Common Ground Journal

Perspectives on the Church in the 21st Century

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Opportunities and Challenges of Technology in Ministry

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Mission Statement
An Online, Open-Access, International Journal

Common Ground Journal (*CGJ*) is a publication of the CanDoSpirit Network and is published twice annually as a resource for Christian congregations seeking to understand and faithfully live out their calling as the people of God in the world. The primary audience for CGJ is thoughtful Christians in congregations who are catalysts for growth within their own churches.

CGJ is devoted to the development of strong, faithful churches whose life and ministry grow out of the church's nature as the people of God. They are organized and led in a manner consistent with their nature and mission. They continually ask, "What does it mean to be a sign of the Kingdom of God in the world today?"

CGJ is a resource for congregational development. We invite scholars and thoughtful Christians in congregations around the world to stimulate inquiry, reflection and action around issues central to the life and ministry of the gathered community of faith. We invite those who serve as leaders in congregations, mission agencies, parachurch organizations, relief and development work, higher education, and non-traditional leadership development to apply their scholarship and expertise in these fields to the context of the local church. We encourage members of congregations to address the broader church with insights grounded in a thoughtful examination of Scripture, and in their own experiences as part of communities of faith in the world.

CGJ is international in scope. We draw on the rich resources of the church around the world to provide a variety of voices and perspectives on issues facing the church. Writers are encouraged to be specific to their own culture and context. In order to contribute to the development of indigenous literature, articles may be submitted in a language other than English.

CGJ is an electronic journal freely available to anyone with access to the worldwide web. The electronic format allows distribution to a wide and diverse audience, and enables the journal to be interactive in nature. Readers may engage in ongoing conversations about the topics and articles we print, and find links to other resources on the web.

Submissions to the Journal

The *Common Ground Journal* welcomes articles from scholars and discerning Christians. Each issue will feature invited articles around a theme, as well as articles received through open submissions. Open submission articles are reviewed by members of the Editorial Review Committee who make recommendations to the editor regarding their publication.

General Guidelines

Common Ground Journal seeks to stimulate Christian Churches to thoughtful action around their calling to be the people of God in the world. All articles should be grounded both in theology and the life of the church. Writers are encouraged to write to and about their own cultures and contexts. CGJ invites submissions in the following categories:

- Articles that stimulate thinking and reflection on the nature of the Church
- Articles that link the nature of the Church to its life and work in the world
- Articles that explore the integration of theology and social sciences in relation to life and work of the Church
- Essays on truths gleaned from the interplay of theory and practice, theology and experience in the active life of faith

- Articles that present insights from congregations attempting to live out their identity as the people of God in world
- Articles based on responsible qualitative research designed to inform a local congregation's understanding of its life and ministry
- Articles that raise questions that the Christian community needs to explore in becoming the people of God in the world
- Reviews of books, journals, programs, web sites and related resources

Submission Guidelines
Common Ground Journal submission guidelines and protocols are based on the need of meeting web design standards that are compatible across multiple versions of both current and legacy web browsers. Please follow the standards carefully when submitting documents for consideration for online publication in the *Common Ground Journal.* Documents to be considered for publication should be e-mailed to the editor at: editor@commongroundjournal.org.

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Articles should be approximately 2500 to 3500 words in length. Book reviews and essays should be shorter.

Language and Foreign Languages
Articles should be written in clear narrative prose. Readers can be expected to be familiar with the language of the Bible and theology, but will not necessarily have formal education in these fields. Please avoid academic language and discipline specific terms. Provide clear definitions and examples of important terms not familiar to a general audience. Use explanatory footnotes sparingly; explanations and examples in the text of articles are preferred.

The best articles are clear and focused, developing a single thesis with examples and application. The successful writer translates complex ideas into everyday language without talking down to the readers. All articles should use inclusive language.

Biblical language terms and words in foreign languages should be transliterated into English. If foreign language fonts are used in lieu of transliteration, you must embed the fonts in the document so the text can be reproduced accurately. Instructions for how to embed fonts can usually be found under the *Help* menu of most word processors (keywords: embed font).

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- Times New Roman font 12 point (important: you must embed any other font used in the document)
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- Do not underline text, as underlining is reserved for documenting hyperlinks—use bold or italic for emphasis
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- Charts, graphs, images etc. appearing anywhere in the document should be submitted in BMP, GIF, JPG, or WMF format—images should be as clear as possible
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From the Editor

By Meri MacLeod

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Recently I was reflecting with friends on our amazement that a small local hardware store was not yet using computerized barcodes on items for sale. You can still read a "real" price tag, even on the smallest screw! We laughed over how nice it was when clerks could still count out change without a computer telling them what amount was due the customer. You may have your own story of surprising little pockets of life where computers have not fully taken over. But if you think about this very long you'll probably discover that those little pockets are hard to find.

It has become apparent that there has been a dramatic acceleration in computing and Internet use, far beyond the early notion of computing as "e-mail at the office." In today's world of Internet and computing use we now find them central for leisure and entertainment, for personal learning on any topic of interest, for academic education, for shopping and business, and for their central place in nearly every form of work. Computing has become ubiquitous and enormously time consuming for a growing population. In what may seem to some decidedly not "born" digital, this enormous social transformation has occurred in barely a few short years!

This issue of the *Common Ground Journal* provides a variety of articles that explore the Internet in Christian education and ministry. The eight articles are arranged in two clusters. In the first cluster three different designs of graduate programs of higher education for Christian leaders are introduced. "Online Learning Communities: The Heart of Online Learning" by Mark A. Maddix looks at how distance learning programs can make a valuable contribution to local churches and ministries. This is followed by "Distance Hybrid Master of Divinity: A Course Blended Program Developed by Western Theological Seminary" by Meri MacLeod that documents how a program can combine online and face-to-face learning. This cluster concludes with "Learning in Online Community: A Model Doctorate Level Internet-Enhanced Education" by Mark Simpson, which gives a comprehensive description of a doctoral level Internet-enhanced degree program. It is striking to note that while these three articles describe very different programs, they each identify the critical place of interaction and community in distance learning.

The second cluster of articles provides a variety of valuable insights and resources for either ministry or Christian education. For the first time I have an informed way to help others learn how to wisely read and use web sites as a source of information thanks to the article by David Schock, “An Amazing Panoply.” Mark Hayse’s article, “Toward a Theological Understanding of the Religious Significance of Videogames” is a valuable orientation to the world of videogamers. Mark Simpson’s “Tech Etiquette is Just Common Sense” provides practical and helpful guidance with etiquette for digital communication that many have discovered cannot be taken for granted. Whether learning online for personal enrichment through a local church or for a formal degree program, personal responsibility for one’s learning is key. Jack Cunningham’s article, “Self-Direction: A Critical Tool in Distance Learning” is a very helpful overview on the place of responsibility and motivation in online learning and teaching. The concluding piece by Mark Simpson, “Ministry in a Digital World: Establishing a Multidimensional Web Presence” reminds us that the Internet and web sites have once again dramatically changed. Mark provides readers with valuable insight about this new approach to a “Web presence” and offers helpful direction on how to establish a ministry presence on the Internet.

About the Editor

Meri MacLeod, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Director of the distance learning M.Div. program at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. Her positions blend her innovative and educational passions for ministry in a global 21st century.

Online Learning Communities: The Heart of Online Learning

By Mark A. Maddix

Maddix, Mark A. 2010. Online Learning Communities: The Heart of Online Learning. *Common Ground Journal* v7 n2 (Spring): 10-15. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

Abstract
The article explores the development of online courses and programs in Christian higher education, with specific attention given to graduate theological online education at Northwest Nazarene University. The article provides evidence, from research and experience, that online learning communities are central to learning and formation in online courses. The article also discusses the benefits of developing online learning communities as it relates to ministry and the local church.

As a professor I often tell my students, "I was a youth pastor before e-mail." The typical response from students is, "Who uses e-mail anymore, we only text." I remember in 1984 purchasing my first desktop computer. It was an Epson Equity II with a lighting fast 8086 processor with a 20 meg hard drive. I also remember my first e-mail experience connecting to a CompuServe account sending e-mails on my 1200 baud modem (you can hear the noise in the background). During those early days of e-mails in the 1990's I remember feeling the freedom to communicate to friends and family thousands of miles away. Since then technology has expanded and developed in significant ways. I can now surf the internet at lighting speeds with my wireless router and talk to people on Skype. Technology has revolutionized the way we communicate, the way we live, and the way we learn. Students are building "relationship" through these virtual media and social networks at a rapid pace. The increased demand of social networking is evident in the explosion of growth of Facebook and Twitter. These social networking interfaces suggest that the hunger of human persons to be connected and in relationship with others remains.

Mediated forms of communication are impacting how education is being offered. In 1999 I taught my first online class—a course on Christian education to pastors and church leaders all around the world. At first it seemed so foreign and "distant" but as time passed I began to see how learning and community could be developed in a virtual community. Since then I have been teaching and developing online courses and programs in Christian Ministry. Over the past decade, I have become convinced that online courses can develop a strong learning community that provides effective learning and formation of students. At the heart of online courses is the development of online learning communities—places where people can engage in critical reflection and dialogue in a safe context.

In 2002 I was asked to develop an online master's degree in Spiritual formation at Northwest Nazarene University. The University and the School of Theology & Christian Ministries began this program to resource pastors in the Northwest region of the United States. The region includes over 400 congregations in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Wyoming, Montana, Colorado, Idaho, and Nevada. Given the vast geographical distances from Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho to these congregations, the School decided to offer online education courses to address the growing need of advanced theological education to pastors and church leaders.

Since the beginning of online programs in 2002, the School currently offers four masters degrees (Spiritual Formation, Christian Education, Pastoral Ministry, and Missional Leadership) and a fully online Master of Divinity degree. All the programs are approved by the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). Currently over 150 full-time students are enrolled with over 200 graduates. The School will shortly launch a fully online undergraduate degree in Christian Ministries for non-traditional students and a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Practical Theology. The success of the online programs is based on the growing need for pastors and church leaders to receive a theological education without moving from their current ministry context. Also, each program is built on a learning community (cohort) model of 15-20 students. The learning community provides support and encouragement to students throughout the program. The learning community, which focuses on student and professor discussion, is the heart of the online learning context. Students do not meet during the program, but do often come to graduation to celebrate their accomplishments. It is always exciting to see them interact with their colleagues. Even though they have met in person for the first time, it seems that their relationships are well developed.

Online Learning Communities

Few question that online courses, using interactive technology to foster student and faculty interaction, provide effective learning. Online learning communities develop significant relationships with peers, faculty, and with God. Studies indicate that formation does take place in online learning communities (see Palloff and Pratt 2007). The primary goal in online courses is the creation of communities of learners, where they find opportunities to be leaders and teachers.

The formation of community cannot be guaranteed any more than in face-to-face courses where many students drive to campus to take classes, sit in the back row, and do not engage their colleagues or professor in the learning process. However, Alfred Rovai (2002) observes that transactional distance, a psychological and communication space between learners and instructors, is reduced when students engage in effective dialogue. He suggests that the frequency of dialogue enhances learning and community; and Shore (2007) argues that frequency of communication enhances social presence online. Effective online learning communities are fostered by the social presence of both faculty and students.

Impact on the Church and Ministry

One of the primary benefits of our fully online degrees is the strong sense of community that is developed through the learning community. Students and faculty journey together for two years and build significant relationships and share life together. Some pastors who serve in full-time ministry find their role as shepherd lonely and isolated. Many pastors and church leaders indicate that the online learning community became a safe place to share ministry and life concerns. Graduates have reported that the learning community is one of the strongest aspects of the program. Some also said that the relationships they developed online saved them from leaving ministry. They view this learning community as a "real" community where they can share their ideas and ministry struggles without fear of rejection or disloyalty. In this regard, the online learning context provides a place for learning, but more importantly a place for community.

Common questions continue to be asked: "How can formation take place through a computer mediated forms in a disembodied context?" "Is it possible for computer mediated courses to provide a virtual presence that is commensurate of bodily presence?" "To what extent are people formed in Christlikeness in a disembodied context?" These are difficult questions to answer, but given the research supporting online learning communities and formation, it seems that formation and community can be established.

The Apostle Paul says that *koinonia* (community) cannot be restricted to physical presence since we enjoy the fellowship with Christ now (I Cor. 1:9). He insists that when the church celebrates "communion" we experience a *koinonia* with Christ even though he is not physically present (I Cor. 10:16). Physical, face-to-face community is not required since the Spirit is active in forming and shaping us into Christlikeness (Gresham 2006, 25).

Even if we hold that community can take place when people are not physically present, the online learning community cannot fully replace all human interaction. One of the ways we supplement the online learning community is to have students contextualize learning by selecting a spiritual director/mentor. The spiritual director/mentor helps the student grow in personal awareness, communication, and intimacy with God. This enhances the student's ability to live out their relationship in the world. The process of spiritual direction or mentoring involves regular sessions focused on the student's relationship with God as it is reflected and challenged by all aspects of his or her life. Sessions last approximately one hour in which the mentor may question, challenge, suggest, support, and reflect as he or she senses the Spirit is directing the response. Mentors meet with students at least twice during an eight week course for a total of at least sixteen meetings during the program.

Spiritual directors/mentors are to be persons of prayer and who seek to live a life grounded in Christ, infused with the Spirit, and dedicated to service of God and others. A spiritual mentor is open to God, practices times of solitude and silence in prayer, and receives spiritual mentoring from another. Also, students contextualize learning by selecting a group of church leaders to mentor and provide spiritual direction. The student takes what is being learned in the class and applies these principles in a local ministry context. The contextualization of learning is more transformative than more traditional forms of delayed learning. This approach to online learning benefits the student, the mentor/spiritual director, and the local congregation. The online learning context is enhanced by the human interaction of the mentor and local church community.

A second benefit of fully online degrees is that it provides an opportunity for students from a wide diverse context to complete a theological education. Since many people are reluctant to relocate to a school due to economic challenges, an online degree provides an opportunity to stay in their ministry context while completing a degree. If designed well, learning can be even more formative and transformative than a classroom because students can integrate theory with practice. We also hear from district leadership that they are thankful their pastors can stay in their current ministry assignment instead of moving. Staying in a person's local context provides a context where theology can be done in the church among the "people of God." In this sense students are engaged in theological and ministry reflection among the people instead of in a distant classroom separated from God's people. It is here where both students and parishioners are able to share in the *mission dei,* working and struggling together with how God is working in their lives and in the world—an approach that is much more theologically grounded than traditional forms of education.

Conclusion

Social networking, online education, and mediated forms of communication are here to stay. The church and the academy can benefit from this technology by providing online education that fosters strong learning communities. When these strong learning communities are developed they benefit the student, the church, and the academy. Students and parishioners together engage in theological reflection and ministry in a local context which reflect the biblical ideal of the people of God.

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About the Author

Mark A. Maddix is Professor of Christian Education and the Dean of the School of Theology and Christian Ministries at Northwest Nazarene University. He is a contributing author to several books, co-author of *Discovering Christian Education* and *A Heritage of Christian Education,* and has published numerous articles, including some in *Christian Education Journal* and *Wesleyan Theological Journal.* He also has taught Christian education, spiritual formation, and online education at over twenty colleges and seminaries around the world.

Distance Hybrid Master of Divinity: A Course-Blended Program Developed by Western Theological Seminary

By Meri MacLeod

MacLeod, Meri. 2010. Distance Hybrid Master of Divinity: A Course-Blended Program Developed by Western Theological Seminary. *Common Ground Journal* v7 n2 (Spring): 16-31. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

Abstract

The complexity and challenges of distance education can seem daunting for many seminary administrators. The following case describes the experience of one seminary at which distance education was shaped to meet the learning outcomes of a Master of Divinity degree. Faculty adoption, student and faculty satisfaction, MDiv learning outcomes, formational assessment, and program quality were areas addressed by faculty and administrators in the creation of a new kind of distance learning program. The paper concludes with lessons learned through the seven-year experience.

Note: This article is reprinted from *Theological Education,* Volume 43, Number 2 (2008): 79–92.

Introduction

In 2000 the Reformed Church in America (RCA) urged Western Theological Seminary (WTS) to create a Master of Divinity (MDiv) program for distance learners. Mindful of its mission to serve the RCA as a denominational seminary, WTS's leadership embraced the challenge. Two critical decisions shaped the program: (1) the MDiv offered through distance learning was to be driven by educational factors and not by technology, and (2) the program had to maintain the established outcomes for graduates, including pastoral formation. These outcomes required students to experience regular relational engagement with the faculty and the campus community. Planning and fundraising began in 2001, a program director was hired in 2002, and the first matriculated student cohort began in November 2003. Now, after the first four years of this hybrid degree program, WTS has gained an expanded student body with increased diversity, faculty who appreciate the value and benefit of a blended hybrid model, a high retention rate, and students (and families) who are deeply grateful for the access to an MDiv this program offers and delighted with the high quality of the community and education they have experienced.

Identifying Denominational Concerns

WTS is one of two seminaries of the RCA and is situated in the small West Michigan community of Holland. In the 1880s it began offering the residential MDiv. Changes in the RCA churches and mission began to suggest that different types of access to theological education would be needed for the twenty-first century. New leadership at the seminary began listening to the urging of denominational leaders who wanted emerging pastoral leaders to remain in ministry while pursuing their MDivs at Western Theological Seminary.

Throughout 2000 WTS faculty and administrators asked pastors and leaders about their needs and how they envisioned the seminary might serve them in the future. They were surprised to hear the urgency of the request for more accessible theological education. They interviewed men and women who were clearly called to ministry but unable to move to an RCA seminary. The denominational leaders identified losses through retirement and the need to equip church planting pastors as significant concerns for the next decade. Finally, they were told how important the context was in the ministerial formation of future pastors. For example, those called to serve a church in San Francisco or New York City found it difficult to be placed in a mentoring church in Holland, Michigan. These concerns were the catalyst for WTS to envision an accessible yet deeply formational distance MDiv.

Hybrid or Blended Designs to Meet MDiv Outcomes

WTS's commitment was to create a way, through the integration and support of technology, for distance students to receive a comparable theological education to that experienced by residential students. As a result, a hybrid MDiv has been created in which students remain at a distance yet take only four fully online courses throughout their five-year, ninety-six credit MDiv. The program blends both face-to-face and online learning components in each fourteen-week semester. Matriculated students are admitted in a cohort annually. Over the past four years, students and faculty have processed feedback from program and course assessment, peer group facilitator reports, formational assessment, admissions data, and orientation conversations. Faculty are delighted and sometimes surprised at the extent to which their curricular goals are being met.

Blended or hybrid courses and degree programs shift a significant amount of learning to the online medium, thus making it possible to reduce the amount of time in a face-to-face classroom.[1] Blended courses and programs are the primary focus of energy today in the development of distance learning across much of higher education.[2] They address the persisting problem of student retention in online learning and attend to the desire of the emerging "Net Generation" of students to be connected online without losing completely the face-to-face classroom experience.[3] Yet, as faculty get involved in blended courses, they realize they have to learn new teaching skills, and they discover that their new experiences in online courses cause them to redefine the purpose and approach for their face-to-face classroom experiences.

Both undergraduate and graduate programs are experiencing success in achieving learning outcomes through the integration of online and on-campus components.[4] These emerging programs are changing the way courses are developed by faculty[5] and altering the way distance programs are conceived.[6] While research on hybrid or blended degree programs is limited, initial findings suggest that faculty time for teaching a hybrid course is less than for teaching a fully online course.[7] Further, the preliminary findings suggest that hybrid courses may provide a better format for student learning.[8] As colleges and universities are developing blended courses, an accompanying blended courses are linked in a formal degree program.[9] As a result, creating a hybrid degree program involves a great deal of "learning-as-you-go," and it often needs leaders who are adept in higher education administration and innovation.

