

Distance Learning Pilots in Trinity College

Summer 2010

Kristen Stephens, EDUC 168, “Issues and Innovation in American Classrooms” (9 students)

Description of the course and technologies used

Stephens’s Education 168 was planned specifically as an online course from the start. The course was structured around a series of asynchronous Blackboard ‘modules’ (sets of readings, videos, and interactive content, plus discussion and small assessments) plus a series of virtual 2 – 3 hour audio/video discussion sessions using Adobe Connect.

Completion Date: June 23, 2010

Topic: 21st Century Knowledge and Skills: Making School Curriculum Meaningful

Concepts: Teaching, Curriculum, and Instruction

Learning Goal:

- To understand how the push for “21st century skills” is shaping school reform.



Overview:

In this module you will explore the ways in which 21st century skills are being used to shape curriculum and teaching methods in states across the country.

Instructions:


1. Listen to the podcast in which Tony Jackson discusses global competency skills in our schools.
2. Read the overview of the 21st century framework from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.
3. Watch at least 3 videos that demonstrate the use of 21st century skills in the classroom.
4. Read the 3 articles about 21st century skills (Jay Mathews, Diane Ravitch, Common Core)
5. Respond to the reflection prompt based on the podcast, articles, and videos.
6. Submit written reflections to instructor by June 23, 2010; 11:59 PM EST

Podcast - Making American Students “Globally Competent”



Listen to this interview in which Tony Jackson, Vice President for Education of the Asia Society, discusses the skills and knowledge our students need to become globally competent. (10:29 minutes)

21st Century Skills Framework



[P21_Framework_Definitions.pdf](#) (131.809 Kb)




Figure 1: A screenshot of a typical Blackboard module. Note learning goals and instructions, followed by links and embedded content

During these sessions, students would also be asked to collaborate in group activities using Adobe Connect’s ‘breakout room’ feature, and then would again meet up as a full class to continue the discussion. One class session also involved a videoconference between the students at a distance (all participating via Adobe Connect) and a local Duke class led by David Malone. As an aside Stephens, her TA and Malone reported that the students participating at a distance were far more “engaged” in the discussion than the students in the live, local course.

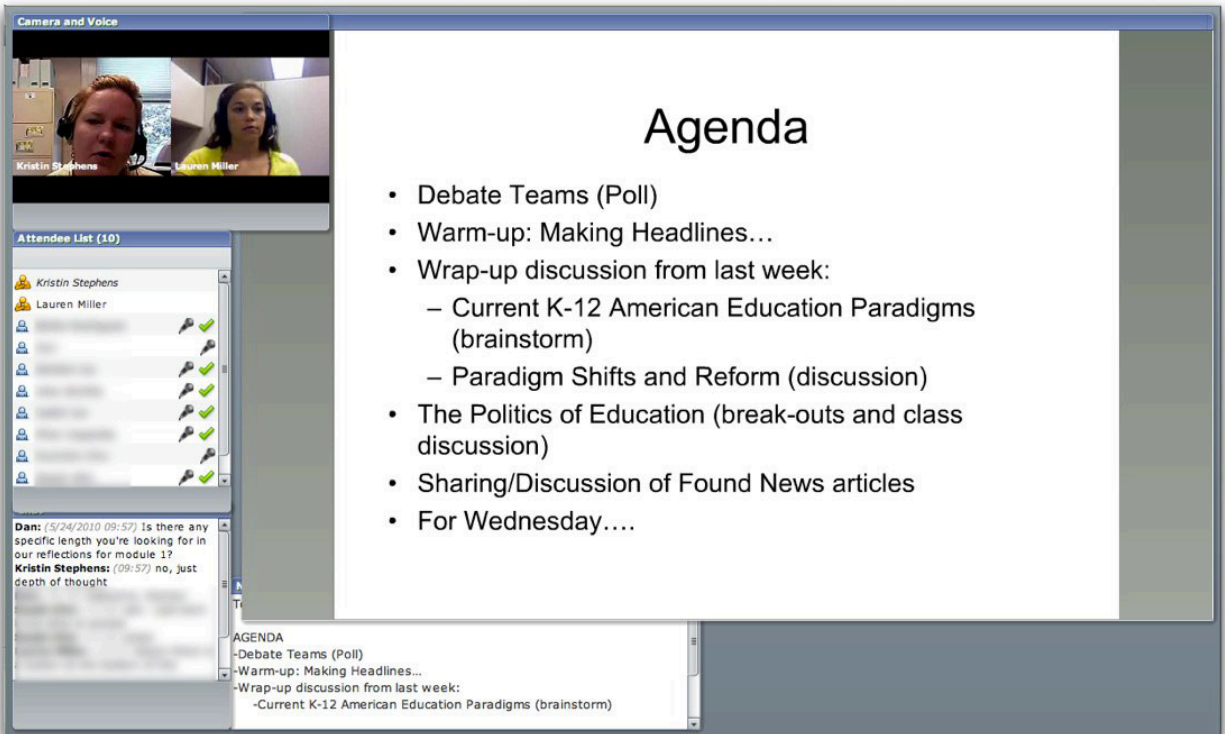


Figure 2: A screenshot from an Adobe Connect session. Note that students can also enable their own webcams, though they most often would keep them off unless they were presenting or commenting.

