

## Introduction

### CREATING AN ONLINE CLASSROOM WHICH ENCOURAGES ETHICAL ONLINE ACTIONS AND ASSESSMENT.

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Distance learning has undergone a long evolution from correspondence courses to videotaped lectures to audio-tapes/lessons created for offsite coursework, finally incorporating internet based instruction into the distance learning milieu. This discussion will be limited to suggestions for Internet based courses.

Internet courses allow the learner and the instructor to interact while remaining in a different place and time. This difference does not mean that educators should abandon techniques learned while teaching face to face, nor should they abandon authentic assessments established in the traditional classroom. Although the assurance of honest student and course evaluation poses new challenges for the on-line classroom, the basic desire for ethical course delivery and student evaluation is the same in the traditional classroom or online. Authentic assessment and student involvement eliminates or lessens many of the ethical questions which surround online instruction and internet based courses, just as it does in the face to face classroom.

## Modification of Traditional Classroom Techniques

Some teaching techniques/assessments established face to face require modifications; however the basic techniques/assessments remain effective online. One such technique/assessment is the one-minute paper. The one-minute paper is a universal face to face classroom teaching/authentic assessment technique in higher education; it is used in many disciplines and many levels. The one minute paper has long been elevated for its effectiveness as a learning vehicle for students, regardless of their ability or their instructor (Chizmar, 1998). One minute papers ask some version of the traditional two questions:

1. In your opinion, what is the most important point of the class today?
2. What is the most puzzling question that remains after today's class?

By posing these two questions, instructors not only encourage students to identify and express their opinion of the central point in the lecture, they illuminate anything that still needs clarification. This encourages the student not to just recite a part of the lecture, but to take ownership of the knowledge offered: it shows respect for the student's opinion, and gives value to their active participation. If class participation is equated to submittal of the one-minute paper, attendance generally improves. The one-minute paper also benefits the instructor by explicating any areas needing further attention. Often there is a correlation between points identified on the one-minute paper and test questions.

This discussion of the one minute paper may seem both an incongruity in Internet teaching and to be of no relevance to a discussion of ethics in online teaching. The application of the principals of the one-minute paper is congruent with the goals of online learning and a part of authentic assessment. Authentic assessment is a part of the ethical contract into which students and instructors enter.

The on-line equivalent of a one-minute paper is found in the group discussion area. The difference between one-minute papers in the classroom and the Internet group

discussion area-equivalent is that one-minute papers are read only by the instructor, whereas the instructor and more than one student will read the group discussion board version of a one-minute paper. When students are required to respond to another student's opinion, additional depth of thought occurs and, perhaps most importantly, additional ownership of the opinion and the learning that supports it occurs. This will equate to more than just an exchange of knowledge; learning will occur for both the student writing the paper and the student discussing the paper.

The value of interchange about a specific topic has been substantiated by student comments in the qualitative portion of a survey administered to students in a Public Affairs Issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century course (Hawkins, 2004). A senior student commented:

This semester I have read and learned lots of encouraging things about our globe. But also lots of bad things. I don't know how to deal with large reality. I would have been lost except for the discussion board. It helped to know what others thought. I got to see their opinions and think about them.

A graduating senior wrote:

After talking with others on the discussion board, I believe that people are beginning to realize the impacts that industry is having on the environment. Before I took the class, I thought no one knew and worried but me.

This knowledge also is reflected in authentic assessments. A junior student wrote

The discussion board helped me study for the last test because I could look at what other's opinions were and I had thought about things on the test.

These student comments show, from a student's point of view, the value of structuring the on-line discussion board area so that it emulates one-minute papers in face to face classes, but with the addition of student interaction. From an instructor's perception, the questions which were discussed in the group area are more likely to be answered correctly. This perception has not been quantified, but a study has been proposed to investigate this opinion.

Creating student assessments with knowledge reinforced on the group discussion board is a form of authentic assessment, and an ethical evaluation of student learning. Pertinent and appropriate forms of assessment are used to encourage honesty from students. Clear expectations are used to promote student trust in an ethical on-line interchange.

Another form of assessment which benefits from student participation in the online discussion area is the mastery question. The online discussion area has allowed the instructor to know the attitudes and responses of individual students. The instructor is, therefore, more likely to recognize a different student by their opinions and someone who is the student can be recognized.

In a mastery question, students are asked to apply principals from the class to something in their lives or their individual experience. To answer a mastery question, not only knowledge from the course, but individual experience is used. Asking the student to analyze how the area around their home has changed in the last 10 years and the environmental impact of the change would be a mastery question. The question must

allow an alternative location for a student who has moved, but the answer will still be unique and still force an evaluation of the environment. Because each answer unique, the instructor will easily recognized any answer which has been submitted before.

