are likely to be those who will attest to the credibility of a source, even as there will be those who will impugn the reliability of others. In an ideal world, this would be an instance of every day democracy in action. It is a democracy of the educated, and a rather pointed critique of those who still cling to the notion that democracy means being held in the thrall of the lowest common denominator, and that whatever is most drastically "dumbed down" will prevail in such a climate. We see, quite quickly, that in a Web 2.0 environment, just the opposite is the case, and that experts (or exceedingly wily ideologues) begin to assume a leadership position, elected as it were, by their peers in the web.

In summary, the following Web 2.0 inflected and inspired repositories of data are changing the way that one can obtain and share high–quality information.

Google Scholar

This is an amazing database. Granted, many of the citations lead to articles locked behind a subscription–only portal, but the fact that the search function turns up so many articles and monographs in the open Web 2.0 environment is gift enough.

Google Books

It is amazing how many books are available in their entirety, allowing readers to download and read the text. For the most part, however, the open access part of the book is limited. It gives the reader an idea of the book, but not everything. The reader can click to links that allow the purchase of the e–book or a hard copy. Readers can also provide reviews.

Findarticles.com, Pathfinder.com, Questia.com

Databases have open access and, in many cases, the full texts of the articles are available free. Granted you have to click through many ads, and it is not possible to download a PDF, but instead one must print or save one html page at a time (tedious!)—but, you get what you pay for, right? The for–purchase versions tend to be PDF copies.

Wikis

Wikipedia notwithstanding, which is probably the single most–quoted source in the history of the college essay, the idea of collaborative sharing and fact–checking is brilliant, and leads to very nice results. It is always necessary to point out to students that Wikipedia (and wikis in general) are not desirable as sources because they are works in progress, and the presence of bias and incompleteness does not necessarily perturb anyone who is a stakeholder in Wikipedia. As an open–access jumping–off point, it is unsurpassable. As unvarnished, unmediated truth … well … it leaves something to be desired. Caveat emptor.

Textbook Companion Sites

In a time of ever–escalating costs of textbooks, it is easy to demonize the publishers. However, before we bash, let us look at what they provide to the public and to those who purchase their textbooks. Have you actually looked at the digital assets provided by such publishers as Pearson, Cengage (formerly Thomson Learning), McGraw–Hill and all their imprints? It is enough to make you catch your breath in awe. The companion sites tend to have activities (quizzes, flashcards, interactive maps) that look a lot like very cool mashups. In addition, they often have video and downloadable mp3 files that are perfect for mobile learning. Personally, I think that textbooks are underpriced and should cost a bit more. I also

believe that textbooks should come with CDs and DVDs in case of Internet access issues, and should be web–updated, with paper version updates and new editions coming once every three years rather than one or two.

Amazon.com

Amazon, you say? Surely you jest! No. I am quite serious. Have you looked at Amazon lately? Have you read the new features; author input, author blogs, reader reviews, sales numbers, excerpts and tables of contents? Amazon.com embodies the spirit of Web 2.0 in a way that no one else does, at least at this point. Frankly speaking, it is exhilarating. I love it. The only problem, as far as I can tell, is that Amazon makes it entirely too easy to jump into impulse purchases, especially with their "one–click" options. I am hooked.

Numerous other Web 2.0 applications and services have something to do with libraries and library resources. There is not enough time or space to go into all of them; however, I do hope that this overview has been helpful. If it has encouraged you to look at Web 2.0 in fresh ways, and helped you become a more efficient and confident web researcher in your e–learning courses, that is wonderful. Do not give up.

References and Useful Articles

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Library 2.0 Reading List. www.squidoo.com/library20.

Miller, P. (2005). Web 2.0 building the new library. *Ariadne, 45*. www.ariadne .ac.uk/issue45/miller.

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INNOVATIVE MATH MASHUPS FOR EDUCATION, COMMERCE, AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

Integrated math–based mashups and web applications can bring together demographic information and other kinds of data sets in useful, engaging and productive ways. Any database can be used, and sources of information could range from census bureau data, GIS repositories and satellite information, to online shopping inventories (Amazon.com), restaurant reviews, iTunes, video–rating social networks and more. All involve math, and engage learners and users in real–life information, which make the instructional activities more relevant. The applications are also interdisciplinary, which allows learners to explore real–life uses for new approaches with Web 2.0.

Podcast/downloadable audio: http://www.beyondutopia.net/podcasts/math–mashups.mp3.

In addition, learners and users can think of other integrated, interdisciplinary math–focused applications, which could include community planning, urban renewal, traffic management, retirement planning and even vacation planning.

Furthermore, integrating the information from demographic databases with social networking (MySpace, FaceBook, LinkedIn) can help pinpoint individuals who may share interests, purchase patterns or areas of expertise.

The purpose of this blog post is to provide links to repositories of information, useful Web 2.0 applications that may help young math learners and to posit ways to combine applications.

You may wish to employ cluster analysis, artificial neural networks or other approaches to the data. For algorithm development, Wolfram's Mathematica 6 is highly recommended.

The key is dynamic interactivity. Here is what Wolfram Labs state:

Mathematica 6 brings a revolution in the concept of interactive computing, for the first time allowing dynamic interfaces to be created instantly as a routine part of every-

day work. Based on a series of inventions at Wolfram Re-search, Mathematica 6 builds on Mathematica's powerful core symbolic architecture to allow sophisticated interactive interfaces to be created from single lines of input, as easily as getting answers to simple calculations.

<div align="center">(Wolfram on dynamic interactivity)</div>

If you last worked with SPSS in a college statistics course, you might be surprised at their array of browser–based data collection and display products, as well as the data mining, text mining and analytical programs. SPSS focuses on predictive analytics in what they refer to as the predictive enterprise.

This blog looks at simple approaches to using math–based web applications. The goal is to think about integration:

1. <u>Foundations</u>: Learning the basics of math by finding help-ful information on the web.

2. <u>Data</u>: Finding sources of useful information, and learning how and where to put the information to good use.

3. <u>Combining Information</u>: Meta–tags, tags used in folk-sonomies, ISBNs, UPCs, zip codes, altitude, latitude and longitude are some of the gatherable data that can be brought together. They can yield interesting new looks at the world around us.

4. <u>Tools</u>: Numerous websites discuss how to use iGoogle and MyYahoo as a foundation for combining Flickr, Picasa, and Amazon information. It might be more interesting to move forward a bit and use powerful analytic tools provided by Wolfram and SPSS.

Demographic Information: Practical Math Applications, Interdisciplinary Approaches

World Facts

- <u>CIA World FactBook Country Listings</u>: https://www.cia.gov /library/publications/the–world–factbook/countrylisting.html

- <u>U.S. Census Information</u>: http://www.census.gov

Free Demographics

- http://belay.extendthereach.com/api/
- Graphic from http://belay.extendthereach.com/api/

State Demographics

- http://www.cross–culture.org/regions/mapdoc.htm
- <u>Melissa Data: Free Lookups</u>: http://www.melissadata.com/lookups/
- <u>Texas</u>: http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Texas

Community Tapestry (from ESRI's website)

To better serve your customers, identify the top three neighborhood lifestyles. ESRI's Community Tapestry segmentation system classifies each U.S. zip code based on socioeconomic and demographic characteristics to create sixty-five distinct market segments. Author note: The information is very intriguing.

- http://www.esri.com/data/community_data/community–tapestry/index.html

ESRI: Best Data for the Best Business Decisions

http://www.esri.com/data/community_data/traffic/index.html

Math Applications and Math Tools: Perfect for Developing Instructional Activities

Wolfram Mathematica 6: Users and uses examples

- Diagnostics for eye cancer prevention.
- Geo–positioning for targeting accuracy (defense application).
- Designing children's playground equipment. (combining multiple values)
- Predicting likely degradation rates of biofuels.

SPSS

SPSS has a full array of analytic tools and programs that far exceed the limited SPSS package one uses in one's college statistics courses. SPSS's new embeddable building blocks create flexibility.

It is not clear whether the blocks can be used in web applications, but one could, of course, use the obtained from web applications.

OEM embeddable components

- SPSS 16.0
- Text–Mining with Clementine (R)
- Surveys and Data Collecting (web–deployed) with Dimensions
- Browser–based Reporting Platform (Showcase)

Squidoo.com

Check out the various lenses: http://www.squidoo.com

Kids Online Resources

Think of how to combine with Flickr, Google Maps, or other mash-up databases

Fractions

http://www.kidsolr.com/math/fractions.html

Famous Curves

http://www.geocities.com/famouscurves/

Number Skills

http://www.woodlands–junior.kent.sch.uk/maths/index.html

Geometry, Fractions, Algebra

http://math.rice.edu/%7Elanius/Lessons/

In Spanish!

http://math.rice.edu/~lanius/fractions/spindex.html

Practical Money Skills for Life

http://www.practicalmoneyskills.com/english/index.php

Individual Retirement Accounts

http://www.learnerinstitute.org

Differential Equation Java Generators

http://www.sci.wsu.edu/idea/JCGTemplates

Here are some text–based lessons that encourage individuals to bring in widgets, and mine different databases.

- <u>Teachers.net—Lesson Bank—Math</u>: http://www.teachers.net /cgi–bin/lessons/sort.cgi?searchterm=Mathematics

Now for something completely different

- <u>Road Sign Math</u>: http://www.roadsignmath.com/

This is a rather bizarre concept that is not really a mashup, but something more akin to gematria. The goal is to find mathematical relationships within the numbers found in road signs. It is an inter-esting puzzle, almost like a living brainteaser. It is an amazingly clever idea. The site has to be visited to really appreciate the depth of the cleverness. Hashing out the algorithms and teasing out the mathematical relationships should not be done while driving. (!) Record the signs with your camera phone or digital camera.

WEB 2.0 LANGUAGE LEARNING: VIRTUAL WORLDS, SOCIAL NETWORKS, AND MASHUP ASSESSMENTS

Can you really learn a language in a virtual world or by using Web 2.0 applications? Yes, however note that success has to do with how the learning experience is designed, how and where learning objectives and outcomes are defined, and how they are assessed. Developing good instructional strategies for learning languages via Web 2.0 apps will provide answers to the following questions and more: What makes some Second Life language expe-riences effective? What makes having a virtual mentor effective? Which easy–to–use mashups can be used to develop vocabulary? How can mashups and instant messaging be used to develop learning communities? How can skills be assessed using scripted role–play games and virtual worlds?

Web 2.0 applications offer enormous promise to people who want to learn or perfect languages. The virtual worlds of Second Life and There.com, the general social networks of FaceBook and

MySpace, and the specific needs–tailored networks built around language acquisition and practice succeed in encouraging individuals to interact in a new language, and to feel a sense of affiliation and bonding.

In addition, virtual worlds and social networks can be attractively designed places. It is easy to spend hours in a virtual world or social network and never feel any of the pain one might normally associate with monotonous drills with an interactive CD–ROM, a set of tapes or seat time in a language lab.

Learning Objectives

What do you want to learn? What do you hope to take away from a virtual world experience where people interact in a different language? It is very important to identify the learning goals.

Learning Objective–Based Instructional Activities

In learning a language, the learning objectives may have clearly definable outcomes. For example, a learner may want to continue increasing her medical vocabulary. In that case, the instructional activities should be developed around the objective and not the other way around.

Meaningful Interaction

Once the learning objectives have been established, it is easier to develop virtual worlds and interactions that help achieve objectives. For example, the individual who wants to expand her medical vocabulary may participate in a virtual world that simulates a medical clinic or a home health care situation. The interactions would be in the target language, and the virtual world could have mouse–overs to tag the items with the name and pronunciation.

Self–Assessment

One of the gaps in virtual worlds and virtual learning is the fact that it is hard to tell what kind of learning has taken place. Self–assessment that ties in with learning goals would be effective. At the same time, if the goal of the student is to be able to pass the TOEFL or another standardized test, it might be very useful to be able to ask questions in a virtual world, review comprehension and vocabulary, and then to follow up with a practice test.

Mashup Assessments

Integrating Web applications to create language tests is not as far–fetched as it sounds. For example, an application could pull images tagged in Flickr, integrate a Spanish dictionary and incorporate instant messaging.

One could even integrate a Meebo (http://www.meebo.com) widget that integrates several text messaging programs. Thus, individuals could also participate via cell phone in lively, informal language assessments.

Furthermore, this is an excellent way to develop a learning community built on people who have:

- Shared interests;
- Similar goals;
- Aligned competency levels;
- Complementary learning styles.

Results–Based Tutoring

Many companies have emerged that offer language tutoring using collaborative, real–time software as well as virtual worlds. This is an exciting possibility, particularly if the learner clearly sets out objectives and the tutors stay focused on determining the best ways to achieve the objective.

New Online Services Offer Web 2.0 Language Instruction

- http://www.livemocha.com provides social networks, language lessons, tutoring.
  - What is the quality of the instructional material? How does one identify the outcomes assessments?
- http://www.palabea.net focuses on social networking and informal tutoring networks
  - Can interest groups be tagged around desired outcomes?
- http://www.italki.com is a social network that encourages developing a learning community. It is focused around

creating networks of people with similar goals and objectives. The core focus is Chinese.

- o Would the focus need to be primarily in spoken Chinese? Would the written language present a problem?

- Language Learning via Skype: http://www.soziety.com /LanguageExchange.do

- Social Network for Learning Languages: http://www .voxswap.com/

- FriendsAbroad: http://www.friendsabroad.com

- http://www.bilingualinstitute.com

Using an Action–Hero Video Game for New–Hire Orientation

- <u>Corporate Culture</u>. The simulation provides a wonderful opportunity to introduce individuals to the corporate culture.

- <u>Developing Community of Learners</u>. Having a sense of a community is absolutely vital for individuals who can learn from each other and ask questions in an environment that encourages questions, support and answers.

- <u>Instructing One in Procedures</u>. Role–playing and practice are effective ways to learn.

- <u>Engaging the Learner, Maintaining Interest</u>. Using serious games and simulations is a great way to engage the learners, and keep them interested and receptive to learning.

- <u>Developing a Belief in the Corporation that is Positive</u>. Perception is reality, they say, and if employees perceive their employer to be forward thinking, caring and innovative, it helps develop a positive belief about the company, and encourages vision and mission coherence.

- <u>"Boomer" to "Gamer" Knowledge and Experience Transfer</u>. The challenge of finding ways for employees with distinct learning styles and preferences can be overcome. Specifically, "digital immigrants" of the Baby Boomer generation have an opportunity to share knowledge with the "digital natives" who grew up playing video games.

HAIKU: WEB 2.0–FRIENDLY LMS ENCOURAGES INTERACTION, PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT

While most learning management systems encourage interaction, very few incorporate Web 2.0 applications in a functional, easy–to–use, integrated way. The Haiku learning management system (http://www.haikuls.com) has built in Web 2.0 applications, which creates a friendly environment for users who are probably already familiar with the popular applications. Because Haiku has carefully selected applications that respond to learning preferences, a robust and solidly grounded instructional strategy is possible as students and teachers incorporate audio, video, images and other multi-media. The drag–and–drop feature makes it possible to share the resources in many places, including the discussion board. Finally, courses and schools that emphasize mastery learning and portfolios can combine the Web 2.0 applications, even using them in conjunction with Haiku's easy–to–use assessment, dropbox, gradebook and calendar functions.

The platform is attractive and extremely user–friendly, which makes it appealing for young users in primary and secondary schools. In addition, the friendly interface makes the learning management system appealing for other organizations, such as not–for–profits and corporations, which may need to find platforms that appeal to those who primarily use their computers for the Web 2.0 applications such as photo sharing, videos and podcasts.

- Subscribe Free
- Add to my Page

Ideas for Web 2.0 Applications in Haiku

Flickr

Flickr allows students and teachers to create photo albums in and share them with the course. This is perfect for portfolio develop-ment, and encourages students to create and share files. In addi-tion, it is possible to search with key words and find photos that align with the course content.

Odeo

The teacher can subscribe to podcasts that illustrate and augment the course content. An example might be a course in social problems and/or the family, where numerous podcasts are available. Another example might be This American Life (http://www .thisamericanlife.com/), where although the podcasts are not free, but are affordable.

Frankly, it is a relief to see an audio file–sharing application other than iTunes.

Here is an example of an Odeo feed: http://odeo.com /channel/1359/view.

YouTube

It is amazing what one can find on YouTube these days. I have been very impressed with some of the math videos. For example, Video Math Tutor, http://youtube.com/user/videomathtutor, has very clear and enjoyable basic math videos.

GoogleVideo

There are a number of videos that are available via GoogleVideo that are not available through YouTube.

Here is an example of a video from a creative writing course entitled "The Heart Journal": http://video.google.com/videoplay ?docid=9166315927326276885&hl=en

Finally, it is possible to subscribe to services and for the user to download, and share video and audio from other sources, including repositories of instructional media, such as Learning Portal (http://www.learningportal.com/). Here is an example of a downloadable novel: http://www.learningportal.com/Detail.aspx?id=WO uEzOJLJCZd59SDD%2fLY5g%3d%3d.

An example of a corporate training series is the "Basics of Customer Service": http://www.learningportal.com/Detail.aspx?id =81ZXFfr9vMB9A1OtiEsZ9g%3d%3d.

Have a Plan to Avoid Distractions

Web 2.0 applications encourage interaction and help create conditions in which learning can take place. They can motivate and pique one's interest. However, they can also be extremely distract-

ing if not incorporated as a part of an overall instructional design that clearly points to how the media will be used to achieve learning objectives.

The same can be said for discussions. Discussions can be productive; however, if the questions are not designed well, the discussion board can easily frustrate people as the students answer the same questions and/or respond with the same yes or no answer. Prompts should inspire sharing and rehumanize the space.

It should be mentioned that although Gcast.com is not incorporated in Haiku, it is a way to add a podcast even if all you have is a phone. Today's podcast was recorded using a phone, and then posted. The player html code is extremely easy to embed.

I would like to say that I believe that Haiku is an example of what we will see in the future. Instead of having to swim through the huge number of Web 2.0 applications, Haiku simplifies the task by focusing on functionality and ease of use. Simplicity seems quite Zen–like—appropriate for this very elegant learning system.

FEED READERS

This list is not inclusive by any means. However, one of the keys to being able to take advantage of E–Learning 2.0 and Web 2.0 is to be able to process and evaluate significant amounts of information in a way that you can then use. While one might automatically assume this refers to web applications, the truth is that the integration of information is much more flexible and the way information can be used, particularly in an experimentation–friendly learning management system, such as haiku or moodle, is still an open book.

Google Reader: http://www.google.com/reader

Very nice, web–based reader/aggregator. The presentation is very clean. I like it a lot.

Bloglines: http://www.bloglines.com

I have been using bloglines for several years now, and it has never let me down. It is great. Very simple to use and straightforward, and a huge stress–reliever. All your information is at your fingertips—RSS, RSS 2.0, Atom, etc. are all accommodated.

Netvibes: http://www.netvibes.com

Netvibes is a multi–lingual Ajax–based personalized start page. It is organized into tabs, with each tab containing user–defined modules.

Newshutch: http://newshutch.com/

Simple, clean design, with an easy–to–use interface. It integrates with other services as well. Guess it was killed, though. Figures. Just signed up, learned the interface, then read the following words: "we're pulling the plug on Newshutch." Grrr.

BlogBridge: http://www.blogbridge.com/

What? You have to download it? Perish the thought.

Feed Demon: http://www.newsgator.com/IndividualsFeed Demon/Default.aspx

It is $29.95, and you have to download and install it too. What happened to "free" (even if the free version is limited)?

Feed Ghost: http://www.feedghost.com/

Free "lite" version, robust version is $20. This seems fair to me. Many features.

Juice: http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net/index.php

Juice is free. Juice is good. Juice's main function is to manage podcasts.

ANTIVIRUS PROGRAMS AND WEB 2.0 APPLICATIONS

Paden found out the hard way that going without an antivirus program can really throw a spanner into the works. Granted she did not start out without antivirus protection; her new computer came with a six–month trial subscription to one of the most familiar programs on the market. After the program expired, though, the cost of renewing it seemed very high. Therefore, Paden decided to download a version of the same program from the university where she was a student. The university had obtained a license to offer a version to its students. Although it was the same program, it

was very slow, and Paden became frustrated with it and decided to take off the program. Within two weeks, her brand new computer had crashed.

"It was a nightmare!" said Paden, as she brushed her dark wavy bangs away from her face and grimaced. "I am taking two online courses, so you can imagine how difficult it was for me."

Without realizing it, Paden had encountered the two most common problems that organizations and individuals encounter in antivirus programs: high costs and big footprints. The reason the program slowed down her computer was that the "free" antivirus program that her university offered was a clunky version that required a great deal of computing resources in order to run.

After she had her computer back up and running again, Paden decided not to go a single minute without a robust antivirus program.

"I decided to go with AVG Internet Security, version 7.5. It was about half the price of the other antivirus program, and it had everything—antivirus, firewall—you name it," she said. She decided to purchase it after reviewing one of AVG's websites at http://www.avg–antivirus.net.

In reality, the AVG solution that Paden selected had even more functionality, with the ability to remove viruses, spyware, adware, worms and trojans. It also had a firewall and antispyware capabilities.

Perhaps the most appealing aspect was that AVG 7.5 was specially designed to have a very "light" footprint, which is to say that it does not bog down computing processes as it runs.

Ironically, a month after Paden purchased AVG for her computer her college switched to AVG. The college purchased enough site licenses to provide a copy of the program to administrators and faculty. This helped protect the school from virus–infected files uploaded into the course management system.

Potential malicious codes and malware embedded in Web 2.0 applications have added to the need for a solid antivirus solution. Wherever there is code, there is the potential for malicious code. AVG recognizes patterns and can eradicate the malware before it has a chance to affect computers.

Two new popular applications are expected to face growing challenges with malware in the future.

1. <u>Truly Viral Videos</u>: Malicious code in flash players and embedded script for YouTube videos can wreak havoc. In this case, a highly popular and rapidly spreading "viral video" will disseminate bad code instead of the expected good cheer.

2. <u>Web 2.0 Malware Vectors</u>: The fact that people can embed code into their blogs, MySpace, FaceBook, iGoogle, Bebo or other spaces, and enable unique functionalities, makes the Web 2.0 environment truly unique. The openness and ability to share also makes it truly scary, since any of the applications could potentially be tainted. If malware is in the embedded code, what is it making your computer do? The possibilities are truly frightening.

AVG is aggressively and proactively addressing Web 2.0 vulnerabilities. While other antivirus programs are doing so as well, the light footprint makes AVG more flexible and nimble.

Another advantage for individuals and organizations is the availability of 24/7 local support. Walling Data Systems at http://www.avg–antivirus.net/, the largest distributor of AVG software, makes sure that clients have several ways to obtain support. Clients can call in, send an e–mail and obtain live online assistance.

While Web 2.0 applications and the newly robust abilities of online courses have led to a more dynamic experience and extreme openness, they are also increasing user vulnerability. No one should stop using the web because of scary applications, but everyone should definitely keep antivirus programs up–to–date.

The iTouch and Lifelong Learning for Senior Adults

In the past, programs for adult learners over the age of fifty tended to revolve around face–to–face seminars at a local senior center or university, and highly structured travel–study programs led by a professor. Gradually, online programs have targeted senior learners who are interested in personal growth and enrichment, as well

as degree programs. Those forms of course delivery do not meet the needs of many senior learners, particularly those who may be traveling frequently and may not have constant or continuous Internet access. Further, face–to–face seminars, travel–study and conventional online courses may not be effective or appropriate for learners in assisted living facilities who may have special require-ments due to visual, physical or cognitive issues. Portable devices may offer a solution for delivering content and encouraging inter-action. While it may not be feasible or even advisable to offer the entire course on the iTouch, there are compelling reasons to look into offering course content and instructional activities via the iTouch and the video iPod.

The iTouch, which is essentially the iPhone without the tele-phone capabilities, takes the video iPod a step further by allowing users to use WiFi connections in order to access and even transmit data. The iTouch has built–in icons on the touch screen that enable users to manipulate certain functions, such as YouTube and iTunes, with great ease.

Features of the iTouch that are Senior Adult–Friendly

- Comfortable, light, easy to use
- Excellent clarity of icons and graphics
- Large screen for videos (larger than the iPod)
- Easy–to–read numbers and symbols
- Audio adjustable
- Can easily repeat programming
- Can easily create customized playlists
- Can play directly from YouTube when there is a WiFi con-nection
- Can download music, podcasts, vodcasts and other video through iTunes, then sync to the iTouch

Features of the iTouch that are Friendly for Immobilized Individuals

- Comfortable, light, easy to use
- Learner can be in bed or in a chair, and still be able to play stored audio, video, text

- Learner can be lying in bed and still be able to access the Internet, play YouTube, Picasa

Features of the iTouch that are Friendly for Learners on the Move (in Cars, Planes and Mass Transit)

- Long–life battery
- Comfortable, light, easy to use
- Easy to navigate playlists
- Can repeat content as necessary
- Convenient to use in conjunction with books and notes, paper, etc.

