

How Do You Teach That Online? They Said It Couldn't Be Done

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Abstract

Computer literacy, algebra fundamentals and speech are college courses normally taught in a traditional classroom setting. Critics of the online movement would view the development of an online computer literacy class, an online developmental math course, and an online speech class as another step in the depersonalization of education. Three community college teachers challenge that myth and other misconceptions about online courses by detailing the personalize approach generated in the instruction, climate and materials developed in their courses. The instructors challenge the traditional reluctance to offer such classes on the Web and answer the question, "Why not?"

How Do you Teach That Online? They Said It Couldn't Be Done

Introduction

Online literature has been speckled with strong opposition to distance learning and the technological backbone that supports it. Perhaps the spirit of this resistance is best captured in the following 1998 statement:

One overarching conceit of cyberphiles is the absurd notion that distance learning can adequately replace classroom instruction.... [Ten] years from now, computer technology will be used, as it largely is now, as an occasionally useful supplement to classroom instruction, not as a replacement for it.¹

Along with this resistance to technology, there are many unsubstantiated notions about online instruction. These notions are not solely based on the idiosyncratic misconceptions of technophobes, but are wide spread, universal, found in the ranks of students as well as educators, and have reached mythic proportion. A few of the common flourishing myths are listed below:

- “Computers will replace instructors; the loss of face to face contact will destroy essential communication; evaluation or testing cannot be ‘properly’ done online.”²
- “Online courses are easy credits; broken computers are great excuses; there is no personal attention from your teacher.”³
- “Online courses are just online textbooks.”⁴

¹ Remarks by Daniel L. Wick, Director, Summer Session University of California, Davis in The Chronicles of Higher Education Colloquy, 1998: at <http://www.chronicle.com/colloquy/98/skeptics/19.htm>.

² From Faculty Guide to Online Instruction, “What Are Some Common Misconceptions About Online Instruction” at <http://www.imd.macewan.ca/imdgot/introduction/myths.html>

³ From Online Learning: Is it For Me, “The 10 Myths About Online Education” at <http://www.monroec.edu/depts/distlearn/minicrs/10mythsindex.htm>

This smokescreen of misinformation does an injustice to education. It diverts public focus away from the productivity of teachers who often spend thousands of volunteer hours developing new educational models that address student needs and maintain high course standards.

In *Improving Student Motivation*, Dr. Judith Meece identifies two factors that impact student engagement in the learning process: instructional approach and climate. Several dimensions comprising each factor have been identified (Table 1). Meece states that “the goal of any educational program must be to create a learning environment that supports or elicits student’s intrinsic interest in learning.”⁵

Dimensions of Instruction	Dimensions of Climate
Diversity, Variety and Novelty	High Expectations for All Students
Appropriate Difficulty Level	Fostering Student Autonomy
Relevance and Meaningfulness	Promoting Cooperation
Assessment, Clear Goals and Expectations	Knowing the Student
<i>Table 1: Dimensions of Instruction and Climate</i>	

Course materials are also important components that impact student motivation and learning. “Course materials communicate important information about course content, policies and procedures and, in addition, convey messages about the atmosphere of the course and the instructor’s attitude.”⁶

⁴ From Learn NC The North Carolina Teachers’ Network, “Four Myths about Online Instruction” at <http://www.learnnc.org/Index.nsf/doc/myths0507?OpenDocument>

⁵ Judith Meece and Wendy McColskey (1997) *Improving Student Motivation-Aguide for Teachers and School Improvement Teams*. Greensboro, NC: SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education: SERVE

⁶ Maryellen Weimer, et. al., (1992) *How Am I Teaching? Forms and Activities for Acquiring Instruction* Input Magna Publications, Inc

The authors of this report present the “it can’t be done” myth and misconceptions associated with converting three traditional college courses into distance learning courses. These courses are Computer Concepts and Applications, Elementary Algebra, and Fundamentals of Speech. The design and content of these courses are described in terms of instructional approach, climate, and course materials. The authors demonstrate how peer to group, peer to peer, or faculty to student activity is integrated into the curriculum and provides students with channels for communication, affiliation, and support. Also included are evaluations of the course which raise awareness of why online classes are so successful.