Throughout the development of the WTS distance learning program, technology supported the educational values and the resulting program design. Program design choices were not determined by what technology could offer but rather by the desired educational and formational outcomes. During the early phase of program development, residential faculty were, not surprisingly, concerned about issues such as the appropriateness of the distance model for pastoral formation, workload expectations and adequate release time, the challenges of relearning how to teach with integrated technology, apprehension about the expected loss of student relationships, and the possibility that WTS would lose residential students. Learning to teach in a new way raised concerns about adequate institutional support. One by one, faculty engaged their concerns with the director as the collaborative work of course development began. Over time, faculty had opportunities to share with one another their growing wisdom from firsthand experience in the design and teaching of a distance hybrid course, and fears gave way to the surprising joy and reward despite the many hours of relearning a craft now requiring technology.

Empowering Faculty to Succeed

Empowering faculty success involved several elements. First, each faculty member's attitude toward and experience with technology had to be identified along with general skill level. Second, several classrooms were updated with fixed technology so faculty could try new tools in a familiar environment with predictably high levels of success the first time. Faculty experiences with *reliable* classroom technology were a critical factor in rebuilding positive attitudes toward technology. They could also experiment with the distance course software (ANGEL) at their own pace.[10] They discovered that they could quickly master basic features such as posting their syllabuses, and they found it could assist them with some repetitive and time-consuming administrative duties, such as grading weekly quizzes. Faculty teaching their first courses in the distance program had a full year to experiment with ANGEL, and the remaining faculty had two or three years to learn it at their own pace as they used it for their residential courses.

In 2002 roughly 10 percent of the faculty were identified as early adopters[11] of technology and only 10 percent were younger than 40 years of age. Faculty reported few positive experiences with technology and rarely did a professor speak favorably of the technology support given by the institution. Most faculty had old computers, and no classroom had reliably integrated technology. Hardware for faculty was neither standardized nor on a consistent upgrade cycle. Further, there was a strong withholding culture across the seminary regarding technology. This culture left the faculty feeling frustrated, discouraged, and convinced that technology was far too much trouble to work with. To the faculty's delight, however, a new permission-granting culture has emerged, and they now feel empowered to risk in new ways as they link new technology to learning outcomes.

Third, a new type of blended course design was developed that integrated each professor's goals, learning outcomes, and vision for his or her course. This gave faculty the freedom to shape the course design in a way that matched their outcomes for students, was consistent with technology standards, and maintained a generally consistent format across courses, allowing for a high quality of student support. Standard online course design models typically used by instructional designers and based on the model of software production fit neither the blended courses that WTS was offering nor the higher education culture of the seminary. It is interesting to note that numerous blended degree programs in higher education are not using the common instructional design model for course development and are creating a faculty-oriented model while maintaining quality levels of course consistency. This practice can lead to cost savings in creating new distance programs.

A permeating conviction throughout the design of the program was that technology *supported* the educational goals and values of WTS's MDiv program. Technology options and rich media possibilities did not drive or determine the course design or educational practices. WTS has found repeatedly in its course evaluations that students value interaction with their professors and peers over interaction with advanced rich media. This is consistent with the literature on student satisfaction in distance education.

> While most learners, like people in general, have favorite communications technologies, it is rarely technology that determines how our learners feel about their distance learning programs. Whatever the technology used, what determines their satisfaction is the attention they receive from their teachers and from the system they work in to meet their needs . . .[12]

Experiencing a Fully Blended Program Design

WTS's distance MDiv program has been a positive experience for faculty and students. One professor in 2002 was convinced that spiritual formation could not be taught at a distance through technology. Today, he is one of the program's most enthusiastic proponents as he has creatively integrated both web-enhanced and face-to-face features in his seminar on spiritual formation. Now in the fifth year of the program, the majority of the faculty are neither apprehensive regarding program quality nor resistant to the program as a whole. They are pleased with the learning that has taken place in their courses, and students report that they learn as well or better in this blended format design when compared to residential classroom programs. These primarily second-career adult students are highly motivated to learn and participate weekly in in-depth dialogue within a course at a level faculty rarely experience in their residential courses. "I'm thrilled by my experience in this program," one second-career student told me. "I was really concerned about whether I could learn online and if I have a similar experience as if I were on campus. But the combination of online and on campus together in a course makes all the difference. And the collaborative noncompetitive learning community is an absolute highlight of the program!" While faculty support the blended learning design, the work of incorporating this type of program within the seminary remains an administrative challenge. The complexity and administrative challenge of distance programs for a residentially focused campus cannot be underestimated.

The transition into a web-enhanced degree program has not been without its challenges for faculty. Coordinating the work and decisions of a team of people (i.e., program director for pedagogical direction, educational technologist, and professor) in order to create and deliver a course in which students are well supported is a new experience for faculty and most seminaries. Full completion of a course in advance of the start date can be a tough adjustment for faculty who tend to be more spontaneous. Most often, faculty have established the practice of working individually in the creation of their courses, but this practice changes substantially in distance programs where a team is required to assist with the technology components and the support of students. Another challenge is the steep learning curve for faculty who must acquire a new understanding and new roles (pedagogical, social, managerial, and technologic) related to teaching online.[13]

Next generation blended or hybrid programs are primarily distinguished by the incorporation of both online and face-to-face residential components within courses and degree programs. Two-week intensives on campus inserted into the middle of two fourteen-week semesters, plus one fully online course annually, is the pattern WTS has chosen for its blended program design. Students begin their courses online working in a highly collaborative asynchronous learning community where faculty's regular presence allows for a rich learning engagement. After several weeks online, students come to campus to continue their learning in a classroom. They are highly motivated to use the time together on campus for continued dialogue and course discussion. At the end of a two-week intensive, the students return home to conclude their learning online.

In addition to class time, the on-campus intensives incorporate numerous other formational and community-shaping experiences. These include student-led morning prayer followed by breakfast together, a morning break for student-led worship and community fellowship, evenings over dinner in the homes of faculty, occasional evening lectures on topics of special interest to the students, several meetings of their peer group for prayer, mentoring and mutual support facilitated by an ordained clergyperson, special lunches with denominational leaders, a spiritual formation retreat each spring, an intercultural immersion experience, and special seminars offered annually on such topics as sexual abuse and diversity training. New student preparation takes place over a four-stage cycle incorporating both online and on-campus experiences during the first year a student is in the program.

WTS faculty have worked to create a distance MDiv in which online students have many of the same experiences as residential students. After several years, there are encouraging signs as faculty report that the seminary's community and culture are shaping the personal and spiritual formation of the distance students. Through their online and on-campus experiences each year, they develop a strong sense of community, and they speak and write about the way the culture of WTS is shaping their pastoral identity. In addition, the cohort design contributes to the unusually high retention rate (approximately 90%)[14] as students support one another and are in regular contact with one another, especially through the peer groups. Each year the winter intensive concludes with students and faculty gathered in the home of the seminary's president for dinner followed by students sharing their experiences of the program. After listening to the students, one theology professor remarked, "When we were designing the distance program, we really hoped that it would be as good as the residential MDiv. But now it looks like the distance program is even better than we could have imagined."

A Technology Infused Future

Undertaking the development of a distance degree program, whether a blended design or a pure online design, is a long-term investment in the new paradigm of twenty-first century education in which the physical and virtual components are integrated. Students today are connected, whether online or on the phone. Their experience is about mobile computing, collaborative learning, and almost continual social interaction. But most students have no interest in leaving behind the experience of a residential community and face-to-face learning. Leading a seminary into the twenty-first century will inevitably mean engaging the changing nature of learning and the changing characteristics of students in a world infused with technology.[15]

The direction of today's technology is toward dynamic interaction—to enhance social engagement through technology wherever people are geographically. While many seminaries may choose not to engage distance degree programs of any design, future residential students will increasingly expect greater and greater integration of dynamic technology in their educational experience.[16] By embarking on the journey of creating a distance blended program, WTS has provided a degree sought after by increasing numbers and has begun to rework its residential programs for the twenty-first century. More than 95 percent of full-time faculty use ANGEL and classroom technology for all their courses. This is a remarkably high rate of adoption and one that will serve WTS well into the future as residential students are attracted to this learning environment.[17]

Sustaining Blended Distance Degree Programs: Lessons Learned

Reflecting on the experience of WTS's distance program and the growing literature in the field of distance education, several recommendations are suggested:

- Plan carefully with special attention to using an organizational systems approach.[18] Distance programs will impact nearly every element of an institution, often requiring change. Draw upon leaders who can assess your institution's degree of readiness regarding technology integration, and support systems, perceptions, and degree of receptivity across the institutional culture. In time, everything begins to change when a seminary embraces a distance program in which students are widely dispersed.[19] Knowing this factor is critical to long-term sustainability and program vitality. Practices and policies taken for granted in a residential world now no longer fit well and inadequately support student learning. Faculty, administrators, and staff involved with distance programs need reeducation into the field of distance higher education. Technology-enriched programs are dynamic and require continual upgrading. In most cases, these lessons are best learned as faculty are involved in designing and developing courses and facilitating the learning of their students.

- Involve leaders with teaching and administrative experience who can provide an informed understanding of the many aspects involved and point to valuable resources. These can include resources in budget management and planning for a technology-infused degree program,[20] online and blended learning, course development and assessment (at both course and program level), standards of quality for distance education,[21] and various means of student support.[22]

- Define long-term goals early in the process, whether it is to offer online courses, web-enhanced residential courses, or a full distance degree program. It is apparent that investing in technology-integrated teaching and learning will not be a one-time investment, nor likely a modest investment for some seminaries. Utilizing the investment to reach a new student population seems a strategic consideration. WTS has gained additional tuition revenue that has been vital to ongoing resource investment. However, an institution doesn't undertake distance learning to increase revenues; most often, there are significant costs involved.

- Senior leadership and institutional legitimacy are essential for a sustainable distance degree program. Harnessing adequate resources over the long term of development will be essential. Likely, senior leaders will need to embark on their own learning curve as diligently as faculty. Most day-to-day decisions by academic administrators are currently based on the assumptions and practices of a residential paradigm. Administrators will need to gain a new understanding of the nature of distance programs and what they require for both educational effectiveness and long-term sustainability. For example, a common residential approach to student support is a misfit for a distance program. Activities that foster formation in a distance program will be different, to some degree, from those in a residential program but no less vital to the success of the program. Program assessment will take on a greater importance and challenge myths and models that rely on residential practices. These and numerous other differences will require resources to develop and skilled staff to implement, neither of which may be fully considered or adequately planned for initially. As reported by Amrein-Beardsley and others,[23] planning for a degree program requires greater attention to the many program pieces—not just courses. This observation has been borne out in Western's experience.

- Take an educational and strategic approach to technology. The critical commitment underlying success in distance degree programs is to effectively meet educational objectives and student learning outcomes. A congruent program design follows and is then supported by particular technology. Not all technology may be appropriate for the educational objectives of a course or degree program. In addition, WTS determined that faculty adoption was a high value to the long term quality and sustainability of the program. Both of these convictions shaped the approach to course design and technology used. Strategic classroom upgrades and course management software (ANGEL) were chosen based on criteria that were directly linked to faculty adoption. These criteria included ease of use, reliability, degree of support required, amount of maintenance downtime, nature of proprietary restrictions, growth capacity, and annual cost. Faculty now regularly record lectures in a digital format, use weblinks in class, develop collaborative assignments through drop

> boxes, and capitalize on the learning benefits of threaded discussions in their residential and distance courses. Today there is a regular cycle for upgrading faculty technology, expanded access to the library and web-based databases enhancing faculty research, and an increase in WTS's visibility and attraction to prospective students.

Concluding Observations

As WTS worked to integrate technology for the distance program, it became clear that a critical distinction had to be made between administrative technology and educational technology. The assumptions, practices, and staff skills are many times different for each of these separate professional fields. A successful distance degree program requires the development of educational technology and staffing structures to ensure success for the academic programs. Administrative technology tends to include network systems, software, and hardware for administrative work.

Because faculty adoption was a critical factor, faculty members had to see that student learning in the online medium was comparable to what they perceived in the residential MDiv; they had to be assured of long-term sustainability; and a course design approach had to be created that placed the faculty culture and established practices of course design at the forefront. The director brought an educational approach to consulting with faculty as they began to work with the new rhythm of a course that began online, moved to the campus, and then concluded online. This consultative process included the educational technologist and lasted approximately six to eight months. Voluntary lunch sessions were offered to share lessons learned and to seek assistance with problems. Courses previously taught were open for new faculty to review and meet with the professor who created them to learn one-on-one.

The development of a distance MDiv will likely mean engaging an academic institution in change, perhaps deep change.[24] Familiarity with research on change in higher education can offer insights about long-term challenges as academic leaders attempt to work with "institutional policies and governance structures that aren't conducive to implementing change."[25] Calculating the capacity people have for coping with change and for acquiring new skills while creating entirely new approaches for supporting students and faculty, new feedback and assessment systems, and new modes of pastoral formation will be a critical factor in program sustainability. Balancing the pace of program development and resource investment while establishing clear deadlines and goals that keep people moving forward is an art not easily achieved but essential for sustainability. It has been important for WTS to be realistic in the work of creating courses for a hybrid format while also having course timelines with deadlines. Courses have been scheduled well in advance, and faculty know when they can expect to take the plunge into distance teaching.

A temptation may be to place energy (and resources) primarily with faculty to the neglect of staff development and numerous other program demands. The cumulative impact can be continual high stress levels and a progression of reduced program quality. Leading with the awareness of a systems perspective is critical for implementing new distance degree programs.

> Academic leaders encounter a delicate balancing act between defending academic tradition in its broader context and facilitating the unproven potential of adopting and assimilating new innovations, ideas, and practices into the academic culture…. This dilemma has been, and will continue to be, the most fundamental reason change is so difficult for most universities at the departmental, college, and institutional levels.[26]

WTS was able to capitalize on the new interest and demands of a distance degree program for broader institutional impact such as expanded discussions on student learning, the nature of pastoral formation, and outcomes assessment effectiveness. The changes required for distance education stimulated WTS's faculty to explore student learning at a deeper level. One New Testament professor shared with faculty after teaching his first distance course:

> For the first time in all my years of teaching I really had to stop and think about student learning. How did I know if they were really learning? I couldn't see their responses in class. This has forced me to read and think about learning for the first time in my teaching career. My residential courses will never be the same again!

During course development, faculty received new materials to review on the nature of student learning, learning online, and collaborative learning.[27] The distance program also stimulated an opportunity to create a new assessment process for identifying the development of pastoral formation across the program. Twice each year, students write a reflection paper in which they respond to one of four different questions related to the development of their pastoral formation. Review of these papers over four years has identified encouraging growth in students' pastoral formation.

The integration of technology in new learning opportunities marks the rapidly emerging future of higher education. "The technological revolution has transformed every major social institution in our culture."[28] Similarly, every facet of formal education is experiencing these deep changes. The impact for theological education is both challenging and costly, suggesting that a new era of partnerships and forms of collaboration may soon be upon us in order to manage the increasing demands of technology and to be prepared for the way the Net Generation learns.

About the Author

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Concluding Summary

Reflections on the "Next Generation" in Distance Learning in Theological Education

By Linda Cannell
North Park Theological Seminary

Meri MacLeod's article reflects her experience as both a teacher and an administrator. The article's value is in the lessons learned from considered, competent, hands-on involvement in the planning and implementation of a program in distance education. MacLeod offers insight from what she and her team have learned about the specific support needs of faculty and students and the administrative details necessary for effectiveness. The sort of planning and intensive support MacLeod and her team demonstrate is becoming more common among those seminaries that are taking next generation distance learning seriously. In my judgment, the elements that give this program and others their next generation character are as follows:

1. WTS determined *before* hiring a director that the program would reflect the seminary's values. These values included the importance of service and personal, pastoral, and spiritual development in a relational community.

2. A competent *educator* was hired as director to ensure that the program would be driven by educational values and process and not simply by technology. In this case, the director, Meri MacLeod, has a PhD in education, managed a $5 million nontraditional adult program, and taught for seven years at the extension campus of a major seminary in the United States. She understands the nature of teaching and learning and, just as importantly, understands assessment for *learning*. It was important to WTS that the program be educationally rather than technologically driven.

3. To avoid the "step-child" syndrome, the faculty designed the distance learning MDiv as part of the regular academic program, staffed by regular faculty supplemented with guest faculty. When participants are on campus, they are there at the same time as the residential students, thus reinforcing the fact that the distance learning MDiv is part of the whole.

4. MacLeod and her team work tirelessly to build the supports needed by faculty. The day-by-day effort to foster a "learning community of faculty" is central to this support. The best "training" is informal, peer-to-peer, and suited to the faculty member's level of experience. Most faculty members voluntarily share their experiences and best practices for course development with one another.

5. Two of the more frustrating elements in the design of online learning are addressed: The technologists commit to having the necessary resources available and working. Then, when a faculty member is ready to be creative and move to another level, the team is ready with support.

6. Student feedback on "what they love and what they hate" is elicited and taken seriously in planning.

7. Because the program is educationally driven, the faculty are adding ideas to their personal repertoire that will increase student engagement in higher order learning. Adult participants are expected to assume responsibility for their own learning.

8. Next generation distance learning programs are typically "blended" programs. At WTS, however, the program participants don't just come to campus for a week or more of face-to-face class time. They are oriented to the campus, to their colleagues, and to the faculty at the beginning of the program—their accommodations and initial experiences of professional quality. Participants are involved in a spiritual formation retreat, professional development seminars, and six semesters of supervised ministry. Because the program is intentionally diverse, all participants receive sexual harassment and racial awareness training to deal with blind spots and to nurture a community that takes "respect of the other" seriously.

9. The participants are treated in every way as *adult* learners. Throughout their program, participants are involved in different types of cohort activities with or without a faculty presence. Even the more skeptical affirm that the community works.

Through the work of its director, Meri MacLeod, her team and faculty, the distance learning MDiv program is reaching adult professionals who otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to pursue a ministry degree. Distance learning programs are known for high drop-out rates. The drop-out rate in the WTS distance learning MDiv program is remarkably low, and participant response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Linda Cannell is Dean of Academic Life at North Park Theological Seminary and director of the CanDoSpirit Network, an international community of Christian leaders.

Endnotes

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[2] Mark Milliron, "My Generation, Your Generation: We're All in this Together" (keynote address, Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning, University of Wisconsin, Madison, August 8–10, 2007).

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Learning in Online Community: A Model of Doctorate Level Internet-Enhanced Education

By Dennis Williams, Mark Simpson, and Jack Cunningham

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Abstract
During the mid-1990's, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky began the research and development of a nontraditional Ed.D. degree program built around the use of the Internet as a significant part of the instructional delivery system. The resulting Ed.D. in Leadership degree was highly successful in its cohort approach to doctoral studies utilizing principles and best practices of online learning in tandem with elements of traditional classroom education. Although the degree is no longer offered by Southern Seminary, the parameters of the original Ed.D. in Leadership program design are presented as one possible model of doctoral level education utilizing elements of online learning.

Development of the Internet-Enhanced Ed.D. in Leadership

The Ed.D. in Leadership program was first offered by Southern Seminary in July 1998 and was the first ATS accredited doctoral program approved with the utilization of the Internet as a major component in the instructional delivery system. Casual observation and dialogue with Christian education professionals had suggested to the faculty that a research doctorate focused on Christian education leadership and offered through a nontraditional delivery system was needed and desired. Christian educators usually had earned a Master of Arts degree or its equivalent, preventing them from pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree. A research doctorate was more appropriate and valuable to these educators in their development and advancement within their educational vocation. In order to evaluate these assumptions, a survey instrument was designed and randomly distributed to three professional Christian education associations.

A national survey was made in 1996 of a random sample of the membership of the North American Professors of Christian Education (NAPCE), the Professional Association of Christian Educators (PACE), and the Southern Baptist Religious Education Association (SBREA). The survey indicated the following:

- 62% of the respondents were currently in church ministry
- 56% had earned a Master of Arts degree or its equivalent

- 13% had earned the Master of Divinity degree
- 32% desired a doctorate for continued leadership in the local church
- 49% indicated a doctorate was important to their vocational ministry
- 78% had five or more years of full-time ministry experience after the master's degree
- 20% were able to relinquish their current vocational ministry to study in residence
- 80% desired periodic resident studies so as to remain full-time in their current ministry

The survey confirmed the previous observations and dialogues with Christian educators—a research doctorate was desired, and a nontraditional delivery system was needed. The faculty of the School of Christian Education and Leadership thus redesigned the seminary's Doctor of Education degree to have a focus on empirical lines of research in educational leadership offered through a precedent nontraditional delivery system.