Social Networking

- Can easily view updates on FaceBook
- Can view web albums from Picasa
- Can view favorite videos on YouTube

Information and Search Tools

- Google for Mobile is easy to read; reading the results may be another issue, depending on the way the information is displayed
- Maps/routes, etc. are easy to access

Disadvantages and Downsides of the iTouch

- Very limited storage (8 GB or 16 GB)
- If not downloading from iTunes and storing on the iTouch, slow download time can be aggravating
- Cannot download and save very easily from WiFi downloads
- Safari web browser display can be difficult to use unless the website has been designed so that one can easily enlarge blocks of text
- Not enough sites dedicated to display for mobile devices
- Need to practice to use the touchpad keyboard; may not be very good for people who lack some mobility in their hands

Perhaps the most helpful and viable uses for the iTouch in learning programs involving "seasoned" adults, to use the term found on

the Osher Foundation website, http://www.osherfoundation.org/, would be the following:

- Easy–to–use companion for face–to–face or correspondence course

- Convenient and very portable mobile device for accessing and replaying course content

- Colorful, engaging format for introducing seniors to social networking with FaceBook

- Great way to easily access and view friends' and relatives' photos on Picasa

- Great way to motivate by creating a sense of connected-ness, assuages a sense of isolation

A possible place to integrate mobile content in senior programs would be to start building them into Lifelong Learning programs such as the ones sponsored by the Osher Foundation. Dubbed "Lifelong Learning for Seasoned Adults," the Bernard Osher Foundation provided grants to establish centers on the campuses of one–hundred fifteen institutions of higher learning across the United States. Headquartered in San Francisco, the Foundation was founded in 1977 by Bernard Osher, a respected businessman and community leader. The Foundation seeks to improve quality of life through support for higher education and the arts.

To summarize, I believe that the iTouch holds a great deal of potential for programs involving seniors. Not only is it convenient and cute, it has more capabilities than ever now that it can access the internet via WiFi connections. Granted, there are some design issues, not to mention storage issues, which will need to be resolved quickly in order for it to be an ideal solution. But, all those issues notwithstanding, I believe that the iTouch has a number of advantages over other mobile devices, one being the ease in which individuals are introduced to the world of social networking and video sharing (Picasa, FaceBook, YouTube). For seniors, this could be vital in helping overcome depression and a sense of isolation or abandonment.

Useful Senior–Friendly Sites

These sites use clear fonts, are amenable to the use of screen readers for the vision–impaired (JAWS, etc.), and are quick to load and easy to navigate.

- Light & Dust Anthology of Poetry
- U.S. Health Portal: http://www.health.gov/
- Healthfinder: http://www.healthfinder.gov/
- Depression–Screening Test: http://www.depression–screening.org/screeningtest/screeningtest.htm

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EDUCATIONAL MASHUPS AND E–LEARNING

A variety of Web 2.0 applications from Flickr to Google map to RSS feeds are being combined to create one seamless and integrated user experience. This post explores how one might combine tools to achieve educational objectives. Bottom line: Web tools and content are being mixed and matched to create interactive tools and content. What seemed to be a very 2005 kind of concept has "legs" today, thanks to the fact that Google, Yahoo and others are making their web applications more amenable to integration. They are providing platforms and/or are encouraging the use of AJAX (asynchronous JavaScript and xml) that is rather rough around the edges, but produces results.

Let us look at what a mashup is. A mashup combines web applications so that several can be integrated and viewed at the same time. Typical mashups import data that somehow relates to each other. For example, Frappr.com allows you to see where the visitors to your site are coming from. In certain ways, it is no different than the web traffic statistics you already get, but Frappr goes a bit further by providing actual graphics and information drawn from the various social networking sites.

A cautionary note about mashups, though, is that the results are only as good as the quality of the information you are incorporating. One good examples of this is Mibazaar.com's mashup of the highest paid college presidents. The information is dated—there

are now one million college presidents. Two others are Union College in Schenectady, NY and RPI in Troy, NY.

Are Mashups Truly Useful?
Or Do They Simply Create "Fun Facts"?

- E–Learning Uses of Mashups
  - o Increase participation and interaction with your social networking spaces
  - o Create interesting interactive activities as a project
  - o Excellent display for presentations for school or work
  - o Quality control of information, sharing methods, etc.
- Getting Started: Easy–to–use sites that allow you to combine feeds
  - o Google Personalize Homepage: http://www.google.com (click on iGoogle)
  - o Add a Gadget for the Google Reader: This will allow you to get the feeds you want and need, and to see them in a single place. You may choose from the menu on iGoogle, or add your own. http://www.google.com/ig
  - o Netvibes: http://www.netvibes.com/
  - o MyYahoo: http://my.yahoo.com/
  - o MyEarthlink: http://my.earthlink.net
- Mashups that Combine Maps and Social Networking
  - o Frappr: http://www.frappr.com
  - o Mashups with Audio Books
  - o Project Gutenberg: http://www.gutenberg.org
  - o Librivox: http://librivox.org/
  - o Learning Portal: http://www.learningportal.com— example: http://www.learningportal.com/Detail .aspx?id=WOuEzOJLJCZd59SDD%2fLY5g%3d%3d
- Mashups with Podcasts
  - o Smithsonian Institute Podcasts: http://www.si.edu /podcasts/default.htm
  - o The Smithsonian Institute's Folkways project provides content for mashups: http://www.folkways.si.edu/index .html

- Maps Mashups

  - <u>Schmapplets</u>: http://www.schmapplets.com/. Free map mashup application

  - <u>Outstanding maps mashups</u>: http://www.mibazaar .com/. Word of caution—be aware of the source of the data. Some data is flawed, resulting in a flawed mashup.

- Flickr Mashups

  - <u>AlphaLearnr</u>: http://www.rapidmonkey.com/alphalearnr/. Helps children learn the English alphabet via Flickr photos.

- Science and Data Mashups

  - <u>Chemistry Quiz</u>: http://labs.insideflex.com/flextraining /chem101/bin/chemistry101.html. Chemistry quiz that uses StrikeIron.

Take a Look at StrikeIron's Data Pack

With the Super Data Pack, developers can leverage multiple data sources for use within a diverse set of rich applications with no cost or commitment. StrikeIron provides the first ten thousand hits per month across all of the Web services within this Super Data Pack FREE! http://www.strikeiron.com/ProductDetail.aspx?p=257

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED WEB 2.0 SITES

Are you looking for ways to update your skills and web presence, and to communicate and share information more effectively? The following websites and programs will help you get started.

Lifehacker: http://www.lifehacker.com

My favorite part of Lifehacker is the fact that it is a great gateway to free programs. Who has time to conquer all that software? No one, but still it is fun to window shop.

- http://lifehacker.com/software/downloads/—If you are over-whelmed, try narrowing the search by taking a look at Lifehacker's 2007 top choices.

- http://lifehacker.com/software/feature/lifehackers–2007–guide–to–free–software–and–webapps–334568.php

Web 2.0

Also included is a "most improved" list of web–based software applications. Google's Gmail makes the list. http://www.gmail.com.

There is an excellent Lifehacker article on how to host your own domain with your own URL using free web applications: http://lifehacker.com/software/feature/host–your–domain–with–free–apps–331865.php.

Lifehacker recommends one of my personal favorites, Zoho web–based software, http://www.zoho.com.

Kottke.org: http://www.kottke.org

Home of fine hypertext products is nothing short of the truth! Wonderful short, pithy links and finds, with excellent tags. Today's discovery: YouTube video about the Apple Lisa (my first computer, along with an Apple 2e)…love it! http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nj2A0LybwPA

Webware: http://www.webware.com

Webware allows you do download very useful and intriguing web applications that are ideally suited for integration and creating mashups. There are a large number of applications, and it may be useful to skip to Webware.com's top 100. http://www.webware.com/html/ww/100.html

Ajaxian: http://www.ajaxian.com

All Things Ajax: This blog provides a great overview and introduction to AJAX and combining web applications.

Web 2.0

Programmable Web: http://www.programmableweb.com/. Very thorough program that focuses on Ajax applications and has a nice link to interesting mashups.

Yahoo directory: http://dir.yahoo.com

Amazingly, still relevant (after all these years).

Digg.com: http://www.digg.com

Digg is a place for people to discover and share content from any-where on the web. From the biggest online destinations to the most obscure, Digg surfaces the best stuff as voted on by our users. You will not find editors at Digg—"we are here to provide a place where people can collectively determine the value of content, and we are changing the way people consume information online."

CHAPTER 6

PROFILES OF E–LEARNERS AND CAREERS

ONLINE CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS OFFER CAREER AND PERSONAL REWARDS

Over the last several years, online certificate programs offered by colleges and universities have gained popularity. The programs, which often contain a collection of five courses centered on a central subject matter area, provide learners opportunities to gain up–to–date expertise quickly and efficiently. They also offer an entry into new careers, or areas within one's own careers, that offer opportunities for advancement.

Ranging from vocational training to programs that advance professional careers, and fast track one to a bachelor's or master's degree, certificate programs can be a highly cost–effective investment.

The most effective certificate programs respond to emerging learner needs and demands. For example, educational leadership certificate programs allow teachers and educational administrator to obtain the knowledge they need to go into administrative positions. The courses included in an educational leadership program could include the history and philosophy of education in the U.S., an overview of policies in place over the last twenty years and a close look at the changing school needs (curriculum, support service, teacher training) given the changing demographics in the U.S.

A typical certificate program consists of five or six courses, which include a capstone course at the end that brings together the other courses and applies them to a large–scale vision. There may also be an internship or another type of applied experience.

Here is a brief overview of top benefits of online certificate programs.

Career Opportunities

Are you a teacher with a master's degree, but unable to advance to administration because you lack coursework? It might not be practical to pursue another master's degree, and embarking on a doctorate could require too much time. An effective alternative is to complete a graduate certificate program in educational leadership. The courses may also apply toward a degree (a doctoral program, for example), which encourages ongoing lifelong learning.

Niche Opportunities

You may be able to enter high–paying niche markets that require specialized knowledge and abilities if you have the right kind of training. For example, health care certificate programs that empha-size working with specialized populations could lead to oppor-tunities in areas where there is a high demand but a shortage of qualified personnel.

Flexibility

Taking online courses allows you to take classes when and where you want them. Granted, it is important to have consistent access to high–speed internet and to invest in high–quality equipment. Nevertheless, the flexibility is something that is quite appealing.

Learn About the Latest Trends

Curriculum development and approvals occur more quickly with certificate programs than in the case of full degree programs. In this case, the courses tend to be fresher, with more up–to–date texts, approaches and connections to the real world.

Expanded Curriculum

Course offerings change, as do ideas about the approach to courses, and to outcomes and outcomes assessment. The certificate program allows colleges to expand curriculum in an integrated process, and it allows students to take courses in a stepping–stone way.

Focus on Application: Situated Learning

Many certificate programs emphasize practical application of content. For example, a certificate program in Homeland Security tends to incorporate information that relates to real–life situations and scenarios. "Situated learning"—hands–on, experiential, and practical—matches the learning styles of many students.

Work with Experts

Because certificate programs are often specialized, you will be working with specialists and experts in various fields. This is a unique and very valuable aspect of certificate programs.

Virtual Internships, Experience

Many certificate programs include practical experience in the form of internships. You may wonder, how can you do internships at a distance? Through an online program. Careful arrangement of coordination with a mentor makes it possible to do projects at a distance, or to complete the work in a local site such as a hospital, school or organization, and then report the experiences to your mentor.

Impressive to Future Potential Employers

Your drive, commitment and focus will impress employers who need self–starters, and employees who are willing to take the initiative to do something important.

Learning Communities: Bond and Network

Finally, a certificate program allows you to participate in a vibrant, meaningful learning community in which the members share like interests. In this situation, you will be able to forge relationships that will continue for the future, and provide valuable contacts that will stay with you as you advance in your career.

ONLINE EDUCATION DEGREES: UPDATING TEACHER SKILLS

Rapid immigration of families with young children, a surge in birth rates in the "echo–boomers" (the children of the baby boomers), and a change in the way that elementary and secondary school–aged populations are educated and assessed is creating a demand for teachers who have specialized training and awareness of the new populations, tests and technologies.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) forecasts record levels of total elementary and secondary enrollment through at least 2016, reflecting expected increases in the school–age population (source: http://www.fedstats.gov/). The projected fall 2007 public school enrollment was seen as a new record. New records are expected every year through 2016, which is the last year for which NCES enrollment projections have been developed.

Public elementary school enrollment (pre–kindergarten through grade eight) is projected to increase by ten percent between 2007 and 2016. One thing to keep in mind is that many of the students in this demographic will be new to the country, and English may or may not be spoken at home.

Public secondary school enrollment (grades nine through twelve) is expected to be two percent higher in 2016 than in 2007. The relatively flat growth does not show the realities behind the changes in the behaviors and the kinds of student population shifts that will be occurring. More students will have access to cell phones and internet, and more students will be from non–traditional families. Family support is changing its face, with more single parents, and extended family support networks.

Number of Teachers Will Rise

Despite the fact that some school systems will face challenges in meeting the needs of students and accommodating the high rate of growth, it is important to bear in mind that they will be hiring new teachers. The overall number of teachers in the U.S. is projected to rise significantly.

Elementary and Secondary School Teachers
in the U.S. (in thousands)

YEAR	TOTAL	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
2007	3,679	3,213	466
2010	3,812	3,325	487
2016	4,180	3,642	538

(Source: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables
/dt07_004.asp?referrer=list)

For new teachers, it is important to choose a program that includes training in assessment, new technologies, instructional technology and assessment. It is also important to keep the cultural shifts in mind.

To be hired in the future, the new teacher will need to have specialized training. While examining programs, prospective students must consider the following questions:

1. What features are necessary for a good educational program?
   a. Curriculum
      1) Thorough
      2) High Quality
   b. Solid Advising
      1) How?
      2) Automated?
      3) Who?
      4) When?
   c. Convenient Course Lengths
      1) 8 weeks
      2) 16 weeks
   d. Teacher Certification Basics
      1) Classroom Management
      2) Learning Theory
      3) Assessment
      4) Outcomes

2. What kinds of career guidance and job placement does the school provide?

    a. State Requirements: provide information**;** curriculum covers requirements

    b. Student teaching

    c. Mentoring opportunities and networking

    d. Connections with public/private schools; the opportunity to visit

    e. Honor society and recognition for achievement

    f. Instruction on how to teach and develop K–12 online courses

For teachers with permanent certification or tenure, it is vitally important to update one's skills and perspectives in order to take advantage of new opportunities that will be emerging. In addition to teaching opportunities, there will also be opportunities for administration in public schools. Furthermore, new private schools that are based around online education will continue to flourish. A large share of current home schooling is likely to be supplanted by guided learning center clusters.

Source

Digest of Education Statistics: 2007. (2008). IES National Center for Educational Statistics. U.S. Department of Education. Accessed July 10, 2008 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/.

HOW WOMEN SABOTAGE THEIR EDUCATION AND THEIR FUTURES

While studies show that women tend to outperform their male counterparts in college and professional development programs, ironically women at present do not necessarily capitalize on what would seem to be a clear academic advantage. Despite the higher scores on tests and grades in courses, women do not necessarily study fields that will result in high–paying jobs, nor do they go for male–dominated graduate degrees or professional certification programs that could open more doors. Instead, it has been pointed out in numerous studies and publications that women tend to self–

sabotage by undermining their own efforts in myriad subtle and not–so–subtle ways.

Why do women self–sabotage? What are some of the symptoms of self–sabotage? What can be done? Perhaps the best first step is to identify some of the ways in which women sabotage their education, career paths and futures.

Poor Self–Concept and Perfectionism

According to Katherine Rose–Mockry, Director of the Emily Taylor Women's Resource Center at Kansas University, Lawrence, KS, a major reason that women perform well turns on a reason why they self–sabotage later in life. The problem is a low self–concept, which results in a tendency toward perfectionism.

"At an early age, women have internalized messages that in order to be OK, you have to be better, you have to be essentially perfect at what you do," said Rose–Mockry (2006).

While on the surface, perfectionism may seem to be a valuable trait; in reality, it blocks individuals by setting them up for failure. After all, nothing is actually perfect, and perfectionism feeds a tendency to be too self–critical, and to be unable to delegate work or prioritize tasks. The unwillingness to delegate work (or child-care) and to make (and keep) school obligations a priority leads to almost certain failure, either in graduate school or in the workplace.

Relationships—Smart Women, Foolish Choices

Society conditions women to be nurturers and peacemakers. This is well and good, except when the balance is upset and women find themselves in dysfunctional relationships with "bad boys," "Peter Pans" (boys–men who refuse to grow up), abusers and abandoners. Often, the conditioning that brings about nurture and peacemaking is intimately linked with expectations, desires and even demands for opposites in partners. Conditioning goes deep, planting many stubborn and unperceived roots, and is often difficult to accurately recognize, work with or change. It can follow paths parallel to, and sometimes including, a tolerance of physical abuse. In one of its darkest and extreme corners, it can even contribute to "cutting" and other forms of self–mutilation. Its dangers and tragedies cannot be overemphasized, and the pattern is so well established that the list of related best–selling books is painfully long.

Many of the titles are familiar: *Smart Women, Foolish Choices* (Cowan & Kinder, 1986), *The Peter Pan Syndrome* (Kiley, 1984), *Men Who Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them* (Forward, 1987), *Women Who Love Too Much* (Norwood, 1990), *Ditch That Jerk: Dealing with Men who Control and Hurt Women* (Jayne, 2000), etc.

What do women's destructive and/or dysfunctional relationships have to do with education? A bad relationship is draining. Furthermore, the kind of dysfunctional relationship that these books describe tends to tear down a woman's self–esteem and/or create self–fulfilling prophesies for a woman who believes she is not worthy enough to succeed. It is sad, and women often throw away entire decades as they wrestle (and lose) to their self–hatred, which is only made worse in a bad relationship.

Imbalanced Family Obligations

Women are often the ones who pay the highest price in the so–called "sandwich generation." How many women do you know who are trying to provide for their teen–age children while taking an elderly grandparent or ailing parent to doctor's appointments, therapy, treatments and more. Often, the women who find themselves shouldering the primary burden of the caregiver are hesitant about asking other family members for help. In addition to committing the most time to the family obligations, the same women will work overtime in order to pay the lion's share of the expenses. Needless to say, there is not much time, energy or resources left for higher education.

Helping Others—Not Oneself

Putting others' needs in front of one's own needs can be a subtle way to self–sabotage. The short–term rewards (gratitude and thanks) can be very pleasant, and less stressful than taking on the risk of potential academic failure. The woman who tends to help others rather than herself may also find herself tutoring and mentoring fellow students instead of finishing her own homework or research papers. Staying in a major where it feels comfortable to nurture others, rather than switching to a major that is traditionally male–oriented, is another subtle way to stay in a comfort zone with a very low glass ceiling.

Failure to Save or Engage in Financial Planning

A failure to plan for the expenditures of college can lead to self–sabotage on two levels. First, there is a problem of inadequate cash flow. One has to continue to work full time, and even overtime, in order to pay basic bills. This does not leave much time for studying. Second, there is the problem of exorbitant student loan debt, which can certainly make life difficult in the future. Having too much debt also can result in the problem of being unable to even think of graduate school because the prospect of paying off horrendous debt is so daunting.

Unwillingness to Invest in Up–to–Date Technology and Infrastructure

Perhaps one of the most tempting ways to economize is to keep old computers and dial–up modems, rather than up–to–date technology and high–speed Internet. While one might save a thousand dollars or so, one will lose critical functionality. Without an adequate computer and connection, college courses are difficult to negotiate. It is even more the case with online courses. Without a very good computer and Internet connection, online courses are almost impossible to complete.

Poor Time Management

Procrastination and allocating too much time to non–essential tasks are perhaps the most common ways to mismanage time. Of course, poor time management does not fall exclusively under the purview of women and education. However, because of the propensity of women, rather than men, to be in the sandwich generation or to assume primary responsibility of caring for children, women have unique time management challenges.

Workaholism

Workaholism may seem heroic, self–sacrificing and a badge of honor. However, workaholism masks something much more insideous. It represents a kind of comfort zone from which one avoids the exposure to emotional risk that advancing one's education and career might pose. Being a workaholic is a great way to tread water rather than swimming into unknown waters. It is always a great way to become a martyr and to blame someone else,

such as one's employer, for not formulating a strategic educational plan for one's life.

Misguided Goal–Setting

Have you set goals for yourself? Goal setting can be one of the most powerful approaches to success. However, establishing large, meta–goals without developing small, step–ladder types of goals along the way means it will be difficult to achieve the large goal. Good goals are concrete, measurable and can be broken down into mini–goals. To make goal–setting work for you, it is important to acknowledge the achievement of the mini–goals and reward oneself productively.

Poor Online Communication Skills

Finally, the issue of communication skills in an online course is more important than one might think. Both men and women tend to be affected negatively by poor online communication (a professor's harsh tone, non–responsiveness or fellow students' rudeness). However, it could be argued that women may be more affected by cyber–bullying and cyber–stalking. In any case, women often simply drop out of classes rather than disclosing what has happened.

While both men and women sabotage themselves with respect to education, it is interesting to look at the differences between men and women, and their approaches to education and professional life. Until women become aware of the way that societal conditioning and gender roles may manifest in negative patterns that block one's professional development, it will be difficult to combat it. Women will continue to outnumber and outperform men in college, but only in certain degrees, and not in the workplace and the "real world".

Watch the Video of This Post: Please go to *How Women Sabotage Their Educations & Futures, Part I*. The second part of the video is located at *How Women Sabotage Their Educations & Futures, Part II*.

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THE DEGREE AS AN "EFFORTFUL DECISION": SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

You know that getting a degree is going to take some effort. In fact, you are bracing yourself for extraordinary effort. However, you may not have much experience in the multi–pronged planning that goes into a long–term decision that requires several different levels of effort over a long period. Organizational psychologists call an "effortful decision" the kind of commitment that involves the long–term goal setting that consists of multiple phases and numerous contingencies.

Unfortunately, most people who make "effortful decisions" eventually fail to achieve their goals. Why? Let us think about it. Without a doubt, you are probably familiar with the most common type of "effortful goal," the New Year's Resolution.

What happened? Why was your resolution cast to the way-side? Psychologists U. M. Dholakia, R. P. Bogazzi and M. Gopinath have studied the phenomenon and have found that the place where effortful decisions fall down is in the planning process. Certainly the goal is identified (lose ten pounds, stop smoking, get a college degree), but reasonable and realistic planning have been neglected.

Dholakia, Bogazzi and Gopinath found that, after studying individuals and successful effortful decisions, the key is an effective implementation plan. One can apply it to the goal of obtaining a degree. In this case, the following implementation planning process would involve the following steps:

1. Identify desired result, set goal;
2. Recognize the level of perceived self–efficacy;
3. Identify goal intentions and intentional actions (i.e., study everyday);
4. State the implementation desire (desire to take online course);
5. Implementation intentions that are the final part of the plan, (i.e., intend to take course).

The plan must be complete, must be enacted (with timeline and milestones) and the goal needs to be realized.

Women are in a unique situation, for the most part, because of cultural and social realities that still require women to shoulder the lion's share of childrearing and care giving to aging parents. Furthermore, despite advances, women are still in lower–paying jobs that tend to provide fewer benefits, which means obtaining the proper computer hardware, software and Internet access involves more of a financial burden and sacrifice.

Thus, planning is even more important for women because there are additional demands on resources (time, money, energy, equipment).

The plan must be complete and enacted, with timeline and milestones, and all the inputs required in order to achieve the steps along the way need to be taken into consideration.

Although concrete actions and intentional acts seem to form the cornerstone of a successful implementation plan for effortful decisions, Dholakia, Bogazzi and Gopinath point out that mindsets are extremely important. A positive mindset can be achieved when one remembers and reflects on past actions, which act as powerful reinforcers.

The purpose of a great mindset is that it helps one build on success and, in doing so, engages a strong reminder of self–efficacy. Interestingly enough, the positive realization of an "effortful decision" through an implementation plan happens, in large part, through the successful manipulation of self–regulatory strategies.

Reference

Dholakia, U. M., Bogazzi, R. P., & Gopinath, M. (2007). How formulating implementation plans and remembering past actions facilitate the enactment of effortful decisions. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making, 20*, 343–364.

