

Catholic Distance Learning Network: Online Teaching and Learning Certification Course

Text for a PPT video for Module 1 - Preparation, Part 1 (Developing a Basic Sense of the Terminology)

Welcome to the Podcast for Module One of the Online Teaching and Learning Certification Course. My name is David J. Harrison. I work at Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Cromwell, Connecticut, as the Educational Technologist and Blackboard administrator, assisting the distance learning faculty and staff with a myriad of facets from enrollment to course design to website management. I am an Adjunct Professor of Educational Technology at Webster University, School of Education, in St. Louis, Missouri, teaching theory courses of technology to graduate students working on the Masters in Educational Technology degree. I am also a Faculty Instructor for the Catholic Distance Learning Network. I hold a Masters of Arts in Theology from Holy Apostles, certification in Online Teaching and Learning from the Seminary Department of the National Catholic Educational Association (the same certification that you can earn through this course), and network administration certification. In addition to extensive work in the area of government network and email administration, I have taken a number of distance learning courses from three schools of theology, including Holy Apostles.

In this series of podcasts I will highlight the concepts presented in our course text, *Essential Elements* by Elbaum, McIntyre, and Smith. I will frequently pepper the podcasts with examples from my own experiences showing how I strive to meet the challenges of online instruction.

The book *Essential Elements* may well become your best friend as you cross the mental river from the traditional brick and mortar paradigm to the wide-open, and often confusing, landscape of online learning. Our authors present seventeen steps divided into three stages of production. Before explaining these steps they present us their model of online learning, which we will then be able to build using the seventeen steps.

Their model is called The Concord Consortium e-Learning Model. It contains nine characteristics which we will aim to fulfill as we work our way through this CDLN course. Allow me to discuss these nine characteristics -- which you can find in the Introduction on pages seven through thirteen.

The first one is Asynchronous Collaboration. This simply means that the online course is mainly composed of interactions that do not occur at the same time, that is, they are not "live." Students are able to post comments at two in the morning to a posting that someone else wrote at eight o'clock the previous evening. A third student can then read and respond to both during her breakfast hour a few hours later. Many of our distance learning students are not able to gather together at the exact same time, as we expect in a brick and mortar class. This fact partly explains why they choose our online courses in the first place. For instance, I have had students living in the South on Eastern time taking a course with folks living in the mid-West, while I live in Nevada. Throw into this mix a student who lives in China. Needless to say, we were never all in the course at the same time. Our primary -- but not sole -- communication tools were asynchronous: email and discussion board postings.

That being said, though, there is great value in synchronous communication activities -- that is, live, interactive sessions. I use live voice conferences and live text chats to wrap up each semester. While time zones do become an issue, I offer several different time slots, such as Thursday and Friday evenings and Saturday mornings, to accommodate people's different schedules. The immediate feedback and personal nature of such live communications help the students and me to really connect as people, going beyond our names on a discussion board. And my student in China was able to participate one semester -- it was 7:00 pm on Friday in Missouri, 5:00 o'clock my time, and 8:00 in the morning on Saturday for him. And it worked just fine!

The second characteristic is Explicit Schedules. Students need to be guided through the course together. Long topical modules allowing students to complete their work within an ambiguous amount of time does not easily create collaborative discussion and the learning that occurs thereby (and it can create a nightmare for us instructors to keep track of students who are in different sections of the course). Self-paced courses have their place, but if our courses exist within a semester or quarter calendar, then we must give strong and enforceable chronological guidelines. For instance, my course weeks begin on Monday. I expect the students to post a first response on the discussion board by Wednesday at Midnight (what I refer to as "original postings" that answer that week's seed question or topic), and then turn in the remainder of their assignments by Midnight on the following Sunday which is the last day of the academic week. Response postings are due on Sunday as well, that way students have a few days to respond to the Wednesday postings and engage in conversations. So that the students know that I am alive and well, and reading their work, I respond to all original postings (those that are due on Wednesday) at least by the following morning when they are due, that is, Thursday morning. I email them their grades at the same time. This tells the students that I expect them to be punctual and they can expect the same from me -- we are all in the class together, going at the same pace. No chronological stragglers. Those who deviate from this schedule are penalized unless they have mitigating circumstances (which have ranged from emergency operations to hurricanes!). I am clear about my expectations and the penalties and my students generally keep up and stay together.