Design Precedents

The design of the Ed.D. in Leadership was based upon the accredited designs of two nontraditional instructional models: The AEGIS Doctor of Education degree of the Teacher's College of Columbia University, and the nontraditional design of the Doctor of Education degree of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS). The AEGIS model had been in operation since 1981 and was accredited by the Middle-States Association of Schools and Colleges. The AEGIS Ed.D. program allowed education practitioners to pursue a research doctorate through periodic weekend seminars while remaining in the current position of employment. A cohort of students started each summer, and the students enrolled as a cohort in the prescribed sequence of seminars. Seminars were scheduled for two-days one-weekend per month. Between seminars students were engaged in significant research as contracted with the course professor.

The TEDS Ed.D. model had been in operation since 1985 and was accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, and the Association of Theological Schools. The TEDS program allowed Christian education practitioners to pursue a research doctorate through periodic modular courses while remaining in the current ministry position. Courses met for two weeks (typically Tuesday through Friday, and then Monday through Thursday) and were offered throughout the academic year. Before a seminar students were expected to complete all course readings and any prerequisite research. Following the seminar, students completed a substantial research paper based on a line of inquiry arising from the seminar and related to their vocational interests.[1]

The Ed.D. in Leadership at Southern Seminary incorporated design elements from both the AEGIS and TEDS models, but was distinctive in its tightly integrated precedent literature and research triad approach to doctoral seminars. The nontraditional delivery system of three-day and week-long intensive research seminars was supported by the utilization of Internet resources and the seminary website, participation in online discussion groups, and requisite e-mail access for purposes of communication with faculty and other students. The development of research skills in preparation for the dissertation and the sustainable habit of life-long scholarly inquiry was encouraged throughout the seminars, and in the dissemination of student research in electronic format.

Purpose of the Degree

The Ed.D. in Leadership degree was designed to meet the learning needs of a particular student population: *educational ministry professionals with substantive full-time ministry experience who wished to earn a research doctorate but were unable to relinquish or suspend their full-time employment or change locations in order to attend The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*. The degree was designed as a research doctorate, and conformed to the ATS standards for the Ed.D. and Ph.D. degrees.

This research degree differed from the seminary's Doctor of Ministry degree in that the Ed.D. in Leadership was based on the earned Master of Arts degree, was academic research focused, and culminated in the writing of a research-based dissertation (the D.Min. in Christian Education required the earned M.Div. and culminated with a ministry research project). The Ed.D. in Leadership degree also differed from the Doctor

[1]In the mid-1990's the TEDS Ed.D. underwent a nomenclature change and became a Ph.D. without change to the curriculum design.

of Philosophy degree in the School of Christian Education and Leadership in that the Ed.D. required a minimum of three-years of full-time leadership experience in a vocational emphasis of Christian education following master's degree studies, and was focused on leadership (the seminary's Ph.D. in Christian Education required two-years of substantive experience, but studies could begin immediately following the master's degree; the program also offered a broader range of Christian education study emphases).

Primary Educational Objective

The primary educational objective of the Doctor of Education in Leadership degree was the development of leadership, advanced research, and critical thinking and problem solving skills in persons continuing in full-time practitioner status in local church, denominational, or higher education leadership positions in the field of Christian education.

Program Participants

The requirements for admission to the nontraditional Ed.D. in Leadership degree were stringent and comparable to the requirements for persons applying to the campus-based Ph.D. degree in the School of Christian Education and Leadership. Of the qualified applicants to the program each year, admission was limited to 15-20 students who formed a cohort that completed the sequential and prescribed order of the curriculum and degree requirements as a group. The cohort model allowed for the development and maintenance of collegial cohesiveness and group dynamics across courses, resulting in a significant reduction in classroom time usually needed to foster a dialogic atmosphere. Only one cohort of students was started each year in the summer.

Program Orientation

In order to avoid misconceptions and misunderstandings about the program design and the rigors of completing course requirements, each applicant received the program handbook and a step-by-step program worksheet shortly after submitting the program application form. The applicant was then contacted by a member of the admissions team to go over the program design, using the worksheet as a guide. The applicant initialed each item on the worksheet and returned it as part of the completion of the application packet.

Immediately prior to the first seminar of the first summer term, a formal orientation to the program was conducted. Activities were also scheduled for the doctoral students to meet and become acquainted with the other members of their cohort. Because students were in online discussion groups with each other before arriving on-campus the first time, the orientation session and other special activities proved to be more like the meeting of long-time friends than engaging in first-time introductions.

Faculty Advisor

A faculty advisor was assigned at the time of the offering of admission. The faculty advisor was matched to incoming students based on the vocational experience and goals of the applicant. The incoming student was encouraged to engage the faculty advisor in dialogue on program requirements prior to matriculation, particularly concerning the assessment and documentation of prior learning. The faculty advisor did not necessarily become the dissertation advisor.

Prerequisite Readings

Upon admission to the Ed.D., students were required to read a significant literature base prior to taking the first course in the program. This reading requirement was based on a similar concept that had been proposed by Dr. Linda Cannell for the TEDS Ph.D. program. The literature base in the School of Christian Education and Leadership at Southern Seminary was determined by the school faculty and covered the following five areas:

- Biblical and Theological Foundations
- Historical and Philosophical Foundations
- Psychological, Sociological, and Anthropological Foundations
- Teaching and Learning Theory
- Leadership and Management Theory

Students would read approximately 15-20 specific works across the five subject areas before starting the program. Each work read required the writing of a short abstract that evaluated the significant principles for education and leadership gleaned from the work.

The prerequisite research requirement substituted for a qualifying examination, and allowed students to enter the program in sync with each other as a result of sharing a common knowledge base. This prerequisite research component made it possible to offer courses in an accelerated instructional format—the nontraditional delivery system found in both the AEGIS Ed.D. and TEDS Ph.D. program instructional models.

Assessment Portfolio

Each student developed a portfolio in the Foundational Research component of the first research seminar that included assessments of transcripts, experiential learning, and professional experience received in each of the five areas covered in the prerequisite readings. These assessments were accompanied by a biographical sketch of the student, and a work sheet describing short-term and long-range professional goals.

The portfolio served as the faculty advisor's guide in determining the progress and additional learning needs a student would have during the program of studies. Additional assessment pieces that become part of the portfolio included: 1) the Participant Certification Evaluation at the end of the first fall semester when the student moved from conditional student status to certified student status; 2) the Written Comprehensive Examinations and the faculty analysis of the Oral Examination at the end of the second year when the student moved from certified student status to degree candidate status; and 3) the faculty evaluation of the Dissertation Prospectus at the beginning of the third year.

Participant Certification Evaluation

Applicants entering the program were admitted conditionally. Although the screening of applicants was intended to discern their ability to complete an accelerated nontraditional program successfully, some applicants found their learning style and/or personal circumstances not amenable to the nontraditional delivery system or doctoral studies.

At the end of the first fall semester, a Participant Certification Evaluation was conducted by the Christian Education faculty to determine the advisability of the doctoral student continuing in the nontraditional program. Students who did not receive participant certification were not allowed to continue in the program, and were encouraged to explore more traditional delivery systems or other types of training as appropriate.

Program Design

The Ed.D. in Leadership degree consisted of 48 semester hours (2 years) of seminar research (12 courses; 4 hours each) followed by 16 hours (1 year) of dissertation research (4 courses; 4 hours each). Students entered the program as a cohort of 15-20 students who enrolled together in each course in the prescribed sequence of courses. Students were considered full-time status for the minimum three-year duration of the program as long as they were enrolled in two seminars or dissertation research courses, or a seminar or research course while making preparations for the comprehensive examinations or dissertation defense. The statute of limitations for all program requirements, including the dissertation, was six years from matriculation, including stop-outs.

Students took two doctoral courses at a time, and were physically on-campus three-times per year—two full-weeks in July immediately after Independence Day, a Thursday through Tuesday the second-weekend in November, and a Thursday through Tuesday the second-weekend in March (adjusted accordingly for Easter). The dates for the on-campus Research Seminar component for all courses were fixed approximately three-years in advance of the actual classroom sessions. Once set, the dates were not changed so that students could make travel plans and arrangements with their employers.

In July, seminars were scheduled Tuesday-Friday the first week, and Monday-Thursday the second week. Students were expected to remain on-campus over the weekend to take advantage of the seminary library on Friday afternoon and all day Saturday. Most students found that significant progress could be made toward the completion of the post-seminar research assignment over the weekend, being free from work and family distractions, significantly reducing research time when they returned home. On Sunday mornings, students often car pooled together to visit one of the many local churches in the area. On Sunday afternoon, a tradition arose of gathering together for an informal time of fellowship and relaxation at a local ice cream shop.

Fall and spring seminars were scheduled Thursday noon-Saturday morning for the first course, and Saturday afternoon-Tuesday noon for the second course so that students were not out of work for any one full-week. Courses did not meet on Sunday. In the third year, dissertation defense hearings were scheduled for students Tuesday-noon through Friday afternoon immediately following the Research Seminar component of the spring courses. Students in the first or second year of study were encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to attend the third-year student defense hearings.

Due to the time-compressed nature of the on-campus seminar experience, attendance was required at every course session to receive credit for the course. The student who lived within driving distance of the seminary and returned home for the weekend and then returned late for class on Monday was required to retake the seminar in full with a future cohort. This could result in a significant delay in graduating from the program.

The nontraditional delivery system of the program thus consisted of a summer term with two accelerated format courses, followed by fall and spring semesters with two accelerated format courses each semester, the model repeated for two years. The second spring was reserved in part for preparation for the Comprehensive Examinations. The third summer immediately following was reserved for the preparation of the Dissertation prospectus. The third year consisted of two dissertation research courses each semester. Students who needed additional time to complete the dissertation enrolled in one Dissertation Continuation course each semester and summer term until the dissertation was completed or the statute of limitations expired. Continuation courses were considered part-time status and carried no credit.

Each seminar experience totaled 98 hours of study (40 hours of Foundational Research + 18 hours of Research Seminar time + 40 hours of Advanced Research after being on-campus). The courses of the Ed.D. in Leadership were intentionally sequenced (see Figure 1), and were 4 credit hours each, except as noted.

First Term of Study

Ed.D. students matriculated as a cohort in mid-May and immediately began the online discussions and assignments of the Foundational Research component of the courses that met on-campus in July. Due to the cohort design of the program, students could not matriculate in any other semester or term.

A Mediated Learning Model

Each course in the Ed.D. in Leadership degree program was taught by a graduate professor of the seminary, or an instructional team consisting of an approved visiting professor plus a graduate professor of the seminary. Courses were offered in an accelerated instructional format consisting of a research triad: 1) a Foundational Research component; followed by 2) a Research Seminar component; followed by 3) an Advanced Research component. Each course syllabus reflected the three components with educational objectives designed specifically to link each component of the research triad. Internet-based discussion groups and seminar resources allowed for mediated instruction immediately prior to and following the on-campus seminar experience (see Figure 2).

Research Triad Part I: Foundational Research

During the eight-weeks prior to the first session of the on-campus Research Seminars, students were required to complete readings and research corresponding to the educational objectives in two courses. This Foundational Research engaged students in critical thinking and evaluation of core issues, theories, and practices requisite for advanced reflection and dialogue during the on-campus Research Seminar component of each course. Foundational Research also served as preparatory study for the Advanced Research component following the on-campus experiences. The Foundational Research component involved a minimum of 5 hours of study per week per seminar, and significantly reduced the amount of instructional time in each seminar usually devoted to introductory matters.

Students were required to dialogue with the professors during the Foundational Research component by responding to questions posted in the online discussion groups at least twice a week. On the average, students were expected to spend at least an hour online each week for each seminar. Participation in the Foundational Research discussion groups counted as 15% of the final grade in each course. The professors also used the seminary web site and discussion group software for the dissemination of additional instructional materials formative to the on-campus Research Seminar learning experience.

The Foundational Research component culminated in the development of a critical reflection paper that evaluated educational assumptions in the light of the student's theological presuppositions. The required course readings were to be included in the student's research. This reflection paper had to be completed before the first session of the Research Seminar component of the course. The reflection paper served as a foundation for advanced dialogue in the Research Seminar, and for the Advanced Research component following the seminar.

Research Triad Part II: Research Seminar

Research Seminars were conducted on-campus in a nontraditional accelerated format. Each Research Seminar consisted of 18 hours of classroom instruction built upon the Foundational Research component, and provided a foundation for the learning that would follow in the Advanced Research component of the course. Research Seminars engaged students in critical reflection and dialogue with additional instructional content that did not duplicate the Foundational Research component. Research Seminars also provided the doctoral student with the opportunity to prepare educational objectives for the Advanced Research component of the course that followed the on-campus study.

Research Seminars were team taught by a member of the graduate faculty of the seminary plus one subject area expert, usually a guest lecturer. This allowed students to meet and dialogue with education and leadership professionals from other academic institutions, and exposed them to a broader range of perspectives on Christian education and ministry leadership. Because the Research Seminars were in accelerated format, guest lecturers were more readily available to team teach a course than would otherwise have been possible with a traditional semester-length course format.

The cohort model of degree completion, the Precedent Literature readings prior to matriculation, the Foundational Research component of each course, and the Advanced Research component following the on-campus Research Seminar collectively provided for the appropriation of an accelerated instructional format for the on-campus learning experience.

Figure 1. Ed.D. in Leadership Course Sequence

Research Seminars (44 hours)

Summer I (8 hours)
Critical Thinking and Learning Assessment
Leadership and Management Theory

Fall I (8 hours)
Educational Psychology
Leadership for Church Development

Spring I (8 hours)
Social Systems in Ministry Context
Theological Analysis of Educational Assumptions

Summer II (8 hours)
Change, Power and Conflict
Social Science Research

Fall II (8 hours)
Administration of Educational Ministries
Teaching and Learning: Theory and Practice

Spring II (4 hours—Full Time Status)
Analysis of Empirical Research
Comprehensive Examinations (non-credit)

Dissertation Research (20 hours)

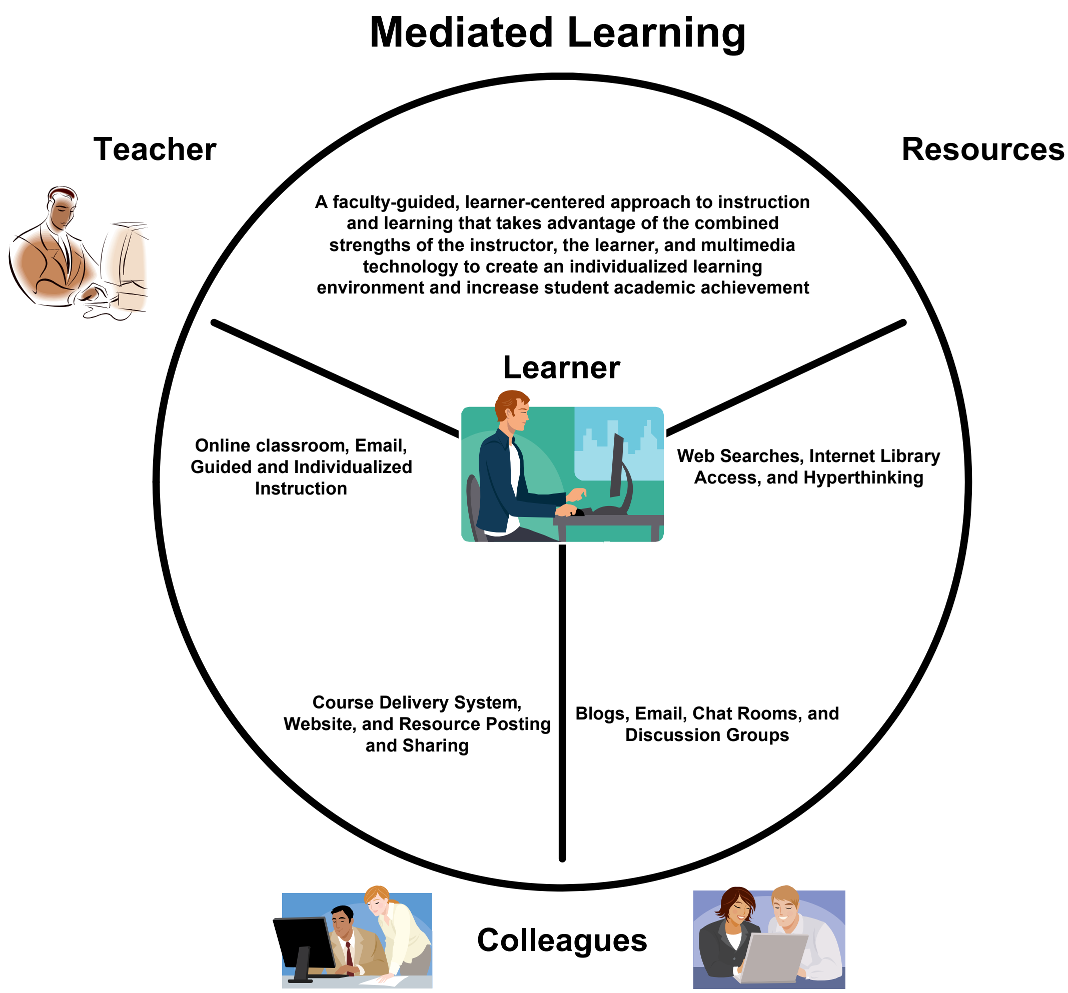
Summer III (8 hours)
Prospectus and Precedent Literature
Dissertation Research Methods

Fall III (8 hours)
Dissertation Data Gathering
Dissertation Analysis of Findings

Spring III (4 hours—Full Time Status)
Dissertation Conclusions
Dissertation Defense (non-credit)

Continuation (0 hours—Part Time Status)
Dissertation Continuation (non-credit)

Figure 2. Mediated Learning Model



Research Triad Part III: Advanced Research

During the eight-weeks immediately following the Research Seminar, students were required to complete a significant analysis of an educational research topic arising out of the Research Seminar and related to their vocational goals. Students identified educational objectives during the on-campus Research Seminar that guided their critical reflection of the Advanced Research topic. Advanced Research involved a minimum of 6 hours of study per week per seminar.

Students were required to dialogue with the professors during the Advanced Research component of the course by posting messages in the online discussion groups at least twice a week. On the average, students were expected to spend at least an hour online each week for each seminar. Participation in discussion groups for the Advanced Research component counted as 15% of the final grade in each course. The professors also used the seminary web site and discussion group software for the dissemination of additional instructional materials summative to the course learning experience.

The Advanced Research assignment had to be completed before the start of the Foundational Research component of the next set of seminars. The advanced research paper served as the integrative piece of the course's research triad, and was intended to result in a monograph with the potential of contributing to the literature of the field.

Break Periods

Break periods were scheduled for a period of two weeks approximately four weeks into the Advanced Research component of each course. These break periods were not intended to coincide with holiday and vacation periods, which was impossible given the differences in personal and professional schedules of the participants involved. Instead, these breaks allowed students to take a short rest from their studies and/or catch up on research if professional work demands slowed their progress. After each break, students had approximately two weeks to finish their Advanced Research studies. The break periods were scheduled annually as follows: August 15th-31st; December 15th-31st; and April 15th-30th.

Nontraditional Delivery System Requirements

The nontraditional delivery system of the Ed.D. in Leadership degree placed specific expectations and responsibilities on the students.

Required Internet and E-Mail Access

Due to the accelerated instructional model employed in the Ed.D. program, all program participants were required to have easy access to the Internet with the ability to send and receive e-mail. Internet access allowed participants to access the online discussion groups and the seminary web site where updated program information was posted. Internet access also allowed participants to peruse the resources available through the seminary library.

