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It seems as if everyone is using e-learning (on-line learning) these days. There are many options available, including self-paced courses, skills-based courses, virtual classrooms (and their cousins, live web seminars), web-enhanced courses, and asynchronous courses. There is a plethora of technological methods that can be utilized for course delivery. Which of these technologies and methods of use will maximize e-learning's effectiveness? In other words, for the university, the instructor and students, which seems to work the best? In a nutshell – all of them. The beauty of e-learning is that there are so many options that can be tailored to specific needs.

Distance education is not a new phenomenon in American Education. Correspondence courses have been in existence for over a hundred years. What is different is the use of technology to deliver college-level courses to students who are separated from the instructor. It is a form of instruction that is learner-centered. E-learning is construed in a variety of contexts, such as distance learning, online learning, and networked learning (Wilson, 2001). Volery (2000) states that universities should embrace the readily available e-learning technology, or they will be left behind in the pursuit of globalization. He also maintains that technical expertise on the part of instructors is not necessarily of great value unless they devise effective ways to utilize it. Instructors play a key role in the effective delivery of e-learning initiatives, as it is the instructors, not the technology that facilitates the students' learning experiences. Wilson (2001) suggests that three instructional characteristics control the degree of learning: attitude towards technology, teaching style, and the control of technology.

In the series of asynchronous courses that are in the Non-Traditional M.Ed. Program in Teacher Education at Columbus State University (CSU), issues are presented to students, and they must respond in writing, using the text, other auxiliary resources, and their problem-solving skills. Often students are asked to solve a problem or design a lesson using the theories or information they have read. They are asked to use their own experiences as examples. Comments and suggestions are made and the work is graded and returned to them. Because of the nature of the assignments and the use of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation levels of the discussion questions presented to the students, plagiarism, or quoting directly from the textbook is not an issue.

There is a notion that an e-learning environment offers students an improved learning experience when compared to a more traditional learning environment. Holley (2002) found that student participants in online university courses using techniques such as virtual lectures and e-mail achieved better grades than students who study in traditional learning settings. There is some evidence that there are current significant limitations of on-line learning environments, and there is not enough research to support it. O'Connell (2002) proposes that students from non-technical backgrounds or those who are more accustomed to traditional face-to-face learning environments, experience problems absorbing course material in online classes.

At CSU, the asynchronous teacher education graduate courses began as an e-learning pilot in 2001, as a response to the need for teachers both regionally and throughout the nation. The College of Education set out to develop alternative means for preparing college graduates (without a teacher education degree) to become teachers. Because these people were already employed, supporting families and leading busy lives, it was thought that asynchronous delivery might work the best. Why did these people want to make the switch from their current careers to teaching? By far the most frequent reason given was "to do something more meaningful in their careers."

The program began with the development of a course for eight hours credit, containing four modules; initially each module would be four-weeks in length and encompass the necessary pedagogy common to all content fields. As it turned out, it was way too much of a load for a working person (who was likely also raising a family), and subsequently required modification. The program's four modules became four separate courses, with three courses at two hours each, and the special education module changed to three hours (to satisfy certification requirements).

Online courses offer students the opportunity to schedule much of their class work at times that are convenient for them. Online classes also reduce the number of trips to class and the library by incorporating the lecture and class discussion via instructor feedback and chat rooms. This material can be saved, unlike "real" classroom discussions which vanish as soon as the class is over. The Virginia Community College System produced a document which summarizes the results of various committees and task forces that developed and refined a *Distance Learning Management Tool* (1996). Guiding principles include:

- The model should reflect what is in the best interest of the student.
- It should keep administrative bureaucracy and paperwork to an absolute minimum.
- It should recognize student choice and student access as fundamental.
- It should acknowledge distance learning as an instructional delivery option of the future that crosses geographical boundaries inside and outside the state, broadens the market competition to beyond the state, and ultimately, redefines the traditional bounds for instructional delivery.

There is evidence to suggest that e-learning university students outperform those in traditional courses. Scott (2000) uses the example of Carnegie Mellon University, where e-learning techniques have not only improved student exit exam results but have acted as educational bridges between subjects, breaking the ancient boundaries between disciplines. The inference is that higher education institutions which utilize effective e-learning methods not only enhance the performance of students on assessments, but also produce graduates who are theoretically and practically prepared for working in an information age (Holley, 2002). The most valuable attribute of online learning techniques and delivery is that they give students potentially greater access to education, in comparison to more traditional, less flexible service delivery.

Enrollment at California State University at Northridge increased by approximately 3,000 students in Fall Semester, 1999. In an effort to lighten the load on the campus infrastructure, such as parking and classrooms, a completely online Upper Division General Education Program has been offered since Fall, 1999. Stipends, training and technical support for the online courses were offered by Fall, 2001. It is evident from the enrollment data that many students prefer to enroll in asynchronous courses (Cheal, 2001).

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