Characteristic number three is Expert Facilitation. Our authors state several important points in this section, so be sure to read the text, but I would like to discuss one of them: "Like a good teacher in a traditional classroom, the expert facilitator doesn't ask all the questions or provide too many answers."

There are two parts to this point:

Number 1: We are not living text books, academic performers, nor talking heads. Online instructors are facilitators, leading and guiding our students to and through the course materials, some of which is our material, some of which comes from other sources. We can provide short text, audio, or video lectures -- such as what I am doing now -- but our role in the online classroom is not to dominate the conversation while students sit like sponges before their computer screens. The instructor-as-lecturer model has worked well for hundreds of years in brick and mortar classes, but this simply does not work in the online class because

of the need to connect. Face-to-face lecture halls may not be very connected environments, but the students in such large classes are present in the same place at the same time as the lecturer. While this is not the ideal learning environment, even this setup provides more of a social-interaction atmosphere than a student sitting at her computer waiting for a professor's email to arrive. We must overtly create an atmosphere of connection in our online courses, lest we only create orphaned distance learning students -- a common problem that I am frequently discerning among online students. Module Two will go more into this topic of transmissive versus transactive communication.

Number 2: Neither do we dominate the online discussions we create. We are present, we ask follow-up questions that encourage the students to probe the issues deeper, we correct mistakes, but -- and this is very important -- we do not get in the way. A close friend of mine has, in the past, spent copious amounts of hours answering every discussion board post her students presented. Her answers and reflections were dizzying in their brilliance and practicality. Unfortunately, not only did she eventually go dizzy herself, but she squashed the student-to-student learning process. When she posted her thoughts, the students, it seemed, felt the issue was resolved with her "The Professor has Spoken" posts, and there were no more reasons for them to discuss it further.

We certainly need to make our presence known, to make it obvious that we value our students' participation beyond just assigning them grades at the end of the semester. We need to show that we will jump in with a comment of affirmation or necessary redirection, but we need to not get in the way of the students learning by discussing the topic amongst themselves. And it saves our own sanity in the process, as my friend revealed to me when she stopped getting in the way.

The fourth characteristic is Inquiry Pedagogy. A variety of pedagogical tools can be employed that take the students into the material and ask it questions. Summaries of text may not sound like such an activity, but for advanced texts such as the Documents of Vatican II and those written by St. Augustine, St. John of the Cross, and St. Thomas Aquinas, accountability summaries can, indeed, become inquiry activities. For instance, if students are to post their summaries of a portion of St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*, whereupon their summaries will be read and discussed by a dozen of their fellow students (not just the instructor), there is a greater likelihood that they will make sure they understand the portion before crafting their summary, so as not to be "publicly" embarrassed. I have been involved with this type of activity and have seen its success.

Another inquiry activity is to provide students a basket of resources, such as several journal articles, several websites, and particular passages from the course text, and a list of several different questions that they can answer based on at least one resource from each category (at least one journal article, one website, and one passage). This will then impel them to ask the various resources the same question so that they may then synthesize the different answers.

Characteristic five is High Quality Materials. We must choose a variety of materials to present the course concepts. Whereas in the traditional face-to-face classroom we can present

materials in the form of lectures, we need to choose other methods to present the same material within online courses. Lectures in the form of text, videos, and podcasts are fine, but they need to be only one element in a full basket, supplemented with other substantive resources. Online journal articles, podcasts (ours or others from around the world, such as those available from iTunesU), online news sources, the Vatican website, YouTube (such as the Vatican's YouTube site), offline books, online books (such as out-of-copyright books available from GoogleBooks), etc. can add multiple artifacts to our courses. We must all keep in mind that our own personal learning styles may not be shared by all of our students. I am a visual learner -- give me a book. And so I create podcasts and audio PowerPoint presentations for my students -- to force myself into providing materials that will work for students who learn differently than I do (the texts of my podcasts and PowerPoint presentations are also provided, for those students who *do* learn as I do).

