Distance Learning in Today’s Classroom: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

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Outline

1. Introduction
2. Distance-Delivery Methods
3. Distribution of Course Materials
4. The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Distance Delivery
5. Considerations
Introduction

• Education involves a wide range of “students”
  – “Students” are not all “traditional” undergraduates

• Many “students” may not be able to attend “traditional” university courses

• A flexible, learner-centered mode of instruction to “students” who experience barriers of time and place
Distance-Delivery Methods

• Synchronous
  – Audioconference
  – Videoconference
  – Skype
  – Elluminate Live

• Asynchronous
Synchronous Delivery

- Audioconference
  - Description: Phone call
  - Equipment: Speaker phone, conference call service if more than one student
  - Pros: Simple, accessible, inexpensive
  - Cons: No visuals
Synchronous Delivery

- Videoconference – Webcam
  - Description: Low-tech videophone
  - Equipment: Webcam, microphone, computer
  - Pros: Simple, accessible, inexpensive
  - Cons: Computer, bandwidth
Synchronous Delivery

• Videoconference – VCON
  – Description: High-tech video phone
  – Equipment: Camera, microphone, VCON capabilities
  – Optional equipment: Computer (for multimedia applications), ELMO, smartboard, etc.
Synchronous Delivery

- Videoconference – VCON
  
  - Pros: Provides audio and visual presentations, more interactive, multimedia
  
  - Cons: More complex, facilities and computer, IT support, bandwidth, inaccessible if no VCON capabilities, faculty training, expensive
Synchronous Delivery

• Skype

  – Description: Software for audio and video conference services using voice over Internet Protocol

  – Equipment: Microphone, webcam, computer

  – Pros: Free calls on internet, can connect to cell and landline phones

  – Cons: Bandwidth, expense
Synchronous Delivery

- **Elluminate Live**
  - Description: Virtual online classroom
  - Equipment: Computer, Elluminate Live software
  - Pros: Powerful, flexible, full multimedia software with endless options, including file transfer, whiteboard, and recording
  - Cons: Need computer, bandwidth, institute must own software
Asynchronous Delivery

• AKA ‘Independent Learning’
  – Description: Completely outside of classroom, material ranges from print media to all online
  – Equipment: Depends, but typically computer and Internet; could use podcasting and webcasting equipment
Asynchronous Delivery

- AKA ‘Independent Learning’
  - Pros: Frees “student” from traditional, regularly scheduled meetings, diversifies “student” population, archived course material
  - Cons: Additional time and $$$ for course development, students must have computer, more computer/network and IT support infrastructure, lose direct student-to-instructor interaction
Distribution of Materials

- Course webpage
- Blackboard
- Blogs
- Chat rooms
- Social networking sites
  - Facebook, MySpace, Twitter?
The Good

- Increases access to courses
- Diversifies student population
- Financial benefits
- Social benefits
The Bad

- Technophobia
- Must have a computer
- Bandwidth limitations
- Loss of direct student-instructor interaction
- Hidden expenses
- Isolation
The Ugly

- Technology failure
- Students skipping or falling behind in class
- Student engagement
- Disruptive activities, e.g., e-mailing, web surfing, or IMing
Which Method is Best?

Considerations

- Is the information conveyable to a remote audience?
- What technology do you have (computers, bandwidth, etc.)?
- Comfort and familiarity with technology
- Technical support
- Expense versus budget
- Student confidence
Conclusions

• Distance delivery offers flexible learning to a variety of “students”

• Simplest may be best, must weigh the pros and cons; a combination of different types of media may be the most effective approach

• Carefully consider different options before deciding ‘best’ method of delivery
The End

Questions?