NUMBER ONE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT KILLER: WORKAHOLISM

What is the biggest threat to a working woman's professional development? Surprisingly, it is not necessarily about raising children. Nor is the biggest threat being caught in the "sandwich generation," taking care of aging parents as well as one's own children. Instead, what some studies have found is that the biggest threat to women's professional development via courses and/or the pursuit of a degree is the very job one wishes to develop and build upon.

How is that possible? How can one's job also be one's pitfall and career barrier? In many cases, it has to do with workload and work responsibilities. The sheer magnitude of the workload causes one to neglect one's life, focusing on just doing the bare minimum in terms of family and personal life.

While one might assume that the workload has to do with the rate of change in the workplace and the unwillingness of corporations to take on new employees, the reality is something else. The fact is that researchers have found ridiculously onerous workloads tend to be a gender issue. Women, who have traditionally held roles of facilitators, moms and superwomen, are unconsciously being cast in the same role today. Women, who are culturally conditioned to be accommodating, are easily converted into workaholics who will do whatever it takes to avoid conflict at the workplace, no matter what the personal cost or sacrifice.

The sacrifice can be very large, indeed.

The expectation of workaholism on the part of female employees, particularly supervisors and managers, can result in the dutiful workaholic female manager "burning the candle at both ends," often arriving at work hours before the workday officially starts and leaving long after the workday ends. Whereas, their male counterparts are networking, taking courses, obtaining certificates and degrees, and generally getting ahead.

A recent study of women managers of university programs in British "modern" universities found the expectation of workaholism, working sixty–hour weeks, added tension between work and life. In addition, the author, D. Woodward, uncovered several additional findings that could be useful to individuals.

First, in this study, all the participants reported unmanageably large workloads, with some seasonal variability. The seasonal variability is a critical element because it could provide a starting point for accelerating demands to allow time for professional development and coursework.

Second, the study found that women were willing to take work home. This seems to be widespread in programs for women workers and those with women managers. The main problem reported by women is that unanticipated urgent items would arise and interrupt the normal flow, which would require work to be done at home, presumably because there was no one to offload or delegate work to. Lunch breaks were a rarity. Many women arrive early and stay late. They usually did so to avoid rush–hour traffic and to give themselves some quiet time before the majority of workers arrived. All the women interviewed worked in excess of contracted hours, and usually ended up working fifty– to sixty–hour weeks. Few women took all their annual leave and, when they did take leave, it was often used for childcare purposes.

Finally, the study found that women tended to have attitudes about work that were not commonly found in men. Women's attitudes about work ranged from finding tasks enjoyable to seeing work as an all–consuming malignant force.

Interestingly, working flexible hours and work–from–home schemes would not necessarily solve the problem except in cases when it might help with childcare issues.

For Woodward, the most useful finding was in organizational culture with respect to gender. Women are expected to be workaholics, concludes Woodward. For women to be able to dedicate time to family and continuing education, organizations must find ways to discourage negative work habits and workaholism. A woman who is mired in a culture that requires working sixty–hour weeks just to manage the workflow is not given the opportunity to keep current with skills or knowledge, and will start to lose currency.

Reference

Woodward, D. (2007). Work–life balancing strategies used by women managers in British "modern" universities. *Equal Opportunities International, 26*(1), 6–17.

E–LEARNING SUCCESS IN THE SANDWICH GENERATION "CLUTTERED NEST"

Jacilla was off to a good start with e–learning. Things were about to suddenly change, however, when she assumed primary responsibility for the care of her seventy–five year–old mother, Abuelita, who suffered from arthritis, diabetes and cognitive impairment.

When Jacilla was able to bring her aging mother from the Philippines to live with her at home with her two teenage girls, Maritza and Violet, she was thrilled. Later, she was worried and wondered if she had taken on more than she could handle. Her mother's health needs required a great deal of time and, instead of being the outgoing, happy woman Jacilla remembered, her mother was often withdrawn or argumentative, and she seemed confused.

To make things even more complicated, Jacilla's daughters started to act out shortly after the arrival of their grandmother. Maritza, who was taking classes at the community college, became very withdrawn and then suddenly announced she was thinking of getting married although, as far as anyone knew, she was not really dating anyone. Violet, who was in high school, started skipping classes. Bickering about inconsequential things, spending time in waiting rooms and driving to clinics, and taking more time grocery shopping and on errands, started taking over more and more of Jacilla's life.

It was a classic "Sandwich Generation" dilemma and Jacilla was caught in the middle. Before her mother's arrival, Jacilla had dreaded the impending empty nest that would occur when her daughters moved out. Now that she had a "cluttered nest" (Riley, 2005), it was more stressful than Jacilla had ever imagined.

The one place of refuge was her coursework. It was a lifeline. By taking courses, Jacilla could feel as though she were making progress toward her dream of becoming a licensed registered nurse and having a nursing degree in the United States.

Now in her "cluttered nest," Jacilla considered dropping out; even though she had worked so hard and was so close to achieving her dream. Jacilla had worked as a nurse in the Philippines, but needed American credentials, a degree and licensure. Thankfully, after speaking with her advisor and searching for information in discussion boards dedicated to individuals taking care of aging family members while simultaneously caring for children, Jacilla decided to continue her education.

"It was a relief to find out I wasn't alone," she said. In fact, she shared many things in common with others.

Characteristics of Sandwich Generation "Cluttered Nest" Caregivers

- Thirty–four million adults, sixteen percent of the population, provide care to adults aged fifty and older (AARP, 2004).
- Of those caring for someone aged fifty and older, the average age of family caregivers is estimated at forty seven (FCA, 2005).
- Most caregivers are women, working either full or part time outside the home (FCA, 2005).

Estimates of the number of long–distance caregivers in the U.S. who are caring for an older relative range from 5.163 to nearly seven million. Long–distance caregivers are generally defined as living more than one hour from the older adult needing assistance (AARP, 2004).

The amount of time spent caring increases substantially as cognitive impairment worsens. Among people seventy–plus years old, those with no dementia receive an average of 4.6 hours per week of care, while those with mild dementia receive 13.1 hours of care weekly. For persons with severe dementia, hours of informal care received rises to 46.1 hours per week. Similarly, nearly one–quarter, twenty–three percent, of caregivers for someone fifty–plus

years old with some type of dementia provide forty hours or more of care per week compared to sixteen percent of those helping someone fifty–plus years old without dementia (FCA, 2000).

Bringing the Statistics Home

At age forty–six Jacilla realized that she was fairly typical. The fact that she was working full time made her similar to almost half the people who were caring for older relatives.

The stress of responsibilities compounded itself as Jacilla investigated more deeply and started to communicate with others in the same situation. She started to realize if she did not do something to balance her life, she would start to suffer health consequences herself. Furthermore, she ran the risk of "pay it forward" consequences as her daughters felt alienated and her marriage suffered.

Granted, it was every person's responsibility to deal with the stress but, as the primary caregiver, Jacilla was feeling the brunt of it.

Thankfully, Jacilla's mother had some savings and a small income from investments. She was aware and able to admit to herself that she suffered from cognitive impairment, and trusted Jacilla with her financial affairs. In addition, she encouraged Jacilla to continue her education and to obtain nursing credentials in the United States.

Success Strategies for E–Learning in the Cluttered Nest

- Make studying a priority.
- Budget high–quality time for studying.
- Fine–tune your time management skills. Identify your tasks and break them up into management chunks.
- Practice effective goal setting. Take a moment to pat yourself on the back when you achieve each of your goals, including the small ones.
- Involve the family, and make your degree a team effort.
- Encourage other family members to take online courses as well.
- Strive to achieve a calm, predictable environment. Schedule naps and quiet time for the elderly person.

- Maintain a separate study environment where you can concentrate without interruption.

- Invest in a laptop with wireless card, and a wireless connection in your home. If there are tasks that do not require a great deal of concentration, try to do them in the same room as your family member.

- Find large–print books and books on tape that your family member can read or listen to.

- Find church activities, library reading rooms (large–print section), and eldercare day care or activity groups to provide outings for your family member.

- Find activities for the relative. This might include gardening or light household tasks (folding clothes, etc.) so that he or she feels useful.

- Find activities for the relative that can be shared with the younger family members.

- Anticipate "crunch times" in the school term, and find support and additional care options during that time.

Implementing the Strategies

Many of the suggestions and strategies are easier to talk about than to implement. Many elderly fall prey to depression and anxiety, especially if they suffer from cognitive impairment. It is important to find activities where they can feel useful. It is also important to find ways to alleviate boredom, and to keep a healthy lifestyle that includes exercise and good nutrition. This applies to the entire family. Family members who may have been neglecting their diets or exercise may find that living with a person who must exercise and eat healthy foods can be a great example.

If possible, make the entire family a part of the degree plan. Involve the family in your educational activities. Celebrate the highs and discuss the lows. One of the realities is that by modeling positive behavior, continuing education and concern for the elderly, families will learn the values and the behaviors that will allow them to thrive. There are families and individual situations in which this degree of functionality is impossible. If you find yourself in such a situation, do not be discouraged. What you are doing now may lead to a better family condition later as a value–added part of your learning activity.

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ONLINE LEARNING OFFERS HOPE FOR WELFARE RECIPIENTS

Unlike the publicized pregnancy of sixteen–year–old Jamie Lynne Spears, there was no fanfare when sixteen–year–old Marilee announced she was pregnant.

No one was clamoring for her photograph and no one was paying her for an interview. Instead, Marilee's experience was typical of teenagers who find themselves pregnant.

Marilee's mother cried and the father of her baby told her she should put the baby up for adoption. If she kept the baby, she was on her own. Marilee was determined though, and she decided to keep the baby, graduate from high school, and create a good life for herself and her child.

With help from the government and a local church, Marilee was able to obtain the basics, food, clothing and immunizations at the clinic. A correspondence course at her high school gave her the chance to graduate with a high school diploma.

"I felt like I was treading water, though," she said. "I wanted to go to college. Therefore, I applied to the state university that was located in my town and thought I would be a business major. I took out a student loan. I got my mom to babysit. I was ready," she said.

However, things did not go quite as planned. The college, which was a four–year institution with a good reputation, had an unsympathetically traditional population.

Most of the students were just out of high school and they lived either in the dorms, or in sorority or fraternity houses. Their educations were financed by their parents, and many drove late–model sports cars.

"You cannot imagine how lost and out of place I felt," said Marilee. "While the other women in my classes were talking about dates, sororities and where they would go on Spring Break, I knew they were not interested in my toddler's weird rash or his separation anxiety."

Marilee finished one semester, but decided not to go back. Instead, she stayed at home for another three years and tried to be a good mom. It was not easy. She felt isolated and ended up gaining fifty pounds.

"I felt very depressed all the time. I felt like a failure," said Marilee.

Hope came in the form of a flyer from her case worker that described colleges with online degree programs.

"It seemed like a good option," she said.

She took courses and graduated in three years with a degree in general studies.

"I felt great each time I logged into my courses," she said. "I felt I was getting my life back on track. "

Marilee's experience was not unique. A recent student survey conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research entitled *Resilient and Reaching for More: Challenges and Benefits of Higher Education for Welfare Participants and Their Children* reported a number of positive findings.

Attending school had a host of positive financial, social, and emotional effects for low–income parents and their chil-

dren. Nearly all (94 percent) of the respondents indicated that their educational experience had changed their lives for the better. The most often cited changes were in the areas of self–esteem (80.4 percent), feeling like a contributor to society (68.5 percent) and accessing better job opportunities (63.0 percent). Many also expressed a sense of personal growth, self empowerment and pride in their newly–discovered academic talents. Respondents reported that higher education helped them overcome substance abuse, leave destructive relationships, and develop self–confidence and hope in a positive future.

Marilee pointed out that going to school and getting a degree had a positive impact on her child as well. She said that she felt great being able to be a positive role model and that her daughter, now in grade school, was emulating Marilee's study habits. In fact, one of her favorite times of the day was when she could go to her room, sit at her desk and work on her homework.

"It is really great to see," said Marilee. "I believe my daughter has a bright future. "

The Institute for Women's Policy Research study reported findings that paralleled Marilee's experience:

The positive impacts felt by those enrolled in higher education filtered down to their children. Many survey participants (42.4 percent) indicated that their children had improved study habits since their enrollment in higher education, and almost a third (30.4 percent) indicated that their children are now making better grades. The vast majority of respondents (88.0 percent) indicated that education made them feel better equipped to help their children achieve educational goals.

Marilee's report was not as glowing as the Institute for Women's Policy Research report. The online programs could provide better services in a number of ways, to include academic support for welfare participants.

Online Programs and Welfare Recipients: Areas for Improvement

Better Online Library Services and Collections

The online library was difficult to negotiate. The person who receives her high school diploma via correspondence courses or GED may have little or no experience using digital repositories. The terminology will be unfamiliar, as well as the techniques and uses. It is important for the library to have a step–by–step guide, a virtual tour, and an easy–to–use portal and search capability.

Better Financial Aid Support

Many institutions do not provide specific guidance for welfare recipients. The forms and guidelines need to be clearly posted, and financial aid counselors need to have correct information readily available. Wait times should be no longer than three or four minutes, not a half hour or more which is typical of many financial aid offices.

Women and Family–Friendly Testing Procedures

Because women on welfare are the sole supporters and providers of their children, they often have a weak and insecure support network. When a child is ill, it is often an all–day affair, taking the child to the clinic, waiting in line at the pharmacy and taking the bus home. Online colleges need to make sure that they accommodate special needs and requirements. Many practice tests, and then an opportunity to retake tests, is often a good approach.

Knowledgeable and Supportive Advisors

It is important for academic advisors to understand the specific needs of women and children students who are also low–income welfare recipients. Career guidance that is realistic and attuned to individual needs and preference is important. Making available different inventories, and personality and skill assessments is a good idea.

Online Career Guidance

It is useful to have a list of careers online. Students need to be able to take assessments and inventories that help them understand themselves, their preferences, and their learning styles. The more free resources that are available, the better.

Community of Peers/Support Network

This should probably be first on the list. When students can share their stories, they do not feel so isolated and they can develop a sense of affiliation with individuals who share the same values, goals and ideas.

Each college should get to know its students and to create an opportunity for the individuals to connect with each other, create learning communities and to share success strategies.

This is particularly the case with single moms who may or may not receive welfare benefits, and who are often ignored, made to feel invisible or even stigmatized at college. The colleges and universities that recognize their needs and meet them will be doing a wonderful service, which will pay huge social and emotional dividends in the future.

THE ABUSED WOMAN AND E–LEARNING: CREATING NETWORKS AND SUPPORT

Can e–learning offer hope to women who are trapped in abusive or destructive relationships?

The topic cannot be taken lightly, explored quickly or discussed in more than a superficial way here. Yet it is so important that it should not be ignored. Abusive relationships are notoriously hard to leave. Although education may provide assistance for some individuals in escaping the epidemic, it can be only one component, even for them. Nevertheless, it is important; and now, with e–learning that takes advantage of resources and social networking, the information and the emotional support that are needed may now be available.

Abuse does not discriminate. Physical, mental, and emotional abuse occur throughout society, united by a single thread. That thread is composed of shame and denial.

Because the stigma is so very deep, it is very difficult to help individuals who are in such relationships. Furthermore, individuals who have escaped one abusive relationship may slip back into an equally destructive one. The pattern is hard to break, and the damage spans generations. In fact, much of what we have to say here relates to the even more highly stigmatized and strenuously ignored area of child abuse, where long–term effects of brutalization are more deeply engrained. Statistics show that well over ninety percent of male and female prostitutes, more than eighty percent of drug addicts, more than seventy percent of female alcoholics and more than half the population diagnosed as "mentally ill" have histories of abuse as children. Most of these people show the same profiles as those whose abuse began in adulthood. The same statistics show that tolerance of, and even dependence upon, abuse more often than not come from childhood experience; one might even say childhood "training." In this section, we use the word "relationship" with the primary significance of that between adults. Yet we are aware that it often begins between a child and an adult, most often an adult in the family or known to the family. It is important to realize that an abused adult probably started out as an abused child and did not suddenly become tolerant of abuse when they came of age, or because they were morally or physically weak, or because they were in any inherent way "bad." The brave souls in Social and Human Services who unflinchingly deal with this reality often feel that it is the most destructive behavioral element in our society. Education that, in some instances, can free people from the cycles of abuse should be celebrated instead of hidden.

The stories that individuals tell provide a chilling look into the realities of abusive relationships and how they damage an individual's future by blocking their ability, emotionally and financially, to pursue their education along with their other human potentials.

When those who attempt to escape the cycles of abuse venture into education, e–learning often provides a safe psychological and physical space.

New to e–learning, first–year online student Amethyst S. (not her real name) posted a very moving greeting to her fellow students in the "Let's Introduce Ourselves!" thread. Amethyst wrote:

> "I am thrilled to be here. I never thought I would ever be able to get a college degree. After years of physical and mental abuse at home and in my marriage, I had lost all confidence in myself. I truly believed that I would have to beg for acceptance all my life, and that I would be trapped in some sort of self–perpetuating miasma of soul–destroying venom all my life. You do not know how many times I thought about ending it all.

> Only my precious angel, my daughter, kept me from that move. Now, thanks to my academic advisor at ABC College, and my mother, with whom I am finally speaking again after fifteen years of silence, I am on a positive path. I am out of the bad relationship. I am working toward a nursing degree, which I can take online without quitting the job I need to support my daughter and myself. I am taking courses and am a part of a "nursing success network" online. For the first time in my life, I feel true optimism and confidence. I know I can do it. My daughter will have a mother she can truly admire. "

Melanie T. described her fear of going to a traditional face–to–face class after her ex–boyfriend started stalking her.

> "He even assaulted a guy he thought I was seeing. He threatened me. The campus police said they would do what they could do protect me, but honestly, I was terrified. I dropped out of college at that point," said Melanie.

> She continued to explain the benefits of the online environment. "I never thought I'd have a chance to start courses again. Then I found out about online courses. I feel safe and protected, for the first time!" she said.

Tara M. found the discussion forum, and the fact that her classmates communicated regularly with each other, to be very helpful.

Tara M. also pointed to an often overlooked reality that face–to–face courses function in many ways as a dating service and/or singles scene, and that the old 1950s notion that traditional students are going to college to find a spouse is still thriving in some places.

The old joke about women going to school to "earn their M R S" may seem dated; there is no need to categorically belittle the multi–leveled social interactions of traditional education among those without the kinds of problems we are discussing here. Yet we should be equally aware that the "singles scene" aspect of the traditional college could be distracting and even disturbing to a victim of abuse. It can be annoying as well to a non–traditional student who does not have the time or the desire to feel they are being evaluated by classmates as potential dates.

> "I found that the threads the instructor had provided in the discussion board were a lifeline to me," said Tara. "The Virtual Student Lounge, "Ask Your Professor" and "Let's Share!" were great. I started to realize I had a support network of people who had the same goal, to learn and to get a degree, and they weren't looking at the classroom as a big meat market. "

The stories are ones I have seen numerous times in the more than twelve years I have been developing and teaching online courses. She, like many other women, has turned her life around thanks to e–learning programs.

There are three things I have to acknowledge when I consider the stories that all have to do with the power of education liberating one from what seems to be a hopeless situation.

First, despite popular misconceptions, abuse occurs on all levels of society. Second, education is always a lifeline; however, the way that the education is delivered and the environment determine whether the lifeline functions for everyone. Third, e–learning programs help individuals establish support networks and, in doing so, can help an individual feel he is making progress toward personal and family goals. In this third regard, it is important to bear in mind that the first thing an abuser does is isolate his or her victim. The next step is to manipulate the victim's goals.

Resources

Mayo Clinic. (2007). *Domestic violence toward women: Recognize the patterns and seek help*. http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/domestic–violence /WO00044.

PBS. (1998). *No safe place: Violence against women*. http://www.pbs.org/kued /nosafeplace/index.html.

The Greater Portland Women's Resource Center. (2004). *Why battered women stay in abusive relationships*. http://www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=9oILKWMCF&b=116380.

Womensdivorce.com. (2007). *Women in abusive relationships*. http://www.womansdivorce.com/abusive–relationships.html.

Additional Resources

National Coalition Against Sexual Violence. A leader in the national movement to end sexual violence, NCASA is committed to the elimination of sexual violence through intervention, education, advocacy and public policy. The home page includes a listing of Rape Crisis Centers by state.

National Organization for Women. NOW organizes many anti–violence campaigns and demonstrations throughout the country, and provides information on violence against women.

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) 1–800–656–HOPE. RAINN is a non–profit organization based in Washington, D.C. that operates a national toll–free hotline for victims of sexual assault.

U.S. Department of Justice—Violence Against Women Office. The Department of Justice's Violence Against Women Office leads a comprehensive national effort to combine tough new federal laws with assistance to states and localities to fight domestic violence and other crimes against women.

YWCA. The largest provider of shelter and services for women victims of violence and their families in the United States. More than six hundred fifty thousand people come to the YWCA each year for assistance and support to overcome violence.

WOUNDED WARRIORS AND E–LEARNING

Even with the loss of limbs, the consequences of traumatic brain injury, and impaired vision and hearing, veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are able to take online courses thanks to advances in technology and new approaches to content delivery. They can also prepare themselves for careers in many different fields, and take advantage of career placement services for wounded veterans.

One Soldier's Story

Specialist Maria Cardena–Diaz still has only a hazy memory of the incident that took away fifty percent of her vision, left her with headaches, reduced mobility in her left arm and a leg amputated below the knee. It happened during her second deployment to Iraq. As she was traveling down a road to check on a lead that there was a weapons cache in a nearby village, an improvised explosive device detonated. The force of the blast gave her a concussion, and left her with injuries. It killed one of her companions, a young private who had just become engaged to his girlfriend.

Recovery was slow, and she worried about her future. Although Maria was able to walk, bright lights, crowds and quick movements caused dizzy spells. That made her nervous about driving and taking courses in an on–campus environment.

Maria's goal was to eventually work with children with disabilities. To do so, she wanted to take courses in early childhood development. She discussed her situation and her goals with a counselor at the VA hospital, and got in touch with Disabled American Veterans. After discussing her goals, she found that there were a number of online programs she could take.

Worried about her injuries, she described her difficulties with her left hand and the problems with flashing lights.

There was nothing to worry about, said her counselor. Many programs have courses that allow the student to use special equipment such as laptops with touch screens and special keyboards. Others incorporate audio and video files that can be viewed on one's iPod, iPhone, iTouch or other mobile device.

Maria signed up and successfully completed two courses in the first term.

Causes of Injuries

As opposed to other wars where the primary injuries were bullet wounds or chemical burns, the war in Iraq and Afghanistan has involved injuries due to explosions, fire and impact. Because of reinforced vehicles and highly effective body armor, as well as new surgical techniques and medical technology, soldiers are surviving attacks and injuries that would have killed them if they had fought in previous wars.

According to the Iran Afghanistan Veteran's Association, most injuries in the theatre of war were caused by the following:

- Improvised Explosive Devices
- Mortars
- Vehicular Accidents

Wounded Health Issues and E–Learning Accommodations

- Injuries to Limbs (limited mobility, amputees)
  - Computers with special touch screens or keyboards
  - Mobile devices—content presented in audio or video, with large, easy–to–operate buttons and controls (example: iTouch courses offered by AIU)
- Mobility Issues
  - Remote controls to play audio and video
  - Online course interface designed with minimal clicks or hand movements required
  - Allow audio responses to questions (record the student's voice for exam response or discussion)
  - Use easy to access technology for student to post audio discussion responses (example: http://www.gcast.com)
- PTSD
  - Structured, predictable courses
  - Mastery in one leads to success in other courses that use the same template
  - Flexible deadlines
  - Relevant content/curriculum
- Traumatic Brain Injury
  - Clear, clean presentations
  - No flashing icons or lights
  - Avoid excessive reliance on automated quizzes or activities
- Limited Vision
  - Computers outfitted with JAWS—converts text to sound files
  - Scalable fonts for laptop presentation

- o Text or audio using iTouch/iPhone technology (scalable fonts using fingers)
- Limited Hearing
  - o Text alternative to online audio lectures

A Soldier's Success Story

As one of thousands of polytrauma survivors of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Maria realized that her victory over her physical limitations meant that many others could experience the same.

She decided to share her story, and to spend some time at the local VA center, where she and other distance students had an informal "study hall," and shared their tips and insights into the new computer technologies that could help individuals with multiple injuries.

At the same time, she made available a list of resources that can be used by anyone impacted by war.

Resources: General

Army Behavioral Health. http://www.behavioralhealth.army.mil/.

Disabled American Veterans. http://www.dav.org/.