**Going the Distance:
Adapting Computer Applications and Concepts to an Online-
Distance Learning Model**

Robert Safdie

*When asked what I taught, my answer was "students".
When the questioner protested: "no, no - I mean what
subjects do you teach". I said "students"..... The answer
to me is always my subject is "people"⁷*

Roane State Community College's Computer Concepts and Applications (CCAA) course is a 3 semester-hour introduction to computer fundamentals. It is listed in the Roane State catalog as COLL 1020. The class is currently required in most AS and AA programs at Roane State Community College.

When the idea of teaching CCAA online was first conceived, the mythopoeists exclaimed, "You can't do that. You're expecting a student who can't get the work done right in the classroom to do it right at home. Students need a classroom and a teacher."

Despite the cacophonies, Roane State computer science faculty, administration, and support staff with clearer visions of the future, technological readiness, and heart were willing (if not ready) to find solutions to make innovations work. This section of our presentation describes some of the processes and consideration that were undertaken to develop CCAA. The last pages present the unique adaptations that prepared the course for online distance learning and how it differs from the traditional class. Finally, student evaluations illustrate the online course's effectiveness and the value of good communication.

⁷ Remarks by Xenia Stanford in her profile for "Connecting the Dots: GLD Success Stories - Story 4: Introducing the Deans of the Socrates Academy" in KnowMap: The Knowledge Management, Auditing and Mapping Magazine [Vol. 2, No. 3](http://www.knowmap.com/open/hibbs_connecting_dots_4.html) at http://www.knowmap.com/open/hibbs_connecting_dots_4.html

DEVELOPING A QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH

In 1997 the computer science department established a task force to explore how computer applications and concepts should be taught in the future. Initially there were two members on the team: Len Bailey⁸ and Robert Safdie. Later, as the project developed, the development team expanded to include many members of the computer science faculty.

The development team recommended a new design for the course – a comprehensive multi-media delivery approach. The model meant much more than a simple textbook change; it established new criteria around which the course would be built. The model incorporated the following standards:

1. ownership of learning would be transferred to students
2. diversity would be added to the course through interactive multi-media presentation
3. high standards would be maintained, but recognition would be given to the divergent range of computer skills found among class enrollees
4. student learning would be outcome based and a competency-based instructional strategy would be integrated into the course

The committee also narrowed and formalized the goals for the course.

Completing the course requirements would help students develop:

1. skills necessary to be an informed PC consumer in the home or work environment
2. an understanding of basic Internet concepts achieving access to the Internet
3. e-mail skills

⁸ Len Bailey, Associate Professor at Roane State Community College provided the innovative leadership on the newly established task force. He had conceptualized a comprehensive multimedia model for course delivery. Over the next few years, working on the task force could best be equated to a long and educationally thrilling roller coaster ride, as we tested new books, new materials, reformulated ideas, and adjusted the model to match changing technologies. I thought it would be appropriate to recognize Len's contribution in this public forum and thank him. Len, the destination was for students, but the journey was ours.

4. browser searching skills on the WWW and an understanding of browser concepts
5. a basic understanding of OS tools and directory navigation operations
6. word processing and spreadsheet skills for document production in home, work, or for school use

Course competencies were also developed. After a two year period of content exploration and beta testing in selected classes, the task force recommended significant changes in CCAA's course structure and materials. The following recommendations were made:

- Standardize the syllabus, calendar, lesson plans, materials, and testing for every section of the course.
- Place the course syllabus, lesson plans, testing, and other course materials on Roane State's intranet. Give students their own login accounts and use WebCT as the course environment.
- Pre-test each student for computer competencies and create individualized learning plans for each student. Exempt students who demonstrate competency in a pre-tested unit from the course work in that unit.
- Based on pretest results, individualize course work calendars for each student. Students may take a test on or before a calendar test date and complete the course early.
- Incorporate the recommended multi-media materials in the course and hold students accountable for the completion of the multimedia projects.
- Require students to create a portfolio-like notebook to document the completion of their work.
- Utilize class time to assist students through their assignments.

The recommendations were adopted by the faculty and implemented in the fall of 2000.

