

*Carnegie Scholar Project: Using the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning to
Transform a General Education Music Course*

Transformation Theme: Multimedia Delivery, Including On-Line

Summary of Significant Findings

by

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In addition to changing the content and empowering students by giving them the opportunity to select their own “learning activities,” I still felt that I could not just lecture in the traditional manner to which I had been accustomed. In terms of the in-class delivery, a possible solution might have been to move away from the lecture format to any of a variety of alternative teaching strategies (such as dividing students into small groups to do collaborative projects). Although these strategies would probably have worked well, I always felt my greatest strength had been as a lecturer. Furthermore, it seemed that the “Face2Face” time could be best utilized by incorporating guided listening, my playing the piano to demonstrate music fundamentals and stylistic characteristics, watching film clips, etc. Consequently I began systematically to incorporate a variety of media into what was basically a lecture format.

The class became so popular, I soon had requests from students who could not attend lectures during the scheduled time or perhaps even come to campus. Their requests pointed to the need for distance learning options. My first “distance learning” option was simply allowing students to select from the various learning activities and submit their work either through postal mail or e-mail. In 1996, a colleague in the Computer Science Division was creating a new web-based educational template he called ETUDES (Easy To Use Distance Education Server). I asked to be the first instructor to “pilot” the template and used it to offer my Music of Multicultural America course “on

line.” This web-based version of the course has evolved over the subsequent years, and now offers students lectures (with listening example sound files), assignments, a dialogue chamber (for class announcements), a private message center (for communication between individuals), academic forums, and tests completely on line. Because of the efficiency and thoroughness of this delivery method, on-line teaching has replaced the other distance learning options.

But then I discovered that many students did not fit neatly and solely into traditional or distance learning formats. Students who could come to class generally were sometimes not able to do so because of work or personal obligations, but they still wanted access to the material covered in class. Students who did the course on-line requested the opportunity to attend lectures occasionally. I decided to create a new, flexible model in which students select from an array of delivery modes and activities to meet their individual learning and scheduling needs. Thus, for example, in the module on Hispanic traditions, a student might attend one campus lecture, go to the campus Media Center to watch a documentary on Mexican Americans, rent the film *Selena* from a local video retail store, listen to music examples streamed through the web, participate in an on-line student discussion, and submit the module's written assignments to me electronically through my website. Another student might select to do everything through traditional, classroom-based activities.

I was feeling comfortable enough with the on-line version until, as I was analyzing the course transformation for this project, I found myself embroiled in a debate regarding on-line teaching on campus. The majority of faculty believed that on-line teaching was vastly inferior to traditional Face2Face teaching. I asked the Leadership Group of our Campus Conversations to help me “brainstorm” the benefits and detriments of the two delivery models from a student and instructor perspective. This brainstorming

session turned out to be very informative, as we soon discovered that both models had benefits and detriments. The table below illustrates some of the salient points of that discussion from the perspective of the student:

Student Perspective			
On-Line Benefits	On-Line Detriments	Face-to-Face Benefits	Face-to-Face Detriments
Increased access because it is not time and place dependent.	Reduced access because of cost of technology, barrier to students of lower SES	Designated time and place to focus on education.	Time and place bound and hence impossible for some.
No physical barriers for disabled students; no psychological barriers for age, race, ethnicity, personal shyness...	Inappropriate for some disciplines/courses because courses need physical activity (e.g., drama performance...)	“Mainstreams” disabled and socially isolated.	Physical barriers for disabled; psychological barriers for age, race, shyness, ethnicity, immigrant, etc.
Students can work in solitude; anonymity brings personal safety and comfort.	Lack of oral/aural language exchange	Students can work in groups; “social mirror,” facilitates convergent learning.	Forced and unavoidable social contact.
Individual and personal access to instructor; don’t have to deal directly with disliked instructor.	Some on-line instructors are too busy for even “virtual” interaction. No “seductive instructor aura” to motivate, challenge, inspire	Formal and informal access to instructor.	Forced interaction with disliked instructor.
Levels playing field for reflective learners because it allows them time to “think” before responding.	No multi-sensory interaction and discussions.	Readily structured for interactive and collaborative learning.	“Reflective learners” get frustrated.
Saves time (e.g., from commute); also self-paced.	Requires students to be self-disciplined in regard to time.	Time is already structured.	Problematic if work or personal schedule conflicts.

Clearly there are benefits and detriments to both models. What became apparent to me in terms of the Music of Multicultural America class was not “which” model was best, but how to balance the two models by finding ways to emphasize the benefits of both. For example, I could offset the on-line mode detriment of lack of social interaction by incorporating more opportunities for student interaction and discussions on-line. I have continued to search for strategies that can integrate the best of both delivery systems.

Qualitative evidence indicates that students believe the flexibility of options is extremely important. But even for those students who are able only to take the course on-line, the comments are favorable, as is indicated by the following three quotes:

You teach an awesome class. I loved the format, the flexibility, the material.... This was the first online class I had ever taken and I was a bit hesitant before starting but it was really great. Also, I thought it worth mentioning that even though you have a lot of students taking this course online that you don't see face-to-face, you still managed to make it feel really personal.

I am taking this class on-line because I am currently staying in Japan. I have no choice other than taking an on-line course. Despite the reason, I really enjoy taking this course on-line. I don't feel like (I am) taking this course on-line because the instructor and students have lots of communications and discussions between them, which is quite an effective way to learn the materials in the text.

Learning is learning. I would rather have taken an on-line course than not have had an opportunity to take the course at all (since attending in the traditional setting is not possible for me). My instructor has brought the course Music of Multicultural America to me with so much vibrancy and color that it over-powered this cold, faceless computer. In other words, if you can get an on-line course with a teacher that has the ability to reach out to you just as if you're sitting in the class.... you've got gold!

Of course not all students do well with on-line instruction and I am continuing to search for way to improve this aspect of the delivery. Nevertheless, this course, with its blended format, had 91% retention rate of students as compared with a 68-72% rate for distance learning students institutionally.

One of the projects of our Campus Conversations group is to analyze more closely what makes on-line teaching most effective. Part of this puzzle is determining what characteristics and support systems students need to be successful on-line, and research is being conducted this year to attempt to answer that question.