The Impact of War. http://www.npr.org/templates/topics/topic.php?topicId =1078. Information and retrospectives of the war. Tributes to the fallen. Statistics.

Injured Soldiers Foundation. http://www.injuredsoldiers.org/.

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. http://www.iava.org/. Information for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

MedlinePlus–Veterans and Military Health. http://www.nlm.nih.gov/med lineplus/veteransandmilitaryhealth.html .

Military Severely Injured Support Page. http://www.militaryhomefront.dod .mil/portal/page/itc/MHF/MHF_HOME_1?section_id=20.40.500.393.0.0. 0.0.0.

PDHealth.mil. http://www.pdhealth.mil/.

Seamless Transition. http://www.seamlesstransition.va.gov/.

Specially Adapted Housing Program. http://www.homeloans.va.gov/sah.htm.

U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program. http://aw2portal.com/.

VA Polytrauma System of Care. http://www.polytrauma.va.gov/.

Veterans Administration Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program. http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/index.htm.

Wounded Warrior Project. https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/.

Resources for Traumatic Brain Injury

Brain Injury Association of America. http://www.biausa.org/.

Center for Outcome Measurement in Brain Injury (COMBI). http://www.tbims.org/combi/.

Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center. http://www.dvbic.org/.

MedlinePlus–Head and Brain Injuries. http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/headandbraininjuries.html.

National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury. http://www.neuro.pmr.vcu.edu/.

Federal TBI Program. http://www.mchb.hrsa.gov/programs/tbi.htm.

THE CHANGING FACE OF HEALTH CARE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR NURSING AND HEALTH CARE WORKERS

The changing face of the American population, coupled with demographic shifts, new technologies and the need to cut and conserve costs, have created new opportunities for health care providers.

Courses that prepare individuals to provide health care in the new areas are extremely valuable. In addition to offering new tracks in women's health, mid–wife studies, home health care, palliative care, gerontology and cross–cultural health, many colleges are offering stand–alone courses such as Spanish for Health Care Professionals, Cultural Diversity, Cross–Cultural Communication, Cross–Cultural Conflict Resolution, and the Diaspora and the New American Family.

Urban and Suburban Health Care

Structural changes in population distribution have made it necessary to have small clinics located near population centers, which include exurbs and suburbs, as well as urban areas. Each region tends to have a unique demographic breakdown, with population–specific health needs. Nurses with training and specialization that

align with the populations are key. Examples include pediatrics, family health care, addiction, psychiatric and oncology.

Emerging Lower–Cost Health Care Providers

The emergence of distributed health care and local providers has resulted in a boom in demand for nurses. Having a full team of nurses on every level, from nursing assistants to nurse practitioners, allows health care providers to be more responsive to individual needs. For the health care company, the results are cost savings and responsiveness to patient needs.

Consortia of Health Care Service Providers

Because of the cost of equipment and technology, it is often necessary for health care providers to form consortia and to share in the imaging centers, labs and emerging technologies. While it has been common for doctors or health care centers to locate themselves near each other in order to share resources, technology is allowing the clustering to be virtual.

Virtual Doctor's Park

The "virtual doctor's park" of the future will include a face–to–face center, which is individually owned, but will incorporate distance techniques. Nurses will need to be able to interact with a large array of populations, ranging from the patient, the patient's family, to imaging specialists, diagnosticians, pharmacists, laboratory technologists and nursing/medical specialists.

At–Risk Populations

The rising cost of medical care, the rising number of uninsured, insecurities about the nature and extent of insurance coverage for those who have it, and the concerns about possible Medicare and Medicaid insufficiencies, have expanded the number of people who could be considered at–risk. Children and families who are uninsured still need some sort of medical care. As a result, small practices of nurses, nurse practitioners and doctors are springing up to meet the needs. Unfortunately, many of the at–risk populations have problems due to addictions, substance abuse and other problems that are often exacerbated by poverty. Nurses with exper-

ience in counseling, substance abuse treatment and addictions, in general, are needed in these settings.

Changing Face of Community Health Care

The demographic makeup of the United States is changing very quickly. Health care professionals must have an appreciation and understanding of the beliefs, values, attitudes and approaches of various ethnicities within the community. They must also understand how ideas and attitudes change as new generations emerge. Second–generation immigrants often have very different ideas than the first and may have to understand the dynamics, inner conflicts and cognitive dissonance that may accompany such dramatic cultural change as that confronted by new residents.

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY ENROLLMENTS PROJECTED TO CONTINUE TO GROW QUICKLY

Rapid growth in public elementary and secondary schools creates unique pockets of opportunity for teachers. The view is more complex than it may seem and, when closely examined, there are niche opportunities that will be booming in the next few years.

Again, it is not just that the gross numbers are rising, and more teachers are needed to provide a teacher for every classroom. Technology in the classroom, and the way that textbook resources are accessed is making it necessary for teachers to be comfortable with online learning.

Further, with budget cuts, many schools are not able to offer advanced or enriched courses. As a result, teachers must often function as facilitators for online courses, which are taken from a provider of online elementary, secondary or AP (Advanced Placement) dual–credit courses.

The fact that diversity is increasing, and many students are from households where English is not spoken at home, requires teachers to have a great deal of cultural sensitivity and awareness.

Here is a close look at the statistics, drawn from fedstats.gov, with analysis provided by this author:

Enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools rose twenty-six percent between 1985 and 2007 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2008). The fastest public school growth occurred in the elementary grades (pre–kindergarten through grade eight), where enrollment rose twenty-eight percent over this period, from 27.0 million to 34.6 million (Digest of Education Statistics, 2008). Part of the relatively fast growth in public elementary school enrollment resulted from the expansion of pre–kindergarten programs. Between 1985 and 2005, enrollment in pre–kindergarten increased by five hundred eighty–five percent, while enrollment in other elementary grades increased by twenty-five percent. Public secondary school enrollment declined eight percent from 1985 to 1990, but then began increasing from 1990 to 2007, for a net increase of twenty–one percent.

In more recent years, secondary school enrollment has been increasing more rapidly than elementary school enrollment. Between 2000 and 2007, public elementary school enrollment rose three percent compared to an increase of eleven percent for public secondary school enrollment. Private school enrollment grew more slowly than public school enrollment from 1985 to 2007, rising eleven percent, from 5.6 million to 6.2 million. As a result, the percentage of students enrolled in private schools declined from 12.4 percent in 1985 to 11.0 percent in 2007 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2008).

The enrollment rates of kindergarten, elementary and secondary school–age children did not change substantially between 1985 and 2006. As a result, increases in public and private elementary school enrollment have been driven primarily by increases in the number of children in this age group (Digest of Education Statistics, 2008). The enrollment rate of pre–kindergarten age children (ages three and four) rose between 1985 and 2006, which was reflected by a substantial increase in pre–kindergarten enrollment.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) forecasts record levels of total elementary and secondary enrollment through at least 2016, reflecting expected increases in the school–age population (Digest of Education Statistics, 2008). The projected fall 2007 public school enroll-

ment is expected to be a new record, but new records are expected every year through 2016, the last year for which NCES enrollment projections have been developed. Public elementary school enrollment (pre–kindergarten through grade eight) is projected to increase by ten percent between 2007 and 2016. Teachers who have prepared themselves with second languages, cultural diversity, and assessment and testing preparation strategies will be well positioned for advancement.

Public secondary school enrollment (grades nine through twelve) is expected to be two percent higher in 2016 than in 2007 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2008). While not all students will be college bound, at least not immediately, teachers will still need to understand the nature of online courses used to prepare students for college (AP courses), and for standardized achievement tests (NY Regents, Texas, NCLB, etc.). In addition, teachers will need to be able to guide students with standardized entrance exams and offer preparatory courses. Transitions from private schools, or from home schooling environments to public schools, or advanced institutions may require significant attention.

The future of elementary and secondary education will require innovative solutions, and will need to leverage technology in order to provide high quality education and access for all. Teachers who are able to understand the needs, and meet them with innovative approaches, will have plentiful and diverse opportunities for meaningful leadership.

Digest of Education Statistics: 2007. (2008). IES National Center for Educational Statistics. U.S. Department of Education. Accessed July 10, 2008 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs /digest/d07/.

National Dialog on Student Retention: Student Engagement and Institutional Involvement. http://e–learnqueen.blogspot.com /2008/06/national–dialog–on–student–retention.html.

The question of how institutions can do more to address retention in online education programs was addressed at the inaugural National Dialog on Student Retention (NDSR) Conference. Hosted and organized by Education Dynamics (http://www.educationdynamics.com/),

the event brought together thought–leaders from colleges and universities who presented the results of research, as well as lessons learned at their institutions. Podcast: http://www.beyondutopia.net /podcasts/dialog.mp3.

The event, which focused on both for–profit and not–for–profit institutions, identified the reasons when and why adult learners stay enrolled in their online programs, and the factors that help them succeed and make satisfactory academic progress.

In order to pinpoint the conditions in which adult students thrive, it is also necessary to take a close look at why and when they do not thrive. Online programs designed for adults will face different challenges than programs that are hybrid, or which address more "traditional" students. The speakers who made pre-sentations at the conference specifically addressed many of those issues.

The program and the presenters are included in the website, http://www.educationdynamics.com/retention_conference. The site has been updated to include links to the conference presentations.

Video and audio recordings of featured sessions are avail-able for download at http://www.educationdynamics.com/retention _conference/conference_downloads.htm.

For many of the experts, the key to retention is student engage-ment. Dr. George Kuh presented what he referred to as the "Stu-dent Engagement Trinity" in his keynote speech; Retention has to do with the "Student Engagement Trinity":

1. What students do—time and energy devoted to educa-tionally purposeful activities;
2. What institutions do—using effective practices to induce students to do the right things; and
3. Educationally effective institutions channel student energy toward the right activities.

More of Dr. Kuh's comments can be found in an article called *Is Retention Improvement Within Colleges' Reach?* at http://insidehighered .com/news/2008/06/04/retention.

It is worth noting that the National Survey of Student Engage-ment (NSSE), http://nsse.iub.edu/index.cfm, has archives of the results of its survey from 1999.

All reports reinforce the reality that student engagement is a powerful factor in retention. The NSSE was conceived in early 1998 and supported by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The NSSE conducted a successful pilot in 1999 that involved more than seventy–five selected colleges and universities. The last round of the NSSE included more than three hundred institutions.

It is useful to note that student engagement is rarely a grass-roots endeavor, unless the conditions are such that social networking can be used to establish true collaborative learning. Even then, the most successful attempts to boost student engagement have to do with the pro–active stance of the institution, which must invest in a variety of resources. In this endeavor, creative and innovative approaches can yield tremendous payoffs.

Children's Health Conditions in America: What Do They Mean to E–Learning?

We often think that the future of e–learning is all about the technology. Others suggest it is about making sure individuals are retooling themselves for future professions and jobs.

Both are true. However, they overlook the fact that social conditions are the real determinant of how, where and if people in a nation, especially the youth and the women, have a chance at education. I am not talking about just any education. I am talking about the kind of education that is relevant to lives that opens doors to a better life, professionally, personally and in the community.

In our world, that translates to e–learning. Why? The answer is simple. E–learning providers are offering courses and degrees that lead directly to jobs. By e–learning, I am referring to delivery, which includes mobile learning such as AIU's new iTouch–based course, and the audio chapters available through such sources as Cengage Learning's textbooks' audio chapters.

In the past, we have tended to view access to education as a matter of convenience, affordability, and marketability.

However, we have been overlooking the obvious. Social conditions must be conducive to learning.

For that reason, I have decided to look at different aspects of our society, focusing on America's children and families. I am using the annual report prepared by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. The 2007 report, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well–Being,* http://www.childstats.gov /pubs.asp, is admirably extensive. It reports findings and analyzes trends, which provide a unique view of our social conditions.

The report does not shy away from looking at social inequality. In fact, inequalities in our society are precisely where the greatest opportunities lie. Help the people who need a helping hand, and you are likely to see dramatic results.

To get started, I looked at childbirth rates and birth weights. The reason is that birth weight is an excellent predictor of future health and health problems, which affect the children and their caregivers. Low–birth weight infants are at higher risk of death, long–term illness and disability than infants of normal birth weight are.

According to the report, the percentage of low birth weight infants (less than five pounds, eight ounces) has increased, as partially indicated by the following figures.

Low Birth Weight Babies in America
(from America's Children, 2007)

2005	8.2 percent
2004	8.1 percent
2003	7.9 percent

Are all ethnic and demographic groups having low birth weight babies at the same rate? The answer is a very clear no. Black women are giving birth to low birth weight babies. In 2005, that amounted to fourteen percent.

Implications

Women and primary caregivers for low–birth weight babies will need more support in order to help them as they deal with the health issues that accompany low–birth weight babies. It may be difficult for the mother of a special–needs baby to have a full–time job or to go to campus for a traditional college education. This pre-

sents a classic Catch–22 in terms of education and employment. If the mother does not have family or community support, she is likely to be stuck in situation without access to education or a way toward a good job. Further, the baby, very likely to have health problems, will have challenges if not able to attend preschool or to participate in educational activities. The isolation of the mother could adversely affect the socialization of the child and restrict access to educational opportunities. Low birth weight, like other problems, including improper nutrition and domestic violence, can cause organic as well as personal challenges in the ability to learn, making education more difficult. Such difficulties are not necessarily insurmountable. To put a silver lining on a dark and heavy cloud, finding means of correcting problems brought about by disadvantages may lead to advances in everything from education to social work to medicine, along with more job opportunities.

Recommendations

- Outreach to mothers of special–needs children.
- Low–interest education loans and rewards for academic excellence.
- High–speed internet, computer access, mentoring.

Special needs children will need support from local schools and in some instances from local social services.

The analysis above is based on findings described in detail in *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well–Being*, 2007, http://www.childstats.gov/pubs.asp. *America's Children* is the U.S. government's annual report that monitors the well–being of the nation's children and youth. The report is a compendium of the most recently released federal statistics on the nation's children, and is issued by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/press_release.asp.

Key Informational Sources

http://www.childstats.gov/pubs.asp.

National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/.

National Center for Health Statistics. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/.

Today's Real–Life Online Behaviors and Health Challenges; Tomorrow's E–Learners

What all groups of youth have in common is the fact that they are, when presented with the opportunity, using computers. However, they are not necessarily using them for educational purposes, but instead, are using them to share video, audio, text and images. They network, create social communities and shop.

Today's youth in America do not necessarily gravitate toward education when they use the Internet. Nevertheless, comfort and familiarity with the Internet and with mobile devices, such as Smartphones and players that play downloaded materials, means that introducing individuals to e–learning does not constitute a huge barrier to overcome. The students have already trained themselves in most of the basic technological practices they will need for e–learning.

The analysis above is based on findings that are described in detail in *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well–Being*, 2007, http://www.childstats.gov/pubs.asp. *America's Children* is the U.S. government's annual report that monitors the well–being of the nation's children and youth. The report is a compendium of the most recently released federal statistics on the nation's children, and is issued by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/press_release.asp.

Key Informational Sources

http://www.childstats.gov/pubs.asp.

National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/.

National Center for Health Statistics. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/.

WORKPLACE–FOCUSED LANGUAGE COURSES: KEYS TO EFFECTIVE E–LEARNING

It is becoming extremely important for workplaces to offer courses that allow employees to communicate across languages and cultures. In addition, many companies are finding that offering bilingual or multi–lingual service allows them to expand markets. While

few companies can afford the investment on an immersion experience or intensive face–to–face course, many are finding that using e–learning, both web–based and mobile learning, is extremely effective. Here are keys to effective language e–learning.

1. <u>Identify and Articulate</u> precisely what you want to accomplish in the course. Understand the background, contexts and needs of the learners. Prioritize the presentation of content so that it aligns itself with urgent needs of the course.

2. <u>Good Materials</u>. Identify good books video, audio to supplement e–learning (web–based and mobile).

3. <u>Situated Learning</u>. Make sure that the activities are placed within a realistic context, and use simulations, graphics, diagrams, interaction and life–like scenarios whenever possible. This will assure that the learning is "situated" and situational. For example, a course on Spanish for Health Professionals should provide conversations and vocabulary for what one is likely to find in a busy clinic or hospital.

4. <u>Problem–Solving Approach</u>. Engage the learners by making the learning as experiential as possible. Use a problem–solving approach, which encourages learners to move beyond memorization of terms and vocabulary, and to accomplish deeper learning. For example, in a course on Spanish and English for Construction Sites, you may wish to ask students to identify hazardous situations in a workplace, and then find a way to communicate it to co–workers, in Spanish and English.

5. <u>Logical Sequence</u>. Make sure that the lessons are placed in a logical order. For example, a course on Spanish and English for Construction Sites might be organized around the way that learners are likely to interact in the workplace and on the job, as well as the sequence of actions. You may wish to identify various jobs and roles first, and then the actions and tools used in each.

6. <u>Scaffolding</u>. Be sure that the lessons build on each other, and that you provide proper cognitive scaffolding.

7. <u>Repetition, Practice, Enactment</u>. Incorporate active learning, which includes repetition, practice and taking an active part with the content. Focus on student engagement with the material, but make sure it is meaningful engagement.

For example, in a course on Construction Spanish for workers and supervisors primarily from Mexico and Central America, avoid texts and materials that are idiomatically dissimilar; i.e., Spanish from Spain is distinctly different from that of Mexico and both differ from the Spanish of Puerto Rico.

8. <u>Assessments in Same Form as Practice</u>. It is amazing how many times students will learn through video, conversation and speech. However, when it is time for assessment they are forced to take a text–based multiple–choice exam.

9. <u>Clear, Straightforward Learning Platform</u>. The ideal experience for workplace–focused language courses will include a combination of simulations, interactive audio, text and graphics, along with dynamic interaction among the learners, such as audio and video chat, and informal webinars with multiple presentation capabilities. Although complex applications are attractive, it is important to keep in mind the abilities of the learners and their own situations; i.e., infrastructure, hardware, software, WiFi or high–speed internet connection availability, mp3 players, etc.

10. <u>Redundancy of Content Presentation</u>. Not all users will be able to connect to the Internet. They may not have constant and consistent access to high–speed connections. At the same time, they should be able to use the devices, players and equipment that they feel comfortable with. This includes the use of mp3 players, video players, and even cell phones and handheld (PDAs, etc.).

11. <u>Cultural Considerations</u>. Language is more than just words. Language is communication that includes and incorporates values, beliefs, traditional behaviors and codes, both verbal and non–verbal. One could spend a lifetime working on the cultural differences between different groups. In–depth http://www.italki.com coverage is not necessary. Nevertheless, it is good to provide the learners with key cultural points in order to facilitate and enable mutual understanding. The coverage should include discussions of values and attitudes about family, community, religion, personal relationships, authority and tradition. In many ways, the writings of Hofstede can be found to be useful.

Useful Resources

Rosetta Stone. http://www.rosettastone.com/. Extremely effective CDs and blended solutions. Excellent breadth. Not many courses are industry–specific.

Italki. http://www.italki.com. Excellent resource for finding language partners, and other resources for learning languages.

Berlitz. http://www.berlitz.com/. Berlitz is a well–known and trusted source of language instruction techniques and materials.

Free Online Language Courses. http://www.word2word.com/coursead.html. Adequate, perhaps, for vacation traveling. It is a good start. Skimpy in terms of what is really needed in the average workplace or job site. Relying on the average Lonely Planet phrasebooks and such will just cause hardships and problems if you are trying to communicate with your construction crew, food service employees or health professionals.

Learning Chinese and Other Languages with New Web 2.0 Strategies

New Web 2.0 applications such as Italki, http://www.italki.com, encourage interactions in multiple languages in social communities, virtual worlds and information sharing. They seem perfect complements to traditional language courses, as well as the new podcast and radio–based programs. For example, students who take courses through the new podcast and satellite broadcasts of Chinese language lessons by China Radio International (CRI) could find participating in the italki.com language–learning community to be very helpful.

A new endeavor, italki.com aims to incorporate the functionality of Web 2.0 to encourage language learners to participate in activities designed to motivate, as well as providing practice in the target language. In doing so, italki.com is creating unique language–learning communities.

Italki.com's language learning communities are an excellent way to overcome a sense of isolation. Furthermore, they provide learners a great way to practice speaking, writing and listening to others. The sense of community can help the learners overcome the psychological blocks, such as anxiety and low self–concept, which often hamper the efforts of language learners.

In fact, language–learning anxiety can be reduced dramatically in the italki.com environment because there are a number of re-

sources and tools at one's disposal in the online arena. For example, pronunciation and vocabulary support are at one's fingertips. In addition, the use of avatars and screen names can help one feel as though one is role–playing instead of actually jeopardizing one's real identity or self.

Perhaps the most powerful way to use language–learning social communities is to develop a personal learning plan that clearly and systematically integrates the activities in the community with a more formal language program.

For example, the lessons offered by China Radio International (CRI) could be incorporated because they are standardized and are being offered in more than thirty–eight countries (http://enpf .chinabroadcast.cn/TalkChina/).

Uniform study materials have been compiled by the Office of Chinese Language Council International.

- Confucius Institute Project. http://english.hanban.edu.cn /market/HanBanE/412360.htm
- Office of Chinese Language Council International. http:// www.hanban.edu.cn/en_hanban/jgsz.php
- Confucius Institute at Michigan State University. http:// confucius.msu.edu/
- CRI Talk China. http://enpf.chinabroadcast.cn/TalkChina/
- Italki. http://www.italki.com

Professional Development and Corporate Training: The Webinar Weakness

Anyone who has taken online courses through a college or university is likely to be disappointed and discouraged by the webinars commonly offered in corporate and professional development training. Even though new versions of webinars use software such as illuminate, http://www.elluminate.com/, which allows synchronous audio, presentation media and streaming video, the experience often leaves a feeling that something was missing.

So, how can webinars become more effective? The answer lies in learning strategies.

All too often the assumption is made that if individuals can come together in a virtual space, they will get as much from the experience as being in the same room together. However, just as meetings can be unproductive, and classrooms boring, a virtual meeting can fall flat. Weak webinars are doubly frustrating because they implicitly communicate a negative message about learning and information technologies. Such a message is doubly ironic in a time of iPhones and expanding WiFi penetration, and incessant video and text–messaging.

Here are a few ways to strengthen a weak webinar:

1. <u>Capture the Learner's Attention at the Beginning</u>. Be catchy. Connect with your audience. Engage their emotions, pique their curiosity, and appeal to their sense of self and community. By doing so, you will be creating conditions of learning (Gagne), and making it more likely that they will actually follow through and watch the entire webinar.

2. <u>Build a Cognitive Framework at the Beginning</u>. Be sure to list learning objectives and outcomes. By doing so, you are helping the learner develop schema, which can be thought of as file cabinets in working memory.

   A recent article on cognitive architectures and mobile learning describes some of the processes at work in an effective E–learning or mobile learning course.

3. <u>Encourage Interaction</u>. The sage on the stage exudes authority. Although it is a good idea to establish credibility with your program, such as the American Management Association, http://www.amanet.org/, which touts management luminaries and gurus such as Peter Drucker in its online seminars offered with a Corpedia.com learning management system, if your learners simply sit and passively watch, their recall is likely to be close to nil. Get them involved. Ask them to type in questions, use voice–over chat and videocast their images from webcams. Encouraging interaction will create conditions of learning.

4. <u>Make it Real: Connect to Audience Experience</u>. The American Marketing Association, http://www.marketingpower .com/, offers webcasts in topics that are designed to appeal

to its members. With webinars, both live and recorded, in branding, B2B, direct marketing, Internet marketing, market research, marketing return on investment, marketing strategy and more, the members are likely to find something they can relate to, and which will help them. Without an opportunity to further the connection, and to respond to questions or ideas that ask the individuals to problem–solve for their own particular needs, the audience members are likely to be bored.

5. <u>Show Me the Money: Reward the Learners</u>. Some learners are happy with the emotional "reward" that comes with interaction. For them, it is sufficient emotional affirmation and it satisfies their need for affiliation. Other learners are happy to be able to take a test or a questionnaire that "rewards" them by showing them how much knowledge they have gained. Still, other learners are motivated by certificates and other ways to show they have achieved a level of professional expertise. A good example is the exam to become a Professional Certified Marketer. Ostensibly, one can take webinars to help one prepare to take the exam, which is offered through the American Marketing Association ($100 to register, $435 to take the test—discounts available for members).

Unfortunately, though, most webinars do not establish a clear pathway between their courses and a certificate, college credit–eligible course or degree.

6. <u>Repurpose with a Purpose</u>. If you are repurposing old videos from the 60s and 70s, keep in mind that the technology, clothing and hairstyles have changed dramatically. You will need to remember that the anachronistic elements are potentially a huge distraction from the actual message. So, if you are repurposing old video or media assets, be sure to do so with a clear purpose in mind. Repeat the outcomes, the categories of knowledge, the key points and the desired outcomes. Keep the learner on track. Continue to point to the reason for the presentation or topic.