Meaningfulness and Relevance

The changes in curriculum have moved the teacher's position from the "sage on the stage" to the "guide on the side." The change has been justified by the members of the development committee. They noted that scores from the beta test classes indicated students were learning just as much with a well written textbook as with a lecture. Without the lecture, students are forced to take ownership of the reading components of the class. The major assumption is that a caring teacher who assists a student in need of help ultimately changes the situation into a win-win relationship and makes the class experience meaningful to the student.

The course materials have also been selected for meaningfulness and relevance. The faculty made a common observation -- most students are able to start up a computer, use the mouse, and gain access to the Internet, but they have "blind spots." The new course goals addressed those blind spots. Because the identified areas have an impact on a student's pocketbook and his or her everyday use of the computer, the assumption is that those materials generate a reasonable level of interest.

Diversity and Variety

Diversity and variety are incorporated into the course in several ways. The exercises in the concepts units include readings from the textbook, Internet searches, writing assignments, CD lab videos and exercises, and unit review quizzes. The application portions of the class have hands-on activities. Online tutorials are also available for Word and Excel. Students may complete their work at home, but they still have to attend class regularly and take all tests at school. Finally, the lecture format is not prohibited, so a teacher could provide lecture time in class.

Appropriate Levels of Difficulty

Because the course is required across most degree programs, an effort has been made to assess what is reasonable for students with different educational skills,

varying interests, and a wide range of computer skills. Consequently, the committee has tried to make the difficulty level a best-fit match between the characteristics of the students and the course goals.

Student Testing and Assessment

Evaluating student achievement was utilitarian. The course contains five concept chapters and numerous homework assignments. Students are given one randomly generated multiple-choice type test for each concept unit. Concept tests are stored on WebCT. The pool of test questions had been selected to best match the course competencies. After completing all the units in Word, students take the Word exam. The same applies for Excel. The Word and Excel tests are presented through SAM, an online, hands-on applications simulator. Testing feedback is immediate. Teachers review the test with the student on a one-to-basis, so the review process has become another teaching experience. Students turn in their homework assignments in a portfolio-like notebook.

CREATING A QUALITY CLIMATE

High Expectations

The high expectations of student and faculty have played a major role in the success of CCAA. Like any other good teacher, the computer science teachers feel that every student is equipped with the fortitude, motivation, intelligence, and skill to become competent in the course areas.

Fostering Autonomy

The entire structure of CCAA has been designed to encourage autonomous study and self-reliance. There are several mechanisms within the lesson plans of the course that fostered autonomy.

The competency-based curriculum provided clearly defines operational procedures and “independent challenges.” Students followed the operational procedures to build their skills. The independent challenges have very few

instructions, reinforced acquired skills, and promote independent thinking by requiring students to find solutions on their own.

Pre-testing is mandatory for all students enrolled in the CCAA class. The design of the course permits students to pretest out of areas in which they have adequate skill or knowledge.

Individualized calendars are constructed for each student with due dates dictated by pretest scores. An accelerated calendar is given to students who pretest out of course areas. All students are allowed to take their exams on or before their calendar target dates. This procedure offers students an additional reason either to stay on task, or work ahead and finish early.

Promoting Cooperation

The CCAA design assisted students in establishing cooperative relationships in the course. Besides the obvious reasons for good communication, the intent of the constant interaction is to assure each student that the teacher/student relationship is a cooperative and positive partnership. Verbal interaction is the predominate means of communication between faculty and student. Students form cohort groups based on affiliation and proximity in the lab and begin assisting each other through the assignments. The design of CCAA provides an opportunity for the teacher to work with and know his or her students.

Interactions with the student occur each class period as the teacher provides assistance in class.

COURSE MATERIALS

Student Textbooks

- Computer Concepts – Illustrated Introductory 4 or Computer Concepts -- Illustrated Enhanced Edition, Parsons/Oja
- Microsoft Word 2002 – Illustrated Brief, Duffy
- Microsoft Excel 2002 – Illustrated Brief, Redding
- SAMXP and TOM Student Tutorial/CD

Other Student Materials:

- at least three 3.5" diskettes (DSHD, IBM/PC formatted)
- labels for each diskette
- stereo headphones - 1/8" mini plug
- 1 3-ring binder, 1 1/2" for notebook and applications assignments
- tabbed divider pages
- a three-ring compatible pencil bag to store disks