Overall Findings

This course was deemed a success by both the faculty and students. The combination of technologies selected (primarily Blackboard and Adobe Connect) enabled the faculty member to achieve her learning goals for the students, and she felt that her vision of an interactive, engaging, discussion-based seminar on contemporary issues in education was achieved.

Details

The faculty member reported that from her standpoint, the course went very well. The TA, who was heavily engaged in the course planning and delivery, also felt that the course was successful. Feedback from the students submitted via the standard course evaluation process indicated that the students agreed that the course was successful, rating it on average as good or better than other Trinity summer courses according to comparisons made by the Office of Assessment.

In addition to the standard set of course evaluation questions, supplementary questions were added regarding the technology used in support of the distance learning needs of the course. Student ratings of the technology indicated that they were comfortable using the technologies selected and that these technologies were effective in promoting and supporting interaction with both the instructor and the other students. Comments from students made it clear that in fact the success of the technology exceeded their expectations in terms of reliability and effectiveness. Students unanimously agreed that they would recommend the course in this online format to other students.

Probably the most significant aspect of the success of this course was the extent to which the faculty member and TA were able to successfully create a course which was highly interactive. The faculty member felt that the students' participation in online discussions exceeded her expectations, and using the breakout group functionality of Adobe Connect, the course not only included whole class but also small group discussions. As an illustration of this success, the instructor pointed out that when her class remotely joined a campus course taught by another education faculty member, the online students participating remotely appeared to her to be more vocal and engaged in the conversation than the students who were physically located on the Duke campus. The ability of Adobe Connect to allow side conversations (text chat) was noted by both the faculty and students as an enhancement to the class conversations, allowing students to ask side questions of the TA and others without interrupting the flow of the conversation in the online class.

Factors contributing to the success of this course

- The ***on campus technology orientation session*** for the students prior to the start of the course,
- The ***nature of the course***, including its small size, seminar format, and contemporary issues focus, which was particularly conducive to lively conversation even in the online setting,
- ***Having a TA***, particularly to help in developing online course modules prior to the start of the course and to assist students during interactive Adobe Connect class sessions with side questions, technical issues, and managing the electronic whiteboard tool (when used) so the instructor could focus on facilitating the discussion,
- ***The flexibility of the technologies selected***, particularly the various features of the web conferencing software and its relative ease of use for both the students and instructor,
- Setting ***realistic expectations for the technology*** up front with students regarding the potential for technology glitches,
- ***Thoughtful advance design and preparation*** of online learning modules incorporating varied media types and content delivery approaches (rather than simply posting recorded lectures).

Challenges reported

- The technology supported most of the activities that the instructor wished to include except one; namely, there was no way to incorporate pre-recorded video segments into the interactive class sessions via Adobe Connect. A reasonable workaround was identified (asking the students to go and watch the video and then return to the web conference for a discussion after a suitable period of time had elapsed).
- Students experienced some occasional difficulties in their connectivity – in some cases they worked around these creatively by changing locations during the session (e.g., driving to a coffee shop and then logging back onto the discussion) or by viewing recordings or transcripts later to catch up on anything missed. Overall these issues did not seem to present much of a problem for any of the students.
- Students had some scheduling difficulties given the wide range of time zones and the fact that some were working or interning during the course; however, the faculty member reported that

all students were able to work out these issues and actively participate in the online discussions. It is important to note that all of the students participating were still in the continental US. Any future courses that involved students further abroad would make using synchronous technologies such as Adobe Connect much more difficult logistically.

- The faculty member and her TA both indicated that the biggest difference in preparing the course was in the amount of advance preparation required, particularly the time spent locating and evaluating content for use in the online modules. Overall the faculty member indicated that she felt the total amount of time required to prepare and deliver the course was comparable to a campus-based course, but that much more of this time was spent on the front end rather than during the course.