7. <u>Respect Culture and Language</u>. Your webinar may appeal to a very narrow audience, and yet you may need to show it to people from diverse cultures, languages and geographical regions. Be sure to incorporate the cultural assis-

tance you will need. Create a mediated space by including bilingual cues and guides, links to helpful dictionary or encyclopedia entries, and explanatory sidebars.

For corporations, professional associations, and organizations with a large inventory of stored "webinar events," the opportunity to strengthen them and expand their reach and impact should be cause for celebration. The "Webinar Weakness" can be overcome by using effective learning strategies.

VIDEO CLIPS IN AN ONLINE LITERATURE COURSE: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOES NOT WORK

- <u>Create Ideal Conditions for Learning by Capturing the Students' Attention</u>. Say something provocative about the work or the author. Find the heart of the issues that surround the work and focus on them in order to engage your reader.

- <u>Arouse Emotions and Curiosity</u>.

- <u>Do Not Drone on Too Long</u>. Keep it short, usually between forty–five seconds to one and a half minutes. Remember, you are engaging the learner and trying to inspire him or her to want to delve in to the text, and also to ask questions and engage in a dialogue, even a debate.

- <u>Go for Sizzle</u>. Have fresh settings, nice backgrounds, and interesting venues.

- <u>Keep it Real</u>. Students respond in a positive way to the real presence of their professor or a subject matter expert. If it is a bit rough around the edges, it comes across as authentic.

- <u>Try for the Human–Interest Angles</u>. Find an intriguing factoid about the author or the work itself and mention it. Establishing a connection with your viewer within three to five seconds is absolutely critical. In those first seconds and nanoseconds, the viewer makes the decision whether or not to pay attention, or to switch to something else. You have five seconds to get their attention. Do you like challenges?

Video Clips in an Online Literature Course: What to Avoid

Here are a few natural mistakes that will result in less–than–ideal implementation and outcome.

- <u>Do Not Focus your Eyes on the Ground or the Sky</u>. Keep your eyes on the camera. The direct eye connection makes a difference.

- <u>Avoid the "Talking Head" Approach—It does not Work</u>! Talking heads, uninteresting and unanimated heads such as those in many political talk shows that fill the screen, and drone on and on, do not engage viewers. Talking heads work on news and conversational TV programming because the people with them have already built up an audience or the subject has motivated the viewer to ignore the lack of interesting video. In the video we are discussing, they usually make learners become passive and stop paying attention, even if you think you have fancied it up with whiteboard.

- <u>Avoid the Endless Script</u>. Do not tape yourself writing on a chalkboard and trying to approximate the experience of reading. Do not try to imitate the classroom lecture, either. Students stop paying attention.

  Do not read from a script or book that you hold in your hand unless you have thoroughly learned to handle it with a flourish and use it as a dramatic prop. Actors, ministers, and others study how to wield books and papers to good effect, but it takes a lot of practice. I tried doing it without extensive preparation. It was horrible. While watching myself, I immediately felt as though I were attending a painful poetry reading in which the poet has gone on entirely too long. I just wanted out. I clicked "pause."

- <u>Do Not Recite Statistics</u>. Avoid statements that sound "canned." Biographical details and statistics may be important pieces of information, but the mind does not hang onto them. Our minds love narrative in conjunction with the moving image. Therefore, it is good to connect the moving image with a story.

These are just a few practical suggestions from an "in the trenches" point of view. While the technology has improved immensely and it has made the incorporation of video both inexpensive and easy to

use, it is clear that we are in a "rapid evolution" phase of technological development. So, keep an open mind, be willing to experiment, and keep up to date by continuously scanning the environment and trying to get the most from the available technology.

The key is to uncover the real behaviors of your students and design a use of video that builds on how they are comfortable with using the technology.

Do not try to impose an artificial behavior or awkward way of using technology. Instead, learn how it is being used, and incorporate that activity into your instructional strategies.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to try incorporating video clips in your online courses is that it is fun and effective! You will find that you are engaging students' interest, creating conditions that are ideal for learning, accommodating learner preferences and styles, rehumanizing the e–learning space, and inspiring students to delve deeply into the text—make connections, analyze in a new way, and think critically.

E–LEARNING AND CHILDHOOD DISORDERS

Childhood Obesity: Implications for the Future and E–Learning

We have all read about the current explosion in childhood obesity rates. Many blame it on fast food and hormone–laced milk, while others blame obesity on video games. There is no doubt that a sedentary lifestyle, coupled with poor eating habits, leads to more weight in children than is good for them. It can also cause problems more insidiously by introducing an unhealthy or imbalanced diet that does not necessarily manifest itself in children's weight.

According to the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics and their 2007 report, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well–Being*, http://www.childstats.gov/pubs .asp, during 2003–2004, eighteen percent of children ages six through seventeen were overweight. Black non–Hispanic girls had the highest rate, with twenty–five percent being overweight. In other groups, the rates were slightly lower. For example, sixteen

percent of young white non–Hispanic girls and seventeen percent of Mexican American girls were overweight.

What is the story behind the statistics? We live in a society of single mothers and dual income couples, who work three or four jobs just to try to keep up with fuel costs and adjustable rate mortgages. Children entertain themselves, and they consume chips, candy and soft drinks as they do so.

Social Isolation and Social Networking

The story is one of social isolation, except for the world of social networking and multiplayer role–playing games, *WoW* (*World of Warcraft*) and many others. It is a story of children becoming conditioned to feel comfortable with the Internet, computers and mobile devices such as phones, iTouch, etc.

Eating Disorders: Pro–Ana and Ana–Mia Sites

Female adolescents are under enormous pressure to maintain an appearance that conforms to the popular images of the day.

Socialization occurs via the Internet, and images of Beyonce, Rihanna, the Olsen Twins, Nicole Richie, Paris Hilton, Miley Cyrus (aka Hannah Montana) and Britney Spears (pre–breakdown), are widely circulated as the ideal of female beauty. How many of the celebrities are anorexic or bulimic? How many of the celebrities openly discuss taking classes via the Internet?

Colleges and trade schools offering online courses have their work cut out for them. While the upcoming generations of potential e–learners are familiar with the Internet, and regularly use it to communicate, share information, set up networks and shop, they are not necessarily using it to prepare themselves for a future.

Unless a few prominent celebrities champion e–learning in favor of induced vomiting and self–starvation, it is likely that more young teenage girls will try a new diet and hair style before they try a new set of YouTube videos on how to solve Algebra problems, or immerse themselves in a Second Life Japanese language–learning world or island.

Asthma and America's Youth: Twenty Percent with Asthma in Some Populations?

It is a bit shocking to look at statistics on asthma. Asthma has been rising dramatically. In fact, according to the 2007 federal report, *America's Children*, as many as twenty percent of children of Puerto Rican descent suffers from asthma.

The child who suffers from asthma is not only a special–needs child. If she does not receive ongoing medical support, she will have developmental problems and could even die.

In 2005, thirteen percent of black, non–Hispanic children under the age of eighteen were reported to have asthma, compared with eight percent of white, non–Hispanic and nine percent of Hispanic. Within the Hispanic population, there are differences, with twenty percent of Puerto Rican children and seven percent of children of Mexican origin reported to have asthma. (*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well–Being,* http://www.childstats.gov/pubs.asp)

Asthma is expensive. It will drain the resources of families with asthmatic parents or children. It also makes certain outdoor activities difficult. Long commutes and bus rides are scary for the child who suffers from asthma. Very often, parents miss work as they take their children to the emergency room. As a result, parents who can afford to often homeschool their child.

However, homeschooling is not always an option in a single–parent household, especially in a low– or middle–income situation. Nevertheless, many parents of children who suffer from asthma tend to encourage their children to spend time working on the computer, which helps develop confidence.

Young asthma sufferers, if they have the proper infrastructure and hardware such as wireless laptops, mobile devices and high–speed connection, may benefit in a disproportionately positive way from online learning.

FAMILY LITERACY:
CAN IT WORK FOR E–LEARNING?

A distance literacy program delivered via television developed in England in the 1990s focused on family literacy. The program incorporated an interactive literacy pedagogy that asked family members to get involved in literacy–building activities (Pitt, 2000). The goal was to improve the reading and writing skills of the students in the program, generally ages five through ten, as well as to find a way to have a curriculum that was constantly up–to–date and effectively created learning communities.

Television–based distance learning was an effective technique in the 1990s, but may be less so now. A more effective approach now might be to include multiple forms of access: television, books, podcasts, audio books, synchronous webinars, asynchronous online learning, etc.

1. Procedures and practices included:
    a. Separate work with parents;
    b. Separate work with children;
    c. Joint activities.

2. Underlying concepts:
    a. Situate learning by incorporating real–life context(s);
    b. Keep language and literacy instruction tied in a relevant way to actual practice in:
        1) Home and family;
        2) School and education;
        3) Workplace.
    c. Constructivist approach to learning and literacy;
    d. Bilingual, multi–cultural accommodation to foster positive; self–concept

3. <u>Family Literacy Strategies Applied to Online Learning</u>. While the program was originally delivered via television, in today's environment new learning technologies, such as online and mobile learning, make it possible to revisit this program and consider adapting it for today's students.

4. <u>Online</u>. The following applications to family learning could be employed in the following ways:

   a. Synchronous instruction via webinars and voice–over telephony;

   b. Asynchronous instruction via course website, lessons, quizzes and other activities, recorded audio and video, recorded webinars, discussions, journals and e–mail.

5. <u>Mobile</u>. Family literacy strategies could be incorporated in mobile learning in the following ways:

   a. Synchronous instruction via text–messaging, voice, instant messaging with video/audio, and responding to prompts by text–messaging to a bulletin board or blog.

   b. Asynchronous via podcasts for audio, syndicated video casts for video, reading lectures, posting to discussion board and bringing the lessons into the environment that makes the content come alive. For example, a reading assignment about algae formation in ponds could be incorporated into a visit to a pond, where the student takes photos and a journal, and records an audio file to post to a place such as a blog or a forum, where all participants have a chance to read, listen to each other's work and respond.

   c. Activities should be structured to take to the real world, with the overall purpose of asking questions, observing phenomena, describing them, reading and listening to how they are described, and map out connections between the world, the reading and one's personal experience with both.

However, before any of the "family literacy" approaches can be effectively incorporated in today's context, it is important to look at a few key cultural and social issues:

1. Redefine "family". Is it a birth family, or simply a community of interest and shared purpose?

2. How can distance learning actually help with the formation of a "family" that could be, for the purposes of education, a "learning community"?

3. Homeschool as the embodiment of family literacy. This seems to be a perfect fit.

Collaborative e–Learning and mobile learning activities include:

1. Reading Together;
2. Share articles and links to blogs;
3. Read comments;
4. Post comments;
5. Enter information in wikis;
6. Encourage social networking, especially if people are posting portfolios and photos to rehumanize the learning space.

Writing Together

Activities could focus on describing items in the world of phenomena, the world outside the textbook or the course materials, and could include journals, diaries, and logs of observations and experiences that could be shared with others.

Activities could also include how the "family" creates bonds, given that the "family" could simply be a learning community, and could include a family diary, an exploration of relationships and a gradual evolution of a mission, vision and overarching sense of purpose.

Listening

Comprehension is more than simply understanding the literal meaning of the words. If the context is taken into consideration, other items, such as cultural meanings and values, will enter. Cultural literacy is as much a part of this as regular "reading and writing" literacy.

Assessment

Outcome expectations are clearly stated. Students have the opportunity to rewrite, regroup, revise and resubmit.

Conclusion

Specific programs in reading, writing and communication could lend themselves to such programs as:

1. Reading
2. Writing
3. Listening (comprehension) and speech (communication)
4. Performance (assessment and evaluation)

Aspects with positive implications for today's contexts and challenges:

1. Cross–lingual (Urdu and English in the original program in England; other languages are applicable now)
2. Requires time and involvement with parents or "family", whether virtual or real

There are presuppositions in the original program that may need adjusting. For example, the notion that everyone has a television and that they are used to watching programming that comes on at a certain time is not really the typical mode of operation in today's just–in–time and on–demand, 24/7 access world. Furthermore, it is a stretch to expect everyone to have a television or computer. It may be more appropriate to make the content available in multiple modes, such as asynchronous e–learning, downloadable content to mobile devices, Smartphone, CD–ROM/DVD, etc.

Moreover, the presupposition that "family" learning must incorporate the birth family, and particularly the concept of children in a "family" all sharing the same two parents, is perhaps a bit narrow for today's times, where homeschooling occurs with individuals from multiple households, etc. What must be present is a cultural–appropriate, cross–cultural set of motivations and motivational strategies, as well as a deep–seated desire to work in a collaborative environment.

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YOUNGER E–LEARNERS: VIRTUAL HIGH SCHOOL, ADVANCED PLACEMENT, AND COURSES FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

Adult e–learners lead by example. Their sons and daughters see them managing their time and resources in order to study online, and they witness them making progress toward life goals and a better life. Now, in a growing number of states, e–learning is available for students of all ages, including students wishing to take advanced placement, honors or enriched courses at the K–12 level. These courses are ideal for those who may not have access to certain courses, library resources or assessments.

It is a perfect situation: the home with adult e–learners is likely to have a high–speed Internet connection, appropriate computers, and a supportive environment, which becomes a family learning community. Savvy and seasoned e–learners can mentor and coach the newbies, which creates a sense of interdependence as well as a feeling of shared interests and goals.

Virtual High School, www.govhs.org, offers courses and encourages state departments of education to collaborate with them to have access to advanced placement and other general education or standards–based courses:

> Founded in 1996, Virtual High School is the pioneer of online course design and instruction for teachers and online education for high school students. The companies' rigorous and real–world simulated model of online education is a supplement to traditional, high school course offerings, which provides for skill enhancement for both students and teachers. Customers include over six thousand enrolled students, two hundred sixty eight member schools and one hundred fifty two teachers in twenty–

nine states and twenty–four countries. (Information from Virtual High School press release).

Courses are taught by qualified instructors who live throughout the U.S. Virtual High School, and core offerings are NCAA Accredited. There is an initiative to reach out to international students, and the Virtual High School is involved in the piloting of the International Baccalaureate (IB) standard level economics course.

Schools can offer Virtual High School courses to their students, or individual students may sign up. It is not clear what the tuition is. However, information for individual students can be obtained by contacting Educere, VHS education partner, which is handling all registration and inquiries for individual enrollment at 866–433–8237, ext. 6, or kswinehart@educere.net.

In addition, the Virtual High School offers courses for gifted and talented students in middle schools, and it offers enrichment courses for high school. One core element of the program is advanced placement courses, which are particularly valuable for students who attend schools that lack the resources for advanced placement courses.

VHS uses Blackboard as their learning management system, and the text and course materials, including media, are accessed within the course itself. Two demos are available at AP Environmental Science and Cultural Identity through Literature. The link to the demos is http://www.govhs.org/Pages/Academics–DemoCourses.

One downside to the course seems to be the absence of a tra-ditional textbook. While it is convenient to have the materials online, it seems to be very tedious to have to click through every screen for course content. There is nowhere one can print out a full text or booklet.

Individual states have followed the example of Virtual High School and are offering virtual courses as well.

Here is a brief listing:

Florida Virtual School

Well–respected for the courses they offer, and their willingness to partnership within the U.S. and internationally, the Florida Virtual School offers all the standard AP courses, as well as others not

usually seen, including driver's education. The course management system seems to be a proprietary one, which is clear and easy to navigate. The link to the demos is http://www.flvs.net/products _services/p_s_course_demos.php.

The courses appear to have all the course content online as well. The look and feel is much like a CD–ROM course, except for the interactivity via discussion board and assessments. http://www .flvs.net/

Louisiana

The Louisiana Department of Education, in partnership with The Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts, provides Louisiana high school students access to standards–based high school courses delivered by Louisiana teachers through The Louisiana Virtual School. Students in LVS courses utilize the web, e–mail, and other online and offline resources to complete a rich course of study in a wide array of courses, which include math, writing, reading, languages, science and more.

The LVS affords schools the opportunity to expand learning opportunities to students through courses that would not otherwise be available to them. The 2007–2008 school year marks the beginning of the eighth year of program implementation for the Louisiana Virtual School. Most LVS courses are offered as full year courses following a traditional time schedule. However, some courses are offered as full–credit block courses or half–credit semester courses. http://www.lsmsa.edu/.

Missouri Virtual School

The Missouri Virtual School (MVS) at Missouri State University (MSU) in Springfield, Missouri provides high school courses in foreign languages, French and Spanish, and English, history, math-ematics and science instruction to students statewide as part of Missouri State University's statewide public outreach mission. For the 2006–2007 academic year, there are six hundred students in fifty school districts across Missouri taking classes. To deliver the courses, MVS employs six full–time and eleven part–time teachers, five student assistants and one full–time administrative assistant. http://mvs.missouristate.edu/.

Virtual Virginia and the Virtual Advanced Placement School

Virtual Virginia offers AP courses to students who are part of a participating Virginia school. http://www.virtualvirginia.org/.

Virtual Virginia offers a wide array of online courses, as well as satellite courses for some language courses, such as Japanese.

CHAPTER 7

CULTURES, CONTEXTS, READINGS

HIT TELEVISION SERIES AND E–LEARNING: *NUMB3RS* AND *MENTOS*

What happens when you couple a YouTube sensation with actual scientific information that helps us better understand the physical world around us? What you have is a fantastic learning opportunity, and a chance to change people's lives as they develop a thirst for knowledge and a willingness to take a hands–on, participatory approach. Television programs such as *Numb3rs* (http://www.cbs.com/primetime/numb3rs/) and *Bones* (http://www.fox.com/bones/) make math and forensic anthropology suddenly amazingly revelatory. They give people a new way to see the world. Specialists in these disciplines may argue about problems ranging from different schools of thought and methodology within the area of study, and with simplifications necessary for brief presentation, but it is difficult to argue against the increased interest, respect and possibilities for the funding of arcane and difficult forms of research that such programming introduces.

It is not just about watching all the series on television, though. It is also about how good television and instructional design brings together current events and issues that people really care about, and then relate them to a story. They build a narrative of explanation and engagement.

Here is an example. Do you remember the summer of 2006 *Diet Coke* and *Mentos* craze? I remember jogging on a sidewalk bordering a par three golf course near my home. It was littered with *Mentos* wrappers and two–liter *Diet Coke* bottles. At first, I did

not know what it was about. Then I realized it was all about playing the cool mad scientist, creating exciting explosions.

What was the cause? Perhaps you remember seeing the YouTube sensation EepyBird.com, Entertainment for the Curious Mind, "Experiment #137." A wild experiment using two hundred liters of *Diet Coke* and countless *Mentos* to create an intricate choreography of effervescing fountains, which was billed as a mini–Bellagio. The spectacular bursts of foam and liquid were accompanied by wonderfully retro techno, reminding one of Thomas Dolby's "She Blinded Me With Science" or Kraftwerk's "We Are the Robots". The video was posted and reposted on YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKoB0MHVBvM, and embedded in websites and e–mails throughout the world.

EepyBird.com's next production was a euphorically successful domino effect, "Experiment #214".

Hosted by Google video, almost five million viewers have logged in to see how 251 bottles of *Diet Coke* and 1,506 boxes of *Mentos* create explosions of liquid, not fire. It is refreshing to see this rather than fireworks. http://eepybird.com/exp214.html

Yet, if one watches the videos alone, it is somehow unsatisfying. What is missing? It is the explanation. They never say HOW or WHY the reactions happen.

The answers came one night in an unexpected way. The boxed set of DVDs I had ordered arrived. I was watching Season Two of *Numb3rs* when the characters in the series re–enacted the *Mentos* and *Diet Coke* experiment for an Applied Math course, and accompanied the explosions with an explanation. The answer involves surface tension. There is extreme change upon the sudden introduction of a highly irregularly micro–pitted gum Arabic and gelatin disc into a liquid under pressure, due to the carbonation, where the only way for gas to escape is through a narrow neck after the contact of the two creates a rapid phase change. The way the surface tension changes is explained here. An alternative explanation is provided by AeonFlux, http://www.aeonflux.com/, that a person we can relate to. AeonFlux characters tend to be projections of fantasies and alter egos. On the other hand, human beings with human frailties make you feel as though the knowledge they are imparting is achievable, as are their skills.

- <u>The Story</u>. The mind makes meaning by means of stories. Predictable narratives, events, cognitive signposts and archetypes all help you remember just how the math worked and why.

- <u>Cause–Effect</u>. The science experiment and the math equation do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, they reside within a causal chain where one allows the viewer, or the online learner, to insert the equation in an analogous situation. For example, in one of the episodes of *Numb3rs*, Charlie proposes that certain acts of violence set off chains and exhibit flock behavior. While there may not be anything too revolutionary in the idea of murders and retribution, the methodology used to analyze the events and the victims lead to being able to pinpoint the individual responsible for triggering chains and long series of retribution killings.

  The causal chain also helps put order into chaos and helps us understand our often inexplicable world.

- <u>Instructional Design Idea</u>. If you want to get the message across about a causal chain, one way to do it would be to have a high–impact introduction. It could be a series of giant dominoes toppling toward you. You see them coming. You see the math equation being written on a wall or etched into the air next to you. You jump out of the way, just in time.

- <u>Math Keeps Us Safe</u>. Patterns protect us. We see this every time there is a severe weather alert. Doppler radar, wind sheer measures, etc. all form patterns. Although we may not understand the complex mathematical expressions, the differential equations, the probability and statistics, we do understand the basic expression of it. We understand that our ability to survive often hinges on our ability to detect, explain and model patterns. Patterns often have predictive ability, which helps us immensely.

  Math makes us feel secure.

- <u>High Impact E–learning Intro</u>. Flash image of a threat—an approaching tornado? Numbers and equations could spin out from the vortex. A storm spotter enters a number in a computer and makes a phone call. Flash of light and the tornado transforms into a rainbow.

- <u>Humor</u>. Math can be used to predict behavior, and to map affinities. Think of the claims of Match.com, http://www.match.com/, and e–Harmony.com, http://www.eharmony.com/.

- <u>An Attainable Paradise</u>. *Numb3rs* takes place in an FBI office, at crime scenes, at a cool shambling craftsman house and a nicely manicured college. The college and the Epps home are refuges in a tough world. This is where the love is. It is where the math takes place.

- <u>Partnering with Technology</u>. Texas Instruments has partnered with CBS and developed a website that ties with *Numb3rs* introduction, "We all use math every day." Located at http://www.weallusematheveryday.com/, the site includes a wonderful repository of activities that tie together with the episodes.

  One example is a worksheet to help students learn how to apply math to flock behavior, which corresponds to an episode dealing with a change of gang leadership.

The *We All Use Math Every Day™* series is just one part of TI's educational materials offerings.

One of the most appealing underlying messages of *Numb3rs* is that the creativity you have is what makes you special and desirable. E–learning techniques, both online and through mobile devices, that engage the reader and uses techniques from television series and YouTube phenomena to teach math, are not just teaching a subject; they are making math and science exciting. At the same time, these approaches are teaching and modeling how to be successful, and to connect life and learning in an increasingly confusing world.

LEARNING WITH AUDIO: LESSONS FROM TELEVISION— *HOUSE MD, MONK, NCIS AND SCRUBS*

Borrowing the "in media res" techniques of popular programs, *Monk*, *House MD* and *NCIS*, among others, can help make online and untethered mobile learning more effective. In the early days of

e–learning, it was common to tape a classroom lecture, digitize it and then stream it over the web for students to view. Sometimes it was synchronous, and one had the opportunity to use a whiteboard and text message. That approach was quickly discredited as passive. To solve the problem, designers started adding overlays of learning objectives and outcomes, along with review questions at the end.

Television technique: switch to "in medias res." Literally meaning "in the middle of the thing," this technique is employed in almost all programs designed for television, as well as a significant percentage of feature–length films. It is a familiar technique: the viewer is catapulted immediately right into the middle of the action, usually a dramatic pivotal moment upon which the rest of the plot is constructed. For example, in *NCIS* (*Naval Criminal Investigative Services*) a spin–off of *JAG*, the episode opens with a two– or three–minute dramatic situation, usually resulting in a murder. The investigation of the murder is what constitutes the rest of the episode.

House

Similarly, in *House MD*, the episodes open with a medical crisis, which takes one by surprise. We see a person going about their daily life, when a catastrophic medical emergency besets them. The medical condition is life–threatening, and time is of the essence. Will the team of forensic diagnosticians be able to determine the cause before the patient dies? This adds to the urgency, as well as the emotional involvement of the viewer.