Institutional Resources

- WebCT
- Word
- Excel
- Windows
- Computer Labs
- Internet Explorer
- Internet Connectivity

The Distance Learning Version of CCAA

Turning CCAA into a distance learning class has required minor adjustments in the course syllabus and course procedures, but major adjustments in communication. The default communication occurs through e-mail. Matters of urgency are handled through the telephone. Students who fail to log-in within the first four days of the course are contacted by telephone. The syllabus has been changed to require students to e-mail biographical and contact information to the teacher. Students are also instructed to respond to a "values" assignment placed on the bulletin board on the first login day. Pre-testing and testing are permitted to take place at the student's home. After pre-tests are taken, each student is e-mailed an individualized calendar. Students are required to send a teacher an e-mail indicating the score on each test they take. In response, the teacher sends an e-mail with appropriate encouragements, a summative progress report, and a reminder of future assignment due dates. The syllabus allows a distance learning student to make up a missed test, but only if the student has asked for an extension of his or her calendar date prior to the date of the test. After the teacher grants an extension and the student takes the test, the teacher responds

with appropriate encouragements and requests that the student assist in determining new target calendar dates for the remainder of the semester. In the traditional class, students were overtly encouraged by the instructor to review the items they missed on the test. In the distance learning class, reviews are either given on the telephone or at a campus location, but only at the request of student. Distance learning students are required to have a computer system, modem, connectivity, other appropriate computer hardware, and application software. The institution had to make some technological changes that bridged the intranet sub-structure upon which CCAA had been built to the Internet, thus allowing students to access their accounts from their home browser.

Teacher Evaluations and Distance Learning Students

A course evaluation questionnaire was e-mailed at the end of each semester for 2 semesters. Twenty responses were returned from the pool of 55 students. There were 14 items on the questionnaire. Students were asked to respond to each item on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represented strongly agree and 5 represented strongly disagree. The questionnaire was modified from the distance learning evaluation form used at Volunteer State Community College. The total average response to the 14 items was 1.14. The responses to 3 questions were informative. The average response was 1.1 to the following question: "The quality of instructor contact in this course is as good as the quality of instructor contact that I have had in a traditional class." All students strongly agreed that "Course requirements were manageable and appropriate for a college level class," and that "The instructor seemed interested in your progress." The average rate of course completion was 80%. The teacher to student response averaged 2:1 per semester. In two semesters the teacher averaged 1000 outgoing e-mails and received an average of 500 incoming e-mails. Eighty phone calls were made.

A student comment field was placed on the questionnaire. There was only one response criticizing the organization of the assignments. That student wrote, "It was difficult to know what to do and where to start with this class. I stayed

confused most of the time.” This response is understandable because of the volume of material on the course web site and menus. CCAA course developers are continually evaluating the class structure to determine better methods of organization and clarity.

The rest of the comments were positive in nature. A few are being placed in this report in response to all of the myth makers that debunk the online environment making claims that diminish the significant role educators play (and will continue to play) regardless of the technology being used.

“I have never encountered an online instructor who tries to make an online class like a “classroom atmosphere.”

“If more instructors were as enthusiastic as this instructor about educating students, we would have a nation of scholars.”

“This is the first semester that I have had an online courses, but compared to the other two courses that I have now, the instructor was the most helpful and most responsive to my needs as a student...more helpful than most instructors that I have had in traditional classes.”

The CCAA model was designed to address various motivation factors that impact student performance such as diversity, autonomy, choice, affiliation, and communication. Regardless of the class delivery system, traditional or distance learning, it is up to the teacher and student to appropriately use the environment to achieve their objectives.

DSPM 0800 Elementary Algebra as an Online Class

By Betty Denison

Elementary Algebra (DSPM 0800) at Roane State Community College is a 3 semester-hour developmental course designed to provide basic algebraic skills on a pre-college level. It is a prerequisite for Intermediate Algebra (DSPM 0850) and does not fulfill the math requirements for graduation.

Students are placed in developmental courses by ACT scores or other placement testing, and it is never voluntary. Most of the students are first semester freshmen who are juggling jobs and families in addition to college classes, and many have very poor computer skills in addition to poor math skills.

