

VIRTUAL TEACHING: THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF MOVING THE CLASSROOM INTO THE OFFICE

**Claudia M. Bridges, College of Business Administration, Sacramento State University, 6000 J Street,
Sacramento, CA 95819; bridgesc@csus.edu**

ABSTRACT

Having conquered the challenges of teaching a traditionally-administered Principles of Marketing class in the classroom and the challenges of teaching in a television studio, the author took on the task of administering the class in the office, behind the desk. Armed with a PC, camera, headset and iMeet (Eluminate) software, a semester-long course was developed and comes to a relatively uneventful end that is not without its questions. Having developed a partially synchronous and optionally asynchronous delivery method, the students appeared to be most engaged in the asynchronous collaborative learning forums (ACLF), also known as "discussion threads". Two of these threads were both formal and guided by a topic, while two others were informal and were open for discussions of all things academic and personal. The actual administration of the class created, most likely, the most interactive and stimulating level of participation from the students. This special session will be an introduction to the teaching world behind the desk, a walkthrough of the optionally asynchronous iMeet (Eluminate) learning experience, challenges of teaching in this environment and a discussion of the role of ACLF in the learning experience.

INTRODUCTION

The options for delivery of courses in a distance-learning environment are extensive. Some of these forms include: the integration of Blackboard- or WebCT-based tasks into a traditionally administered class, the hybrid environment of in-class meetings along with online meetings, television broadcasts with or without live student audiences, asynchronous online delivery, synchronous online delivery (using a camera and interactive software) and/or creating an asynchronous collaborative learning forums (ACLF) (Friesen 2004). The opportunity to take learning out of the traditional classroom has expanded the number of students able to take the course and, surprisingly, increased the responsiveness of students to questions asked in class.

OPTIONS FOR ONLINE COURSE DELIVERY

According to Allen and Seaman (2008), online course delivery enrollments have exceeded the

increase of total higher education enrollments. In 2007, over 3.9 million students were taking at least one online delivery method course. In our institution there is are incentives (and personal) to increase the distance learning offerings in the College of Business. Without the constraints of time and place, these courses could take on a myriad of forms.

Considering the technologies that were available, the options included developing a course that was prerecorded (using Camtasia) and taught online with no real-time interaction between the student and faculty, a television-studio-based recorded delivery available both in real time and asynchronously and the use of a web-based program (iMeet Eluminate) that could be taught in real time in the office and recorded for those who wished to take the course asynchronously. The decision was made to use the iMeet technology and bring the classroom into the office. Software and hardware included a PC (and optionally a laptop with a built-in camera/microphone for off-campus recording), WebCT fitted with iMeet, a PC camera and audio headset. Students were notified that they could take the class in real time on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:00 until 3:15pm or they could watch the recorded sessions available one hour after the live broadcast was over.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE CLASS

The overall structure of the course included optional attendance in the real-time online "classroom", online quizzes and exams, and computer-mediated discussion threads. Each one of these processes was outlined in the syllabus and specific directions, time-frames and rules were given. This section includes a description of each of these processes.

The iMeet Learning Environment

Students were offered the opportunity to take the class in the real time online through WebCT or watch the recorded class afterwards. The incentive to participate in the class in real time was the opportunity to drop one quiz score for every four (4) times that the students attended and participated in the online class, up to four (4) quizzes. Ideally there would be a group of students, having thoroughly

appreciated the interactivity of the online class, that would continue to log on in real time long after they had met the maximum number of dropped quiz scores. Participation would mean more than logging onto the course, it would mean participating in polling activities (raising their virtual hands, using checks and x's or selecting choices of answers such as a, b, c, etc.), asking questions and/or responding to their names when called upon. This would preclude the students logging onto the course and walking away from the computer. Students could respond in a chat box that would bring up their comments along with their names. The option was for their comments to be seen by the entire class or just by the faculty member.

Once the class was to commence, the video transmission of The Moderator (faculty member) was displayed on the screen (in a small box in the corner of the screen, which the students could enlarge), the recording function was set and a lecture and interactive learning environment was deployed. The software offered the opportunity to "share" the desktop of the Moderator with the students. This allowed for the use of the Internet (allowing access to web sites such as YouTube, etc.) and the display of any other necessary documents (Word documents outlining an assignment, for example). PowerPoint slides were displayed on a whiteboard screen and a tablet and drawing stylus were used to make notes and markings on the slides.

Online Quizzes and Exams

Completely online quizzes (9) and exams (3) were administered during the semester. Textbook test bank questions were used and set up to allow for development of randomized question selection and answer order. All exams were multiple choice and 60 questions were randomly selected for each exam out of 400 individually selected questions in the bank. A time period of 15 minutes was allotted for each quiz (10 questions) and 75 minutes was allowed for the 60 question exams.

Discussion Threads

Discussion threads, a form of asynchronous collaborative learning forum (ACLF) (Friesen 2004), gave the students the opportunity to have discussions among themselves in a computer-mediated environment. Three unstructured (and informal) discussion threads were created along with two structured discussion threads assigned to small groups. The unstructured threads were available the entire semester, while the structured threads had a time limit.

OUTCOMES AND CHALLENGES

In a class of over 150 students, over 40 students typically participated in the real-time online class. It was exciting to observe that over the semester they greeted each other and the professor as they entered the "room." Several students would also linger after class and would chat with the professor and each other as others left the "room." Due to the fact that their participation incentive was dependent on their actual participation, everyone was required to respond to questions asked during the class and there were about 15 or 20 students who regularly added comments using the online chat function. Only two or three students did not participate during the average class which was demonstrated by their lack of response to polling questions randomly queried during the class. There were also times when their names were called and they did not respond. Reception of this technology was positive and a solid group of 30 students, who had already dropped as many quiz scores as they could, continued to participate in the online class.

Challenges in this technological environment were many and some will have to be addressed before this class can be administered again. The challenges included controlling student's online behavior, using the honor system in the administration of online exams, time for administrative work, and the failure to reach those students who are not self-motivated.

References Available on Request