Discussion Group Participation

Quality participation in the online discussion groups was required. Students were expected to participate in online discussions several times each week. The faculty knew and understood that every post made would not be stellar or profound, but frequent participation in the discussion groups was an integral part of each course experience. Students found that the more frequent the participation in online discussions the less time was spent online in reading messages in preparation for posting a response. The following protocol was observed in online discussions

1. The closure of a discussion group was always clearly announced. Discussion closures were always marked with a title like “Discussion Closed” followed by a brief message. Students were to refrain from posting any messages in a group marked closed, as the discussions were archived upon closure.

2. Students were encouraged to archive discussions for their future reference. This was usually accomplished by using Adobe Acrobat software.

3. Students were expected to participate in the discussion groups at least twice each week, if not more often. “Participation” meant the posting of content messages, not just, “I agree,” or “What he/she said” messages. Posts did not have to be long to be substantial. In fact, concisely worded and short messages communicated much more clearly than long and wordy messages in the online discussions. The best strategy was to plan to read the messages and post a response in the same discussion visit. Students who went offline and came back later to post a response had to adjust their message content to reflect any additional posts made between discussion visits.

4. Students were encouraged to follow "Simpson's 4x4 Rule for Online Communications" when participating in online discussions: post 1 message limited to 4 sentences per paragraph, 4 paragraphs in length maximum. The length of messages posted was to be essentially no more than 100 words in length. This required students to think carefully about what to say and how to say it in the discussion groups, and to do so precisely and concisely.

5. Students who did not participate in the online discussions or did so only infrequently put themselves at risk of being dismissed from the program at the end of the term.

Discussion Group Design

Two online discussion groups were created for each course: a discussion group for questions on assignments, and a discussion group focused on the course content. The assignment discussion group allowed students to post questions on research activities so that the professors could respond and everyone read the same recommendations. This kept the course content discussions from being interrupted with questions about assignments, and ensured that everyone was told the same thing in the completion of assignments.

The course content discussions were used to engage students in a dialogue on their readings and research in the course subject matter in preparation for the on-campus Research Seminar. These discussions were led by the professors during the Foundational Research component of a course. A suggested order of topics to be discussed was posted at the beginning of the discussion by the professors to get the dialogue started. Usually this list of topics was not strictly followed, as the flow of the dialogue taking place between the students and the professors often changed the order of or focus on the proposed topics.

Students used the content discussions during the Advanced Research component of the course to pursue lines of inquiry of interest to them after the on-campus Research Seminar. The first student to post a message at the beginning of a week was to choose the discussion question and lead the discussion for that week. That student then had to wait one week before leading the discussion again so as to allow others to determine what topics were to be discussed.

To help build and strengthen a sense of learning in community, a discussion group independent of course discussions was created for personal interaction outside of the classroom. Called the Cohort Café, a “table” (online discussion group) was created for each cohort to allow students to share prayer requests, tell humorous stories, share personal experiences, and just chat with their cohort colleagues on any subject matter. Students typically posted messages only in their own “table,” but were free to visit the Café discussions of the other cohorts as they desired. It was discovered over time that these “tables” were the heartbeat of the community of learning. Students posted in the Cohort Café frequently, and faculty members were allowed to participate in the conversations. This enabled all program participants to keep abreast of what was happening in the lives of the doctoral students and with the faculty who were at a distance from the campus. Students even continued to use the Cohort Café after graduation to keep in touch with their colleagues. The Cohort Café provided a place for students to talk on any subject matter without interrupting the flow of course content discussions.

It is believed that the linear/conversational format used in the online discussion groups, rather than the typical threaded discussion format, also contributed significantly to the success of the formation and development of the online community of learning. The linear/conversational format was a feature of the Web Crossing discussion software used for the Ed.D. in Leadership program. This format made the flow of discussions feel more like face-to-face conversations, and avoided the confusion that threaded discussions sometimes create when students do not click the correct “respond to this message” button or “add discussion” button in the discussion software. The consecutive flow of postings in the linear/conversational format kept students on topic in the discussion groups, and made it more logical to frame responses based on the flow of the topic-to-date at the time postings were read. Thus students could not delay responding and play “catch-up” in online discussions by adding messages to subjects already discussed previously. Instead, students had to respond to the discussion at the point in which it had unfolded when they accessed it, just as would occur if sitting in a traditional classroom and responding to a conversation. The linear/conversational discussion format kept discussions moving forward in depth of dialogue, which contributed to the success of the accelerated format of the Research Seminar and Advanced Research components of the course.

Discussion Group Etiquette

Like any statement made in a face-to-face dialogue, discussion group postings had to be considerate toward other participants in the discussion. The following four etiquette guidelines applied to all discussion groups in the program:

1. Typing in UPPERCASE LETTERS was considered shouting. To emphasize a word or phrase, the student was to consider using italic or bold face font instead.

2. In order to avoid any confusion between "net speak" and the abbreviations and acronyms used in education and leadership resources, discussion participants were asked to refrain from using abbreviations in place of common phrases of speech (e.g., F2F, BTW, LOL, IMO, etc.). Postings were only to contain abbreviations required by a discussion group host or as used appropriately in the precedent literature or name of an organization. Internet users often create abbreviations as a short-hand way to minimize typing out full words and phrases. This short-hand can become confusing when the abbreviations are not easily decipherable.

3. Discussion participants were asked to refrain from creating or using emoticons, except for the following: :) smiling or :(frowning. In face-to-face conversation, it is possible to compare a person's words with their facial expressions to determine whether or not a statement is to be taken seriously or interpreted as humor. Internet users have created emoticons, combinations of alpha/numeric characters, to express many types of facial expressions. Like word and phrase abbreviations on the Internet, emoticons can become difficult to interpret if they are complex. And some of the simple emoticons used on the Internet are rude or inappropriate in the classroom.

Discussion Group Privacy Policy

All online discussions were considered to be private conversations between professors and students. Cohort Café content was especially considered to be private due to the nature of sharing prayer requests and personal issues. Therefore, all online discussions were limited to doctoral students and professors registered to use the discussion software. This did not mean a discussion was accessible only to the professors and students in a specific course though—all students and professors in the doctoral program had access to any course discussion or Cohort Café. To support privacy and maintain the integrity of academic dialogue in the online discussions and Cohort Café, the following privacy policy was enforced:

> *Any student who provides non-registered users access to discussion content in any form for purposes of using posted information against any discussion participant or identified person(s) will be terminated from the program of study.*

This privacy policy included not allowing non-registered users to login under a registered user's name, sharing printed copies or saved electronic copies of discussions with non-registered users, or verbally relating to non-registered users the content of messages posted online.

Access to Precedent Literature

All doctoral students were encouraged to obtain access to a local research library to supplement the resources directly available from the seminary or as found on the Internet. Accessing the holdings of a local university and/or a substantial public or private research library was recommended to enhance the variety of resources available to the student, and encourage the utilization of resources from a variety of research context.

Active Participation

Engagement in seminar dialogues was considered more than an opportunity—it was a necessity. These dialogues were considered to be much more than a discussion; they were a mode of learning. The operational learning principle was that ideas are best assimilated when shaped into one's own language and used in highly disciplined conversations. Doctoral students were expected to have completed the Foundational Research requirements prior to the first session of the Research Seminar so that they could engage in an informed dialogue in the face-to-face classroom. As a result, the professors were able to move quickly into the dialogic mode, since explanation and orientation to the content was reduced significantly, and all doctoral students entered the seminar with a common base of knowledge and understanding of the subject matter.

Oral Comprehensive Examinations, Dissertation Prospectus Hearings, and Dissertation Defense Hearings were open to all students and faculty to attend. Attendance and participation in open hearings was encouraged for purposes of collegial support of the person and their work being evaluated. Open hearings also provided an opportunity for doctoral students to engage in observation and reflection on hearing protocol and lines of inquiry common to the hearings in preparation for their own hearings.

Networking for Cooperative Learning

Doctoral students in the Ed.D. program were encouraged to abandon any competitive habits accumulated during previous years of formal schooling. The intention in the research triad of each doctoral course was for students to engage in the giving and receiving of ideas and the sharing of information and resources in the context of a community of scholarship. This sort of exchange included sharing Foundational Research and Advanced Research manuscripts with other students for purposes of analysis and evaluation. Advancing one's own status and scholarship by hoarding resources, privatizing information, or refraining from the sharing of one's own reflections and formulations was deemed unprofessional.

Doctoral students were expected to enter fully into online discussions and seminar dialogues, and to participate constructively in open hearings. This resulted in a community of scholars that was further developed and maintained between courses through the use of e-mail and informal online discussions.

Doctoral students were expected to ground their research in significant and pertinent literature, and to share ideas and resources with their colleagues. In sum, doctoral students were expected to help one another.

In the facilitation of community and the networking for cooperative learning, two educational principles from the TEDS instructional model were considered essential:

1. The outcome of advanced graduate education was the development of refined sustainable habits of scholarly inquiry and professional integrity. These habits included engaging in seamless and life-long learning, and discerning, upholding, and accurately communicating truth. Competitive practices and individualistic approaches to scholarly inquiry were considered to be inappropriate outcomes.

2. The preferred learning environment was one which fostered a community of cooperative inquiry. Faculty and students alike were to be engaged in this learning community toward the development of all participants, not just the individual.

Residency Requirements

In designing the nontraditional format of the Doctor of Education in Leadership degree, the integrity of program residency was a paramount issue. Of particular concern was how to engage the student in resident-level study given the limitations placed upon doctoral students remaining full-time in their current ministry. The residency model of the Ph.D. at TEDS was evaluated as one possible approach to program residency.

Dr. Ted Ward, Program Director of the Doctor of Education Program at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, developed a modular course model to accommodate the residency needs of educational professionals whose ministries would only allow them to attend TEDS periodically. The design allowed students to satisfy the residency requirement by taking three consecutive modular courses in the month of May and three modular courses at any point over the course of the adjoining summer, repeating this residency pattern on two separate occasions. Of the approximate 90 program participants at that time, over half were engaged in this periodic mode of study. These students were engaged in full-time resident study for the brief modular periods, and then stepped out of academic study for a full year or more, depending on the provisions for academic study allowed by their vocational ministry.

Trinity students completing degree requirements solely through the modular model typically took five or more years to complete the TEDS Ph.D. degree. In most cases, these doctoral students were unable to be engaged in academic research for a significant number of months between their full-time enrollment in the modular seminars. The community of learners also varied greatly across modular courses as other part-time program participants arrived and departed for modular study.

The nontraditional delivery system of Southern Seminary's Ed.D. in Leadership degree was intentionally designed to be as focused and as intensive as the resident-level study of the Trinity Ed.D. modular model. In Southern's design, the doctoral student was engaged in consistent, full-time academic research and dialogue with faculty and peers for three full years. Resident-level study was sustained in the nontraditional delivery system of the Ed.D. in Leadership through:

- the cohort approach to the learning community in the seminar experience
- the substantial research immediately preceding and following each seminar
- the consecutive enrollment in full-time course work (fall, spring, & summer) for three years
- the required Internet access to Southern Seminary library resources

- the required e-mail access and online discussion participation to engage professors and colleagues in dialogue throughout the research components preceding and following seminars—literally a networking of the community of learners

Student Responsibilities

Students were expected to meeting the following responsibilities as partial demonstration of academic integrity and excellence:

1. Students were responsible for reading and being familiar with the policies, procedures, and program information contained in the catalog, program handbook, course syllabi, bulletins, newsletters, web pages, online news discussion groups, memos, e-mail, official correspondence, and any other materials distributed to students.

2. Students were responsible for following program procedures and guidelines.

3. Students were responsible for participating actively in the advising process.

4. Students were responsible for submitting course work in a timely fashion to meet deadlines and keeping Academic Services and the Program Office informed of changes in name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, etc.

5. Students were responsible for pursuing learning goals with honesty and integrity.

6. Students, faculty, and staff were expected to treat each other with respect, understanding, and patience appropriate to a Christ-like character.

7. Students were responsible for meeting their financial obligations to the school and lending institutions in a timely manner.

Comprehensive Examinations

The comprehensive examinations marked the shift from "user of the knowledge of the field" to the "originator and extender of the knowledge base of the field." These exams sampled the critical thinking and problem solving skills of the doctoral student, and upon successful completion, moved the student from participant certification status to degree candidate status. A doctoral student had to complete the comprehensive examinations successfully before the dissertation prospectus could be approved and the degree candidate enrolled in dissertation research. This model of comprehensive examination was designed after that used by the TEDS Ph.D. program.

Written Comprehensive Examinations

The Written Comprehensive Examination was modeled along the lines of the professional writing task, resulting in two draft articles worthy of consideration for publication. During the final spring semester prior to the onset of dissertation research, the doctoral student developed, in consultation with the faculty advisor, two questions of scholarly inquiry. One question was to be devoted to the theological reflection of an issue in educational leadership related to the ministry vocation. The second question was to be devoted to a line of research related to the proposed dissertation topic on leadership. The Written Comprehensive Examination questions were not to duplicate research completed in program course work.

The student researched each question as approved by the faculty advisor, and prepared a one-page work sheet (usually an outline) for use during the examination. A four-hour block of time was then scheduled for each exam question with no more than one exam being written per day. The student was allowed to use a laptop computer to type the exam, and then print it immediately following in the seminary's Computer Lab. If the exam was handwritten, the student was given a photocopy of the handwritten exam and was required to submit, without editorial changes, a typed copy of the exam by the next day. Most students used laptop computers to take the written examinations, and often shared a printer brought to the exam by one of the members of the cohort (such was the ongoing support for one another in the community of learning).

Oral Comprehensive Examination

Following the written examinations, an Oral Comprehensive Examination was conducted in an open hearing for program participants and professors to engage the degree candidate in a dialogue on how the candidate's theological presuppositions informed their theoretical assumptions on education and leadership. The candidate began the examination with a 20-30 minute presentation of their reflections. This presentation was then followed by a 40-60 minute dialogue between the candidate, the faculty advisor, and the dissertation advisor (or other faculty member) that sought to help the candidate refine, clarify and test their lines of reasoning. The candidate's colleagues attending the open hearing were also encouraged to participate in the dialogue. A doctoral student had to complete the oral examination in the same semester as the written examinations.

Dissertation Research

Each candidate for the Ed.D. in Leadership had to complete successfully a dissertation based on the candidate's own systematic inquiry into an area of educational leadership. The dissertation was intended to demonstrate competency in research methods, the ability to think critically and systematically, and to make a significant contribution to the literature base of the fields of Christian education and ministry leadership.

The process of writing the dissertation was not a sudden enterprise, but a progressive investigation of a line of empirical inquiry begun in the doctoral courses. Students first encountered the dissertation in the *Social Science Research* course the second summer term. This course introduced the student to research methodologies. The following spring, one question of the written comprehensive examination encouraged the student to begin focusing on a topic of inquiry. After the comprehensive examinations (the summer that began Year Three), the course *Prospectus and Precedent Literature* culminated in the development of the prospectus, particularly the completion of the introductory and precedent literature chapters. Throughout the program, students were encouraged to complete Foundational Research and Advanced Research papers in the style and format of the dissertation, and to engage in empirical inquiry and forms of documentation in the completion of their research.

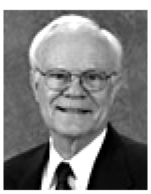
After the final course in the program of study and the approval of the prospectus, the degree candidate was enrolled in four dissertation research courses that systematically engaged them in the completion of the chapters of the dissertation. The Dissertation Defense was anticipated the third spring (the end of the third year) following the fourth research course. A degree candidate who needed additional time to complete the dissertation enrolled in a dissertation continuation course each semester until the dissertation was completed or the statute of limitations expired. Continuation courses were considered part-time status.

Conclusion

The success of the Internet-enhanced model of the Ed.D. in Leadership degree is best measured by the lives and ministries of its program graduates. With a graduation rate of well over 90%, the vast majority of participants in the Ed.D. in Leadership program are serving in churches, denominational organizations, and institutions of Christian higher learning in administrative and instructional capacities. Some have gone on to help others utilize the Internet in the development of online programs or training courseware. Others have advanced further in their occupational role in ministry leadership. And many still keep in touch with one another though the Cohort Café is no longer operational.

Learning in online community made all of this possible. Most of these graduates would never have been able to leave the workplace to attend doctoral studies full-time in a traditional campus-based program. Many of the life-long friendships and collegial relationships that were formed would never have been developed. But by combining best practices in online learning with other nontraditional learning strategies and campus-based instruction, the Ed.D. in Leadership was able to fulfill its purpose and meet its primary educational objective in providing doctoral-level learning for these ministry professionals. All of the participants and graduates of the Ed.D. in Leadership program formed a true online community of scholars, and one can only look forward with excitement as to what they will do to advance learning in online community with other colleagues in the days and years ahead.

About the Authors



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The Amazing Panoply

By David B. Schock

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Abstract
While the Internet is a vast storehouse of information, not all of it is gold. How can one test whether or not the information is reliable or questionable? This article describes a process of researching Internet sources to assess trustworthiness and usefulness.

It's all there! You can find anything! Everything! The repository of all of known history! The cutting edge of research! With more every day! What a tool! What an aid to scholarship! What a force for good!

Well, yes, it can be. It is. Somewhat. Sometimes. But by the same token the Internet is a source for material of doubtful provenance and even anti-utility. Oh, and it'll waste your time, too.

Okay, so let's say our eyes are on our work, we have no intention of being sidelined by distractions. How do we know that what we're looking at—as innocuous or apposite as it seems—is accurate? Mmmm? …Hence the need for a site like Snopes.com, one of several that purports to bust rumors and debunk misinformation. Well, it works and there is the need for a Snopes, but you don't want to have to hit it every five minutes. And besides, there are a lot of things you may come across that don't rise to the level of a Snopes.com inquiry.

So, how, exactly can you give yourself and your friends (read family members, coworkers, students) a fighting chance?

First, realize that all of us will be gulled from time to time. Recently I received a posting from a knowledgeable friend entitled "An ABSOLUTE Must Read" about a scholar—historian David Kaiser—who had reportedly taken a particular stand and who had written an essay castigating the administration's fiscal policies.

Now, I had a passing knowledge of Dr. Kaiser. This ominous warning that we were following in the goose-steps of pre-World-War-II Germany didn't sound like him. So, I took the few minutes to do a little research. Nope, says Snopes.com, it wasn't Kaiser. Snopes gave us Dr. Kaiser's blog address where he chronicled his frustration about having his name and reputation hijacked.[1] And his anger wasn't just because the article attributes the writing to him. No, he said, not only was it not his scholarship, the piece ran counter too much of what he thought. My friend had taken the misrepresentation as truth. I've done that a time or two as well. But less often, now. I've been burned. Chances are you have, too.

Well, Lord love you! If you were an undergraduate student researching monetary policy and came across something like this how would you know UNLESS you, too, took the time to suss it out? And, if you were the professor of the class, what kind of opportunity would you have to debunk it when you were facing 25 research papers?

For my own part, I developed a protocol when I was teaching both composition (research writing) and communications at a small, Christian liberal arts institution (Hope College, in Holland, MI. I taught there for 12 years, the first six as an adjunct in English and the last six fulltime in Communication).

I didn't develop this plan of attack all on my own. Years earlier I had the opportunity to work with two amazing professors, Ron Primeau and the late Dean Memering at Central Michigan University when they worked with a group of faculty members from various specializations. I was teaching broadcast journalism and copywriting there at the time and took part in this seminar. We faculty members had been charged with teaching something called "Writing across the curriculum." With the coaching of Dr.s Primeau and Memering we were all going to learn to be better teachers of research and writing. I had a doctorate in writing but what they were teaching was revelatory. Part of it had to do with helping students find and review their source materials. This was before the Internet but the concepts readily transferred. Ron and Dean suggested that the teacher's responsibility started by coaching the student in harvesting and winnowing out the best, most appropriate resource materials, copying them, and working with them almost as a manipulative—a tool in the hand. Students would come to class with stacks of photocopies and we'd proceed to go through them, evaluating them, looking for hallmarks of primary or secondary scholarship. Here's the hierarchy: **primary** sources were the reports scholars would publish of their research or of their opinions; **secondary** were summaries of their published research/opinions that would appear in other publications that reported on that sort of research and opinion. **Tertiary**

[1] http://www.snopes.com/politics/soapbox/proportions.asp

sources would be something on the order of *National Examiner* (well, people *want* to KNOW!) and were consequently discouraged.