Making the principals of the one-minute paper work on the internet may require a redefinition of time. Clock time, a culture based concept, is typically used for FACE TO FACE classes. Classes meet at a specific time. The lecture occurs. The one-minute paper is filled out and submitted. Even the name of the assessment, a one-minute paper, is tied to the concept of clock time.

Because of the nature of the Internet and how interaction occurs, instructors have the opportunity to define class time in an entirely new way: as a block of time. This redefinition, once again, is a small adaptation from what was discussed as "clock time" in a face to face classroom. Although a specific point in time (such as a due date) may be necessary in order to accommodate both class and higher education administration, student assignments such as the internet version of the one-minute paper, the one-block paper, do not have to be tied to clock time. face to face instructors might be annoyed if students submitted papers to them from the time they were assigned, until they were due. Internet instructors do not mind if assignments are submitted early and collected by the course software or sorted in the instructor's email. This may lessen the acceptable excuses for not submitting the paper when due.

When one-block papers are used, the same benefits occur as one-minute papers: 1) students do not to just recite a part of the lesson, they are encouraged to take ownership of the knowledge offered, 2) one-block papers show respect for the student's opinion, 3) gives value to their active participation, 4) participation is equated to on-line (asynchronous) class attendance, 5) the instructor benefits by explicating any areas needing further attention, 6) there can be a correlation between points identified on the one-block or the one-minute paper and test questions.

Blocks of time, not a point in time, may be considered in other ways. People participating on the Internet need the same commitment to participation in block time as they do in clock time. Instructors may agree to answer email within 24 hours of time received. Although students may be given 48 or 72 hour block in which to respond to a group discussion board question, short, research based, opinion papers may be given seven days for response. This sets limits and boundaries in time, but it is not point-in-time specific. An almost instantaneous medium (the Internet) is thereby adapted for a slower, more thoughtful, asynchronous use. It is a new way of thinking. This has implications for the ethical use of the Internet to teach.

#### Using Technology to Encourage On-line Honesty

Blocks of time mean that the instructor abandons one more method of assuring honesty among those taking the course. Having already abandoned identifying students taking a test by sight or by comparing handwriting, instructors using time blocks now cannot specify precisely when the test is administered. If all tests are objective and precisely the same, there is no guarantee that the questions will not be passed among students in the class. However, Internet classes are not so different than face to face classes where students use crib notes, try to look at other student papers as they come to the front to ask for assistance from the instructor, write formulas on their clothes, etc.

There are several methods of combating this form of dishonesty. Some of them use the technology of course management systems available for the Internet. One of the most commonly used is making the final test of random queries from a pool of test questions. By doing this, no two students receive the same test. To be effective, it is necessary for the instructor to rate the questions in the pool for difficulty, thus assuring equity for the students. It is also essential to make the pool sufficiently large to accommodate the size of the students in the class. Both Blackboard and WebCT offer the "random questions from a pool" feature.

Monitoring the duration of the test is another commonly used method which encourages honesty. This is available on both Blackboard and WebCT. Instructors use it so that any student reporting a computer "crash" and asking for permission to re-enter the test is subject to evaluation by instructor about the honesty of the reported crash.

#### Other Traditional Methods for Assessment

Once again, using techniques created in face to face classes can present good learning opportunities. By making all assignments open-book the problem of unauthorized resources is minimized.

One of the most beneficial methods of lessening dishonesty in Internet instruction is by giving the greatest weight to a grade for evaluation of one another's projects. The projects will be unique to the course and the semester, thus the evaluations will be unique to the course.

#### Personalizing the Course

The experience of the researcher is that personalizing the course is a step in making the internet courses more like classrooms. Maintaining appropriate faculty/student interaction is important. Although some "mass email" may be important, individual email which uses the student's name help break down barriers. Providing a short biographical sketch, perhaps accompanied by a picture of the instructor is another technique. If cost is not a barrier, providing a CD with a recording so that the instructor becomes a person, not just someone on the other side of the monitor helps to quell student unease. Beginning the class with a letter, not just a policy is a good first introduction, even if the course policy is attached or referenced. Once again, this is a technique borrowed from traditional classrooms.

Personalization does not have to be limited to interaction between the student and the instructor. Group projects, peer review of papers prior to the final submission, and small discussions which result in a team effort are also helpful. All of these forms of ethical student collaboration are positive in humanizing and personalizing the course.

#### Conclusion

No matter what methods are employed, some unethical acts will occur. It is virtually impossible at this time to stop one person for taking a course for another person. However, that may have also occurred in a traditional classroom. Ethical standards for online instruction have not yet been formalized. If, however, instructors remember that the purpose of education is to help students achieve long lasting, useable learning, a guide for ethical action will have been established. To efficiently facilitate this learning, instructors should attempt to create an environment which students perceive as fair and

safe and where students believe they can succeed. This may be the most important ethical commitment of online teaching.

#### References

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Hawkins, R. S. (2004). Student Attitudes, Motivation and Actions: Effects of a Public Affairs Issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Course. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.