There are still many who do not think developmental students should ever take online classes. They are “at risk” to begin with, many lack the maturity for college, and they are behind before they even get started. Many have to take developmental writing classes and/or developmental reading classes as well. The skeptics claim, “They can’t read, they can’t write, they can’t do math. This kind of student will never be successful in online classes. They are just being set up for failure!” What is being under-estimated is how very creative, capable, and dedicated developmental students can be.

DEVELOPING A QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH

Meaningfulness and Relevance

The competencies for the course have been adopted across the state of Tennessee. Unfortunately, the material in the course is so basic that it is difficult for students to understand any meaningfulness or relevance from the course-content. This is a “dry cereal” kind of math class with very little nutritional value until the skills can be developed.

Mastery learning is the primary instructional approach. Because this is essentially a “skills” class, repeated practice is a real key to being successful later. The students are allowed to take the tests in this course twice and keep the highest score. Some just need to review and refresh the material because they have taken algebra in high school. Others have never had algebra before and need to take a thorough approach. They can see their mistakes on the first attempt of the test, restudy the material, and take it again to really master it.

The real meaningfulness for the student is not realized until a couple of semesters later when they are successful in college level math. But mastery of anything at any level is meaningful and relevant! It is especially meaningful and relevant to students who come into a class absolutely convinced that they will not be successful. A subtle but important affect from the class is the confidence the students gain. In a traditional class, the students tend to give the credit for their success to their teachers. In an online class, students tend to grab all of the credit for themselves because they have accomplished this by themselves, and they tend to move ahead with a greater sense of accomplishment.

Diversity and Variety

Two elements contribute to the diversity and variety of instruction: the schedule for the class is flexible and the course materials allow for different learning styles. The flexible schedule has only 2 due dates in the course: one for the midterm exam and one for the final exam. Students are allowed to work through the class at their own pace as long as they do the first half of the course before the midpoint of the semester and the second half by the deadline for the final. Within 3 weeks into the semester, every student in the class is on a different lesson. This allows the students to move through the course at a speed that is comfortable to each one.

The second element that provides diversity and variety is the course materials. In addition to the textbook, there are video-taped lectures, video clips, online

supplemental exercises, review sheets for each test, a solutions manual, and online notes written by the instructor. The students are free to pick and choose among the materials that best fit their particular learning style.

A variety of approaches are suggested. A student can quickly go over the review sheet for a test and only study the portion they do not understand. A student can go through the text, carefully working each example and working every homework assignment. A student can even take the first form of the test almost as a pre-test, just to see how well they know the material, then restudy and take it again for a better grade.

Tutoring is a huge issue. There are several ways students can get the extra help they need to make it in a math class. Roane State subscribes to a 24/7 online tutoring service called Smarthinking.com that allows students to enter questions online and get immediate answers. There are peer tutors on 6 of our local campuses. The instructor does a great deal of tutoring over the phone and by email and fax. With this much diversity, most of the students are getting their questions answered.

Appropriate Levels of Difficulty

The course covers the competencies at a very fair level of difficulty. Since the instructor has taught or teaches all of the courses that the students will eventually take, care has been taken in making the course challenging enough to prepare the students for the next course and easy enough for the students to be successful. There is a fine line between a course's being too difficult and too easy. What makes a difficult course successful is the level of confidence-building an instructor is able to communicate. This is a difficult course, but it is given with a balance of encouragement, caring, and acknowledgement. It is vastly important to create a feeling of safety so that the student, who feels they are stupid-or-they-wouldn't-be-in-this-class, will keep trying and keep going.

Student Testing and Assessment

There are 4 online tests and 2 proctored exams in the course. The average of the two proctored exams is 50% of their grade, the average of the 4 online tests is 40% of their grade, and the remaining 10% of their grade depends on the student's staying in touch with the instructor. They are required to email, phone, or otherwise contact the instructor at least once per week for the full 10%. This communication requirement lets the instructor know where the students are in the course, what questions or problems they are having, and what method they are using to get through the course.

The tests and exams are graded in WebCT, so the students have their grade immediately. The students can easily see which questions they have answered incorrectly and see the correct answer. They have only one opportunity to see the test after it has been taken, and they cannot print them. It's a valuable opportunity to learn from their mistakes.