That concept of working with students as they worked with their research materials stayed with me and by the time I was at Hope, students were digging out source accounts from the library AND—sometimes—from the Net. By the time I left, most of their research was from the digital domain. And what changes that wrought! Because primary and secondary print sources most often had some credibility (there was an author, an editor, a publisher) there was a carryover for the web-based sources: if they could find it, axiomatically it was valid. At that time they were bringing the same credulity they had given to print to Internet materials. It didn't always end well.

So, it became necessary to share some of the inner workings of web information. One class in particular, Introduction to Mass Communication (a half-semester class), gave me pause for thought. When I arrived at Hope that class was based on a several hundred page text, and a text that was loaded with all kinds of freight (for instance, the author conveyed his feeling that it was unimaginable that Spike Lee had to self-fund some of his films. Poor Spike. Yikes. There were lots of other cultural assumptions that I thought didn't belong in what purported to be an objective text). When I took over the course I applied the same kinds of skills I was attempting to engender in students and, calling it what I thought it—biased. I tossed the text and couldn't find what I thought was a suitable replacement. So, I insisted that students build their own. The resources? They were to come primarily from the web. But how? And what did that mean? Did anything serve as long as it came from the web? It didn't. (See *Appendix* for Course Syllabus)

I knew that I had knowledge limitations about being able to convey all my students needed to learn, so I asked for help from a librarian. Mmm. Good plan. The second day of each class David O'Brien came to class and in his laconic manner led students down paths of their own assumptions. "Well, you'd think because the site is a dot ORG and SAYS it's about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that it would be a serious study of his life, right?"

Wrong. The site turned out to be posted by a group of white supremacists. The students had their eyes opened at least a little. In example after example Dave showed us that our assumptions are not enough to gauge a source. He asked us to engage some of these questions (and I've added a few to the list) as we considered sites as sources:

- What is the motivation for this site? What's the intended audience? One way to tell is to look at what follow the period…the dot. Is it a .com or .biz (ostensibly commercial), a .org (supposedly a valid social organization, sometimes a non-profit), a .edu (an educational institution), a .net, a .info, a .name or a .us? (You can read about these and even more at http://www.internic.net/faqs/domain-names.html.) Is the information on the site consistent with the suffix?

- Is the site affiliated with an organization? What kind of work does that organization do? Something credible?

- What is the source of the information at the site, the authority? Does it even say? If there's an "About Us" does the information wave any red flags? Can you determine the author? Does that person have appropriate credentials? What turns up when you Google the name? Can you run a WHOIS search on the site (http://www.internic.net/whois.html)? (This is not necessarily a deal-killer; even my site is screened under the name of a registrar who purchased my domain name on my behalf.) At the very least using WHOIS can you find out when the name was registered and updated and when it expires?

- When you search other sites that have like materials does the content at this site stand as consistent? When you search people cited at the site, do they come up as credible? Can you visit the primary sites that house their research or opinions? Can you find the blogs of the researchers and do they disavow the material or the sites you are considering? (This is called checking your sources. There is an old saw among reporters about this kind of checking: "You say your mother loves you. Check with the source.")

- What is the currency of the site? When was it posted? What's the copyright date? Who holds the copyright? How recently has it been updated?

- Are there ads at the site? What kind?

- Are there links to other sites and are those links consistent?

- Put on the cloak of dissimulation: If you were an evilly intentioned person, could masquerading as THIS site forward your agenda? How?

- Can you contact someone who is responsible for content at the site? Say you have a question…will it be answered? And in what way?

- And, finally, assuming the site passes your scrutiny, just how valuable is it for your particular topic? Is it really, really useful, maybe essential, or is it only tangentially related?

Each half semester the students would decide during the first class on which medium we'd concentrate: books, magazines, newspapers, radio and the recording industry, movies, television, or even the Internet.

That decided and with Dave's teaching under their belts, they'd launch into their research.

Students were first to find websites (one each week) that dealt with the topic they wished to study (within the area of the selected medium). For instance, if that half semester we were concentrating on television, perhaps they'd research media ownership so they could analyze patterns of convergence and conglomeration. They would find the best resources they could…and that was plenty; the college had a well-connected library that could be used to access a whole lot of legitimate social science research, the type of which the average internet user wouldn't be able to access without paying a lot (Infotrac, Lexis/Nexis and all the other databases are wonderful). The results were pretty amazing.

The student then had to prepare annotated abstracts of the information that would include:

> ***Topics:*** We'd use these as categories to post them so other students could easily find and use them.
>
> ***Site Address*****:** This would be a live link so that all students would have to do would be to click on it.
>
> ***Date*****:** How current or recent is the information? Is there a mention of "Last Updated?"
>
> ***Host*****:** Is there any affiliation with organizations/causes/groups?
>
> ***Abstract*****:** The students would generate a 150-word précis so the other students would be able to tell if the site had information they'd want to use for their textbooks.
>
> ***Links*****:** The links and types of links from the site.
>
> ***Reliability (rating by reviewer):*** I asked students to tell me how reliable they thought the site was given all the criteria I had asked them to incorporate.
>
> ***Utility (rating by reviewer):*** How useful was the site?
>
> ***Reviewed by:*** The students signed their work so that if there were questions we might make further inquiries.

A sample of a completed annotated abstract appears in the Appendix. The students filled out a template and e-mailed it to me on a weekly basis. I checked and evaluated their work and then posted the annotations in a searchable database.

The students were then to print out the annotations and the contents of the sites and they would build their own textbooks. If they had done a bad job of gathering and assessing, they didn't have much of a text from which to write their final exams. So, they understood VERY quickly the importance of good and sufficient Internet research. A few who discovered that they were far off the mark changed their topics entirely.

Twenty-plus students, each writing six of these created an active and useful database for research. The biggest problem was students repeated other's annotations, even after they'd been cautioned to monitor our website. Those repeats started showing up in about the third week and took a fair amount of oversight, not all perfectly effective. I read, read, read and tested every link. Their research taught me a whole lot, too.

The idea was to create a research tool for everyone in the class. Any student could use any of the annotations in searching out web resources that would be useful in building a targeted text—a text that dealt with just one aspect of this large topic. It was to be an aspect about which the individual students had expressed interest and from which they would write their final exams. Now, with 120 entries spread across a wide range of topics dealing with the medium we were studying, there was slim likelihood that all students were going to share the same experience in the class; they would, after all, be creating different texts and writing about different topics. That was the idea: they were to follow their interests; the specifics were left to them.

How did it work? For the first couple of weeks students were a little doubtful; they'd never had a class quite like this. And who was doing the teaching, anyway? A common remark at the assessment at the end of class was something like this: "At the start I didn't see exactly how this could work but as we went along it just did." Of course, *they* made it work; I was just there to facilitate the process. (I believe it's our nature to make order out of chaos.)

And they learned something, too, about testing their sources, proving the worth of what they would later have to rely on. They also learned something about themselves and their interests. A handful found their calling.

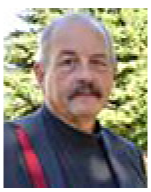
So, what does this bode for research on the Internet? There is more and more valid material there, resources never before available to scholars (think of the Google book scanning efforts). But there is still plenty of muddy content, sometimes the result of misdirection or mis- and malfeasance. Information may well be the new currency, but we run the risk of losing something as we stand in awash in it all, trying to sort out the experience. T.S. Eliot, in the "The Rock" put it this way: "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" We have plenty of information, more than we'll ever be able to strain through our sieve looking for solid nuggets. Have we, then, been brought low by our technology?

I don't think so.

Wisdom is still the goal here, but we need knowledge AND information. Can we persevere in this struggle? Is there any chance for success? We hope so, we trust so. But turning to Eliot again (this time from "East Coker" in *The Four Quartets*): "For us there is only the trying. The rest is not our business."

Let me to encourage you to keep trying. Let me know how it's going. What works for you? You cannot afford to be discouraged. Nope. Not even a little.

About the Author



David B. Schock is president of penULTIMATE, Ltd. and a former Hope College associate professor. Most of his work these days deals with murder: http://www.delayedjustice.com. He also has made films about the Ku Klux Klan and Native American issues (*The Pink Shawls Project*, *Asemaa*). He has produced films for Western Theological Seminary, the Michigan Department of Education, Michigan State Police, National Geographic Society and a host of others.

Appendix

Introduction to Mass Communication

TR 9:30-10:50 a.m. Spring 20__

David B. Schock, Ph.D.
Here were office hours, phone number and e-mail address

Is this too cynical? What do YOU think?

Course Description:

Introduction to Mass Communication--An effort to begin to understand the effect of mass media on our culture. The course will focus on one medium each half-semester. That medium will be chosen by the students the first day of class. Students will research--using the Internet--characteristics of each medium, its organization, ownership, management, effects on audiences and investors, and effects on society. Students will contribute their researches to the Hope College Center for Media Research web page. They will be responsible for building a textbook for the course. Two Credits—Schock—Each semester.

Course Objectives:

This is an introductory course, a survey course. You do not need any prerequisites to take this course. In fact, if you watch television, listen to radio, CDs, go to movies, read newspapers, books and magazines, and use the Internet, there is a danger you're over qualified. My goal is to lead you on a journey of inquiry. We want to take a look with fresh eyes at the impact of all the mass communication programming we take in. What have the mass media done to us? What control do we have over them? What's it like to work in them? What are historical and current issues in the field?

The first goal of the course is to help you be more aware and discerning in your media consumption. In particular, what are the audience adaptations you will need to make as you prepare your materials for publication (who will read it, how, and why)? As well, what does it take to critically deconstruct a text (what is the message, the messenger, and the intent of the resources you will analyze)? The second goal is to prepare you for further study should you be interested in this field.

Course Method:

The first day of class you will pick the one medium we will study in some detail during the class. Your choices are these: books, magazines, newspapers, radio and the recording industry, movies, television, or the Internet.

You will then be asked to write what you know and think about that medium to describe its impact on our culture. That's your benchmark paper: 500 words maximum. Then, through discussion and use of the Internet, you will research available materials to offer your classmates and--through our Hope College Center for Media Research web page

http://www.hope.edu/academic/communication/media/ [no longer active]

--the rest of the world. You will go out on the Internet each week and be responsible for finding, retrieving, and annotating a worthwhile site. You also will read several selected sites each week. This is how you'll build your own textbook…the efforts of your own researches and those of the other members in class. My office will serve as the nexus for your efforts, and a student in my employ will post your work on the site--along with your name! You will need to e-mail these to me at masscom@hope.edu. [no longer active]

Here are the fields I'd like you to fill out:

> ***Topics:***
> ***Site Address:***
> ***Host:***
> ***Abstract:***
> ***Links:***
> ***Reliability (rating by reviewer):***
> ***Utility (rating by reviewer):***
> ***Reviewed by:***
>
> ***This is annotation number:***

This form will be e-mailed to you so that you may simply reply. Make sure you save the blank template to use from week to week, please.

Here's what a sample of one might look like (and you can check the web site for hundreds of others):

> ***Topics:*** Media Ownership/Conglomeration/Convergence
>
> ***Site Address:*** http://www.cjr.org/resources/index.php
>
> ***Date:*** 8/4/08
>
> ***Host:*** *Columbia Journalism Review*
>
> ***Abstract:*** *Columbia Journalism Review* lists 60 major owners of media and media related

enterprises ranging from Advance Publications to Young Broadcasting. Each one of those, in turn, reveals subsidiaries and part ownerships. For example, Sony breaks down into these categories: film, television, music, and other. In the film category alone we learn that Sony owns Sony Pictures Entertainment, Columbia TriStar, Sony Pictures Classics, Phoenix Pictures (partial interest), Jim Henson Productions (partial interest), Mandalay Entertainment (partial interest). This worldwide company maintains 171,300 employees. Not bad for a Japanese company that started as Tokyo Telecommunications Engineering Corporation in the wake of WWII (founded on May 7, 1946 by Mr. Ibuka).

Links: Each listing is accompanied by a link to the parent company.

Reliability (rating by reviewer): Highly reliable; an independent research organization, part of Columbia University.

Utility (rating by reviewer): A. This site is a must read for anyone who wants to understand the implications of who owns what…connections among companies, competing interests, complementary interests. The corporate links are very handy, too.

Reviewed by David B. Schock, Ph.D.

Annotation number: 1

Class time will be devoted to reports of your findings, discussions about the field, examples from the medium in question, and guest speakers.

Concerning the textbook and the final exam:

It's entirely possible that no two students will have exactly the same textbook or the same learning experience; in fact, I guarantee it. This is an adventure in autodidactic study. One concern is to make sure that the study is, however, rigorous enough to be worth your time and attention. Be on the lookout for theories to help us make sense of all that we encounter.

When you come to take the final exam on March 1 during class time, please bring with you your textbook. And though this "textbook" sounds scary, I hope it's not. The textbook should be made up of from six to ten web sites…printed out in full. It's best if they're tabbed in a loose-leaf binder. You may highlight portions, underline, have outlines scrawled upon the back…whatever it takes to help you write a strong final exam (short of a rough draft of the exam itself). The whole purpose of the textbook is to help you write a strong final exam. (This is perhaps the ultimate in open-book tests.)

The text and the exam will total 100 points (fifty points each)…about a fourth of your grade. I will grade the text on the validity of the sites and the coherence of the materials to your thesis. I will grade your final exam on concept, content, mechanics, and efficacy (am I convinced that you have a case and support your thesis—I DON'T have to agree with your thesis).

Grading:

Each weekly site review and annotation (six in all) is worth 25 points for a total of 150.
In addition, you will be involved in a research project as surveyors taking a poll among members of the community. That endeavor is worth 25 points. There also will be an Aristotelian Critical Analysis of a work resulting in another 25 points. There may be up to six 10-point, in-class

responses (quizzes over assigned site readings). Finally, there is the text that you will create. From it you will write your final exam that deals with the SAME question we started with: What is the impact of this medium on our culture? You will have the whole period of the last class to deal with that question. The final (including your textbook) is worth 100 points, a fourth of your total grade (50 points each for the text and the test).

How do I assign grades? On a percentage basis: A 93-100; A- 90-92.9; B+ 87.5-89.9; B 83-87.4; B- 80-82.9; C+ 77.5-79.9; C 73-77.4; C- 70-72.9; D+ 67.5-69.9; D 63-67.4; D- 60-62.9; E below 60. There will be no class curves, so it's possible--theoretically at least--for EVERYONE to earn an A!

Late Work:

Assignments will be due at their assigned times…annotations will be due Mondays no later than 5 p.m., and written assignments will be due at the start of class. All work prepared outside of class must be from a printer. I will not accept late work unless you and I have agreed upon it in advance. **Missing a class and assuming that you can turn in an assignment at the next class is most definitely a misapprehension.** It doesn't work that way in this field. If for any reason you will not be in class or will be late, **please contact me ahead of time** so that I can work with you. If you are having problems, give me a heads-up. If you are planning on being absent for a week to take advantage of a theater field trip, you need to take another section of the class at a time where there is no conflict. Missing one week of a seven-week class is not acceptable.
A cautionary note: This really IS an experiment. I don't know exactly what's going to happen. Your prayers are welcomed. You can be assured that the schedule will vary…at least a little because of the topic you will pick and the availability of speakers.

Final Considerations:

I am here to help you in your search for information, knowledge and--I pray--wisdom, but you are doing the work. I am NOT pulling off the top of your head and dumping in a few pounds of teaching. I want to keep us moving forward, and though this is more a nonlinear (and nontraditional) approach to content acquisition and organization you will gain IF you pay attention and work at it.

Tentative Schedule:

Your annotations will be due on Mondays at 5 p.m. The classes will be spent in a mixture of discussion, lecture, guest speakers, and annotation presentations. I'm pretty sure about the first two classes, but after that, things get a little interesting, given the schedules of guest speakers. I will do my best to keep you posted of what's happening and when through class discussions and e-mail. You can expect a fair amount of communication so be sure to check your e-mail often. Tentatively, this is what the schedule looks like.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Date	**Topic**	**Assignment Due**
Tuesday 1/10	Introductions Syllabus Pick the topic Web Resources Assignment: What is the impact of this medium on our society. Pure blue sky…no outside research for this one.	Pick the Topic.
Thursday 1/12	Class discussion about impact Web Resources with Dave O'Brien. How do you gauge the reliability and utility of a web site? Assignment: research and first annotations (send them to me at masscom@hope.edu)	Five-hundred word essay on your first impressions of the medium we've selected.
Monday 1/16		First annotation due by 5 p.m. mailed to masscom@hope.edu.
Tuesday 1/17	Talk about your first results…your sites and annotations. Governmental/regulatory considerations.	
Thursday 1/19	More of the milieu	
Monday 1/23		Second annotation due by 5p.m.
Tuesday 1/24	Guest speaker?	Two intelligent questions
Thursday 1/26	Ways of knowing. Aristotelian Critical Analysis.	Pick your final exam topic…at least for now.
Monday 1/30		Third annotation due by 5 p.m.
Tuesday 1/31	Story structure	Your ACA printed out and handed in.
Thursday 2/2	Forming a survey question: What might we investigate?	
Monday 2/6		Fourth annotation due by 5 p.m.
Tuesday 2/7	Nailing down the survey question. Guest speaker from Frost Center.	
Thursday 2/9	Guest speaker.	Two intelligent questions. Go over survey.
Friday 2/10	Winter Recess begins, 8 a.m.	
Wednesday 2/15	Winter Recess ends, 8 a.m.	Fifth annotation due by 5 p.m.
Thursday 2/16	Legal considerations.	
Sunday 2/19		Survey submissions due by midnight.
Monday 2/20		Sixth annotation due by 5 p.m.
Tuesday 2/21	Survey observations. Discussion of final text and test.	Your thesis for the final is due.
Thursday 2/23	Guest speaker	Two intelligent questions.
Tuesday 2/28	Final Class—final exam	Bring your Text and be prepared to write your Test.

Toward a Theological Understanding of the Religious Significance of Videogames

By Mark Hayse

Hayse, Mark. 2010. Toward a Theological Understanding of the Religious Significance of Videogames. *Common Ground Journal* v7 n2 (Spring): 68-80. ISSN: 15479129. URL: www.commongroundjournal.org.

Abstract
Videogames can evoke feelings of strong emotion and deep pleasure, often situated within the interplay of mythology, morality, and mystery. Many 20th century scholars associate these qualities with religious experience and religious education. Thus, videogames can remind the church that religious education encompasses more than the transmission of biblical or theological data. At its best, religious education invites learners into the creative exploration of divine Mystery—a Mystery known by the church as Christ.

In 2009, online videogame players in the USA spent over $1 billion dollars on in-game items and experiences to enhance their game play experience (Snider 2010). In many cases, players gladly paid for these items even when the game itself was free. For example, *RuneScape* is a free online fantasy role-playing game, but it also solicits a small subscription fee that grants restricted access to premium areas. *Farmville* is a free Facebook farming strategy game, but it also allows players to pay real money for in-game coins that can purchase farm upgrades. The videogame industry refers to such purchases as "microtransactions"—expenditures of only a few dollars at a time. In 2010, online videogame players are expected to spend $1.6 billion dollars on microtransactions for in-game virtual goods.

This phenomenon begs the question: what motivates a videogame player to spend real money on virtual clothes, housing, pets, and other artifacts? To some observers, the answer to this question resides within the realm of emotional experience.

Videogames and Emotional Experience

Videogame players tend to enjoy strong emotional bonds with their own videogame experiences. Although microtransactions are a new phenomenon, the emotional experience behind them is not new at all. Consider the case of Bandai's *Tamagotchi*—an exceeding simple videogame by contemporary standards. A *Tamagotchi* is a digital pet that lives in an egg-shaped computer to be worn around the neck or stored in a pocket. The monochrome display screen is not much larger than a postage stamp. Players can only use three buttons to play the game. Each *Tamagotchi* requires its owner to continually feed, care, and play with it each hour, day after day. Reputedly, over 70 million *Tamagotchis* have been sold since 1996 (Takahashi 2008).