Cathy Shuman, ENGLISH 109S, “Writing the Experience: Civic Engagement and Creative Nonfiction” (5 students)

Description of the course and technologies used

Shuman's ENGLISH 109S class was planned specifically as an online course that would allow students in DukeEngage and similar summer experiences to integrate their field work with a creative writing course. The class ran from the last week of May through mid-August, with the first eight weeks of the term spent writing and sharing experiences about their work in the field and the last two weeks of the term working in small groups online to generate final drafts and a creative writing portfolio.

Since the students would be located in areas where Internet access might be variable, and to keep the students focused on writing, Shuman chose to keep the technology as simple as possible. During the first eight weeks of the term, Shuman and the students used a Blackboard discussion board as their primary means of communicating and exchanging information, the assignments tool to submit drafts, and email as a backup in case of difficulty accessing the course.

In the last two weeks of the course, the Blackboard collaboration tool was used for real time small group conferences for critiquing each other's work. Skype was also used by Shuman for some conferences with individual students during the second half of the course.

During the portion of the course, students were located in Tanzania near Mount Kilimanjaro; Santiago, Chile; the coast of South Carolina; Georgia; and Texas. In the last two weeks of the course, they were located at their homes around the US, Argentina and London.

One student (in Santiago) was involved in DukeEngage. All of the other students, except for the student in Texas, were involved in other civic engagement projects.

[2010 SUMMER FULL] WRITING THE EXPERIENCE: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND CREATIVE NONFICTION (01) [ENGLISH109S 01-SS2010] > COMMUNICATIONS > DISCUSSION BOARD > COURSE DISCUSSIONS: WEEK SIX

Course Discussions: WEEK SIX Tree View List View

Thread Remove Collect Flag Clear Flag Mark Read Mark Unread Subscribe Search

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Writing Thoughts	Cathy Shuman	6/28/10 8:53 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> from Austin	Cathy Shuman	6/29/10 5:59 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: Writing Thoughts		6/29/10 10:23 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: Writing Thoughts		6/29/10 11:12 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: Writing Thoughts		7/1/10 3:35 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Experience Updates	Cathy Shuman	6/28/10 8:58 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: Experience Updates		6/30/10 11:53 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: Experience Updates		7/1/10 12:38 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> from Austin	Cathy Shuman	7/1/10 7:40 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Quoted in the local news		7/2/10 10:20 AM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: Experience Updates		7/5/10 10:09 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: Experience Updates	Cathy Shuman	7/5/10 10:20 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: Experience Updates		7/6/10 10:25 AM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Technical/Blackboard questions	Cathy Shuman	6/28/10 9:16 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Baldwin in Paris	Cathy Shuman	6/30/10 9:25 AM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> from Austin	Cathy Shuman	6/30/10 5:38 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: from Austin		6/30/10 9:13 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: Baldwin in Paris		6/30/10 10:01 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: Baldwin in Paris		6/30/10 10:47 PM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: Baldwin in Paris	Cathy Shuman	7/2/10 10:20 AM
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> RE: Baldwin in Paris		7/2/10 4:30 PM

Figure 3: Blackboard Discussion Board, showing threads and student responses



View Recording: [REDACTED]

Cathy Shuman: so I'll set the recording Aug 11, 2010 9:01:01 AM EDT
Cathy Shuman: and say bye for now Aug 11, 2010 9:01:06 AM EDT
[Cathy Shuman left the session] Aug 11, 2010 9:01:10 AM EDT
c: Alright, let's get cracking. Aug 11, 2010 9:01:12 AM EDT
i: i really like the end Aug 11, 2010 9:01:27 AM EDT
a left the session] Aug 11, 2010 9:01:41 AM EDT
c: Oh maybe her internet is bad now too! Aug 11, 2010 9:02:12 AM EDT
c: But I agree, I really liked the ending as well. Aug 11, 2010 9:02:21 AM EDT
you liked it? Aug 11, 2010 9:02:45 AM EDT
wait Aug 11, 2010 9:02:48 AM EDT
c: Your writing has gotten much more clear since teh assignments. Aug 11, 2010 9:02:51 AM EDT
I just got into work so let me pull it up Aug 11, 2010 9:02:53 AM EDT
c: Ok, sure thing. Let me know when you're good to go. Aug 11, 2010 9:03:06 AM EDT
its up Aug 11, 2010 9:03:33 AM EDT
c: Yeah, I liked the ending. Aug 11, 2010 9:04:04 AM EDT
oaky Aug 11, 2010 9:04:04 AM EDT
before we get to specifics Aug 11, 2010 9:04:10 AM EDT
a joined the session] Aug 11, 2010 9:04:14 AM EDT
I had issues in the first draft about the idea Aug 11, 2010 9:04:17 AM EDT
before I tried something like its unfied despite seperation Aug 11, 2010 9:04:29 AM EDT
it was wishy washy Aug 11, 2010 9:04:32 AM EDT
now, I just focused on the seperation Aug 11, 2010 9:04:38 AM EDT

Figure 4: Blackboard chat transcript

Overall findings

Feedback from the instructor and students indicates that the course was successful. Using simplified tools allowed them to overcome situations where Internet access in the field was difficult for some students in the class and kept the group working together. Shuman also felt that discussions had a higher quality in the class - students were more thoughtful with written comments than "off the cuff" remarks in a face-to-face course. Shuman was pleased with the experience and would like to teach the course again.