Cheating happens!! It becomes very obvious when students have cheated on the online tests because they cannot pass the proctored exams. The proctored midterm exam is scheduled so that the students who fail it can still drop the course. Math skills build one on top of another—cheaters are eventually stopped for lack of skills.

CREATING A QUALITY CLIMATE

High Expectations

Every student is held to the same high expectations. This is absolutely essential in a class that utilizes mastery learning as an instructional approach. Because the students can practice the homework exercises over and over and can take each of the tests and exams twice, it is important for the standard to remain the same for all students. There is no extra credit available and no scoring on a curve. The expectation is mastery.

Fostering Student Autonomy and Choice

Students have many choices in this course. The students are allowed the flexibility to move at a very slow, but comfortable, pace and complete the course in 16 weeks. However, if the student wants to move much faster and complete the course early, they can. Or, they can attempt to complete 2 courses for the price of one! Since all 3 developmental math classes are available online, the student can complete one and move right into the next one immediately and complete it in the same semester.

Other choices include the timing of their online tests (all tests are made available for the entire course during the 3rd week of the semester), whether or not to take the 2nd attempts, how much of the homework to do or skip, how to get their questions answered and the material mastered. The students can even choose their level of mastery in the course. There are some who select to be A students, but there are many who choose to be B or C students—and they are happy to have that choice.

Promoting Cooperation

It is absolutely vital that students remain in touch with the instructor. There are reminders in several components of the course that keep the importance of this requirement before the students. The instructor ends up sending 2 or 3 times the number of emails as the students in an effort to promote cooperation.

Conspicuously missing from this course are community building, discussion boards, or efforts at whole class culture. Technical and language problems contribute to the difficulty of student interactions with other students on specific math topics. Equation editors are cumbersome for most users and require some training, therefore most students cannot type anything more complex than parentheses—typing exponents, square roots, and fractions can be their undoing. Also, the students are not moving as one giant caterpillar through the course; they are more like ants working hard at their individual tasks.

Since the students were forced to take this class, many are mad and many are negative. A discussion board tends to give the students a real easy way to promote frustration and despair—no one needs that.

COURSE MATERIALS

Student Textbooks

- *Introductory and Intermediate Algebra*, 2nd edition, by Lial, Hornsby, and McGinnis published by Addison/Wesley 2002
- *Student Solutions Manual*
- *My Math Lab CD* from publisher
- A scientific calculator with a fraction key (a b/c) is required

On the Course Website:

- Read Me First document telling them how to get started
- Syllabus
- Assignments
- Calendar of suggested pacing and due dates
- Testing Center schedules
- Reviews for tests
- Grades
- Email access to the entire class and the instructor
- Tutoring information and links to sites

Statistics

Central to destroying the myths that developmental students are not appropriate for online classes and are being set up for failure is the statistics. Every semester, the instructor compares the passing rates, failure rates, and withdrawal rates of the online classes to the traditional classes. Last fall, the numbers looked like this:

Online DSPM 0800	Traditional DSPM 0800
29 enrolled	19 Enrolled
8 withdrawals = 26.67%	3 withdrawals = 15.79%
Out of the 21 who completed	Out of the 16 who completed:
8 A's = 38.1%	2 A's = 12.5%
8 B's = 38.1%	5 B's = 31.25%
2 C's = 9.51%	2 C's = 12.5%
3 F's = 14.29%	7 F's = 43.75%
<i>Table 2: Measurements and Assessments</i>	

The withdrawal rate is higher in the online classes every semester. Each semester, several of the students who register for the course discover that the online format is not going to work with their own learning style or habits. However, there were clearly more failures in the traditional class than in the online class. In fact, the overall grades in the online class were higher. This is generally how the statistics with the online classes have gone for the last several years.

The comments on evaluations are pretty overwhelmingly positive. Many could not take this course unless it was offered online. Several were delighted with getting through 2 semesters of math in one semester. Others were glad they could do all of their math requirements flexed around their work schedules. One online student has a disability that makes it difficult for her to deal with the distractions in a classroom—she was very grateful to work alone and independently through the course. Two students had very sick children and could not leave their homes—they had not been able to progress with their college educations until online developmental math classes were offered.

DSPM 0800 in the online format is an extremely successful course at Roane State Community College in spite of the skeptics!