Anecdotal evidence clearly suggests a strong emotional connection between *Tamagotchis* and their owners. For example, one reporter notes that school-age *Tamagotchi* owners in Oahu, Hawaii focused so much attention on their virtual pets that classroom lessons and schoolwork suffered as a result. Eventually *Tamagotchis* were banned from Oahu schools amidst much protest from distressed *Tamagotchi* owners. Some children quickly passed their *Tamagotchis* along to parents who willingly took them to work and "babysat" them throughout the day (Barayuga 1997). The *Tamagotchi* phenomenon simply but vividly illustrates the intense emotional connection that many videogame players tend to feel toward their virtual selves, their computer-mediated relationships, and their alternate lives (cf. Gee 2007; Selfe and Hawisher 2007).

Early scholarship concerning the first-generation Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) theorized that the emotional lure of videogame play stems from the play of power. For example, Marsha Kinder (1991) argued that school age children enjoy videogames because they provide a platform for the exercise and development of new, powerful mental and behavioral skills. Kinder also noted that the narrative contexts of NES videogames often situate play within myths of power such as the story of *David and Goliath* or *Jack and the Beanstalk*. In a similar vein, Eugene Provenzo (1991) contended that NES videogames lured children into game play through aggressive and violent fantasies, trapping children within a simulated but unhealthy world. Both Kinder and Provenzo interpreted videogame play through the principle of power.

More recent scholarship attempts to interpret videogame play through the experience of addiction. Certainly, extreme cases of apparent videogame addiction do exist. For example, Jagex CEO Mark Gerhard reports that one of the top three players of the online *War of Legends* has logged over 17,000 hours in the game (Snider 2010). That's the equivalent of 425 workweeks of 40 hours, or 35 years of work without a vacation—an unfathomable, perhaps impossible claim to imagine. However, a new Kaiser Foundation study does note that today, 8-18 year-olds spend over seven hours a day with entertainment media including not only videogames but also music and Internet (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2010).

However, the jury is still out on the question of videogame addiction. The case for videogame addiction remains difficult to document and verify. At best, in-depth research provides only inconsistent evidence in favor of addiction (Gunter 2005). The Pew Internet and American Life Project reports that only 34% of teenage males report playing videogames for two hours or more each day, while 18% of teenage girls report the same—certainly far from a majority (Lenhart 2008). On the other hand, research suggests that videogames can positively address the therapeutic concerns of occupational therapy, pain management, cognitive rehabilitation, the development of social and communication skills among the learning disabled, impulsivity and attention deficit disorder, and others (Griffiths 2005). Certainly in some cases, videogame play correlates positively with unhealthy behavior and attitudes. However, popular concerns about widespread videogame addiction appear to be exaggerated.

To the contrary, recent scholarship notes that videogames invite social interaction and cultural engagement. The popular stereotype of the bug-eyed, socially-isolated, zombie-like videogame player looms large in the public imagination. However, the Pew Project (Lenhart 2008) finds this stereotype largely unwarranted:

- For the majority of teenagers, videogames are social experiences.
- Most teenagers play online videogames with friends from their offline lives.
- The majority of teenage videogame players who have the most "civic gaming experiences" (i.e., helping others, reflecting on ethics, learning about social issues) tend to express and demonstrate interest in civic and political engagement apart from videogames.

Although the Pew Project finds that videogame play can be positively correlated with social and civic engagement, it does not suggest that videogames *cause* social and civic engagement.

In summary, videogame play evokes strong emotion within a simulated or amplified social context. If single-player gaming evokes such a strong emotional experience, then it stands to reason that online gaming with live players offers a more intense emotional experience. In some cases, this emotional experience may serve as a gateway to compulsive or addictive behavior. In most cases, however, it does not appear that this emotional experience produces pathological behavior of that sort.

Videogames and Religious Experience

A variety of researchers suggest that videogames—particularly role-playing games—also possess the potential to evoke one or more aspects of religious experience. For example, religious educational researcher Christopher Scholtz (2005) suggests that videogames—like religion—sponsor a sense of engagement with myth, identity, longing, regular ritual, and fascination. Like Scholtz, Michael Heim suggests that the distant horizons and undiscovered countries of virtual reality evoke a sense of yearning among digital explorers (Heim 1993, 105-107). Thus, he maintains that virtual reality sets the stage for "an experience of the sublime or awesome" (1993, 137). Similarly, Edward Castronova describes online videogame worlds as "vistas" of "longing" that contribute to a "sublime state" among players (Castronova 2005, 106-112). He further suggests that the mythologies of online videogame worlds can inspire a form of reverence within those who play them (Castronova 2005, 309n; 2007, 206-207). Harry J. Brown also notes that videogames weave myth and meaning into the stories and cultures of the worlds that they simulate (Brown 2008, 107-111). Finally, some research also implies that when videogames invite the player to create their own content or direct their own worlds, they tap into a human impulse that evokes a general sense of the religious (cf. Kelly 1995; Wolf 2005). Other critics are quick to note, however, that significant differences exist between creativity within videogames and the divine creativity of God (Scholtz 2004; Herzfeld 2005).

To summarize, several theorists suggest that videogames tap a religious nerve. Like religion, videogame worlds can give concrete expression to powerful myths. In response, videogame players yearn to explore these worlds, plumbing their mysterious depths. The fascination of this adventure intensifies when videogames invite players to create their own identities, artifacts, stories, and worlds. Thus, videogame players can either enter the pre-created worlds of others or assume godlike roles in creating their own worlds.

In addition, videogame players often assume messianic roles, particularly in role-playing videogames. Many videogames cast players as heroes on quests to save the world. Along the way, players aspire to dominance in order to finally defeat an arch-villain that holds the world in a dark grasp. The player's path to victory inevitably results in death and resurrection, not only once, but over and over again—all in a day's work for a videogame savior. Although these themes are messianic, they do not accurately reflect the life and work of Christ. Instead, they reflect a form of messianism that Walter Wink (1992) has described as the "myth of redemptive violence"—the achievement of a so-called moral victory through the use of coercive force. For example, strength points, gold pieces, and powerful weapons are the ordinary means of grace in videogame salvation. He, who dominates, brings salvation. Most ironically, many videogames from the Christian publishing industry (cf. *Left Behind: Eternal Forces, Catechumen*) threaten to twist the Gospel into the myth of redemptive violence throughout game play (Hayse 2009b).

At points, videogame play seems to imitate, simulate, emulate, reflect, simulate, or evoke some expression of religious experience. However, it seems premature to describe videogame play as a full-bodied religious experience. Religious experience is more textured and more nuanced than videogame play might suggest or enable (cf. James [1902] 2004; Otto [1921] 1958). Nevertheless, striking similarities seem to exist between the two, and they invite further exploration beyond the scope of this paper.

Videogames and Religious Education

The notion of videogames as edutainment—a hybrid of entertainment and education—is not new (Alessi and Trollip 2001; Prensky 2001). The Entertainment Software Association (2008) reports that "family entertainment" videogames (including edutainment) are the fastest growing segment within the industry. Cultural anthropologist Mizuko Ito (2008) notes that edutainment videogames often feature:

- In-game rewards for the achievement of learning objectives
- Open-ended worlds to explore
- Opportunities for creative and imaginative expression
- Toolsets for the active construction of characters, artifacts, and worlds

Finally, art educator Kerry Freedman notes that videogames—adventure games in particular—"exemplify the border crossing between visual forms of entertainment and education" (Freedman 2003, 131). To Kerry, videogames can function as an aesthetic setting in which players can explore and construct meaning (Kerry 2003, 135). In summary, videogames can function in an educational sense … and perhaps a religious educational sense as well.

Interestingly, the varied phenomena of videogame play reflect—at least in part—the religious concerns of curriculum theorists throughout the 20th century. Alfred North Whitehead famously declares that "The essence of education is that it be religious" (Whitehead [1929] 1967, 14). By this, he means that education should evoke a sense of "duty and reverence" toward human relationships, toward one's influence within the world, and toward the mysteries of infinity and eternity (Whitehead [1929] 1967, 12). Dwayne Huebner similarly suggests that education rises from the longing for transcendence (Huebner [1967] 1999, 134-139) and the encounter with Otherness (Huebner [1993] 1999, 407-408). In his essay, *Transcendence and the Curriculum*, Philip Phenix situates the human desire to learn within our essential longing for transcendence (Phenix [1971] 1975, 337). He contends that a transcendence-oriented curriculum will foster hope, creativity, awareness, doubt and faith, wonder, awe and reverence (Phenix [1971] 1975, 328-332). Echoing Whitehead, David Purpel also links transcendence with interconnection in educational experience:

> In a very profound sense, every moment in the classroom is a sacred one and has within it the possibility of transcendence and connection. In that sense, the classroom itself become an arena for the struggle or, if you will, a place that invites the possibility of transforming the banal to the profound, the vulgar to the beautiful, and the profane to the sacred. (Purpel 1999, 142)

To this end, he argues for a holistic education that cultivates a concern for mutuality, ecological sensitivity, wonder, hope, relationality (Purpel 1999, 146-147), hospitality, human dignity, sustainability (Purpel 1999, 167-168), peace, and justice (Purpel 1999, 182). In summary, curriculum can inspire ethical reflection and an encounter with transcendence—religious qualities which theorists sometimes observe within videogame play as well.

The varied phenomena of videogame play also reflect—at least in part—the concerns of religious educators throughout the 20th century. For example, George Albert Coe (1903) asserts that God plants a "religious impulse" within all persons that permeates all of life. Lewis Joseph Sherrill (1955) argues for religious education that aims for self-transcendence, the capacity to rise above natural limitations, and for the transformation of one's relationship with God, with others, with the physical world, and with oneself. Maria Harris also associates religious education with transcendence and interconnection, asserting that "Every place, every time, and every person is a lure from, and a lure to, the divine" (Harris 1989, 51). Harris also suggests that religious education engages learners in mystery—the conviction that "at some fundamental level, everyone and everything is related to everyone and everyone else" (Harris 1987, 13-15). Similarly, Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore calls for a religious education that reverently seeks to nurture both a "thoroughly incarnational understanding of relationships" and "the presence of the holy in all actuality" (Moore 1991, 130). All of these scholars testify that religious education can inspire ethical reflection and an encounter with transcendence—religious qualities also mediated through certain kinds of curriculum and certain kinds of videogame play.

To summarize, the concerns of many 20th century religious educators tend to echo those of 20th century curriculum theorists. They often enjoy an overlapping interest in education that sponsors ethical interconnection, reverence for mystery, and yearning for transcendence. In a sense, these religious qualities reflect the emotional and aesthetic qualities of videogame play as well. At this point, the work of religious educator Mary Hess is particularly helpful.

Mary Hess writes from the intersection of religious education, media technology, and popular culture. She notes that religious institutions are quick to point out the use of religious symbols in popular culture, but slower to point out the religious *significance* of popular culture. Fundamentally, Hess recognizes the widespread presence of "spaces within media culture that allow us to dream large dreams, to connect with others, and to be drawn into transcendence" (Hess 1999, 287). She suggests that these are religious qualities. At the same time, she also recognizes that the overwhelming intensity of some media may limit the religious imagination of those who interact with it (Hess 2004). Hess is not alone. Other media theorists recognize the same religious potential and limitation of popular cultural media (cf. Babin 1970; Babin 1991; Warren 1997; Prevost 2000; Blevins 2008).

Conclusion

Theologians from C. S. Lewis to Paul Tillich argue that to be human is to be religious. Throughout Lewis' writings, he suggests that all persons experience *sehnsucht*—a German word implying "longing" for something only vaguely understood (Lewis [1949] 2001; cf. Reaves 2005). Of course, Lewis follows Augustine in suggesting that the object of human longing is God. In a more philosophical turn, Tillich explains that all persons seek "ultimate concern," implying "the emotional, perhaps even more strongly than the intellectual" (D. Brown 1965). In this sense, the search for transformation through interconnection and transcendence functions as a religious quest. Thus, we should not be surprised to discover that videogame play may imitate, simulate, emulate, reflect, or evoke a glimmer of religious enjoyment for those who play them. In my own research, I perceive potentially religious significance in computer role-playing games (Hayse 2007; 2009a; 2009b; 2010). It seems to me that role-playing games often invite players into the religiously-oriented experiences of ethical reflection and agency, and a sense of yearning for unfolding revelation.

I wonder if videogames—particularly role-playing games—might remind the church about what religious education can be at its very best. Creative expression. Aesthetic yearning. A quest for interconnection and transcendence. As a lifelong religious educator within the Christian tradition, I recognize that too often, I have restricted my own practice to the rational, the propositional, and the moralistic. To be sure, these are worthy pursuits for faithful Christian religious education. Nevertheless, they cannot constitute its whole scope of concern. If Christian religious education never introduces learners to an encounter with the "mystery" of God in Christ (cf. Rom 16:24-26; Eph 1:8-10; 3:3-9; Col 1:25-27; 1 Tim 3:15-16), then something critical remains unaddressed. Although Christ's first advent is a matter of historical record, Christ's Second Advent remains concealed (Rev 10:6-8). Within my own Christian tradition, God calls the church to respond to this Mystery (1 Cor 13:11-12) with watchfulness (Mk 13) and anticipation (Mt 6:9-10). Mystery calls me to practice Christian religious education in the tradition of Anselm's "faith seeking understanding."

Perhaps if videogames have anything to teach the church about a curriculum of religious education, it is the value of mystery within a broader Mystery. Every time that a videogame player begins a new adventure, mystery beckons and calls. The mystery of videogames animates the player's quest for discovery and fulfillment within the game world. Similarly, divine Mystery provides a means of grace rather than an obstacle to faith. Divine Mystery does not exist as a problem to be solved, but as a potentiality to be savored and a journey to enjoy. If religious education fails to celebrate and support the playful engagement of both mystery and Mystery in this regard, then young people may very well seek it elsewhere (cf. Huebner [1959] 1999). On one hand, the church needs to celebrate Mystery as an explicitly religious world to explore. On the other hand, the church needs to engage popular culture as a conversation partner in order to help open a new gateway to meaning and faith.

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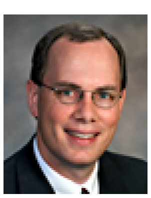

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Tech Etiquette is Just Common Sense

By Mark Simpson

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Abstract

Advancements in communications and online technologies are so rapid that social conventions in their appropriate use have not always had time to develop before problems have arisen. Simple common sense though can tell you how, when, and where it is appropriate and safe to do so. Four common sense best practices are discussed.

The Need for Tech Etiquette

You see it every day in one form or another. Business professionals who appear to be talking to themselves in the middle of a crowded room; the car driver talking on a cell phone while attempting to turn a corner; people walking across a busy street with their heads down, rapidly pushing keys on a smartphone. We have become addicted to technology and the instant gratification that comes with being able to connect to anyone, anywhere, at any time. E-mail, cell phones, social networking, texting, blogging and more, allow us to connect with others in ways we never dreamed of just a few short years ago. We are no longer tethered to a landline telephone or Internet connection at home or work to communicate with family and friends. Now we can call anyone from virtually any location, send them a text message, and connect wirelessly to the World Wide Web to post a blog or send an e-mail. Unfortunately common sense in the use of these technologies hasn't kept pace with the advancements.

Just because we can use technology to connect with others any time from any place doesn't mean that we should. In the United States, for example, state legislation banning or limiting the use of cell phones while driving is becoming more and more commonplace (GHSA 2009a) as the number of accidents increase (GHSA 2009b). The number of fatal accidents caused by text messaging (also known as "texting") while driving (Box 2009) is also resulting in legislation to outlaw or restrict such practices (Schulte 2008). Dangers and accidents aside, casual observation suggests that technology impacts the way in which we interact with each other face-to-face. No longer does the person in your presence get your attention. Instead, the ringing cell phone or the alert tone of an arriving text message brings a conversation to a halt as focus shifts to the incoming message.

To be fair, the advancement of communications and online technologies is so rapid that the social conventions in their appropriate or inappropriate use have not always had time to develop before problems have arisen. For example, the perceived feelings of security in being able to reach someone by cell phone at any time hasn't always taken into account the context of the person receiving the call. A person may be in a meeting or public gathering and not able to carry-on a conversation, but the cell phone invites (even demands) that the alternate conversation occurs. And nothing is more disturbing than a cell phone conversation in a public restroom! We now can communicate with more people more frequently, but sometimes we are doing so in ways that are unsafe or rude to others.

Tech etiquette (sometimes called "netiquette" or "techniquette") does not have to be a series of complicated rules and regulations though. Simple common sense can tell you how, when, and where it is appropriate to use a cell phone or smartphone, what to say or not say in a text message, or what to post or not post on a social network. And because technology changes so rapidly, common sense will more readily help you determine what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior as opposed to waiting for new best practices. The problem then is what should common sense be telling us?

Four Common Sense Best Practices with Technology

I believe there are four common sense best practices in the use of communications and online technologies that can guide us as we use them. These four best practices can be categorized as safety, security, privacy, and courtesy.

Safety

First and perhaps foremost, a common sense best practice with technology should be *safety*. Using one hand to hold a cell phone while driving a moving vehicle is not a safe practice. Not only can the conversation distract you from being alert to what is happening on the road around you, but losing the use of one hand to drive the vehicle can be dangerous. Your reaction times while holding a cell phone or smartphone are diminished, making defensive driving more difficult. All it takes is a second for you to lose control of a moving vehicle if you do not have both hands on the steering wheel. And while hands-free microphones make it possible to use a cell phone while driving, the question of being distracted still remains a possibility, especially when trying to place or answer a call (Box 2009).

Text messaging while driving is also extremely dangerous, as you must use both hands to type the text and hold the device. And not only the hands are distracted while texting—the driver must also look at the screen from time to time to see if what he or she has typed appears correctly. Perhaps you have seen a driver who is looking down at their lap while zooming along the road, often weaving unsteadily in the lane. Chances are good they are reading something, perhaps a text message, or they are texting someone. Sending or receiving text messages while driving is not a safe practice (13 Central Florida News 2009).

Safety also comes into play when using some technologies around the gasoline pump. Many people do not realize or heed the warnings posted at most gas stations to not use cell phones when filling the gas tank. There is always the possibility of the device malfunctioning, causing an electric spark and subsequently an explosion of the gas fumes.

Whatever the context or the technology, common sense suggests that you ask yourself if using the technology is safe to do at the moment, whether your physical mobility or mental acuity is impaired or distracted by doing so, and if the surrounding environment is safe or unsafe with its proper use.

Security

Security is another common sense best practice with technology. It is not wise to be giving out credit card information over a cell phone in a crowded room or bus where anyone can hear what you are saying. Neither is entering personal information on a computer using free unsecured Wi-Fi at a local café or airport to login into a personal bank account or access e-mail. It is not uncommon for hackers to gather personal information from unsuspecting users of sites with unprotected access.

Whatever the context or the technology, it is always wise to ask yourself if your use of the technology is secure, or whether someone else may be able to gain unauthorized access to the information you are communicating electronically. Given the increasing problem of identity theft in the United States alone (ITRC 2009), users of smartphones connecting to the Internet should be concerned about the security of the information they are sending and receiving. Web surfing can be fun while relaxing by the pool—but avoid sending private information over a possibly unsecure network. The same is true when using public computers in schools or libraries. They may or may not have secure access to the Internet, nor appropriate security software to prevent hackers or other users from accessing personal information you may enter on the computer.

Common sense suggests that you ask yourself if the technology you are using has appropriate security protocols in place to protect the information you are communicating, and if the environment you are in while using the technology is secure for its use.