Characteristic number six is Community Building. One of the major obstacles that we must overcome is the very strength of online learning: many students choose online courses because they cannot come to the campus for reasons of schedules or proximity. Online courses allow such students to take courses -- but this advantage also means the potential of student isolation, or what I have termed, the creation of the orphaned distance learning student. We must actively work to create what passively exists in a brick and mortar classroom -- a sense that our online courses are, in fact, classes, not collections of disparate, isolated orphaned students spread throughout the country who do not form a cohesive whole. Creating a sense of community takes overt effort, constant nurturing, and leadership on our part. We will go into more depth later on in this course, exploring techniques and activities that will work together to accomplish this.

The seventh characteristic seeks to limit course enrollment to a minimum of twelve students and a maximum of twenty-five. Online communities require a critical mass, which the authors recommend be about twelve, and because of overcrowding in group discussions, a maximum of twenty-five is suggested. I have found twelve to fifteen to be an ideal number, with at least eight students as being sufficient. The decision regarding the minimum and maximum seats per class rarely rests with the instructor; however, we can keep these recommendations in mind and make suggestions to the appropriate personnel if we encounter issues of community and collaboration related to enrollment size. Within our courses, we can create smaller groups of students who work and interact together for certain assignments. Live, synchronous communication, for instance, is best if the number of students remains between three and six, with one instructor facilitating the conference.

Characteristic number eight discusses Purposeful Virtual Spaces. Our authors explain these to be the discussion areas akin to brick and mortar spaces, such as a student lounge and the hallways outside the classrooms where students discuss the course, the professor, how their families are doing, or what classes they may take next semester. We need to have such community-oriented areas within our courses that are not those reserved for discussion of the course materials. A "coffee shop" or "water cooler" discussion board -- which has clear directions indicating the social chit-chat nature of such a space -- is highly recommended. In addition to such spaces, I also create an introduction space within the discussion board that is assigned the first week of class. I encourage the inclusion of photos, description of

personal hobbies, and the mention of one's pets as a way for all of us (especially me) to get to know each other and be able to create a personal picture that gives meaning to the names which appear in emails and on discussion boards. I post the same information, too.

The final characteristic is Ongoing Assessment. It is recommended that traditional tests and final exams not be components of online courses. Remember that the online world presents new paradigms of instruction, and with these, new methods of assessment and new problems with traditional methods. I will touch more on this characteristic throughout these podcasts.

Interactive discussions utilizing the discussion boards facilitates such ongoing assessment of student participation and comprehension in a way that is easier and more accurate than traditional classroom discussions allow. These ongoing discussions (which work very well as weekly assignments that provide weekly feedback and grades) can be complimented with traditional papers, journaling, blogging, online quizzes, research assignments, annotated bibliographies, etc. The point is to provide continual assessment through the use of constant assignments -- not the traditional two papers and a final exam. We are not able to interact with our students three times a week in a classroom and gauge understanding through body language, rolled eyes, stammering responses, and excited faces. Instead, we must overtly create multiple interactive opportunities each week -- thereby providing constant guidance and mentoring that allow us to quickly see when students understand or misunderstand the materials presented.

I trust that this has been a helpful introduction to this course on online teaching and learning. The online environment may be a new paradigm for some of you, or a familiar one for others. In any event, it is important that we understand that there are a plethora of new tools and opportunities, and pitfalls and problems, which this electronic paradigm creates for us. It requires us to rethink our rolls as instructors and mentors, to examine different methods of teaching, and to embrace a change in the way we guide our students to the final outcome of mastery and formation. I am confident that this CDLN course will acclimate you to this new paradigm, give you the theoretical and practical tools you need to be successful, and provide you with the confidence to make the transition.

Please note that these podcasts have been created to be supplemental material to the course text, not to replace it. So be sure to follow the reading schedule provided in this course.