Fundamentals of Speech Communication (COM 100): Teaching Speech Online

By David Warner

Fundamentals of Speech Communication is a 3 semester-hour introduction to the communication process, interpersonal communication, group discussion, and public speaking. Students are required to prepare and deliver speeches.

Challenges to an online course format range from “How do you expect to be able to do... that...” to “I’m not sure it can be done at all.” Course development challenges require a consideration of what adjustments to instructional approach, course materials and/or classroom climate might be required for online delivery of the course, with specific challenges in the interpersonal communication, small group and the public speaking segments.

Following is an overview of primary faculty concerns, with descriptions of face-to-face approaches and how course challenges were addressed in the online format. With each challenge area, instructional approach, course materials and/or classroom climate was considered the starting point.

CLASSROOM CLIMATE: AN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION CHALLENGE

Interpersonal Communication topics include perception of self and others, self-disclosure and feedback and communication in relationships, topics that benefit from student exploration of interpersonal relationships in the classroom, as an integral part of the classroom climate.

A usual development that affects classroom climate in the face-to-face classroom includes student-initiated conversations, conversations which reach various disclosure levels. In addition, students explore topics while interacting with a partner. Rotating partners engages students in a variety of relationships in the face-to-face classroom, while engaging in self-disclosure and dialogue to examine perceptions of self and perceptions of others. The classroom climate should be supportive and “interactive-friendly.”

To meet the online challenge, students must be afforded the opportunity to provide self-disclosure and to examine their perceptions of self and others while utilizing some manner of interaction with others in the “classroom.” Course design should provide opportunities for developing an interactive classroom climate, a challenge that communication instructors consider a critical component in interpersonal communication.

The procedure chosen to address the interpersonal communication challenge for the online version of Fundamentals of Speech Communication requires use of a

Discussions Board feature, uploading of assignment directions to match in-class handouts and uploading of “lecture notes” to provide supplement to the course text, just as in the face-to-face classroom.

1. As with face-to-face sections, online sections receive directions for interpersonal discussions to disclose personal data in various areas and further, as respondents, to identify common ground, what was most interesting and what the “listener” (respondent) wishes to know more about after reading a self-introduction.
2. In the face-to-face classroom, students interact with a minimum of 3 partners to explore and experience interpersonal self-disclosure and perception in 3 relationships. In the online sections of the course, students are given directions for posting a self-introduction and further directions to choose and reply to the self-introductions of 3 other students by answering the common ground, interest and information-seeking questions noted in #1 above.
3. The classroom climate in an online section is similar to the face-to-face section in that student pairs (a) engage in self-disclosure, (b) respond to and/or experience the responses of others in specific ways and (c) are free to continue the interpersonal conversation as desired. In addition, by using the Discussions Board feature, students are able to “listen in” to other student pair discussions by selecting other self-introductions and responses, just as in a face-to-face classroom when other students are sitting adjacent to each other.

Using Discussions Board introductions and replies provides the experiences for students to begin to discuss interpersonal communication topics in succeeding units, while drawing upon these experiences. The beginnings of a supportive and interactive classroom climate are being constructed, just as in a face-to-face course sections.

INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH: A SMALL GROUP DYNAMICS AND PROBLEM-SOLVING CHALLENGE

Small Group Communication topics include problem-solving, member roles and responsibilities, leadership and evaluation of group effectiveness.

Developing an appreciation of theory and application in small group dynamics and small group problem-solving relies on an instructional approach which provides “hands-on” experiences within a small group, while using a standard problem-solving agenda. Students are also required to assess aspects of their experiences, including examinations of leadership, individual roles and member dynamics and their personal experiences with problem-solving, in addition to an assessment of group effectiveness in problem-solving.

After lectures to supplement the text and to ground the students in the problem-solving activity requirements, students are assigned to problem-solving groups, complete the problem-solving experience using a standard format, then report their findings to the general class population. As noted above, students are given in-class time in order to engage in the problem-solving experience, after which, students complete a series of graded assessment activities based on their experiences in the group.

The online course challenge for problem-solving is to design a similar experience for students to work together in a problem-solving group, an experience that allows for all to participate, to reach a decision and to assess their individual experiences. The instructional approach should provide comparable experiences to the face-to-face course sections.

