General Description of Online Courses Taught & Descriptions of the Innovative Online Teaching Approaches Utilized

I have taught four courses online: Principles of Persuasion, Introduction to Media Criticism and Analysis, Mass Communication and Society, and Intercultural Communication. Of these I developed three; Principles of Persuasion, Introduction to Media Criticism and Analysis, Mass Communication and Society. I also have developed and taught the hybrid version of Fundamentals of Speech Communication (COM 114) and developed and taught one section of Principles of Persuasion and two sections of Speech Communication in video conference formats. All combined, I have taught thirty-five (I believe) sections of these courses over eight years. While all of these courses utilize some innovative online teaching methods, the two that I am currently teaching on a regular basis (every semester), Principles of Persuasion and Introduction to Media Criticism and Analysis, are the two that take advantage of these methods most. This application will focus on these two courses.

**Principles of Persuasion COM 318**

This course introduces and analyzes the effects of persuasion on both an individual level and societal level. Following the argument that all persuasion is self-persuasion (Larson, 1998), this course revolves around students analyzing both how they attempt to influence others and how external sources (politicians, media, friends, and family) attempt to influence them individually and, in some cases, society and the world. The course goals are:

1. To allow students the opportunity to recognize and to think critically about ways in which persuasion is used everyday in interpersonal communication, in media, and in political settings, in ways which effect them (the student) individually, and effect cultures as a whole.  
2. To allow students the opportunity to recognize and think critically about ways in which they use persuasion to effect others as well as themselves.

To achieve these goals well, I believe, students need significant interaction with content, with one another, and with me as the instructor. They need to engage in active learning and need to understand that there are high expectations for these courses. I believe the below learning and teaching tools communicate and promote this.

**Adobe Connect:** Adobe Connect meetings are synchronized meetings that allow both me as the instructor and the students to use video, audio, file sharing, small group, and large group discussions. Once per Unit (each Unit is three weeks), students are offered two times (one in the evening and one in the morning) that they can attend a synchronous, ninety minute Connect session. If they cannot attend, the meeting is recorded and students are offered an alternative assignment. These meetings are broken into four sections. The first part is housekeeping. Here is a chance for students to ask any questions they have (and make comments) regarding the Unit’s readings, movies, assignment(s), any feedback they have received, ideas and terminology, etc. This is a great tool as often is the case that a
question one student has is also a question that others have. They report
appreciating this information more than if it were in e-mail format. The second part
of the Connect meeting is a lecture/discussion/activity period with me reviewing
terms and theories that will be most important for them in the upcoming third
section (small group). Also during this second part, students are
introduced/provided with a video/audio clip, website, short reading, etc. that they
will be analyzing with their small groups in the third section. We also often
participate in short learning activities together which illustrate a complex term or
theory. The third section, which takes up the largest amount of time during our
meeting is when we break out into small groups of 4-6 members where students are
given a short list of questions so that they can put some of the ideas and theories of
the Unit and course in to critical practice with one another and with myself and our
Teaching Assistant. Each group develops a cohesive answer. The fourth and final
section of our Connect session is a chance for each group (usually 4) to report to the
large group and of the class as a whole to ask questions and engage in critical
conversations.

**Video Lectures:** Video/PowerPoint Lectures are another method I use to help
students to meet the course objectives. Each Unit has roughly four readings and/or
movies. I provide a 15-30 minute video lecture per reading/movie. The video
lectures are video/audio of me with PowerPoint overlay, and also many include
embedded videos, images, graphs, URLs, etc. The objective of the video lectures are
really three fold. First to attempt to explain difficult ideas/theories more clearly,
second to provide students with examples to which they can themselves relate and
apply these ideas and theories, and third to provide another mode with which
students can build a connection with me. The lectures are short and engaging, and
many include activities they can do as they watch the video to take part in active
learning.

**Enhanced Feedback:** Feedback is a very important learning and teaching tool. I
provide students with the standard comments in the right margin and provide a
detailed rubric/breakdown of their grade earned at the end of their papers. I also
provide an embedded 2-4 minute video screen capture with audio of me going
through their paper/discussion/video “with them” to explain the areas where the
project is meeting the assignment objectives (and working towards the course
objectives) and areas where they need to build for future assignments in order to
best meet those assignment objectives. I hope that many of the innovative tools I
utilize allow for diverse learning styles to succeed.

