

Interactive Distance Teaching/Learning

A key component of our graduate program is interactive on-line teaching and learning. This is part of our blended learning, keeping students in their community for the majority of time, and connectiveness with peers, teachers, and mentors. Does it work? Does it work in quality fashion? Do our faculty and students use it effectively? Can we promote rigorous academic work through it?

Let me quote a paragraph from Dan Wessner, the most skilled of our faculty in this realm.

"If the programs are to emphasize community-based learning with students and professors separated by oceans and continents, then there must be serious attention to how these cohorts will derive graduate-level educational value and remain a cohort and not simply individual "distance learners." Some faculty uses no IT tools beyond basic e-mail, which is useful but quite incomplete for a Master's of this sort. Others work one-on-one with students so there isn't really student-student interaction for 80% of the student's education"

Our goal plus our claim is that students learn from one another, learn from their practicum mentor, learn from their teachers, and learn from their community. All of this is done across time zones in many geographic areas, in places where internet accessibility is inconsistent, and even when students go far afield in their region.

Future Generations has used Blackboard, e-mail, voice conferencing, Moodle, Dim-Dim (webinar platform), and perhaps several others. New modes keep appearing. Clearly, not all faculty or students are trained in each new method or learn easily in each method. Some people are better communicators than others. The factors can be multiplied.

There is no class projected for this fall. That gives us time to discuss as a faculty this technology issue, come to some agreement what will work best for our model, train where needed, and maintain an openness for newer modes. If necessary, we can hire a consultant, find out what works best with organizations with similar needs, or follow further leads you give. Dan Wessner is most knowledgeable in this issue, and I hope he can lead us in this discussion.

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April 30, 2009