In rhetorical terms, what is activated is emotional involvement, "pathos," to use Aristotelian terms. The situation engages the emotions, and the viewer is held, rapt, in a state of hyper–involvement and hyper–identification with the victim, and the race against time.

Typically, authority is invoked in the persona of a "difficult" voice. In this case, "difficult" means that there is distance between the audience, listeners and the voice. Distance is created through formality, power differentials, subject–matter knowledge gaps, intimidation such as shaming or threatening harm, and refusal to be admitted to an "in" group.

The danger with this approach is that authority is off–putting, which can war against learning. Sometimes the most off–putting authority comes in the characters of "the professor" or the "scolding parent." The content delivered by the authoritative voice can be more accessible when it comes packaged in a character who begins to approach that of a tragic hero, which is to say that the protagonist hero is flawed, which makes the audience identify with him or her all the more.

To be effective, authority must be mediated with human frailty.

Gregory House, M.D., of *House MD*, is a brilliant diagnostician, but suffers from chronic pain due to a nerve–damaged leg, and has become addicted to painkillers.

Monk

Adrian Monk, of *Monk*, is a brilliant detective who can hold forth on a number of technical areas, but he never bores the audience. Instead, they feel for him, they cheer him on as he seeks to overcome his Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder and his grief over the loss of his wife, Trudy. In both series, the stories of House and Monk unfold over many episodes but enhance, rather than get in the way of, the story line in specific episode. House's battle with himself, however, is probably a more familiar situation to a larger number of viewers. Monk's problems with Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder depend on lack of familiarity with the condition, and the comic relief it provides to exceedingly compact and intense stories come at a cost to OCD sufferers. This is not the case with House's anti–authoritarian wise cracks, disregard for practices and courtesies, which have become deeply ingrained. Despite the prominence of the title characters in both series, the rich and pungent development of regularly appearing additional characters gives greater depth to the long–arc stories, as well as those unique to each episode.

NCIS

Likewise, the team of agents and investigators of *NCIS* are brilliant, but quirky. In fact, the concept of professorial lectures is lampooned by Special Agent Jethro Gibbs, who typically cuts off the endearing yet long–winded medical examiner, Dr. "Ducky" Mallard, and asks him to keep to what is relevant. The other technical

experts in the team fare no better. Abby, brilliant in all manner of forensics, computer and biological, loves the long–winded technical explanation, which is also often cut off abruptly, with the question, "How does this relate?" stated in so many words. Special Agent McGee, an MIT graduate and computer whiz, is also cut off. As an audience, we gain knowledge by seeing the theories in action, applied to the case.

In *NCIS*, technical details, analogues and personal anecdotal asides are permitted, but only to the degree that they contribute to an understanding of the case at hand. What this means, in some terms, is that we are looking at "situated learning" in action.

In the case of *House MD*, the fact is clear that we are observing an open critique of education, and a subversion of the typical classroom lecture, filled with professorial quirks, long–winded digressions, asides and self–serving ego inflation, all in front of a captive audience.

The action takes place at Princeton Medical Center, a teaching hospital, and many of the episodes incorporate scenes from the lecture hall where medical students regurgitate concepts they have memorized from their texts, and demonstrate that they have no idea how the concepts apply in real life.

Scrubs

Similarly, in the comedy series, *Scrubs*, hazing of the "newbies" often centers around the gap between "textbook" knowledge and situated, operational knowledge. The amount of information that is presented in a television drama, crime procedural or sitcom can be quite surprising. It is not trivia, but is situated in a real–life or life–like setting, which makes understanding, retention and application more effective.

In a world where distance learners are likely to be very film and television literate, it is probable that they also feel a deep–seated disdain for subject matter authority that is dislocated from its objective correlative, and for the way the subject exists in the world of phenomena.

What this means to all the programs seeking to repurpose old–school lectures delivered by rambling, self–absorbed professors who managed to tape themselves at a chalkboard for thirty or forty

hours, is that every dime they invest in digitizing those old assets will be utterly wasted.

The charismatic professor of the past ruled through a cult of personality, and he or she elicited all the emotions that one might expect of the leader of, say, a cult or a gang of grifters.

The charismatic professor of the untethered world of mobile learning reigns supreme by encouraging extreme identification by imbuing authority with anti–hero or tragic hero elements. If not, the dehumanizing aspects of technology will prevail, and students will simply move on to educational interactions they find more engaging.

To conclude, a few ideas and suggestions can be made, and lessons can be learned from the failures of educational programs to interest the learners. In a pragmatic sense, what this means is the following:

1. Structure audio and video in a way that dramatically captures the imagination and reflects the very heart of the concept being presented in the module or unit. One effective approach is the "in medias res" approach.

2. Find a person who will be your subject matter expert, and make him or her deeply flawed. The flawed authority figure does not need to be morally reprehensible. Quite the contrary. He or she should have flaws that are more exaggerated than those of the general public, but only to the degree that the audience finds the character to be very human, engaging and ultimately disarming.

3. Consider moving subject matter authority around. For example, if one is discussing psychological disorders, instead of focusing on a professor who will discuss facts and figures, write a script that features a person who is suffering from one of the issues under discussion. She can discuss her condition, and compare and contrast her situation with that of others. This allows the listeners to begin to relate to it, and to connect her situation to their own. It situates the material within a real person's experience.

Emerson, Whitman: Leaders for Our Times?

They may be unlikely leaders for our times, nineteenth–century American Transcendentalists, whose work has been read so often that it might even seem threadbare and tired. Nevertheless, when viewed as leadership texts, the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman seems almost shockingly insightful, vibrantly alive and anchored in a disturbing conundrum—boundlessness vs. respect for boundaries. What could be more appropriate for our globalized times and consciousness.

The first time I read Emerson's essay, *Circles*, I was captivated by the expansiveness of his vision. A mental exercise encouraged one to strive to make connections with other people, and to operate under the assumption that we are all connected in some deep, spiritual way.

Later, I started to think that his sense that conversations are circles, overlapping and touching on each other, seemed patriarchal in a very negative way. It felt like engulfment. In certain ways, it seemed to reinforce concepts of Manifest Destiny. After all, whose conversations engulfed whom? White males with power, money and the right to vote.

Nevertheless, there is something about the Transcendentalists of the nineteenth century that resonates with the globalization, and fears of engulfment or isolation, that we wrestle with today. We may even question whether the interconnections and advances of the Western World would have occurred without the impulses and concepts these men so eloquently and differently expressed. Of course, our perspectives have changed and when we look at westward expansion and Manifest Destiny, we have to look at the American expansion as fraught with unfortunate steps and achieving results of mixed benefit and failure. Certainly some profited, but others paid a very steep price. The trajectory, after all, included slavery and genocide of indigenous peoples, among the tragedies that few would see as beneficial today.

At the same time, the idea of new frontiers and possibilities can be translated to today's times. All we have to do is look at the announcement of the new iPhone, or new developments in com-

munications technology and the Internet, to feel the same sense of boundlessness, liberation and possibilities. Today's boundlessness, unity and transcendentalism tend to express themselves through technology.

Granted, the nineteenth–century Transcendentalists may not seem like technology gurus or change agents for today, but their ideas are well attuned to current leadership challenges. Below are a few areas.

Change Leadership

Change means forcing yourself out of a comfort zone. It means learning how to adapt. It also means learning how to identify where it is that you want to go, and to maintain an inner calm when the unexpected happens.

> Everything looks permanent until its secret is known.
> Emerson, *Circles*

A true leader shows us how to negotiate our comfort zones smoothly. We should not reject the concept of a comfort zone; after all, we are talking about a necessary survival zone too. At the same time, we need to be sheltered and guided as we travel down unfamiliar paths. A leader is a mentor, a guide, a kind–hearted believer in human creativity and adaptability.

What are the secrets we seek? The surface may be smooth, but underneath are deep currents that portend change. Life force is not housed on the surface, but flows in the dark, unknown waters underneath. Leaders and leadership are in those dark–flowing waters.

Focus on Constant Renewal and Growth

The effective leader knows how to nurture. She knows how to inspire growth. However, instead of a series of lightning bolts of inspiration, what Emerson describes is a process, and the individual stays constantly in motion.

> We grizzle every day. I see no need of it.
> Emerson. *Circles*

What did Emerson mean? How can we slow the march of time? He was writing long before Botox and laser surgery. How do we "grizzle every day?"

I grizzle when I give up. I grizzle when I cynically dismiss someone's ideas, or refuse to accept a new viewpoint. I "ungrizzle," or "degrizzle, " when I look at things in a fresh, new way. I embrace change, I welcome frustration and I forgive myself for not being "perfect." As I forgive myself for my imperfections, I learn to forgive others. . . . That is the beauty of it.

Inclusiveness

In Whitman's universe, we are connected. Our spirits, souls and writing on this mortal coil are never undetected by others. What we do affects others. What others do affects us.

I sing the body electric,
The armies of those I love engirth me
     and I engirth them,
They will not let me off till I go with them,
     respond to them,
And discorrupt them, and charge them
     full with the charge of the soul.
          Walt Whitman, *I Sing the Body Electric*

The idea of interpenetrating essences can sound like the ultimate in inclusiveness or, alternatively, it can seem overwhelmingly invasive. I think it is a matter of degree. Think of how you connect with others. What makes you relate to another person in a nonjudgmental way? The key is to connect to your own sense of a higher self.

Granted, it is easier if you are the person in the situation of privilege and power.

Vision–Based Leadership

Both Emerson and Whitman wrote in highly visual, metaphorical ways. Of course, we would expect Whitman to create a vision.

After all, he was a poet. The vision has to do with the humanity, and ultimate outcomes.

The successful leader is able to communicate a vision that can be shared by those who hear it. It must resonate with their values and they must see that the vision is, in some way, transformative.

The transformation is not something imposed by the leader, but offered up as a way to unlock one's innate potential. Emerson based his essay style on conversation with highly educated and dedicated peers, and on the preaching style of small, elite churches, such as those in which he acted as minister in his early career, and on the oratory of his later public speaking. Whitman's verse forms came from seemingly unlikely, but tried–and–true sources, ranging from the parallel cadences of the *King James Bible* to the epic catalogues of Homer to the grandeur of the operas he attended eagerly. At their best, both writers knew how to invite their audiences to join them in an adventure, whether through respectful but intimate personal speech or an enthusiasm so sincere and so untainted it could relieve weariness and charge the listener with a similar zeal.

Two other dimensions of their world views relate them to our time, and separate them from us, while forming bonds between them. American Democracy is something they did not take for granted, saw as something still new and, at defining points in their lives, in crisis. Emerson spent a good deal of his life in Concord, Massachusetts, where witnesses had watched some of the troops in the first set of skirmishes of the Revolution from a second floor window. It is important to note that his courtesy to the reader comes through in the most strident Abolitionist articles he wrote in the lead–up to the Civil War. For Whitman, the Revolution itself was still in progress on a personal level. He served as a paramedic in the Civil War. After the war, Whitman spent much of his leisure time visiting veterans until his failing health, possibly made worse by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from his own war experience, kept him at home. Although gender equality was important to him before the war, with the end to legal slavery he became a stronger advocate of women's issues. He saw both the abolition of slavery and women's rights as continuations of the ongoing American Revolution he so fervently believed in and enthusiastically extolled.

In a technological–historical shift, similar to the one that brings forth the book you are now reading, the materials and technology for a major shift in publishing lies behind the work of both. The wild expansion of print was a kind of "transcendentalism" binding large numbers of people unknown to each other in ways they did not perceive. Paper made from inexpensive wood pulp had made mass distribution newspapers possible, and books were being printed in larger numbers because of this and other changes in print and distribution technology. Newspapers spurred the development of both high–speed presses and standardized spelling. Steam power not only drove presses, it also helped in the distribution of print by boat and locomotive.

Economically comfortable, Emerson could buy and read virtually all the important books published in the languages he could read during his day, and felt quite comfortable discussing and ranging through an explosion of data such as the world had never seen. Though unable to afford such a private library, Whitman could see how much the print revolution could stimulate education and make intelligent democracy possible, and he could imagine writing poetry literally for everyone.

Setting some of the type himself on his first edition of poems, and thus foreshadowing the alternative press that keeps poetry in print today, he could imagine a new freedom of poetry from class barriers. Working as a journalist for many years, Whitman took advantage of the technology that gave a writer for a large audience a means of making a living. Emerson used his skills as a journalist and an editor to promote his beliefs on a scale undreamed of before his time. Whitman claimed that poetry was created not simply by great poets but by great audiences.

In a time, like our own, when many feared the effects of expansion of uncontrolled communication, part of Whitman's vision was of a great, lasting, democratic audience. At the same time, it is important to note that he was disgusted by the pornographic and violent publications of his day, and did not see the expansion of media without duly taking into account its dark corners.

Despite their differences as writers, and the disparate public images they projected, it seems important to point out that Emerson was one of the first elite backers of Whitman from the beginning of his career, and that Whitman never lost his appreciation of Emerson.

Some critics have seen in Whitman the embodiment of what Emerson was looking for in his essay, *The Poet*. Privately, Emerson wrangled and pleaded with Whitman to purge sexuality from his verse. Whitman listened courteously, but did not follow Emerson's advice. Their ability to see their common grounds as more important than divergences suggests a basic leadership trait that cannot be overemphasized.

Respect for the Fundamental Humanity of All People

Perhaps what moves me most of all when I read Whitman is the abiding respect for humanity and diversity.

It immediately resonates with an inclusive notion of religious experience, an altered state and trance–like ecstatic union, with purity and omnipotence.

Perhaps the religious overtones are what may make people feel a bit uncomfortable in employing Whitman in the service of leadership text. For this reason, people may prefer to stick with the old pragmatists; Franklin, Lincoln and Machiavelli. Perhaps there is a place for the ecstatic altered state, irrational and passionate, in leadership.

What some might say is that we are seeing a component of the charismatic leader. Perhaps that is true. Perhaps it is also true we are seeing that you cannot overlook the power of emotion to motivate people to care and to believe.

Authentic Leadership
Empathy Coupled with Experience

I hear "surprise" and I cringe. I have experienced too many painful surprises. How quickly I forget the pleasant surprises! I spend much too much time creating the thickest, most impenetrable armor possible. In protecting myself, I cut myself off from being able to recognize the small beauties, the lovely and unexpected surprises, the "life gifts" that greet me every day, if only I would open my eyes.

> Life is a series of surprises.
> Emerson, *Circles*

Authentic leadership rests on the ability to "see." In this case, seeing has to do with being able to recognize what other people are doing, experiencing and expressing. The authentic leader can empathize with a person because he or she has been through the same thing, and they recognize that shared point of contact. They also are willing to tell their stories, relay tales of success, failure and self–overcoming.

Both Emerson and Whitman exhort us to reach within ourselves, find the points of emotional and experiential contact, and open our hearts, our minds and ourselves. We are encouraged to learn how to care about our fellow traveler on this planet. This is valuable for the leader, who must be willing to become vulnerable in order to be able to guide others through their challenges and hard times.

Unlikely Leaders

Yes, Whitman and Emerson may seem unlikely leaders. Similarly, poetry and moldering nineteenth–century transcendental essays seem to be unlikely leadership texts. I would like to suggest, however, that they might actually be the most powerful texts because they touch a side of life and consciousness that typical leadership readings rarely address. I am not saying we should get rid of organizational behavior, developmental psychology, motivation, cognitive psychology, sociology, military history and other approaches to leadership. Instead, I would simply like us to remind ourselves of the efficacy of the humanities in dealing with leaders and leadership.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love
If you want me again look for me under your boot soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fiber your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged
Missing me one place, search another,
I stop somewhere, waiting for you.

Walt Whitman

Whitman and Emerson are everywhere among us now. In our mixed race schools, in the fact that a woman would be able to write this book with large passages devoted to women's issues, to the very Internet we use in our classes. In addition to their un-acknowledged permeation of our lives, we would do well to seek their council directly and consciously.

ANALYZING TELEVISION AND FILM IN E–LEARNING

In 2004, two television series, *Joan of Arcadia* and *Wonderfalls*, both of which were critically acclaimed but fairly quickly cancelled despite fervent fan bases, featured young, underachieving "slacker" females who started to receive messages from a higher power, through both human and inanimate messengers. Both series address issues that e–learners are likely to find thought–provoking, and provide excellent opportunities for discussion, collaboration and highly situated learning.

In *Joan of Arcadia*, protagonist Joan Girardi, a sixteen–year–old C–average high school sophomore at Arcadia High School, reluc-tantly comes to believe that the individuals she happens to encoun-ter in her daily life are actually God. The way they appear to her is disconcerting. God takes human form as a little girl wearing mis-matched outfits, a gruff elderly dog walker, a high school mainte-nance man, a punk high school student with piercings and safety pins in his lips, and many other individuals one might meet in a medium–sized city. Individuals watching Joan will most likely understand her plight. She is being asked to join activities and do things that not only push her out of her comfort zone, they make her confront unresolved issues and anxieties the she has denied and/or repressed.

In *Wonderfalls*, Jaye Tyler, a Brown University graduate with a degree in philosophy, to the dismay of her over–achieving family, decides to work as a clerk at a gift shop at Niagara Falls and live in a down–at–the–heels trailer park. The voices do not purport to be God, but they still give her divine instructions. Jaye's divine edicts are delivered to her by inanimate objects, all with a face, that suddenly start to bark cryptic orders at her. They range from a taxi-

dermies trout on the wall of a Niagara Falls bar, a malformed wax lion, a chameleon puppet, plush animal souvenirs of Niagara Falls, to the carved head at the top of a wooden totem pole outside a gas station.

At the beginning of both series, both Jaye and Joan are quintessential slackers. They resist attachment or involvement in the lives of their family and community. Furthermore, neither Jaye nor Joan is religious, nor do they have religious leanings, although Jaye's brother is working on his doctorate in comparative religion and Joan's mother is immersing herself in Catholicism. Nevertheless, somewhere within a nihilistic consumer culture in a kitschy tourist destination like Niagara Falls where Native American myths and heritage have been commercialized, or a decaying, ethically empty American city like Joan's Arcadia, voices appear and ask the young women to resist the constructivist pressures of their environments, and to replace emptiness and passivity with activity.

For Jaye Tyler, each action comes with a series of ethical dilemmas. Most have an absurd element, but most do have a core dilemma that most people can relate to. Each episode provides students an opportunity to discuss causal relationships and the limits of agency. Furthermore, students can discuss how much self–determination or control individuals really possess.

Both *Joan of Arcadia* and *Wonderfalls* reflect contemporary culture's anxieties about imparted wisdom, and they question the assumptions that are embedded in the skepticism that characterizes an existentialist legacy. Yet, Gen Y lives and operates in a world where there is enormous tension between observable, Newtonian views of reality and seemingly irrational quantum world of unpredictable possibility. The generation is comfortable with believing in processes they can neither see nor understand. In *Joan of Arcadia*, Joan's younger brother, Luke, is an honor student whose interest in science and physics gravitates him toward string theory, quantum mechanics and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which he describes in almost every episode. With a degree in philosophy, Jaye Tyler is comfortable with multiple explanations for reality, although she does worry about her sanity when the wax lion speaks to her.

Further, Gen Y and the "millennial generation" are of special concern because they seem to be two generations that embody the digital divide. While other generations have learned to navigate a world with rapid technological change, they are not "digital natives" like Gen Y and the "millennial generation. " Are "digital natives" truly different? If one believes in environment pressure and adaptive speciation, there is cause for concern.

Rather than relying on the latest handheld device, powerful computer or wireless gadget, both Jaye and Joan tend to find their messages in people or "things with faces." As a result, one might conclude that the digital natives may be skeptical of digital information, knowing that everything digital can be manipulated, while people and stuffed animals possess more authenticity.

The film techniques used in creating the animations in *Wonderfalls*, and the mise–en–scene used in *Joan of Arcadia*, gives students the opportunity to discuss cinematically represented connectedness and interdependencies within families and communities.

The two series also reflect a certain view of Gen Y's response to a context that includes both religious fundamentalism and New Age spiritual eclecticism. As platforms for re–examining determinism, free will, ethical dilemmas and other philosophical issues through often quirky, touching Gen Y lenses, they provide a fascinating opportunity to examine how kitsch and popular culture are deployed to impose a sense of mission and purpose upon two nervous, intimacy–averse, Gen Y slacker girls.

CARLOS BULOSAN E–LEARNING GUIDE: A DIFFICULT AMERICAN DREAM

I sometimes wonder if we are running the risk of forgetting how similar the stories of those who came to the U.S. in the early years of the twentieth century are to many of today's immigrants. We like to think that arriving in the U.S. means instant American Dream, but for many, it is a life of fear, secrecy, discrimination and low–wage work.

One writer whose story is often overlooked, is that of Carlos Bulosan (1911?–1956), who came to the United States from the Philippines. A dedicated reader, Bulosan completed a book a day. He translated his passion for the written word into poetry and prose.

Perhaps his most celebrated work is his memoir, *America is in the Heart*, published in 1946, which details his experiences of work, love and life in California. Bulosan is the outsider's outsider who does not feel a sense of belonging, even within certain ethnic subgroups. No matter how much he may yearn for his family and his home country, Bulosan cannot return to the Philippines, due to violence and threats to his personal safety. Yet, America has not been the safe, comfortable dream he had hoped for. Instead, his experience of America is that of a series of menial jobs, short–term friendships, jail, marginalization and economic insecurity.

Bulosan describes his mindset during the first years of life in the U.S. as one of confusion and defiance. He feels himself to be voiceless and powerless, and the world around him refuses to acknowledge his viewpoint. He dislikes the labels society has put in place and, in one instance while he is working at a restaurant in Buellton, California, he reacts, "When a Filipino and a white woman came to the restaurant to eat and were refused, I flung my apron away and attacked the headwaiter with my fists." (Excerpt, *America is in the Heart*).

He was fired. No one bothered to ask, however, why he erupted in anger. Some of the history of Filipinos in the U.S. can be found at an online exhibit for Carlos Bulosan.

Bulosan writes to inform readers of the experiences of Filipino immigrants, and the sadness that accompanies a longing for home. Bulosan believes he has a common bond with other immigrants. He describes a conversation with a French immigrant who became sad upon hearing the wind through peach trees because it reminded him of the sounds of his native Normandy. There are life lessons to be learned in this. One of the most compelling is that bonds are remarkably difficult to forge once one considers oneself ostracized or outgrouped.

Yet, it is precisely the sense of longing, nostalgia, loneliness and the seeming randomness of one's own existence that unites individuals. Bulosan speaks to the fact that individuals can find kindred spirits and thus bond in that way.

Short Answer Questions: Carlos Bulosan

1. How did the author's environment affect his mindset?

2. What community has the author identified himself with, and how?

3. How did the author's ethnic background influence his mindset?

4. Why did the author continue to work at trying to rehabilitate his brother when he admits that he felt that it was futile?

5. Explain the stereotyping that accompanied the author's brother and the effect on both his brother's and his own life.

6. Although Carlos seemed to have a sense of loyalty to his brother, Amado did not seem to share the same sense of loyalty. How did Amado's sense of connection with a particular group or community effect where his loyalties lied?

7. Why would a man who came to America to make his fortune and apparently succeeded, advise Carlos to go back home?

8. Why would the author not take the man's advice and go home even when he was continuously discriminated against in the US?

9. List all of the ways in which the author and others of his same ethnicity were discriminated against in this reading.

RECONSIDERING MAXINE HONG KINGSTON'S *WHITE TIGERS*

Maxine Hong Kingston's narrative is built on a paradox. On the one hand, historically speaking, in the community she was born in, girl children were considered worse than useless, they were con-

sidered a burden. On the other hand, that same Chinese culture she chose to identify with has a long tradition of myth and "tell–story," as her mother put it, about brave, valuable and valued women. The "tell–story" is a narrative of survival and functioned in powerful, and often unexpected ways, in the life that Kingston relates to us in what appears to be a memoir, but is quite definitely something else upon close examination.

In Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, she tells the story of growing up Chinese–American in Stockton, California. While it is written in first person, giving the narrative the impression of being a memoir or autobiography, the reality is that Kingston's writing defies easy classification. With the stories of ghosts and the meta–narratives derived from the "tell–stories" of her mother, a doctor and midwife, Kingston blends autobiography, folktale, mystical narrative and experimental fiction. Not strictly a postmodernist excursion, nor an exploration of psychological realism, the *Woman Warrior* contains elements of both. It may be instructive to compare *The Woman Warrior* with Kingston's somewhat later *China Men*, one of whose subtexts is the classic Chinese need to redress imbalances in the dynamics of the masculine and feminine principles of nature.