**Enhanced Discussion Forums:** I also believe that that more standard methods of
online instruction can be utilized in creative ways to even better help students to
meet the course objectives and to engage in cooperative, active learning. One
established mode I use to help students meet the course goals is asynchronous
discussion forums (both small group and class). Following Michaelson’s Principles
of Effective Groups, during the first week of our three week Units, students watch a
video online (either a television commercial or a political speech) and answer,
individually in their group’s forum one significant question (analyzing the unethical
persuasive tactics of the speaker/commercial) and providing support. During the second week of the three week Unit, each group works together to develop one cohesive group answer that all members are satisfied with. At the start of the third week, I move all group’s final answers to a class discussion forum and all class members debate, argue, and support, which group has the best answer and support. While asynchronous discussion forums are an established teaching approach in online courses, I hope that this approach uses the discussion forum in an innovative way to help students build community and push each other to meet the assignment goals.

**Preparation/Week 1 Materials:** Certainly one key for success at anything is making sure that the task is both a good fit for you and, especially, that you are well prepared. Before the first week of classes, I e-mail all registered students and open Blackboard early to provide them with the following:

- (Detailed) Course syllabus including assignment descriptions and rubric
- A list of “Tips for Success” from students who have already completed this course (asked and taken from end of the semester course evals)
- An “Intro to the course” video/screen capture of me navigating through the course in Blackboard and Adobe Connect demonstrating how they will need to do the same (accessing quizzes, e-mail, how the Unit folders are set up, how to set up and navigate Adobe connect, etc.
- A “How to do well” quiz during the first week of classes. They must take and retake this quiz until they earn a 100%. Then they are automatically granted access to the Unit 1 materials/folder. The “How to do well” quiz is comprised of questions from the syllabus, the “Tips for success” document, and the “Intro to course materials” video.

*Introduction to Media Criticism and Analysis COM 248*

This course introduces students to major critical approaches to analyzing media and media messages (mass communication). We are essentially pushing ourselves to analyze and learn how we make meaning, understand ourselves, and understand the world based on the techniques and the re-presentations we see in film and other media. This requires the course to be set up in a way that constantly utilized active learning. The course goals are:

1. To allow students the opportunity to learn how to look at media images from a critical perspective; thereby recognizing and analyzing the communication techniques and the motivation behind the techniques of media producers within the context of culture.

2. Through this process, students will be pushed to build an awareness of the increasing role of media in creating meaning in our everyday lives and in the development of the self.
Again, to achieve these goals well, I believe, students need significant interaction with content, with one another, and with me as the instructor. They need to understand that there are high expectations for this course, and, perhaps above all, need to engaging in active learning. In order to achieve this course’s unique goals, it is set up in a similar but slightly different way from the Principles of Persuasion course. The following are the same:

- Adobe Connect Sessions
- Video Lectures
- Enhanced Feedback
- Preparation/Week 1 Materials (including the “How to do well quiz)

One additional component added to this course is:

**Picture/Video Montage Production and Presentation:** Active learning is key to students applying these course materials to their own lives and to meeting the course goals. For this course, students need to know how media producers attempt to create meaning within their audience through the use of certain production techniques. So, students are put in the shoes of the media producer. They define a goal (either an emotion they want the audience to feel or a specific call to action such as go to this URL and donate money to the USO; each student chooses their own topic and their own goal; though it must be a culturally or interculturally significantly topic). They then create a 2-5 minute picture/video montage with voice over/audio, transitions, and text in attempts to achieve that goal. Then the student builds a PowerPoint presentation with embedded video and images with a voice over of her/him explaining the production techniques (lighting, speed, camera angles, music choice, etc.) that s/he used in attempts to accomplish her/his goal.

Students are provided with a detailed description of the requirements of the assignment, grading rubric, documentation, Studio M information, screen capture videos of how to work in Windows Movie Maker and iMovie, and a screen capture of how to properly save and submit this project.
Evidence of Effectiveness in Achieving Desired Learning Outcomes & Demonstrated Rapport with Learners and Other Course Participants

Below are averages and summary of the relevant course evaluation questions/results from the sections of Principles of Persuasion and Introduction to Media Criticism and Analysis I have taught in the past year. I have limited the Qualitative feedback from course evals to five per section.

Fall 2009

*Principles of Persuasion (Learning Outcomes):*

4.72/5.00 I was offered the opportunity to recognize and to think critically about ways in which persuasion is used everyday in interpersonal communication in ways which effect me (the student) individually, and effect cultures as a whole.

4.82/5.00 I was offered the opportunity to recognize and to think critically about ways in which persuasion is used everyday in media in ways which effect me (the student) individually, and effect cultures as a whole.

4.72/5.00 I was offered the opportunity to recognize and to think critically about ways in which persuasion is used everyday in political settings in ways which effect me (the student) individually, and effect cultures as a whole.