Privacy

Privacy is a third common sense best practice with technology. The old adage "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" does not necessarily apply to what you say on your cell phone or post online. It is amazing the cell phone conversations one hears in public. The person talking on the cell phone often seems to assume that no one else can hear the conversation, even when they are shouting to be heard above the ambient noise of the surrounding environment. Thus information is sometimes shared over the cell phone that is inflammatory about others—meant to be shared privately—but heard by all present. Similarly, social networking sites thrive on the capability of people sharing personal information with one another. And some people do—to extremes. Pictures from wild parties, negative opinions about employers, disparaging comments about groups or individuals, proprietary information about the workplace, all get posted on sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc. every day. What is often forgotten is that once the information is posted, it's always there or it could turn up again someday (Barnes 2006) even if deleted. What we forget is that posting information about yourself or others on a social networking site isn't necessarily just viewed by family or friends. Employers are also increasingly turning to social networking sites to learn more about the activities of potential employees, with as many as 1/3 of job applicants being rejected for what was found on the sites (Havenstein 2008).

Technology also allows one to text message breaking information during a meeting so that it appears immediately on a blog or Twitter networking site for others to read. When such information is posted though, participants in the meeting may feel their comments are no longer private, hindering open and honest debate and discussion. No matter how good or positive the information may be, posting information about a meeting without prior approval of the participants can be an invasion of privacy of those involved. It also can result in communicating proprietary information and violating corporate privacy if, in our exuberance to quickly share good news, we accidentally share too many details.

Privacy also cannot be taken for granted in online environments—you should never post something online you would regret someone seeing or reading at a later date, even if years later. And you cannot rule out the possibility of the legal ramifications if what you post about someone or some organization becomes wider public knowledge (Thompson 2008).

Common sense suggests that you think about privacy issues regarding yourself and others as a result of what you are saying in a public environment, or what you are writing and uploading to an online venue.

Courtesy

Courtesy is a fourth common sense best practice with technology. As with using common sense in matters of security and privacy, what we say with technology, how we say it, and when and where we say it matters in terms of being polite and courteous to others. Rather than communicate something face-to-face, we now can send an e-mail or type a message and forward it to a person's cell phone or smartphone. That can be great for sharing important information quickly with another person. But communicating negative information through an e-mail or text message may not be polite or fair to the person receiving it.

Brevity in communication such as that which works best with e-mail, text messaging, blog postings, and social networking means that we must be more careful how we communicate in writing. Just as TYPING IN ALL CAPS IS CONSIDERED YELLING in electronic environments, brevity in writing can easily come across as cold hearted, demanding, or negative. Emoticons (Sharpened.net 2009) do allow us to make smiley faces to express feelings behind what we are saying, or we can use acronyms and abbreviations like LOL to indicate that we are "laughing out loud" in our message

(NetLingo.com 2009). But the use of emoticons and acronyms can become confusing in a message as they assume the receiver knows the meaning of these forms of shorthand communication. When writing in electronic context, we must be careful to be clear in the precision of what we are saying but not assume the reader knows the meaning of every abbreviation and emoticon that we may create. Courtesy means keeping the content easy for the reader to read and understand.

Courtesy in the use of technology should also take into consideration whether or not your use is distracting or embarrassing to others. Taking a cell phone call during a conversation with another person, making a cell phone call in a restroom, or texting or web surfing while sitting in a meeting or movie theatre is not courteous to others with you or around you. What is annoying is the common practice of answering a cell phone call during a meeting or social gathering rather than silencing the phone before it starts. Given that we have always found ways to distract ourselves (such as doodling on a note pad) in situations in which we might be bored or disinterested, it still is not courteous to others to allow your use of technology to distract them or rudely interrupt them. Reading e-mails and sending text messages while you are supposed to be attentive to a meeting at hand is impolite to those present as well as the presenter.

Common sense suggests that being courteous when using technology is to show respect for those taking the time to be in your presence face-to-face, and being polite to others around you. It comes across as rude and impolite to make someone wait while you respond to technology vying for your attention, or to distract others in your use of a cell phone or smartphone.

Conclusion

Advancements in communications technology, social networking, and the information sharing applications available to us on the Internet will continue to present us with challenges on how, when and where to use them, and in ways that are socially appropriate. But if we use common sense as we deploy these technologies in our lives, we can ensure that we are using them with safety, security, privacy, and courtesy in mind. To do otherwise only diminishes or hurts ourselves, possibly endangers others, and ultimately leads to regulations on the use of the technology. If we do not learn to use common sense in matters of tech etiquette, history teaches us that over time someone else will set standards for us, usually the government, resulting in regulations and penalties that could prohibit or inhibit our use of technology to share ideas and communicate freely with one another.

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Self-Direction: A Critical Tool in Distance Learning

By Jack Cunningham

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Abstract
Self-directed learning is key to successful online distance education. For instructors and students to succeed in online learning, both must pay attention to motivation and self-discipline. Self-directed learners are generally more adept at transforming learning into meaning and life application than students who simply listen to the professor. The role and necessity of self-directed learning in distance education is therefore discussed, and principles for teaching in online distance education are evaluated.

Note: This article was originally written by Dr. Jack Cunningham for the inaugural issue of the *Digital Learning Journal* in 2004. Although that journal ultimately was not developed, Dr. Cunningham's article remains a relevant reminder to Christian educator's today of the critical importance of self-directed learning skills in distance learning.

A Brief Background

When I began to write this article on self-directed learning and its importance to distance learning, more specifically, to e-learning, my first thought was, "What have I read that qualifies me to write on the subject? My second thought was to remind myself that I have years of experience in the field of distance learning. I have worked as a designer and instructor in major correspondence programs, directed accredited online degree programs, and have assisted in designing and teaching in mediated-learning terminal degrees. I do not mean to be boastful but simply to remind myself that you probably are more interested in the real world of self-directed learning than in the theoretical one. So, this article may sound more like an approach from grounded theory than from the perspective of qualitative research.[1]

Probably no one has been more instrumental in raising the educator's awareness to self-directed learning than Malcolm Knowles. Generally recognized for revisiting the term, andragogy, Knowles began early on to use terms such as "self-directed learning" and "self-directed inquiry" in his writings (Knowles, 1980). Knowles' primarily focus

[1] Grounded theory has been described as "explicitly *emergent.* It does not test a hypothesis." Its purpose is to view the research situation as it is and, if possible, determine what theory may apply. Please see, http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/grounded.html#a_gt_intro for details.

was upon finding ways to help the student facilitate self-directed learning projects. Much of his attention was on the learning contract, instructor facilitation skills, and learner competencies. Others, such as Roger Hiemstra and Ralph Brockett had entered the fray over traditional learning versus non-traditional learning and began to produce significant materials leading adult educators to understand and engage their students in self-directed learning as a part of their higher-education experience.[2]

Stephen Brookfield and others have been slow to accept the instrumental approach of Knowles, Hiemstra, et. al. Arguing that self-directed learning is more of a transformative activity, Brookfield states that self-directed learning can be viewed as referring to internal change of perspective.

> Put briefly, self-directed learning in this second sense occurs when learners come to regard knowledge as relative and contextual, to view the value frameworks and moral codes informing their behaviors as cultural constructs, and to use this altered perspective to contemplate ways in which they can transform their personal and social worlds. (Brookfield, 1986)

I understand Brookfield to be saying that true self-directed learning comes from inner transformation of meaning schemes coupled with attention to self-discipline. While I doubt if he would totally disagree that some good instructor facilitation and student training can be helpful to the student engaged in self-directed learning, the success of that student is still going to depend on self-reflection and transformation of existing perspectives. The ability to intentionally reflect on one's premises about the subject is the key to self-direction. Brookfield's concern is that the students engage in questioning self-perspectives and attitudes that allow for acceptance of a conclusion not well thought out or owned by the student. But we must remember that Brookfield's passion is change of perspectives through the critical thinking process. He has little time for education that simply transmits "expert" conclusions to be accepted uncritically.

The concept of self-directed learning has been promoted mainly as an adult education tool. A number of research projects during the 1990s were conducted using K-12 students (Abdullah, 2000). Most of the conclusions related to the teacher's methodology design and assessment. But one conclusion was that as children grow, they

[2] For the reader desiring to investigate additional resources and references relating to the development of self-directed learning and the more current advances in research and literature, visit the active learning page of the Center for Teaching Excellence, http://cte.umdnj.edu/active_learning/index.cfm.

have an increasing desire for autonomy. That conclusion is hardly news to those knowledgeable in the field of developmental psychology. For the purposes of this article, we will restrict the discussion to the field of adult education with a focus on adult students engaging distance learning in higher education programs.

No Significant Difference?

Let's admit something up front. There is a significant bias toward distance learning among faculty at higher education institutions. There has been, and to a great extent still is, a negative attitude toward learning that does not occur in the main on a campus or in the professor's classroom. That negative bias continues despite a proliferation of research that shows there is "no significant difference" between graduates of traditional programs and non-traditional programs. To be fair, I am not sure all of the significant variables that affect student success have been considered.

For example, in our programs here at The Baptist College of Florida, I have noted semester after semester that resident students succeed at a greater rate than online students. But the variable I am looking at is the "all or nothing" response of online students as compared with "just get by" attitude of many of our resident students. What do I mean? Students successfully completing an online course normally have greater motivation to succeed and demonstrate significantly greater self-discipline during the process of the course. Students in our distance programs are usually non-residents who are seeking training or credentialing for ministry or seminary purposes. They are highly motivated to succeed. Where these students have taken resident courses, they have been some of our best performers.

On the other hand, we have resident students who see our online programs as a convenient way to take courses without having to meet the classroom structure. The failure rate among this group is the highest of any cohort in our programs. While we have not conducted a formal research project in this area, my observations as program director lead me to conclude that the "no significant difference" studies are not factoring in the number of students that simply are drop-outs or failures in non-traditional programs. Another observation is that successful students in our online programs are normally at or near the top of their class when taking resident studies. Successful distance learning students are motivated and disciplined or they cannot survive.

As far as the effectiveness of distance education is concerned, the U.S. Military training programs have left little doubt as to the quality of training at a distance. Since World War II, military education has relied heavily on correspondence courses, self-study materials, and online delivery to keep the troops current and trained. The largest non-traditional programs are operated by the U.S. Air Force, Army, and Navy.

So why are institutions of higher learning often so reluctant to adopt these strategies? Perhaps the answer is in the attitudes of professors and toward non-traditional teaching/learning strategies. I have had sincere professors tell me they will not teach online because “students cannot get the same quality of learning as they would in my classroom.” Perhaps another cause of these negative responses is fear of failure if professors attempt to teach online. The easier exit is to blame the quality of learning.

There may be value-laden outcomes to teaching in a distance delivery system. Could it be that a change of assumptions about teaching and learning would be beneficial to the professor both in the distance world and in the classroom?

A Change of Teaching/Learning Assumptions

So what does our discussion so far have to do with self-directed learning, you may be asking? The answer is simple. For instructors and students to succeed in educational ventures where self-directed learning is required, both must pay attention to motivation and self-discipline. The validity and success of distance learning is built upon self-directed learning. No longer is the “teaching event” in the hands of the instructor alone. The student shares half if not more of that responsibility. The professor cannot perform the teaching event with the emphasis on the effectiveness of the delivery alone. The student cannot come to class and take notes, pass an exam, and say, “I have learned.” An entirely new set of assumptions are required by both the teacher and the student.

One of the assumptions to change is that of “students do not learn without a teacher present.” Most of us know this experientially. Allen Tough’s research gave evidence of self-directed learning as a commonplace event in the life of many adults (Tough, 1971). Since Tough’s early work, many similar research projects had validated the existence and role of self-directed learning in adult lives. Even with the volumes of research to the contrary, I find this assumption alive and well in much of academia. Somehow, many professors in higher education can see their own self-direction at work but refuse to admit that students have the same capability. It has been said tongue-in-cheek that 90 percent of learning on a campus takes place outside of the classroom. While that may be a slight exaggeration, it serves my point that, for self-directed learning to be effective, both teacher and learner must admit intentional and accurate learning can occur even without the teacher's presence.

Another assumption that is common to the classroom is, "my students cannot possibly understand this textual content without my lectures." My experience has been just the opposite. My online students often report that they profit more from a book knowing that they must "dig it out" for themselves. It is interesting to see the change of attitude toward self-directed learning and distance learning once the student recognizes that their previous assumption about their ability to learn independently of a teacher was wrong. Obviously there are students who are so intimidated by self-directed learning, or, do not have the background to engage in a particular subject without considerable support. I am usually amazed at how quickly students grasp this new approach to learning. My answer to my amazement usually is, "Why should this surprise me?" We constantly learn from personal reading projects or recreational reading. It is only in formal educational institutions that this assumption is even questioned.

A major assumption that must change is how educators and students view learning. Several key questions come to mind here. Is true learning the impartation of knowledge or the transformation of the learner? What role does the critical thinking process play in moving the student beyond simple cognitive gain? What do we really mean by affective domain? Is "learning how to learn" really as important as what is learned? Educators have given some attention to these questions on a theoretical, philosophical level, but how many have incorporated these and other question into their practice of teaching? Most literature pertaining to transformative learning advocates some form of reflection, thinking or intentional problem solving.[3]

In his sometimes controversial book, Allen Bloom advocated a democratic approach to learning in which educators are charged with not only learning facts but are taught how to be philosophic thinkers. His fear is that western rationalism has resulted in the rejection of reason and thought.

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[3] Jack Mezirow, Stephen Brookfield, Patricia Cranton, et. al., are popular voices for the inclusion of reflection and critical thinking into the teaching/learning design.

> I must reiterate that Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Nietzche are thinkers of the very highest order. That is, in fact, precisely my point. We must relearn what this means and also that there are others who belong in the same rank. (Bloom, 1987)

While one may quarrel with some of Bloom's philosophical premises, it is difficult for the serious educator not to admit that the ability to engage in serious critical thinking is woefully lacking in today's student body. Educators would do well to revisit our positions on learning.

My personal teaching journey has caused me to reject much of what I was taught about learning taxonomies. I now see the affective domain as more of a task of the student rather than the professor. True, I have affective learning as a goal for my students, but I understand that my lessons must challenge students at the analysis, syntheses, and evaluation levels. Remaining at the knowledge, comprehension and application levels will do little to help the student become self-directed and will probably not attach the student to the subject at any significant affective level.

A final assumption that I would like to assail is that of learning styles. The "hear, see, do" formula of retention is well recognized in the academic community. But there is another consideration when it comes to teaching self-directed learners in higher education distance programs. Years ago I found a "Peanuts" cartoon that I have prized since. Charlie Brown is explaining to Lucy the difference between TV, radio and books.

"TV," he says, "puts stuff into your mind with pictures and sound. You don't even have to think."

"Radio," he continues, "puts stuff into your mind with just sounds and words. You make up your own pictures."

"Books, Charlie explains, "are quite friends! They let you make up your own pictures and sounds. They make you think!" Good for you, Charlie Brown.

Current literature will lead you to believe that good teaching panders to students' learning styles. While there may be some merit to that position, it often ignores the value of stretching students from their comfort zones to styles of learning that create dissonance. In my campus classes, I often deal with students who claim to be "visual." They want a video or some other form of pictorial presentation to be used. "But I can't learn any other way" is the excuse they offer. I have concluded that many of these students have been raised in homes and educated in systems where reading is not valued.

Students engaged in self-directed learning must be able to read efficiently and comprehend the materials assigned. Of necessity they will be able to transfer these materials into other meaning schemes with a minimum of assistance. Self-directed students will possess the skills needed to understand what they read and be capable of applying the content to a variety of related problem-solving cases. Successful self-directed learners will be able to apply upper-level thinking skills to what they are reading.

While streaming video and other technologies are being employed to deliver distance courses, I am convinced that learning by reading is still the most important delivery system we have for creating thinking in the student. I cannot believe that talking head videos, CDs, DVDs, streaming video, etc.—even employing the use of listening (watching) guides—does not provide the quality of learning that reading and the ensuing required thinking does.

Designing for the Distance Self-Directed Learner

It has been my observation that resident professors who succeed in teaching online courses experience significant improvement in their classroom teaching. There are probably several reasons for this phenomenon.

I have employed several resident professors to teach in my programs. I get two basic responses from these professors. Some discover how much work they need to do on their resident courses to make them as interactive as the online courses. They recognize that their classrooms are centered on "me" and not on their students. They also recognize the contributions to learning students can make in a democratic classroom. In addition, these professors are surprised at how much quality self-direction students can demonstrate when freed to do so. A second response is, "That was too much work. I don't think I want to teach another online course."

Teaching self-directed learners requires detailed course design from the first to the final session. Previous time expended preparing lectures is now spent on developing sequential, student-centered learning activities. Every unit or session must be prepared with consideration for how the student will access and integrate into the learning plan assigned materials without the instructor's physical presence. In other words, every detail of the course should be in place prior to the first session of the course. While this is desired for classroom teaching, it seldom happens. The syllabus is often considered to be the detailed plan rather than the road map it really is. "I can construct my teaching plans as I progress" is often the attitude.

Professors must pay close attention to the way interactive communications are designed. Self-directed learners want immediate feedback on the assignments they are working on. The professor should learn to communicate via asynchronous means in way that establishes a similar psychological climate that is expected in face-to-face communications. Obviously a part of this communication is assisting the student to successfully enter into the course content. Questions to be posted must be designed to focus the student's attention on the important principles of the text. Additionally, the professor must recognize that, as the self-directed learner independently reads the materials, he or she may gain insights the instructor has not considered. Therefore, it is critical that room in the communications' design be made for these sidebars just as you would entertain a few "rabbits" in the classroom.

Speaking of sidebars, permit me one. It has been my experience that asynchronous communications result in a higher quality of discussion than do synchronous models. The reason is simple—more thinking time from question to response. That is true both for the student and for the professor.

When using online asynchronous communications, professors should pay close attention to each student's responses. I have found that I can assist the student to self-direct their understanding of the content only when I respond to each student in the course individually. Yes, this process takes more time than the classroom counterpart. However, when I respond individually, my response to the student will be read by others having the same questions or confusion about a given topic. My personal response, in turn, generates more peer-to-peer discussions that are beneficial to the entire cohort. The difference between these discussions and "after class" discussions following on-campus sessions is that every student including the professor is involved. It does not take long for serious students to recognize they are an important part of the learning transaction.

Another design criterion that is of great assistance to the self-directed learner is the inclusion of a variety of approaches to the subject matter. Reading quizzes, short essays, forum questions, etc., are designed to insure the distance student is properly focused on the materials of the course. These activities form a type of self-diagnostic for the student to understand how to properly interpret and assimilate the course materials. I have found that it takes two or three different perspectives of the materials for some students to finally grasp its significance. The successful instructor will pay close attention to insure that all of the course activities support each other. When these activities are designed properly, I find very little need for the use of traditional testing as a measurement of learning indicators. By closely monitoring student responses to my integrated activities, I am aware of each student's progress toward the course objectives. In other words, I find formative evaluation much more valuable for the self-directed learning student than summative evaluations.

One of the most difficult adjustments from classroom teaching to directing the distance student is the preoccupation with correcting every small error students may make. We must remember that students are often uncertain about how to engage in self-directed learning and feel that they are taking considerable risks in departing from their traditional classroom experiences. Instructors who overly critique form, style, and adherence to precise syllabus instructions are simply adding stress to an already stressful situation. We should remember why these learners are in our classes in the first place. They are interested in mastery of the content. They want to learn! So the successful instructor will pay more attention to whether or not the student is "getting it," the learning outcome, than whether the student is presenting in the proper format. Obviously I do not excuse poor grammar, use of chat room slang, etc. This is, after all, a higher education degree. But, while correcting these errors, I am more concerned about how students understand and reflect on the course content.

Finally, self-directed students want to know what this learning means in their immediate context. I teach several Old Testament courses in our degree-completion program. I have found student participation rises dramatically when my planned activities focus student participation on how to find meaning in their local church or ministry context. This understanding means I must prepare the entire course around application rather than simply content mastery. Obviously, understanding the content must be a part of proper application. But the fact is that self-directed students are more interested in using the content than they are simply knowing and comprehending it. I find it invigorating to teach the Old Testament when students are naturally enthused about the use of the learning for personal problem solving.