Details

Shuman planned the course throughout the spring, meeting extensively with a CIT consultant, Randy Riddle. Riddle worked with Shuman to examine goals for the course and suggest different technologies that might be appropriate. In addition, Riddle helped Shuman try different teaching scenarios and familiarized her with the various tools in and outside of Blackboard that could be used before she settled on the simplified approach she felt was appropriate to her needs.

Shuman noted that this was the first time she had taught a creative writing class and many of the technology tools were new to her. Combined with the planning on using different modes of communicating with the students and conducting course activities in an online versus face-to-face environment, the time spent on planning the course was much more than usual. However, she felt that when teaching another online course, the time investment would be less since she is more familiar with

online teaching issues and the technologies involved.

Shuman didn't think having a TA was appropriate for the course, since students would look directly to her for feedback and guidance on their writing.

Shuman noted that the student participation in the course was "different" – discussion wasn't free flowing as it might be in a face-to-face course, but students could spend more time gathering their thoughts and posting responses with more depth. She did say that, if she taught the course again, she would like to have online chats earlier in the course to kick off discussions. Shuman also noted that students often posted and interacted online more than the minimum she required.

One unique component of the course was the way that students were able to discuss and write about their experiences in different geographic areas and cultures; they showed a genuine interest in each other's work and day-to-day lives during their remote experiences. After the course, she had the students gather for a dinner and was pleased with the camaraderie and interactions she saw.

Overall, Shuman "missed the in-person contact," but went on to say that it was worth sacrificing for other aspects of student creativity and interaction that the online format made possible.

In the course evaluations, students rated the quality of the instruction, enthusiasm of the instructor, and effectiveness of the technologies used in the course very highly. In comments, students highlighted the discussion board as one of their favorite parts of the course and praised Shuman for her patience in working directly with students around a few technology issues.

The students also commented that the time commitment was high, particularly in the context of a DukeEngage experience where they were also working on a field project. However, some went out of their way to say that the course was worthwhile for the way it connected their field experience with their academic work.

Factors contributing to the success of the course

- An **on campus technology orientation session** for students prior to the start of the course.
- Nature of the course, focusing on concentrated writing and sharing of experiences from remote areas, **provided a unique perspective for the students.**
- **Simplicity of the technologies used** that allowed all students in the course, no matter where they were, to have a minimal level of communication and participation in course activities.
- Using asynchronous tools and activities in the first portion of the course to allow all students to **participate on an equal basis**, regardless of the time zone in which they were located.
- Setting realistic expectations for possible technology issues with the students and **planning for ways to work around problems** to continue course activities.
- **Commitment by the faculty member** to be fully engaged in maintaining ongoing online dialogue in the course and being responsive to student needs.
- **Planning of the course with a CIT consultant** throughout the spring semester to familiarize the faculty member with the technologies and explore options that would fit the course logistics.

Challenges reported

- One of the students had limited access to a very slow Internet connection in the first part of the course. Using the backup plan she developed, Shuman had the student submit discussion board postings and assignments via email. She posted them in Blackboard and the student subscribed to threads via email.
- Shuman and the students used Skype for conferences during the second portion of the course; in a few cases there were problems with dropped calls or bad sound and video and they reverted to using the Blackboard chat tool and could continue with no further problems.
- Shuman and the students expressed frustration with Blackboard's collaboration tool, which doesn't indicate when others in a chat are typing a response – they had to adjust their mode of writing to ensure they were responding to comments appropriately.
- There were some challenges with financial aid, scheduling and other issues when recruiting students. There were 21 inquiries about taking the class, but most could not take it because financial aid was not available. Three minority students dropped out of the course because of the lack of financial aid. (Shuman noted that some of the logistics in getting the course listed caused the financial aid difficulties, and that the Financial Aid office is putting in procedures to overcome the problem.) Some students were unable to take the course because their visas were pre-prepared for DukeEngage, which prevented them from taking a course while in their host country. In some cases, the faculty member leading a particular DukeEngage program didn't want the students in the program taking a course during the DukeEngage experience. The scheduling of the course, which followed the Duke calendar, and that of the DukeEngage calendar also proved to be a barrier to recruiting students.