4.72/5.00 I was allowed the opportunity to recognize and think critically about ways in which I use persuasion to effect others as well as myself.

*Selected comments pertaining to demonstrated rapport with learners and other course participants & pertaining to effectiveness of innovative learning/teaching methods*

1. I think that the class connect sessions are very helpful. Although, I was very weary of them at first. I felt that an online class was meant to be used so that the student could work on the assignments at their convenience, and not be tied down to a specific time period. BUT! I was proved wrong. It wasn’t that bad, and the alternative assignments were very reasonable and helpful as well. I learned probably the most material from just simply interacting in the connect sessions.

2. The powerpoints, structure of the units, and papers. They are all very key to the course. Also, I enjoyed the connect sessions. I think that it is an interesting twist to the course. I really makes it a communication course and not just another online course.
3. I really liked the connect sessions, they really help me understand the material. I like all the extra videos and reading material, it gave me a whole spectrum to understand the material.

4. I would have to say the online connect sessions, it helps everyone get on the same page throughout the semester.

5. I like the connect discussions because this allows interaction between the students and also the professor. I like the critically analyzing myself in the papers because it allows me to see where I stand and really what I have learned.

Introduction to Media Criticism and Analysis (Learning Outcomes):
4.79/5.00 I was allowed the opportunity to learn how to look at media images from a critical perspective

4.50/5.00 I was allowed the opportunity to recognize and analyze the communication techniques and the motivation behind the techniques of media producers

4.50/5.00 I was allowed the opportunity to build an awareness of the increasing role of media in creating meaning in my everyday life and in the development of my self.

Selected comments pertaining to demonstrated rapport with learners and other course participants & pertaining to effectiveness of innovative learning/teaching methods

1. I really enjoyed the connect sessions. Because its an online course it gives everyone a chance to ask questions and be clear on expectations. Adam was very clear and accessible with communication and his expectations of assignments and papers. This class was my first class back after 7 years and my first online class so I was a little intimidated and overwhelmed at first but Adam did a wonderful job of communicating and laying out exactly what he needed/expected from assignments.

2. The instructor and his very understanding heart is the best reason to take a course like this one. When you know life gives you more unexpected stress, it is nice to know that the teacher is able to put himself in your shoes!!! Thank you Adam I can’t tell you the impact you have had on me, my life, and my stress level!!! God Bless you and your family!

3. This course is well developed. I liked the class load it required me to stay engaged but at the same time I was not bogged down by minuscule tasks like getting on everyday to check a chat. I loved the connect sessions because it gave me a chance to show what I knew. I would say keep the
Connect Sessions and the PowerPoint.

4. Keep everything as it is... phenomenal course! The book is superb, I researched the links and programming suggestions... it should be mandatory to do so because it was all very informative.

5. I was leery that the course objective wanted us to learn to analyze HOW we make meaning of the media we consume, but the readings, lectures and videos achieved that objective. It is too easy to just consume art and news and entertainment. This course really does help me to analyze why I am watching a particular show or movie and what kind of message is being promoted.

Summer 2009

*Principles of Persuasion (Learning Outcomes):*

4.53/5.00 I was offered the opportunity to recognize and to think critically about ways in which persuasion is used everyday in interpersonal communication in ways which effect me (the student) individually, and effect cultures as a whole.

4.53/5.00 I was offered the opportunity to recognize and to think critically about ways in which persuasion is used everyday in media in ways which effect me (the student) individually, and effect cultures as a whole.

4.47/5.00 I was offered the opportunity to recognize and to think critically about ways in which persuasion is used everyday in political settings in ways which effect me (the student) individually, and effect cultures as a whole.

4.47/5.00 I was allowed the opportunity to recognize and think critically about ways in which I use persuasion to effect others as well as myself.

**Selected comments pertaining to demonstrated rapport with learners and other course participants & pertaining to effectiveness of innovative learning/teaching methods**

1. (e-mail) Just wanted to say thanks...by far this was the best class I've taken at IPFW, or anywhere for that matter...you did a fabulous job with all of it and I will highly recommend it to others! Do you teach anything else...I will be beginning my work on my Masters this fall and would be very interested in another on of your courses? Thanks again, and take care...you have completely changed how I view my world, for the better, and now I will pass it on to my children...Good Luck and God Bless you and yours.

2. (e-mail) Wow Adam.
   I can’t begin to thank you enough for your feedback on my Paper 2. I cannot imagine the time spent in doing this for the entire class. Wow.
I wanted to take the time out and tell you that I appreciate your dedication to my paper and the time you spent for me. Truly.
You are right, I can only build upon weaknesses and you are very specific in what my weaknesses are. Perfect!