Obviously there are other design issues involved in leading the self-directed learner. But those I have discussed are the critical ones for me. Given a nurturing climate, most serious learners will quickly become aware of their self-directed learning role in the teaching/learning process and will adapt readily to the new learning paradigm.

Conclusions from a Practitioner

I readily admit that I favor self-directed learning and non-traditional learning over the more traditional forms of delivery. I enjoy teaching online and designing learner-centered courses. Perhaps that is because I am a self-directed learner, skeptical of authoritarian traditionalists. Perhaps my attitude comes from my many years of being a distance educator alongside of my years of traditional classroom experience in higher education. I readily admit that my classroom practices look and feel much like my online practices. To be quite honest, my colleagues are often chagrined at my non-traditional views of teaching/learning. But, as one of my former doctoral peers once told me, "Cunningham, you have crossed over a bridge and cannot get back!" True, but I am not sure I want to go back. I think I have learned some important lessons on this side of the bridge.

1. Students can learn without me being present! That is a shock to many traditionalists.
2. Students often get different insights from my classroom presentations than I planned for them to get. They are self-reflecting.
3. My lectures are not as effective as I would like to believe they are. My students learn more from the projects and groups then from my presentations.
4. Self-directed learners are generally more adept at transforming learning into meaning than are students who are simply listening to the professor.
5. Self-directed, distance learners have a different motivation to learn than do most of my residents students. That difference requires me to design my respective courses differently.
6. If I want to engage my students in interactive learning, I must see them as capable of self-reflection and self-direction.
7. And, finally, from my distance-learning experiences, I have found a great appreciation for the democratic classroom.

I cannot leave my personal lessons there. The concept of self-directed learning has a negative set of lessons. The first two of these negatives have the potential for disastrous outcomes.

1. Not all students can engage successfully in self-directed learning at higher education levels. From my experience, the major inhibitor to success is not a set of skills or professor motivation, but the student's lack of self-discipline. I find two sets of students especially vulnerable. My younger students normally lack the maturity to be self-disciplined. Older students who are taking distance courses for the purpose of credentialing only are often too distracted with other responsibilities to be self-disciplined.

2. Not all professors are capable of instructing self-directed students. Unless the instructor can set aside his or her traditional psychology of teaching/learning, and, at a minimum, revise the approach to educating, both teacher and student will have a negative experience. Understanding the needs of a self-directed student is paramount for a successful course design.

3. Effective management of self-directed learning takes considerably more effort and time on the part of both student and learner than does the traditional classroom model.

As I stated earlier in this article, I intentionally did not undertake to present a classical research format. I selected the "grounded theory" observational approach to encourage discussion and the exchange of ideas. Literature pertaining to research on self-directed learning is voluminous. Practitioner contributions are mostly from larger institutions.

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Ministry in a Digital World: Establishing a Multidimensional Web Presence

By Mark Simpson

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Abstract

A multidimensional web presence is essential for a church or ministry organization in a digital world. A web site alone is no longer sufficient. In addition to maintaining an online ministry identity, developing an information network and providing places for community through social networking are also essential dimensions of a web presence. A multidimensional approach expands the opportunities for a ministry to create a dialogue with those both within and outside the faith community. Strategies are offered to help simplify the development and maintenance of a multidimensional web presence.

The Presence of Ministry in a Digital World

In his message for the *44th World Communications Day*, Pope Benedict XVI challenged the clergy to see digital media and the World Wide Web as opportunities to broaden the presence and ministry of the Church to the world:

> The spread of multimedia communications and its rich "menu of options" might make us think it sufficient simply to be present on the Web, or to see it only as a space to be filled. Yet priests can rightly be expected to be present in the world of digital communications as faithful witnesses to the Gospel, exercising their proper role as leaders of communities which increasingly express themselves with the different "voices" provided by the digital marketplace. Priests are thus challenged to proclaim the Gospel by employing the latest generation of audiovisual resources (images, videos, animated features, blogs, websites) which, alongside traditional means, can open up broad new vistas for dialogue, evangelization and catechesis. (Benedictus XVI 2010)

Advancements with digital communications present the church with opportunities for ministry that were not feasible with traditional print media and its associated costs and limited circulation. Establishing a digital footprint on the World Wide Web today can be done virtually for free and make the church accessible to a global audience.

Simply having a ministry web site is no longer enough to establish a web presence. Today it is important to have a multidimensional approach that includes not only an information network, but a social network as well:

> Once upon a time, a business would put up a website with its contact information, and that was the beginning and end of its web presence.
>
> Those days are long gone. Savvy marketers today are very aware that a multidimensional approach is essential if one hopes to build a strong and responsive web presence. (Brauner 2009)

But taking advantage of these online opportunities can be daunting to the technically challenged or those not experienced with managing a web presence. At first glance, creating a church web site, posting messages on a ministry weblog, or utilizing social networking sites can seem too complicated to the pastor or church leader. But creating a digital footprint on the Web can be broken down into manageable activities that most any user of the Internet can follow.[1] The following strategies are offered as one way to help simplify the development and maintenance of a multidimensional web presence for a church or ministry organization.

Register a Domain Name to Establish an Online Identity

The first step in creating a multidimensional web presence is to select a domain name that identifies the church or ministry organization on the Web. Visitors access a web site through a web browser by entering the domain name as a URL such as: http://www.commongroundjournal.org. Choosing a domain name is thus essential to differentiating a ministry from all other ministries on the Web (McFarlan 2009). A great deal of thought and research should go into the selection of a domain name, as it can serve as the core identifier used in creating all of the other account names involved with establishing a multidimensional web presence (see Table 1).

A domain name includes a *name label* to associate with the domain—often an organization's name or variation thereof—followed by a dot and an *extension label* that classifies the content associated with the name (such as .com in the United States for commercial endeavors and .org for churches and organizations). International domain names add a *country code* following the extension label to identify the country of origin;

[1] Beginners in developing online technologies may wish to explore the *In Easy Steps* series of books to help them get started (www.ineasysteps.com). Intermediate developers may find the Peachpit Press *Visual QuickStart Guides* especially helpful, as they are built around step-by-step instructions and illustrations (www.peachpit.com). Experienced developers may enjoy any of the New Riders (www.peachpit.com), O'Reilly (www.oreilly.com), or QUE (www.informit.com) books for their advanced techniques.

the U.S. does not use the country code. Thus for the CanDoSpirit Network in the United States, the name label "candospirit" with the .org extension label results in the domain name www.candospirit.org.

For ministry organizations in the United States it is wise to register a name label as both .com and .org domain names, as Web users often search for web sites using the .com extension first. Registering both domain names also prevents others from capitalizing on an organization's name or posting inappropriate content under that name. It thus eliminates potential confusion or embarrassment for the web user who enters the correct name label but with the wrong extension. Different extension labels may be more common in other countries. Therefore the domain names registered should be for the extensions most commonly used in the ministry's country.

Table 1. Domain Name Propagation in a Coordinated Multidimensional Web Presence[2]

Ministry Name	*Ministry Basics*
Domain Name	www.ministrybasics.com www.ministrybasics.org
Google Site	https://sites.google.com/site/ministrybasics/
Blogger Name	http://ministrybasicsblog.blogspot.com*
Twitter Account Name	@MinistryBasics
Facebook Name	Ministry Basics
YouTube Name	MinistryBasics

*MinistryBasics.blogspot.com was already in use and not available—adding "blog" to the name "ministrybasics" was the simplest alternative for the unavailable name

The name label in a domain name should be as short as possible, making it easier to remember. Longer names are easy to misspell, and may be cumbersome to use in e-mail addresses or posting messages on social networks. If a desired domain name has already been registered by others (e.g., firstbaptist.org), a variation on the ministry name and its location or affiliation may be an alternative choice (e.g., fbcnewburgh.org or

[2] Although the domain name and related accounts are registered with the services indicated, they were not yet in operation at the time this article was written.

firstchurchabc.org). It is not unusual to have to explore several variations of a ministry name label before finding one that is still available for registration as both a .com and .org domain name.

Registering a domain name is simple and relatively inexpensive. The availability of a domain name can be researched using the WHOIS database of registered domain names, which can be accessed through many domain registrars such as Network Solutions (www.networksolutions.com). Once registered, it is very important to be sure to renew the domain name annually *before* it expires. Otherwise—even if a ministry is actively using it—the domain name becomes available for anyone else to purchase. The importance of on-time renewal of domain names cannot be stressed enough!

A church or ministry organization should register a domain name even if it will not be used for establishing a web site. For example, many churches use free web space such as provided by Google Sites, where the ministry's name label is part of Google's domain name (as in https://sites.google.com/site/ministrybasics/ for the organization Ministry Basics). Even though Ministry Basics used Google Sites to host their web pages, they still registered the ministrybasics.com and .org domain names for future use. Remember, establishing a multidimensional web presence involves creating other account names that are easier to remember if they are similar to the domain name. A church or ministry organization should reserve and preserve their ministry identity through its name label *now*, as a domain name or other related account names may not be available later when web presence needs change in the future.

Create a Web Site that Promotes Ministry Opportunities

A critical dimension of a multidimensional web presence is the ministry web site. The appearance and content of a web site, and particularly the home page, gives visitors a first impression of the quality of the ministry. A quality web site should seek to provide users with essential resources and information that can enhance the ministry experience and increase the awareness of ministry opportunities.

Having registered a domain name, a church or ministry should determine whether or not to pay for a web hosting company to host the ministry web site, or utilize free web site space such as that available from Google Sites (http://sites.google.com). Using a web hosting company requires a monthly fee, but allows an organization to use their registered domain name, setup numerous ministry and staff e-mail accounts under that name, and make available a broad variety of web-based resources. Having a web site at a registered domain name looks more formal and professional, and clearly establishes the identity of the organization online. Using a free web hosting company such as that provided by Google Sites offers attractive and easy to use web page design tools, but is more limited in functionality than a hosted web site. Free web hosting also does not provide a ministry with dedicated e-mail addresses using the registered domain name. For example, the free Google site would have a single e-mail address such as ministrybasicsweb@gmail.com rather than multiple e-mail accounts such as pastor@ministrybasics.org, churchoffice@ministrybasics.org, and so on as needed by ministry leadership.

Whether using a paid or free web site, a clean, current, and consistent appearance for each web page is essential (Tindal 2009). The appearance and structure of a ministry web site creates a lasting first impression that draws or drives away visitors to the ministry, and encourages or discourages use of the online resources made available. Thus the content on a ministry web site should be kept up-to-date, especially the information on the home page. Announcements about ministries long since past do not leave a positive impression on visitors to the web site and do not keep users informed about current opportunities.

No matter the layout chosen for the web site, key information about the ministry should be easily accessible from the home page through a single-click (very important!) of a navigation button or hyperlink to another page on the site. The essential information that should be accessible through links on the home page appears in Table 2.

In designing the home page it is often helpful to think of the first screen of information—what is visible before scrolling down the page—as being equivalent to what appears "above-the-fold" in a printed newspaper. The first full screen of a home page is perhaps the most important "real estate" of the whole web site. It functions as the current headline that seeks to draw people to the church or ministry, just as the top of the front page of a newspaper entices people to read it. Thus it is important to keep the information above-the-fold: A–Attractive, B–Brief, C–Current, and D–Descriptive.

Table 2. Essential Home Page Links on a Ministry Web Site

Name of Link	Information Retrieved
About Us	**WHO** you are—a brief history of the ministry and denominational affiliation, if any **WHAT** you believe—a brief doctrinal statement or core beliefs and practices
Schedule	**WHEN** you meet—a list of regularly scheduled services; also a link to a calendar of events (e.g., create a free Google Calendar of ministry opportunities)
Directions	**WHERE** you are located—a link to text directions and map to the organization (e.g., MapQuest); the address and phone number should also appear prominently on the home page
Ministries	**WHY** be involved in your ministry—a drop-down list of links to web pages describing your ministry opportunities
Contact Us	**HOW** to reach you by phone, postal mail, and e-mail—provide staff member specific e-mail addresses, and provide an all purpose e-mail contact e.g., info@ministrybasics.org

In the footer at the bottom of the home page, indeed at the bottom of each web page on the ministry web site, a copyright line should appear. The copyright identifies the organization as the originator of the material on the web page. It also serves as an indicator of how current the information on the page is. Thus articles or sermons may appropriately display a copyright date of a past year when the information was posted, whereas the home page should always display the current year. The general rule for copyright information is to use the copyright symbol and the word Copyright followed by the year and the organization name, ending with a period, as in: © Copyright 2010 CanDoSpirit Network. If copyright permissions need to be described, the word "Copyright" should be linked to a separate web page that describes those permissions. The organization's name, if made into a hyperlink, should take you to the organization's home page, not the copyright page.

Utilize Blogging to Expand Ministry Outreach

In addition to a web site, another important dimension of a multidimensional web presence is the development of a ministry weblog (more commonly referred to as simply a blog). Although a blog site can contain many of the same pieces of information contained on a ministry web site, its purpose is different. A blog is a form of personal instant publishing of ideas, opinions, or commentary on topics of interest to the author. Blog postings are usually messages that are time and date stamped (Farkas 2006, 14), and presented in chronological order with the most current message appearing at the top of the blog web page (Stone 2003, 9). Links to other resources or archived messages usually appear in a side column (Stone 2003, 9).

Blogging has changed the way in which information, and particularly news, is disseminated (Hewitt 2005). Broadcasting news is no longer limited to official media outlets—now anyone with access to the World Wide Web can create professional looking content to express their views and opinions. For ministry purposes, a blog site can serve as a way to reach individuals whom might not visit the ministry web site or organization's physical facilities.

Blogging allows ministry leadership to quickly communicate information, perspectives, and positions about a topic with the potential for others to comment on it. What makes a blog so attractive is the immediacy of the communication. Unlike a web page where news and commentary may need to be passed along to a web master to format and upload on a revised web page, a blog message can be posted immediately by any user with the appropriate access rights to the blog site. The beauty of blogging is that a ministry leader can comment on news and events that are occurring *now*, rather than having to wait until a scheduled ministry service. A blog thus becomes a great outreach tool for addressing current issues and events while pointing visitors to corresponding ministries and resources. Blogging makes it literally possible to expand the proclamation, education, and edification ministries of the church world-wide.

Individual messages or blogs are similar to an editorial in a newspaper. The author of the blog is the editor who posts his or her perspective as a message upon which others may then make comments. Comments may be anonymous or require a person to login as a subscriber to the blog site. Either way the comments usually can be moderated for appropriateness by the editor (i.e., edited, hidden, or deleted). Comments on a specific blog posting are often accessed through a link below the message so as to not detract from the message itself. A blog is thus structurally organized and displayed slightly different from the threaded hierarchy of messages used in an online discussion forum.

Blogger by Google (www.blogger.com) and WordPress (www.wordpress.com) are two commonly used free blog site providers. Both blog sites provide web page templates to use in formatting the layout of a blog attractively. This feature makes the development and management of a blog easier without having to have knowledge of web design principles or web page authoring skills.

For the more adventurous, podcasting (short for combining the words "iPod" and "broadcasting") has become popular for those wishing to publish ideas, opinions, or commentary in video or audio format rather than a text-oriented blog (Farkas 2006, 2-3). Originally intended for use on portable media devices like the iPod, podcasts have become a way of delivering audio and video commentary to virtually any electronic device having access to the World Wide Web.

A podcast may be an audio or video presentation as lengthy as a sermon or as short as the reading of a devotion. Unlike a regular text-based blog, podcasting involves the use of a microphone and/or web camera to create the media file that will be accessed online.

Podcasts are typically delivered from the Web online via data streaming of the media to an appropriate media-capable device, which requires continuous access to the Internet throughout the podcast, or downloading of the whole podcast file to be uploaded later on such a device. Because the bandwidth involved in accessing or downloading large files can be problematic for some users, shorter commentary in smaller file sizes is a good principle to remember when creating a podcast.

Utilize Social Networking to Establish a Ministry Community

An increasingly popular dimension of a multidimensional web presence is the use of online social networking. Where blogging has the potential to expand ministry outreach through information and instruction, social networking has the potential to demonstrate ministry care and community through conversation and interaction. Social networking allows a ministry to show love and support for the needs of others through the posting of words of encouragement, and sharing thoughts, feelings, and experiences from daily living.

Twitter

Social networking encompasses an increasingly broad range of online service providers. Twitter, for example, provides a way to send short text messages called "tweets" of up to 140 characters to a Twitter account. Account settings determine whether these tweets are restricted in access to subscribers to the account only or are made available to any Twitter visitor. Tweeting allows for the virtually instantaneous sharing of ideas or needs with those following developments within the organization. It is also a handy way to alert others quickly to changes in ministry opportunities or announce new ministries as they become available.[3] Just as businesses use Twitter to gather information from customers or quickly broadcast important news, a church can use Twitter to keep the ministry community informed of special events, or invite feedback on ministry experiences.

Great care should be taken if using Twitter to share prayer requests. It is essential to remember that matters of privacy must be taken into account in posting information on the Internet—therefore it is always wisest to assume that even messages on sites with restricted access may be able to be read by anyone on the Web. While good intentioned, sharing prayer requests online about health, financial, legal, or personal matters along with the person's name or under an inferred relationship may be a breach of confidentiality and even pose a security problem for the individual.

Facebook

Facebook is another popular way of building community through social networking. Using Facebook, a ministry organization can promote the connection and interaction of friends and family within the community through informal conversations and online activities. Other individuals can also be invited to join the community as a way to reach out to them and build supportive relationships (Internet Evangelism Day, n.d.).

Like Twitter, information can be shared in Facebook about life within the ministry organization. The character limit on the length of messages posted is higher than

[3] Text messaging on a mobile phone (texting for short) is also a form of social networking. For purposes of ministry, texting can provide an additional way for people to be part of a community even when physically apart from one another. Texting should always be done under safe conditions.

Twitter and has gradually been increasing, though there are limits on the number of messages than can be sent to avoid spamming other users. Users of Facebook can form smaller social networks of family and friends for sharing and communicating common interests. Facebook is a great tool to help the ministry community stay connected between meetings and services, and even reconnect with those who may now be at a distance.

Be Alert to Ministry Opportunities Through Other Online Technologies

Web sites, blogs, and social networks are just some of the dimensions available in a multidimensional web presence. Other online applications such as YouTube and Moodle, for example, also provide a way for networking the local and larger ministry community.

YouTube

YouTube is a web site designed for the sharing of videos (www.youtube.com). While many videos uploaded to YouTube reflect personal interests and experiences, training and informational videos created by academic and business professionals are also quite common.

Ministry organizations may find it useful to create short YouTube videos that can be used in teacher training or leadership development endeavors. For example, short videos could be posted that teach theological principles, or demonstrate ministry skills and faith practices. Since the uploaded videos become available for others to use as well, the outreach potential for the ministry organization is expanded.

Moodle

Offering online courses is a way for a ministry to provide opportunities for structured and self-directed teaching and training. Moodle is one of several courseware management systems available for delivering and managing online courses (www.moodle.org).

Moodle classrooms can contain web links, downloadable documents, media files, discussion forums, chat rooms, wikis, surveys, quizzes, workshops, etc. The interface is fairly simple to use, and the software is available for free. Ministries seeking to expand teaching and training events beyond traditional face-to-face settings may find Moodle the solution to creating an attractive and interactive online learning environment.

Most ministries will find it necessary to seek a service provider to host the free Moodle software. Moodle therefore provides a list of Moodle Partners who are recognized and approved service providers (www.moodle.com).

Conclusion

Online technologies grow more numerous and powerful every day as enhancements and services are added to the resources available on the World Wide Web. With each new service comes a potential new dimension for expanding the web presence of a ministry organization.

Everyone eventually develops preferences in the selection of service providers and online applications used in creating a multidimensional web presence. Only the current core and common dimensions are presented here; others are available and will invariably become available in the years ahead. Even so, the core concepts of maintaining an online ministry identity, developing an information network, and providing places for community through social networking are likely to remain essential dimensions. The opportunities for expanding ministry via the Web are virtually unlimited.

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