Through "tell–story," Chinese girls learn about themselves and their eventual destinies, and the way the world regards them and will regard them. The irony is that the lore that is most memorable to the girls is least likely to be realized in their lives. It is the story of the Chinese woman warrior and, here in Kingston's narrative about herself and her consciousness, she weaves the myths together with the factual details of her life. The woman warrior fights, avenges, wins and reverses the injustices in life. She is invincible, possesses supernatural skills and abilities, and is admired to the point of worship. The longing to be a woman warrior is a sad counterpart to reality. In Kingston's world, and in the world of her mother and grandmothers, Chinese girls were considered worse than useless. They were considered a burden, and eventually traitorous and family–abandoning. All investment and accomplishments realized by the Chinese girl would simply remind her family of what she would take from them when she left them.

Kingston's narrative represents a stratagem for self–overcoming. She imagines herself alive by writing the dream. Perhaps the attributes she desires will only have life in her interior

journeys, and in the development of a mental sphere that gives and breathes promise to others. Nevertheless, it is effective, as Kingston juxtaposes the dream of the warrior, who is assertive and avenging, with the reality of extreme submission and the denial of needs.

In Kingston's story, *White Tigers*, the agents of change are the animals, the cranes, white tigers and white horses, who wield magic with their presence. The old couples and magical characters from a time long ago come into her life. They give the dreamer power, freedom and self–actualization. The "tell–story" is what also imparts to the young girl a sense of wonder.

Are fairy tales appropriate modes for instituting real change? Kingston's narrative is ambiguous on this point. As with *China Men*, Kingston's later *Tripmaster Monkey* expands the scope and sources of mythologies and their ambiguous potentials. She has knowledge of who her enemies are, but how can she resist? She has "gun and knife fantasies, but did nothing useful." The warrior woman fairy tale, without a correlative "other" in the phenomenal world that might give a person a way to implement the dreams, is perhaps simply a route to resignation.

Students going into the teaching of language, literature, psychology and cross–cultural relations might do well to check out Kingston's workshop methods.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *White Tigers*, *The Woman Warrior*, 19–53.

Short Answer Questions for *White Tigers* by Maxine Hong Kingston (by Elaine Bontempi)

1. Maxine Hong Kingston suggests that based upon the talk amongst the people within her community, a woman fails if she what?

2. Based upon the above answer, how does this contrast with the folklore within her culture?

3. The author suggests that the feet of women may have been bound because of what?

4. Why do you think women were taught stories of heroines and warriors when it was expected that they grow up to be wives and slaves?

5. Do you see any parallels between the hardships that women experienced within Maxine Hong Kingston's community, and the hardships that African Americans have endured in the United States?

6. According to the author, what community or "village" did she belong to?

7. The author recalls her rebellion growing up. What was her rebellion based upon? In what ways did she act out?

8. The author talks of her Chinese culture still handicapping her. How?

9. The author claims that her only "land" is her job. What does she mean by this?

10. The author faced discrimination because of two things. What are they?

MAYA ANGELOU IN STAMPS, ARKANSAS

Maya Angelou writes a memoir about growing up in Stamps, Arkansas, in the segregated South. Her depiction is searingly honest as it gives faces, places, and specific names and feelings to what could be viewed as the collective experience of many growing up in the South in the first hundred years after slavery was abolished in the U.S.

As young African–American females, Maya Angelou and others are automatically relegated to the position of being marginalized by white society. The sense of being on the outside looking in is made even more poignant and harrowing by the fact that antebellum aristocratic values of European origin are imposed on blacks. They consciously or unconsciously buy into the vocabulary and practices of elitism by embroidering knick–knacks for a dowry chest, learning the rules of etiquette involved in setting an elaborate table, and using the language of the debutante to describe ones' coming of age. Such activities primarily function to reinstate difference as the only way of knowing each other, and reinforce the distance that exists between white women and the black women who present such a potent threat to them. To Angelou, the linguistic and social practices of the South are a cruel joke, particularly

when the more typical role of a young black girl was to be a servant in a white woman's home.

The young black female is considered an outsider who possesses little or no power. Her powerlessness is illustrated when the white woman has the power to erase and then reconstruct identity by renaming. Angelou provides an example of this in the selection printed here. She is working in a white woman's kitchen, in what Angelou characterizes as a perverse finishing school where she learns the finer points of setting a table, etc. Her employer, Mrs. Cullinan, is descended from Virginia plantation owners. In an ugly echo of "the good old days," she surrounds herself with white friends who consider themselves entitled to "culture," and to be waited on by black servants. The sense of the employer's power becomes ominous with the power of naming. "Margaret" is deemed too long and is shortened to "Mary." "Hallelujah" was long ago renamed "Glory" in a creepy echo of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*.

If renaming can dehumanize, negate, invisiblize and nullify, does the act of naming have generative powers as well?

The mindset examined in this selection is one that looks closely at the way language is used to either empower or strip away entitlement or rights. Conversely, there is an awareness that one can empower oneself by naming, and it can be used for the good.

In writing about how black girls and women were subjected to nullifying linguistic and social practices in Stamps, Arkansas, Angelou also corrects the misconception that silence denotes acquiescence or agreement. The women to whom the psychological assaults are aimed are not sufficiently empowered to be able to question or counter the practices directly. Indirect rebellion seems to be their only way to resist. Thus, when Angelou considers her situation, she seeks revenge rather than rapprochement, and obtains it when she deliberately breaks a family heirloom from the old plantation in Virginia. Sadly, no one understands the message behind Angelou's gesture, so her speaking and acting out are misunderstood and, what is worse, processed through the unknowing and unenlightened mindset of her employer.

One does see how erasures of identity are always a part of the outgrouping process. A key lesson is that the converse is possible, and ingrouping and inclusion are possible when one names oneself

into it. The long and difficult task of self–renaming among African Americans continues.

Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 104–119.

Short Answer Questions for *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou (questions by Elaine Bontempi)

1. How was Maya marginalized by white society?

2. What does the author have to say about naming?

3. How does the author resist psychological assaults?

4. Explain the irony in the location of the author's finishing school, and the irony of it all.

5. What was the purpose of Maya learning the things that she was taught where she was working?

6. Why was it so insulting for the author to be called Mary? What did this mean to her and others in her community?

7. How is the author's status as an outsider with little or no power made evident in this reading?

8. Explain what the author meant when she wrote, "Her husband remains, in my memory, undefined. I lumped him with all the other white men that I had ever seen and tried not to see."

9. Explain how Maya's identity was stripped away from her.

10. What does renaming do to one's sense of inclusion?

GUIDE TO JAMES BALDWIN: *NOBODY KNOWS MY NAME*

James Baldwin's autobiographical account is the narrative of a black man coming of age in the first quarter of the twentieth century, a time suffused with huge changes in society. Although there were more opportunities for education and economic access, black men also faced worsening racism, violence and extreme prejudice.

In this selection, Baldwin discovers that once he has moved to Paris, he is able to establish friendships and relationships with Americans that were not possible in America. Musing on this fact, Baldwin explains that in America, race issues still block people.

Ironically, in France, Baldwin is able to communicate with Americans of all races, origins and classes because their common background as expatriates attenuates all other differences.

The selection is from *Nobody Knows My Name* and the chapter is entitled "The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American."

The selection focuses on Baldwin and his experiences in Paris with fellow expatriates. After 1948, Baldwin made his home in the south of France, where he followed a tradition of many American artists and writers who found France to be a more hospitable place for artists and writers than America. This was particularly the case in the post World War II era, when anti–Communist fears of the Cold War made innovative writing and socialist ideas dangerous. Returning to the U.S. for lecturing or teaching engagements, Baldwin's writing addressed themes of racism and homosexuality, which made him the subject of a great deal of controversy, even within the black community.

Baldwin, who was both black and homosexual, found himself cut off from the dominant culture.

In the selection included here, what characterizes Baldwin's narrative is a sense of "thrownness?" "Thrownness" was first developed as a concept by the existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger. It is "the condition of being taken more or less by surprise, hurled into an unexpected and unpredictable situation. In one sense, all human beings are thrown; they all have to find their way through the world without much in the way of practice." In Baldwin's world, there is an awareness of being thrown into a world of which one has no knowledge of what came before birth, or what will happen after death. The thrownness contains a feeling of randomness, and thus other individuals are perceived as part of that great outgrouped mass, a condition which makes one focus on the here and now, one's existential condition.

Baldwin writes to correct the prevailing view that people are rigid and cannot transcend their teleological view of the world and, that order, once established, cannot or should not be re–ordered.

By moving to France, Baldwin places himself in a state of productive chaos, from which he can emerge, reinvented as the person he wants to be, and unconstrained by the ideas of his native society. However, Europe is no utopia, nor an Eden, freshly created

and without a history. Baldwin observes, with some irony, that the place that allows him freedom is also the place from which the slave ships and slave–trading enterprises originated. In Europe, Baldwin's history comes full circle and he is hyper–aware of this.

James Baldwin's first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1952), is largely an autobiographical account of Baldwin's life. Baldwin's writings include essays, novels, plays and the best–selling collection from which the selection is drawn, *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961).

Essay by Susan Smith Nash, Ph.D. See *Excellence in College Teaching and Learning* for a useful text.

Guiding Questions (by Elaine Bontempi)

1. According to the author, he wanted to leave American in order to find himself and similar others. Why was it necessary to leave America to do this when America is supposed to be "land of the free" and a "melting pot?"

2. What were some of the themes of James Baldwin's writings? How did this exacerbate the prejudice he experienced?

3. What is the irony of the author's situation?

4. Why is the author able to experience friendships with Americans in Paris that he could not establish while still living in the United States?

5. Several characteristics placed the author into an outgroup. Name at least three and explain how each trait has potentially devastating stereotypes attached to it.

6. An irony that arises in being thrust into an outgroup is that in so doing, you also "belong" to a group, whether this group is based upon SES, race, medical diagnosis, etc. Explain the potential effect of these memberships in outgroups.

7. For James Baldwin, it took going to Paris to discover what it meant to be American. Explain this.

8. James Baldwin suggested that one of the reasons it is difficult for American writers is because we, as Americans, have a deep distrust for intellectual effort. Discuss your reaction to this suggestion.

9. Why is it supposedly easier to cut across social and occupational lives in America than Europe? Do the previous readings presented above support this suggestion?

10. The author writes of his experiences in Europe as an African American. How might these experiences have been different or similar if he had been writing based upon a white man's experiences? Explain.

Useful Web Resources

American Writers: James Baldwin. http://www.americanwriters.org/writers/baldwin.asp.

James Baldwin, from the archives of the *New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin.html.

James Baldwin. Kirjasto Series. http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/jbaldwin.htm.

James Baldwin: Teacher Resource File. http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/Baldwin.htm.

PBS: American Masters—James Baldwin. http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/baldwin_j.html.

GUIDE TO JAMES BALDWIN'S: *THE DISCOVERY OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN AMERICAN*

James Baldwin's autobiographical account is the narrative of a black man coming of age in the first quarter of the twentieth century, a time suffused with huge changes in society. Although there were more opportunities for education and economic access, black men also faced worsening racism, violence and extreme prejudice.

In this selection, Baldwin discovers that once he has moved to Paris, he is able to establish friendships and relationships with Americans that were not possible in America. Musing this fact, Baldwin explains that in America, race issues still block people. Ironically, in France, Baldwin is able to communicate with Americans of all races, origins and class because their common background as expatriates attenuates all other differences.

The selection is from *Nobody Knows My Name* and the chapter is entitled "The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American."

The selection focuses on Baldwin and his experiences in Paris with fellow expatriates. After 1948, Baldwin made his home in the south of France, where he followed a tradition of many American artists and writers, who found France to be a more hospitable place for artists and writers than America. This was particularly the case in the post World War II era, when anti–Communist fears of the Cold War made innovative writing and socialist ideas dangerous. Returning to the U.S. for lecturing or teaching engagements, Baldwin's writing addressed themes of racism and homosexuality, which made him the subject of a great deal of controversy, even within the black community.

Baldwin, who was both black and homosexual, found himself cut off from the dominant culture for being both black and openly gay.

In the selection included here, what characterizes Baldwin's narrative is a sense of "thrownness?" "Thrownness" was first developed as a concept by the existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger. It is "the condition of being taken more or less by surprise, hurled into an unexpected and unpredictable situation. In one sense, all human beings are thrown; they all have to find their way through the world without much in the way of practice." In Baldwin's world, there is an awareness of being thrown into a world of which one has no knowledge of what came before birth, or what will happen after death. The thrownness contains a feeling of randomness, and thus other individuals are perceived as part of that great outgrouped mass, a condition which makes one focus on the here and now, and one's existential condition.

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9. Why is it supposedly easier to cut across social and occupational lives in America than Europe? Do the previous readings that you have read in the previous sections support this suggestion?

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ferent or similar if he had been writing based upon a white man's experiences? Explain.

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James Baldwin. Kirjasto Series. http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/jbaldwin.htm.

James Baldwin: Teacher Resource File. http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil /Baldwin.htm.

PBS: American Masters—James Baldwin. http://www.pbs.org/wnet /americanmasters/database/baldwin_j.html.

READING EMMA GOLDMAN:
A GUIDE FOR ONLINE LEARNING

The death of actress Maureen Stapleton, who won an Oscar for her portrayal of the energetic and unforgettable activist Emma Goldman in the movie, *Reds*, reminds us how influential memoirs can be for students at all levels. Not only does one gain an appreciation of their contribution, it is possible to examine the mindset of an individual who acted as an agent for change. Whether one agrees with her strategies and tactics, or her politics, is not really the point. The main issue for e–learners is engagement. The stories of real people are unforgettable. *Living My Life,* pp. 624–641 and 685–693, NY: Dover Publications, is a companion guide for reading and studying Emma Goldman.

In Emma Goldman's autobiographical writing, *Living My Life*, the belief that activism can bring about positive social change motivates Goldman and others to stage protests, publish radical flyers and publications, and practice civil disobedience. Advocating such causes as birth control for women, women's right to vote, child labor laws, the eight–hour workday, union organization and free speech, Goldman lived in the maelstrom of controversy.

As an emigree from Russia (b. 1869), Goldman was familiar with the European anarchist writers and movements. Her memoir sheds light on her mindset. She is a woman focused on a goal,

eager to help those around her be aware for the first time of the injustices and inequities they had blinded themselves to.

Although she worked for the rights of all women, Emma Goldman was outgrouped by law enforcement and the mainstream. Her ideas, the eight–hour workday and child labor restrictions, were economically destabilizing. Even worse, her notions were deeply troubling to conventional society's values. By maintaining a presence outside the "in–group," Goldman could see from a unique vantage point. She did not accept conventional explanations.

For example, when entering prison, a guard asked if she had any diseases, meaning sexually transmitted diseases. Explaining that she was referring to the "diseases immoral women get," the guard went on to tell Goldman that most of the women in the prison suffered from them. Goldman responded that "venereal diseases are not particular" and that many "respectable people" had them.

The events described by Goldman take place in 1917, barely months after the United States entered World War I. As she is transported from New York City to the federal penitentiary for women in Jefferson City, Missouri, Goldman interacts with guards and prison officials, and explains her views and positions. This is not a good time for Goldman to be expressing her progressive opinions. Goldman describes the paranoia and patriotism that have gripped the land, in addition to the new laws, such as the Espionage Act, which result in false imprisonments.

The mindset that this reading explores is that of consciousness raising. One refuses to accept the surface appearances of things as the only reality. It also refuses to accept the status quo, and always attempts to see through to the attitudes' impact on all members of society, particularly the impact on the weak, defenseless or poorly informed, who are ill–equipped to fight back.

Goldman's narrative illustrates that it takes courage to open one's eyes to what is really going on. It is not easy to assess societal attitudes, laws and economic practices from the point of view of its impact on various groups. An example is the Espionage Act referred to by Goldman. Although the greater goal was to protect national security, the reality was that it became a tool of ill–intentioned people to trap and/or turn in enemies and irritants, and/or eliminate competition.

Emma Goldman was a prolific writer, and wrote numerous essays and pamphlets on social reform, social justice, women's rights, children's rights, free speech and other topics.

Freedom Press, London, Goldman's main publisher through-out her life, is still in operation, as is the Freedom Bookstore and the *Freedom* newspaper. It had a large web site for a decade, but now that has been taken off–line. Selections from the newspaper can be found in the Anarchist Archive, listed below, that houses the largest number of Goldman texts on–line. The current reduced version of Freedom's site can be found at http://www.freedompress .org.uk/.

The movie, *Reds*, 1981, directed by Warren Beatty, portrays the radical left of the day. In the movie, actress Maureen Stapleton gives an Oscar–winning performance as Emma Goldman.

Activities for E–learners

- Evaluate websites of groups desiring to be change agents. How are they using images? Are they provocative? What values do they reflect? Which images or movie clips capture your attention first? What are their goals? How do you know?
    - People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). http://www.peta.org/
    - MoveOn. http://moveon.org/
- Compare Cindy Sheehan with Emma Goldman. Watch Cindy speak and listen to her message. How does what she says seem the same or different from Emma Goldman?
    - Gold Star Mothers for Peace. http://www.gsfp.org/
- Find other activists and change agents who seem to be a part of an "outgroup" that is countering the positions of the mainstream or the status quo. Would the Terri Schiavo Foundation qualify? Why or why not?
    - The Terri Schiavo Foundation. http://www.terrisfight .org/
    - Emma Goldman. Web Resources
        - The Emma Goldman Papers. http://sunsite.berkeley .edu/goldman/

- American Experience: Emma Goldman. http://www
  .pbs.org/wgbh/amex/goldman/

- Emma Goldman: Archives. http://dwardmac.pitzer
  .edu/

- Anarchist_Archives/goldman/Goldmanarchive.html

- Anarchist Archives: http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu
  /Anarchist_Archives/

- Jewish Women's Archive: Emma Goldman. http://
  www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/goldman/

- http://www.geocities.com/Paris/2159/redemm.html

- Maureen Stapleton (won an Oscar for playing
  Emma Goldman in the movie, Reds)

- http://www.nndb.com/people/376/000032280/

Guiding Questions (by Elaine Bontempi, Ph.D.)

1. Explain how the author's mindset was that of consciousness raising.

2. How did the author's cultural background influence her experiences?

3. Describe the community in which the author belonged.

4. Was the culture in which the author wrote an ascribed or acquired status? In which way did it change?

5. How did Emma Goldman conquer her oppressive situation?

6. Emma Goldman was considered to be a member of an outgroup based upon her beliefs. Explain this.

7. Explain how the government stereotyped and discriminated against Emma and her friend.

8. Why were Goldman's ideas so dangerous to the stability of the U.S. government?

9. Explain the contradiction in David, Emma's nephew, joining the U.S. army. Why do you think that he did this?

10. What motivated Emma and others to stage protests?

GUIDE TO GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ: *CHRONICLE OF A DEATH FORETOLD*

While many readers focus primarily on magical realism in all of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's work, the short novel, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, provides an opportunity to examine the text through multiple critical vantage points and perspectives. Each yields a particular insight, and reveals much about the nature of the narrative, ideas about what it means to be human, the nature of reality and community/individual identities. This brief guide is for readers who would like to employ the techniques to enrich their understanding of the work, as well as of literature in general.

Overview and Themes

The fact that Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is structured as a non–linear narrative can make the plot a bit difficult to follow. A resource that provides an overview to the plot, characters and author background is Sparknotes' plot summary (very clear), http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/chrondeath/summary.html.

Textual Issues

Dialogical Imagination

Bakhtins, *The Dialogical Imagination* http://courses.essex.ac.uk/lt/lt204/bakhtin.htm. This concept is useful because it gives the reader a way to look at the presence of voices and polyphony in a text. In the case of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, interrelationships, juxtapositions, and connections are more important to the narrative than a linear plot and clear character development.

Fragmentation and Disintegration

Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) hold that the way to understand phenomenon is not to try to find a unifying theory or explanation, but to "dissolve" the explanations that we have. In the disintegration process, there will be fragments that reveal frequently overlooked relationships. In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, we see literal fragmentation and disintegration in the case of disemboweled rabbits and the body of Santiago Nasar, cut to ribbons. This is figurative as well as literal, and serves as a meton-

ymy for the fragmentation of reality that occurs once one disrupts the equilibrium. Fragmentation and disintegration characterize the self. They are also employed against the story, or lack of which could be considered silence, which has been told about the murder. The fact that people mention that they foretold the murder, but they only mention this after the murder has taken place, foregrounds the notion of artifice and a constructed reality, which is destabilized when problematized.

The Corporeal Self vs. the Disembodied Collective Self

In *Chronicle*, there is a tension between what is considered the individual self and that of a collective self, comprised of the multitude of voices in the community. The voices comprise a disembodied collective self, and it is a self that is constantly in a state of growth, evolution and change as the voices rise up in unison or in a counter cantus. In this case, the "cantus" refers to the motif that is repeated throughout a fugue. A "counter cantus" would be a motif that is not repeated exactly as it first appears. Instead, it would run counter to it; perhaps appearing backwards, or with different rhythms and meter. The counter cantus in *Chronicle* is a story told many times, but distorted each time. The function is to undermine the notion that there exists a predictive quality in a narrative, and that patterns matter. Instead, *Chronicle* suggests that patterns deceive, and that you cannot really trust the conventional way of interpreting a story.

Death Throes and Ecstatic Transcendence

Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. The current (September, 2008) Wikipedia entry for the Theatre of Cruelty contains an excellent overview of how Artaud sought to shake people up, and rouse them from their conventional ways of seeing and perceiving the world. His goal was to awaken them to see that what they had believed to be reality was simply a convenient illusion. http://en .wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_of_Cruelty.

George Bataille, *Tears of Eros*. Bataille's final work, the *Tears of Eros* suggests that one's final agonies are actually pleasurable. His work was condemned by the French Minister of Culture. Although his work is problematic on many experiential, ethical and moral levels, the basic notion that extreme experiences cause a fundamental reperception of reality and reclassification of what one has

learned to consider truth, is useful when looking at *Chronicle*. An overview of Bataille, his life, times, and work, appears here: http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/bataille.htm.

The Presence of the "Other"

It is significant that Santiago Nasar, the man who is murdered in the story, is clearly identified as Arab, and that he speaks to his mother in Arabic. One could argue that he is both victimized and revered for his difference, which starts to put him in the realm of the sacred. Nasar and his family also function as a bridge from one world to another. The beliefs, customs, and behaviors of Nasar and his family are shaped by their constant contact with something that lies outside the dominant culture. In other works, Garcia Marquez uses ghosts, spirits and the energy of ancestors to bring about the same effect. The fact that they could be viewed as the "Other" makes it possible to look at them as a kind of doubling, or doppel-ganger, for the collective, community identity. The mysterious, violent or otherwise poorly understood parts of their psyche can be projected onto the "Other," thus preserving the illusion that they do not exist. The theories of Jacques Lacan apply nicely to *Chronicle*, in the sense that what Lacan proposed as a "mirror stage" in developmental psychology gives rise to the presence of an "Other," which is composed of displaced thoughts, projections and, above all, desire. http://www.iep.utm.edu/l/lacweb.htm.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez: Biographical Notes

Garcia Marquez was born in 1928 in northern Colombia, where he was raised by his grandparents. The website, The Modern World, has an outstanding entry for Garcia Marquez, which provides biographical details as well as historical contexts and backgrounds. http://www.themodernword.com/gabo/gabo_biography.html.

Contexts and Backgrounds: Honor Killings and Blood Feuds

Body Count: Review of Blood Feud, by Annabell Thomas, a novel about two feuding Appalachian families. http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/12/13/reviews/981213.13harlemt.html?_r=1&oref=slogin.

Excerpt from the first chapter of *Blood Feud*: http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/t/Thomas–blood.html.

Hispanic "honor killings." http://www.vdare.com/guzzardi/050924_hispanic.htm.

The blood feud: Corsica to Appalachia, http://www.ls.net/~newriver/osh/osh15.htm.

CHAPTER 8

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES AND E–LEARNING: WHAT THEY MEAN TO THE E–LEARNER

ONLINE PROGRAMS TURN AROUND STRUGGLING COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITY

Many colleges and universities that managed to overcome declining enrollments and rising costs in the late 1990s now find themselves in a crisis once again.

Top reasons for declining en-rollments:

1. "Stale" degrees and curriculum;

2. Emerging competition;

3. College changes direction and goes into the wrong markets;

4. Inadequate information, marketing and support (college becomes invisible);

5. Rapid increases in tuition and fees;

6. No flexibility in delivery options (no online courses, no hybrid);

7. No enthusiasm or sense of focus, mission or future poten-tial when contacting or interacting with the college;

8. Students have technical and administrative problems when they take their courses, resulting in poor performance;

9. Scholarship funds dry up;

10. Students required to stay in expensive, out–of–date dorms that lack high–speed internet connections.

Here is a more extensive laundry list of potential problems. Some are covered above in the "top ten" list, and some are not. At any rate, the checklist below could be used as a quick diagnostic for a college that is experiencing declines in enrollment, creeping costs and declines in contributions.