3. Adam is super fantastic and I wish he could be "cloned". He is one of the top 3 instructors I have ever had in my postsecondary career. Adam "breaths" what he teaches and he is extremely dedicated to teaching and helping students learn. Wow!

4. I would recommend the connect sessions stay the same, because they helped me internet with others students. Something alot of the other online classes do not offer

5. I actually think the agressive format kept me engaged, other online course have been slower and I have been able to work weeks ahead in those and therefore only engage in the material occasionally. Here I had to be engaged at least every other day as to not get behind.

Spring 2009

*Principles of Persuasion (Learning Outcomes):*

4.56/5.00 I was offered the opportunity to recognize and to think critically about ways in which persuasion is used everyday in interpersonal communication in ways which effect me (the student) individually, and effect cultures as a whole.

4.64/5.00 I was offered the opportunity to recognize and to think critically about ways in which persuasion is used everyday in media in ways which effect me (the student) individually, and effect cultures as a whole.

4.56/5.00 I was offered the opportunity to recognize and to think critically about ways in which persuasion is used everyday in political settings in ways which effect me (the student) individually, and effect cultures as a whole.

4.56/5.00 I was allowed the opportunity to recognize and think critically about ways in which I use persuasion to effect others as well as myself.

*Selected comments pertaining to demonstrated rapport with learners and other course participants & pertaining to effectiveness of innovative learning/teaching methods*

1. I loved the way the quizzes and course video lectures were set up. They really allowed me to understand the material more. I think that it was a good balance between the critical connect sessions and papers.

2. I recommend that you continue to use the videos becuase they are interesting and different. It is not very often teachers use videos to stimulate
learning anymore. I would also continue with the connect discussions and the videos you recorded. It made me feel that i knew my teacher although we never met. This was the only online class i have taken that took advantage of that source. Although communicating to others through computers in a chat format can be frustrating, it makes it feel like an actually class and you don't feel so alone, or on your own. I loved how everything applied to my life, and i can say that i have changed for the better from this class. Oh, and the video, also wonderful. I loved them all and was a little disappointed that im not watching these types of shows on the television in the first place. Who knew education television could be interesting? ;)

3. I definitely like the way in which the connect sessions are set up. So that we are able to participate on a very active (ie. LIVE) basis with the other members of the course. Also, I appreciate that they were recorded and available for those who were unable to attend.

4. I liked the Connect discussions because we went over the materials, got a better grasp of concepts and applied them. I could also get my questions answered by the professor as well as my classmates.

5. I really enjoyed the structure of this online class. I particularly enjoyed logging in to the online connects only a few times throughout the semester instead of having to create a website or group discussions weekly. It allowed us to think critically and take other students perspectives into consideration.

*Introduction to Media Criticism and Analysis (Learning Outcomes):*
4.68/5.00 I was allowed the opportunity to learn how to look at media images from a critical perspective

4.74/5.00 I was allowed the opportunity to recognize and analyze the communication techniques and the motivation behind the techniques of media producers

4.68/5.00 I was allowed the opportunity to build an awareness of the increasing role of media in creating meaning in my everyday life and in the development of my self.

*Selected comments pertaining to demonstrated rapport with learners and other course participants & pertaining to effectiveness of innovative learning/teaching methods*

1. I like the idea of the connect session as this is something I have never experienced before and it made doing an online class easier in some regards. Most online classes you have very limited interaction with the instructors and the other students so the Connect Session was a way to get a better understanding of the class, assignments and simply getting the social experience you miss out on with a lot of online courses.
2. I feel that the assignments were very helpful in learning the material. The connect sessions were also more helpful than anything but I think that that is because I am an auditory learner.

3. Having the powerpoints with the encrypted audio, made it more like an on-campus class. Allowing us visual learners what we need to get a better understanding of the content for the course. The connect sessions gave us the classroom effect, setting it apart from other online classes I've taken.

4. The way the course is organized: quizzes, class meetings, and projects/papers at the end of each unit. The powerpoint lectures were very good and the feedback from our work was always extremely detailed and great: VERY HELPFUL! The teacher made it even better, sowing a great interest on the subjects and making everything flow easily. He also was constantly available for help and willing to help.

5. I loved this class! Taking online classes can lead a student to feel like they are missing out. This is not true for this class. I enjoyed how much effort Adam put into his teaching. I have had few professors who care so much about the work they do. Overall I would not change anything about this class.
Examples of Course Materials Which Embody Effective Online Teaching Strategies

Samples removed in order to protect privacy of students. Please contact Adam who can arrange for you see them.

References