The procedure chosen to address the small group problem-solving challenge for the online version of Fundamentals of Speech Communication course also requires use of the Discussions Board feature, uploading of assignment directions to match the in-class handouts and uploading of “lecture notes” to provide supplement to the course text. The following procedures were used to address this course challenge, the small group problem-solving instructional challenge:

1. In both the face-to-face sections and the online sections, students receive similar directions for completing the small group problem-solving activity and graded debriefing assignments.
2. In face-to-face and online sections, students participate in five to seven-member problem-solving groups, all of which discuss the same problem.
3. In face-to-face course sections, student meetings progress through 5 problem-solving steps and arrive at a group decision. In online course sections, the pattern is repeated.

The basic classroom climate of instructor expectations for participation, the expectation to prepare comments ahead of time, and further, the expectation of dialogue within the group while progressing through the problem-solving process, culminating in a group decision are similar in both formats.

4. In online sections, a “Problem” topic is created for each student group and is posted on the course Discussions Board followed by a selection of students for each group, in order to duplicate the effect of private individual group discussions, to parallel face-to-face course section discussions.

To organize the “agenda” into the problem-solving steps that are used in the face-to-face sections, each of the problem-solving steps are initially posted as separate messages by the instructor, with accompanying directions for each step. This procedure organizes the discussions into the separate steps in the problem-solving procedure. This instructional approach is parallel to the face-to-face student experiences.

Instructional Approach: Public Speaking Challenges

Public Speaking topics include (among others) audience analysis and adaptation and presentation.

Students are expected to analyze an audience, develop a plan to adapt to the audience and deliver presentations before a “live” audience. In the face-to-face classroom, these tasks are related to the existing classroom audience and are completed with the classroom audience in mind, including the “live” presentations.

The online course challenges occur in the (1) audience analysis and adaptation and (2) the presentation areas, areas that require consideration be given to instructional approach to provide experiences for audience analysis and adaptation and for providing an “audience.”

1. The instructional approach is similar in both course delivery formats. In face-to-face sections, the instructor reviews course topics. In the online sections, the instructor review of course topics is presented as online lecture notes for each topic, summaries of the face-to-face lectures. Student questions are posted under a “questions and comments” topic on the class Discussions Board for all students to “hear” (read), a similar experience as the face-to-face class sessions.
2. Course materials are similar in the face-to-face and online formats, with samples, suggested topics, research resources and evaluation sheets for speaking assignments posted online for the distance student.
3. Face-to-face students are expected to complete audience analysis and adaptation plans for their prospective classroom audience. In the online sections, student’s use compiled Discussions Board self-introductions of members of the class to complete an audience analysis and plan for adaptation.
4. While face-to-face students have a “live” audience to deliver presentations before, online students are expected to (a) identify a “public” speaking location and to (b) assemble an audience for delivery of their presentations.

Public location options include school or church classrooms, pulpits, courtroom spaces, board or meeting rooms, general-purpose rooms and the like. To replace the classroom audience, online students assemble a group of seven or more adult listeners and videotape the presentation for instructor review.

Comparisons of Student Evaluation of Instruction:

A useful approach to comparing the effectiveness of face-to-face versus online teaching is to compare summary scores from face-to-face and distance courses using the same instructor.

Five distance course sections and four face-to-face course sections of Fundamentals of Speech Communication were instructed during the fall, 2002 through fall, 2003 terms, including summer session. Comparable questions for distance and face-to-face sections are used in the Student Evaluations of Instruction tool at the institution. A summary follows:

Face to-Face Sections:	Distance Sections:
COM 100 V01: 1.08	COM 100 011: 1.33
COM 100 V52: 1.27	COM 100 011: 1.48
COM 100 V52: 1.45	COM 100 556: 1.37
COM 100 V53: 1.64	<u>COM 100 554: 1.08</u>
<u>COM 100 V52: 1.40</u>	
<u>1.37 Average</u>	<u>1.32 Average</u>

Conclusion

The Fundamentals of Speech Communication “challenges” and approaches to instruction, classroom climate and use of instructor-generated course materials suggest parallel or similar approaches in other courses, where interpersonal communication, small groups and presentation assignments are components of the face-to-face course section and further, present challenges in the online delivery format.