Expanded Checklist of Common College Problems

- Early adopter for technology solutions, (online, distance education); can't afford the updates, so now have lagged behind;

- Enrollment is declining. Students cite poor service and an out–of–date curriculum. They are going with the competition;

- Students are not returning after their first or second semester. They do not finish their courses, often because they do not possess adequate skills to succeed, but the college cannot afford to provide tutoring, student success courses or remediation courses;

- Rapid turnover in administration leads to many "vision" changes, resulting in blurred vision and a loss of focus in establishing a "brand image" to the world at large;

- Student support services are inadequate and slow to respond to student issues;

- Long wait at the help desk;

- Billing errors, resulting in poor collection rates and time–consuming corrections;

- Student registration, billing, and records are housed on a now obsolete system that does not integrate well with financial aid, housing and other departments;

- New departments were formed to solve emerging issues, but they were understaffed;

- Bookstore coordination is poor, and the students often purchase the wrong materials, resulting in frustration and the desire to drop the class;

- Faculty are required to teach large face–to–face sections, and students often drop;

- Reliance on athletic scholarships, which was a sure source of enrollments, until the source of funding dried up;

- Financial over–reliance on academically underperforming athletes brought down overall academic level, with low graduation rate;

- Campus property is in a declining neighborhood. Perhaps it is located in what used to be a prestigious, centrally located neighborhood, but now is in the middle of a high–crime area, resulting in high security costs and a reputation for students having a perceived increase in the probability of suffering assault;

- Faculty members are not publishing books or articles, not winning grants or presenting at conferences, and the school is missing free publicity opportunities.

Effective Turnaround Strategies for 2007

- Obtain leadership "buy–in" for an honest assessment of problems, to avoid "problem blindness";

- Articulate the institutional vision and mission in terms of curriculum, delivery methods, technology and existing resources;

- Articulate the institutional vision and mission in terms of emerging technologies and delivery, with an emphasis on affordability and leveraging legacy systems, and forging forward–looking partnerships;

- Develop ways to partner with technology providers, instructional material providers and organizations to share in marketing, offload costs and develop cohort groups of new students;

- Identify problems, and estimate the actual impact on enrollment and the bottom line. Prioritize based on their negative impacts;

- Identify solutions and list costs, as well as potential positive impact on enrollment, revenues and costs. Prioritize based on positive impacts. Create a "weighted" positive impact statement;

- Avoid one–shot "desperate moves" bail–out strategies (selling property, etc.);

- Inspire a team effort with college faculty and administration; allow egalitarian participation in problem–solving;

- Avoid pessimism. Focus on transformation, rather than just hanging on;
- Create a groundswell of enthusiasm with students, alumni and family.

The turnaround strategies for 2007 are listed in a rather cursory manner, with virtually no discussion. What is interesting is that many insights published by Ruth Cowen back in 1993 still hold true for 2007. Perhaps the largest gap is that in 1993, the role of technology, though, was not always stated.

So, to return to the recommendations for 2007 turnarounds, many of the points deserve a rather detailed discussion which will take place in future articles. However, for the purposes of identification of problems and for general planning for a turnaround, the "meta–strategy" approach is probably an appropriate first step.

References

Cowen, R. (1993). Prescription for small–college turnaround: Saving independent colleges that lack administrative and curriculum objectives. *Change*.

Hamlin, A., & Hungerford, C. (1989). How private colleges survive a financial crisis: Tools for effective planning and management. *Planning for Higher Education, 17*(2), 27–37.

Recommended sites on college administration and new visions in education

Mark Wagner's Educational Technology and Life. http://edtechlife.com/.

Ray Schroeder's Educational Technology. http://people.uis.edu/rschr1/et/blogger.html.

Scott Leslie's EdTechPost. http://edtechpost.ca/wordpress/index.php.

Stephen Downes. Articles published online. An amazing collection, very useful. http://www.downes.ca/page/7.

A PROPOSAL TO CUT COSTS AND INCREASE EFFICIENCY IN ONLINE PROGRAMS

The current model of online instruction that features small sections and a learning management system is expensive. Colleges and universities are finding that, to their dismay, they are faced with

staggering cost increases. The initial investment they made in infra-structure and computing capacity software/servers was just the beginning of their investment. Software, hardware, personnel and outsourced support costs are just a few of those that increase every year. The "cascading software upgrades" effect also leads to unanti-cipated and earlier–than–budgeted programming costs.

If you are an e–learner in a typical online course in the United States, chances are you are used to having twenty to twenty–five students in your course section, and you are accustomed to receiv-ing personalized responses from your instructor for each of your papers, drafts, discussion board posts and e–mails. In a perfect world, this model replicates the experience of being in a small seminar that results in high–quality interactions, multi–pronged student engagement, and personal mentoring and guidance.

Expensive e–learning program costs matter because the high costs are passed on to you, the student. Why is the current model not always sustainable?

1. Bandwidth and storage needs that outstrip capacity;
2. Large numbers of individual sections with high adminis-trative overhead;
3. Frequent software or operating system upgrades or chang-es, which precipitate incompatibilities and the need for ex-treme patches;
4. Large numbers of adjunct instructors who require the team to develop orientation modules and training courses;
5. Coordination of the large number of adjuncts is no easy feat; it is expensive and time consuming;
6. Updating multiple small sections is complicated, time con-suming, tedious and ongoing hands–on work;
7. Complex and time consuming grading and recordkeeping add to costs.

Solutions to the problem could include implementing a new model of online course administration, which would result in:

1. Increased efficiency;
2. Offloaded costs;
3. Decreased overhead.

The new model of online course administration could accomplish the results detailed above by following certain new procedures:

1. Optimize section size by instituting a section size minimum; for example, thirty students per section;

2. Optimize and streamline teaching loads and do not exceed the section size maximum; for example, thirty–five students;

3. Provide low–overhead ways to obtain credit (advanced placement, credit by exam, liberal transfer policy);

4. Offer exam review courses that primarily consist of automated quizzes and reviews, and very little interaction;

5. Use existing digital resources; partner with textbook companies to use their instructional content for your courses, thereby saving time in course development;

6. Use custom texts; partner with textbook companies to develop custom textbooks and workbooks, with a guaranteed edition life of three years, in order to eliminate costly and labor–intensive course shell changes, updates and bookstore stock issues;

7. Incorporate graduate assistant–led discussion sections in order to optimize professor time;

8. Utilize webinars with web conferencing programs such as Elluminate; use audio/phone conference with internet telephone (Skype, etc.);

9. Employ mobile learning where possible; make downloadable text, audio, graphics, and video available and playable with portable devices, including iPods and Smartphones.

This overview is just a basic sketch of possibilities for the future. Clearly, schools offering online programs will have to continue to become more efficient as they grow, and they will need to find a way to "bootstrap" their way to self–sufficiency in times of rapid growth. After all, most public academic departments have a primary problem in that they are woefully underfunded, particularly if they are relying on state appropriations or tax revenues, where property tax reform is resulting in drastic reductions for schools, particularly community colleges.

Possibilities that are more radical exist too, but they are not mentioned here. They will be detailed in future articles. In sum, they discuss ways to partner with existing entities that already offer training and which possess infrastructure that is ideal for offering dual–purpose education and training, for certificates and even for professional development.

The Affective Domain and E-Learning Success: Attitudes, Values, Beliefs, Opinions, Interests, Motivation

If you are used to face–to–face courses and traditional formats, you probably feel fairly comfortable and confident. However, why do you feel so good about what you are doing? You probably have a good attitude about the course, the delivery format and the instructional strategy.

Chances are you have a good attitude because you have succeeded in many similar situations and you are not a bit worried about what you have to do. You trust the teaching method, are convinced that you can learn, and that you can demonstrate what you have learned.

When it comes to online courses, e–learning that involves web–based learning, mobile learning, or perhaps a combination of handhelds, laptops and interactive devices, you are not so comfortable. In fact, you might feel awkward, uncomfortable, even defensive and nervous.

Why the difference?

It all boils down to the affective domain. Instructional psychologists use this term to describe the realm of feelings and emotions as they apply to learning.

The affective domain includes attitude, values, beliefs, opinions, interests, motivation, and even basic emotions such as fear, joy, anger and sadness.

The elements in the affective domain are almost always key determinants in whether or not you, the e–learner, succeed in your course, and whether or not you perceive you had a positive experience.

How can you use this information to improve your chances of success, even enjoyment, in your course? You can start by building a framework for the affective domain and equipping yourself with what you need.

What are the elements to include in the framework? How can you construct them so that you are able to manage them? Here are the elements, and here are suggestions for putting them together.

1. <u>Attitude</u>. Attitude can be viewed in general terms as one's tendency or predisposition to respond positively or negatively toward things, people, places, events, concepts and ideas (Koballa, 2008). The first step is to become aware of your attitudes toward e–learning, online instructors, the software, the technology and your fellow students. Once you identify where you may have a negative reaction, then find out what is shaping your attitude. Once you identify the points of stress, are you able to change your attitude by adjusting your attitudes or beliefs? Often your self–investigation will reveal that many of your attitudes are shaped by fear of the unknown and/or fear of failure. Find activities that help you assuage your fears. Talk to someone. Practice the technology. Buy better equipment. Read your materials. Tell yourself that you like adventure, and you thrive in an intellectually challenging environment.

2. <u>Values</u>. Keep in mind that values tend to be less malleable than attitudes. Your values tend to be strong and enduring. So, with that in mind, use your values as muscle. Put your values to work. If you value education, knowledge, learning and respect, remind yourself of that. Keep in mind that your regard for education can help you overcome your fears.

3. <u>Belief and attitude work together</u>. They mediate, modify and alter behavior. This is a powerful insight. Think of the implications. If you do not believe in the efficacy of e–learning, then your behavior will demonstrate that. You will not attack your lessons in an enthusiastic way. You

will hang back and resist purchasing the equipment you need. You will behave unenthusiastically in the collaborative activities you need to do (discussion board, sharing messages/IM/Twitter, posting portfolio materials).

4. <u>Need to change your attitude? Look to your instructor for help and guidance</u>. Studies have shown that a positive attitude from your instructor can work wonders (Glynn & Koballa, 2006). If he/she demonstrates a positive belief in you, and has a supportive and encouraging approach to you, you are likely to start forming more positive beliefs about yourself and your ability to succeed. Furthermore, you are more likely to enjoy what you are doing.

5. <u>Becoming a self–starter (self–efficacy)</u>. A well–designed instructional strategy or lesson plan will capture your interest, engage your feelings and entice you to start trying out the activities, even before instructed to do so.

6. <u>Believing in yourself and your power to positively change your situation (self–determination, self–belief)</u>. One way to bolster your confidence is to actively tell yourself how your academic activities are worthwhile and meaningful. Furthermore, you should tell yourself how much they will positively impact or influence your personal life. Map out the ways in which your academic activities will lead you toward achieving your goals. Then, be sure to practices sufficiently in order to alleviate any assessment anxiety you might have.

7. <u>Motivation</u>. There are number of tried and true ways to bolster your motivation in an e–learning context.

   • First, reinforce yourself with the positive benefits of what you are doing.

   • Second, look at what you will get. What are the rewards? Are they extrinsic (a raise? a promotion? a new job?). Are they intrinsic? (Do you love the topic? Are you interested in the subject?).

   • Finally, how can you set goals? What is the best way to break down the task into small tasks?

8. <u>Self–determination gives you a better sense of control</u>. In e–learning, having the flexibility to work on your tasks at a convenient time and location, and have choices about the

topics you write about, what you study and what you discuss, can make a huge difference. When possible, remind yourself of where and when you have choices. That will build your sense of self–determination.

As you read these points and suggestions, you may be feeling a bit of anxiety. If so, relax. Keep in mind that a certain level of anxiety is, in reality, motivating. So, whenever you feel nervous about new challenges or changes in your e–learning experience, tell yourself it is a good thing.

You are keeping your edge.

You will succeed.

APPENDIX

TECHNICAL WRITING

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Course Description

Technical writing provides instruction in both theory and process of creating effective documents and presentations. Using a building–block approach, the course demonstrates how to travel effectively from identifying the rhetorical situation and the urgent need to create a persuasive document, to the processes and procedures to follow in the construction of them. Students will analyze texts, discuss core concepts and theories, and will apply knowledge to writing documents, which include reports, proposals, specifications, presentations and correspondence. In addition to texts, students will learn how to use visuals effectively, and to create presentations. They will also practice grammar, syntax and mechanics, and will develop strategies for revision.

Objectives and Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Identify and describe reasons and occasions where one would have a need for effective technical writing;

- List and describe common types of technical writing;

- Create a process for effective technical writing;

- Use visuals effectively;

- Draft technical documents;

- Do online research and evaluate sources;

- Revise effectively;

- Create papers and effective technical presentations;

- Demonstrate competency with grammar and mechanics of technical English.

Course Assignments and Procedures

Please e–mail short answer questions and "real life document review" materials to Dr. Nash at susan.s.nash@gmail.com

Short answer questions for each unit are due at the end of each week. Please send all answers for the unit as a single document.

"Real Life Document Review" is optional. Please e–mail the document that you would like Dr. Nash to review at the end of each week. Please email it with your short answer questions document.

Characteristics of this Course

- *Built on writing process (building block approach—focus on process)

- *Wide coverage of topics (analysis of documents/real–life examples/review of examples of types of documents generated in technical writing)

- *Emphasis on grammar/syntax/technical writing attributes

UNIT I: WHAT IS TECHNICAL WRITING?

What is the approach we will take in this course? Review of writing strategies, with technical applications. The skills and abilities that you will take away will allow you to write for a number of writing occasions and situations.

Instructional Materials

Reading (sent as attachment)

1. Nash, S. (2009). "Technical Writing for Energy Careers." *E–Learner Survival Guide*. (forthcoming). Norman, OK: Texture Press. http://community.elearners.com/blogs/inside_elearning /archive/2009/04/07/technical–writing–for–the–new–quot– green–careers–quot.aspx

Activities

1. Grammar Review (sent as attachment)

2. Placement Test: Objective 1

3. Optional Online Interactive

   a. Grammar Review—Interactive Grammar Activities: http://xnet.rrc.mb.ca/leshanson/Writing_Resources.htm

   Please note that this site gives you a choice: You may work with the Powerpoint presentation, the MS Word print–outs, or the interactive websites.

    b.   Other Option—Grammar Bytes: http://www.chomp
       chomp.com

UNIT II: AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Unit Objectives

1. Define your audience

2. List what your audience wants to gain from reading your document

3. Explain how aligning your work with audience expertise, expectations and needs will help you produce a more effective document

Instructional materials

1. Readings

    a.   http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/aud.html

    b.   Effective Ways to Write Papers: http://community
       .elearners.com/blogs/inside_elearning/archive/2009/03
       /03/effective–ways–to–write–papers.aspx

2. Powerpoint

    a.   http://www.beyondutopia.net/powerpoints/addressing
       –audiences–4a.ppt

    b.   http://www.beyondutopia.net/powerpoints/addressing
       –audiences–4b.ppt

    c.   http://www.beyondutopia.net/powerpoints/addressing
       –audiences–4c.ppt

Activities

1. Grammar Review: (sent as attachment)

   a. Placement Test: Objective 2

   b. Optional Online Grammar Review

      1) http://xnet.rrc.mb.ca/leshanson/Writing_Resources
         .htm

      2) Basic Sentence Parts: Exercises 1–10—http://grammar
         .ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/quiz_list.htm

2. Short Answer Questions

   Please write a one–paragraph response to each question. Include them in a journal (which you will turn in with your unit activities). You may also wish to discuss these with others who are taking the course.

   a. What is the reason you need to know who your audience is and what their expectations may be?

   b. How does aligning your work with audience expertise, expectations and needs help you produce a more effective document?

   c. How can a failure to understand your audience cause problems for your business or your objectives?

3. Real–life Document Review (send a document for review)

*Memos

Additional Readings on memos

Format for technical memos: http://crown.panam.edu/measurements
/handouts/memo.htm

UNIT III: THE RHETORICAL SITUATION:

What is the kind of report you need to generate?

Unit Objectives

1. Define the rhetorical situation

2. Explain how the rhetorical situation affects the way you will create your document

Instructional materials

1. Readings

    a. Required

        1) "The Rhetorical Situation and Kairos": http://rhetorica.net/kairos.htm

        2) "The Rhetorical Situation": http://grammar.about.com/od/rs/g/rhetsituaterm.htm

    b. Optional

        1) http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/models.html#recommendation_reports

2. Powerpoint

    a. http://www.beyondutopia.net/powerpoints/managing–effective–writing–6a.ppt

Activities

1. Grammar Review: Required (sent as attachment)

    a. Placement Test: Objective 3

    b. Optional

        1) http://xnet.rrc.mb.ca/leshanson/Writing_Resources .htm

        2) Basic Sentence Parts: Exercises 11–16 (choose 10): http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/quiz _list.htm

2. Short Answer Questions

Please write a one–paragraph response to each question. Include them in a journal (which you will turn in with your unit activities). You may also wish to discuss these with others who are taking the course.

    a. Identify and describe at least three elements of the rhetorical situation.

    b. Describe a time when you might need to write a technical document in order to inform and to persuade.

    c. What is the key persuasive aim of the following technical documents?

        1) A proposal

        2) A report on a field or reservoir

3. Real–life Document Review (optional): Please send a technical article that you are writing or have written and:

    a. Identify the rhetorical situation

    b. Explain how it responds to rhetorical exigence (urgent need to persuade)

UNIT IV: BRAINSTORMING

Unit Objectives

1. List types of invention strategies for getting started

2. Apply invention and brainstorming strategies to address a need to write a paper

Instructional materials

1. Readings: (emailed to you)

   a. Nash, S. (2009). "Summarizing and Abstracting Information." *E–Learner Survival Guide*. (forthcoming) Norman, OK: Texture Press.

   b. http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/twbrain.html

Activities

1. Grammar Review (sent as attachment)

   a. Placement Test: Objective 4

   b. Optional

      1) http://xnet.rrc.mb.ca/leshanson/Writing_Resources .htm

      2) Verbs and Verbals: 27–36: http://grammar.ccc .commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/quiz_list.htm

2. Short Answer Questions

   a. Why is it important to go through a brainstorming phase, rather than simply writing the paper?

   b. How does brainstorming help you plan your paper?

    c.   What is your favorite brainstorming technique?

3.   Real–life Document Review

*Abstracts

UNIT V: REPORT WRITING

Unit Objectives

1.   List activities required to write a report

2.   Identify the main types of technical reports

3.   Outline the contents of a typical technical report

Instructional materials

1.   Readings:

    a.   Nash, S. (2009). "Report Writing Checklist." *E–Learner Survival Guide*. (forthcoming) Norman, OK: Texture Press.

    b.   on Invention

    c.   http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/twinvent.html

2.   Powerpoint:

    a.   http://www.beyondutopia.net/powerpoints/preparing–reports–20a.ppt

Activities

1.   Grammar Review (sent as attachment)

    a.   Placement Test: Objective 5

    b.   Optional

        1) http://xnet.rrc.mb.ca/leshanson/Writing_Resources.htm

        2) Verbs and Verbals: 37–47: http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/quiz_list.htm

2. Short Answer Questions

    a.   List the elements of a typical technical report.

    b.   Which elements are most important and absolutely cannot be left out? Why?

3. Real–life Document Review (optional)

*Technical Reports: Review your technical report and list the elements/contents. Identify where you may need to expand your report.

UNIT VI: SPECIFICATIONS

Unit Objectives

1. Identify the characteristics of specifications

2. List the elements that comprise effective specifications

3. Discuss the structure of effective specifications

Instructional materials

1. Readings:

    a.   http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/twnarrow.html

2. Powerpoint

    a. http://www.beyondutopia.net/powerpoints/preparing–reports–20b.ppt

Activities

1. Grammar Review (sent as attachment)

    a. Placement Test: Objective 6

    b. Optional

        1) Verbs and Verbals: 48–58

        2) http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/quiz_list.htm

2. Short Answer Questions

    a. How are specifications utilized?

    b. When might you need to write a specification?

3. Real–life Document Review

*Specifications

UNIT VII: PROPOSALS

Unit Objectives

1. Identify types of proposals

2. Explain how proposals are used

3. Describe the elements of a typical proposal

Instructional materials

1. Readings

    a. http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/twoutlin.html

2. Powerpoint

    a. http://www.beyondutopia.net/powerpoints/preparing–proposals–19a.ppt

    b. http://www.beyondutopia.net/powerpoints/preparing–proposals–19b.ppt

Activities

1. Grammar Review (sent as attachment)

    a. Placement Test: Objective 7

    b. Clauses and Phrases: 59 – 66

        1) http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/quiz_list.htm

2. Short Answer Questions

    a. Describe when you might have a need to write a proposal.

    b. Identify two or three purposes for a proposal.

    c. Discuss one proposal that you have written and explain the rhetorical exigence (the urgency and the persuasive aim).

3. Real–life Document Review

*Manuals

Unit VIII: Libraries, documentation, cross–referencing

Unit Objectives

1. Identify and list online libraries

2. Discuss how to best document your sources

3. Explain how to cross–references sources and information

Instructional materials

1. Readings

    a. http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/infoov.html

Activities

1. Grammar Review

    a. Structural Flaws—67–79: http://grammar.ccc.commnet
    .edu/GRAMMAR/quiz_list.htm

2. Short Answer Questions

    a. Where might you go for good sources?

    b. How can you distinguish between reliable and unreliable information?

    c. Name a situation in which you would need to do research for articles online, and describe the steps you would take.

3. Real–life Document Review

*Annotated bibliographies/literature review

UNIT IX: EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS

Unit Objectives

1. Describe the best ways to use visuals in presentations

2. List items to include in presentations

3. Discuss how and where to adapt your presentation for specific audiences

Instructional materials

1. Readings

   a. Nash, S. (2009). "Steps in Starting and Building a Plan for Creating Effective Presentations." *E–Learner Survival Guide*. (forthcoming). Norman, OK: Texture Press.

   b. Nash, S. (2009). "When To Use Visuals in Your Report, Presentation, or e–Portfolio." *E–Learner Survival Guide*. Norman, OK: Texture Press. http://community.elearners .com/blogs/inside_elearning/archive/2009/03/17/when– to–use–visuals–in–your–report–presentation–or–e– portfolio.aspx.

   c. Nash, S. (2009). "Using Visuals Effectively in Papers." *E–Learner Survival Guide*. Norman, OK: Texture Press. http://community.elearners.com/blogs/inside_elearning /archive/2009/03/24/using–visuals–effectively–in– papers.aspx.

2. Online

a. http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/twnoting.html

Activities

1. Grammar Review

   a. Punctuation and Basic Mechanics: 80–99 (select 10) http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/quiz_list .htm

2. Short Answer Questions

   a. Describe a time when you used visuals in presentations.

   b. What kinds of visuals are best suited to your purposes?

   c. Describe a presentation that you made. Who was your audience? How did you align your presentation with their beliefs, level and background?

3. Real–life Document Review

*Presentations

UNIT X: REVISION STRATEGIES

Unit Objectives

1. Develop strategies for effective revision

2. List ways to identify where to add more information to a document

3. Explain how and where audience expectations determine how and when to revise

Instructional materials

1. Readings

   a. http://www.io.com/~hcexres/textbook/hirevov.html

   b. Nash, S. (2009). "Revision Strategies: Logic Tests." *E–Learner Survival Guide*. Norman, OK: Texture Press. http://community.elearners.com/blogs/inside_elearning/archive/2009/02/19/revision–questions–logic–tests.aspx.

   c. Nash, S. (2009). "Using Statistics to Support Your Research." *E–Learner Survival Guide*. Norman, OK: Texture Press. http://community.elearners.com/blogs/inside_elearning/archive/2009/03/31/using–statistics–to–support–your–research.aspx.

2. Powerpoint:

   a. http://www.beyondutopia.net/powerpoints/revising–editing–8a.ppt

   b. http://www.beyondutopia.net/powerpoints/revising–editing–8b.ppt

Activities

1. Grammar Review

   a. Notorious Confusables—125–132

   b. http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/quiz_list.htm

   c. Pronouns 100–110: http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/quiz_list.htm

2. Short Answer Questions

   a. Describe three effective revision strategies;

   b. Explain why peer review is a good idea when you are revising.

3. Real–life Document Review

*Annual Reports