

## **The Use of An Online Learning System for a College Teaching Course**

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## INTRODUCTION

This presentation focuses on an online course management and learning system for a “College Teaching” course designed for developmental educators and educational leaders. This system is the Blackboard delivery system and we will discuss its use in the delivery of a “college teaching” course at Grambling State University of Louisiana, USA. This course also integrates what Esnault (2007) referred to as the Actor-Network Theory and E-Learning. Esnault considered this approach as useful in understanding and improving the relationship between people and technology as follows:

“...The network is built on the mutual influences and intermediaries that actors exchange between each other. Actors in ANT are not only humans, but also nonhumans; as far as something acts, it is an actor. Thus when regarding e-learning situations, the LMS, the technical infrastructure at learners’ homes as well as on the institutional campus, the multimedia tools, the collaboration facilities (if any), among others, are actors as well as teachers, learners, and other human stakeholders. Being able to comprehensively identify all these stakeholders, take their diverse interests into account, and try to align at least some of these interests along common goals (what ANT calls “building the actor-network”) is a key step in the success of an e-learning development.” (p. i)

### THE BLACKBOARD AS AN ONLINE PLATFORM OR DELIVERY SYSTEM

Blackboard is Grambling State University’s online course management and learning system. It is designed to provide tools for building online resources for use with regular classes and can even be used to support classes offered completely online. Blackboard is a flexible system and to make full use of all its features requires certain technical skills, but fortunately it is possible for instructors to use it at a basic level with minimal formal instruction. A guide is available to help instructors who are comfortable with this approach get started on their own, with attention to the basics of content creation. ([www.gram.edu](http://www.gram.edu))

In addition to this guide, there are several other ways to learn about Blackboard. The GSU Distance Learning Program offers Blackboard workshops for instructors providing hands-on orientation to the basic features of Blackboard (contact DL or refer to GSU web for information on the workshop schedule). Users who prefer additional assistance using written documentation might want to take a look at Blackboard's official instructor's manual. Students can download a PDF copy by logging into Blackboard, entering any course that instructors are teaching, and following the links Control Panel > Assistance > Online Manual. If anyone is new to both Grambling State University and Blackboard he or she should also take a look at the Blackboard Guide for Faculty, which provides an overview of the system and explains the administrative policies/procedures used at GSU. This document can be found on the GSU web site at [www.gram.edu](http://www.gram.edu).

The use of online education is increasing in the USA and Blackboard has been used by many universities and other organizations throughout the USA as a delivery mechanism to teach the selected courses. For example, USA Today (April, 23, 2008, p. 6D) reported that online education is booming and is becoming increasingly accepted by employers, a survey by Zogby International suggested. The survey found that 83% of CEOs and small-business owners who are familiar with online education, also called distance education, believe that online degrees are as credible as those earned on a college campus.

Online courses are now offered by more than two-thirds of all US colleges and universities and 35% of schools offer programs that are entirely online, according to the 2007 Sloan Survey of Online Learning. About 20% of the USA's 17 million college students say that they have taken at least one course online. But just 61% of the 1,547 CEOs surveyed were familiar with online education. About 50% said that they would give more weight to a job candidate's work experience; 46% said they considered work experience and education equally in hiring. Zogby conducted the survey in December and January for Excelsior College in Albany, New York (USA Today, April, 23, 2008, p. 6D)

### **USING BLACKBOARD TO DELIVER "A COLLEGE TEACHING" COURSE**

#### **Conceptual Framework Strands and Selected Program Outcomes for College Teaching Course**

Wright, Sunal, and Wilson (2008) indicated that online learning has become the norm rather than the exception for many of today's students. They reported that "instructors are more willing to explore online learning options, students are enrolling in record numbers and colleges, as well as many K-12 institutions, are offering more online courses. As in educators, we have more tools than ever to ensure online course success, but just as with a traditional class, we must continue to place emphasis on good pedagogy." (p.1) (Shelton et al, 2005)

This course is designed to enable students to study a variety of teaching methods used in the contemporary college classrooms (e.g., lecture, discussion, effective questioning, computer assisted instruction, small group instruction, peer teaching, collaborative learning, learning communities, effective course syllabi and online instruction) with an emphasis on best instructional practices in developmental education. (Draves, 2002). Table 1 below shows how we align the conceptual framework strands of the College of Education at Grambling State University with course objectives, program objectives, learning activities and content and learning assessment using Blackboard.

Through broad-based curricula, consisting of performance-based assessment, research-based instruction and strategic field experiences, the educational leadership (including developmental education) programs at Grambling State University graduate educational and community leaders. Content, professional and pedagogical knowledge, skills and dispositions enable professional educators to help all students reach their full potential. The educational leadership department recognizes three strands: masters of subject matter content, facilitators of learning, and enhancers and nurturers of affective behaviors. The program outcomes represent what educational leaders (learners) will know and be able to do at the completion of this course by relating course information with the conceptual framework strands. ([www.mcc.cuny.edu/ITS/MEOnline/onlinefaqs.htm](http://www.mcc.cuny.edu/ITS/MEOnline/onlinefaqs.htm))



Table 1: DEED 618: Program Outcomes (w/CF), Knowledge Objectives, Performance Objectives, Learning Activities, Assignments, and Assessments

Program Outcomes (w/ CF)	Knowledge Objectives	Performance Objectives	Learning Activities	Assignments	Assessments (Multiple)
1.0 Knowledge: Masters of Subject Matter Content (1.1-3.4)	The educational leader will use, apply and evaluate various theories of learning (1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.8, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.9, 2.11, 3.1, 3.3, and 3.4);	The education leader will demonstrate skill in understanding various theories of learning (1.1-3.4)	Orientation; Readings; Discussion Board; Lecture Notes	Readings; Handouts; Aleamoni (1987) Murrell & Clarkston, 1986	Assignment #1, TBA; See course requirements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>define, describe, apply, use, and evaluate the lecture method of teaching (1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.8, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.9, 2.11, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4).</li> </ul>	Understand and use the lecture method (1.1-3.4)	Discussion Board,	Handouts; McKeachie (1994) Readings; Lecture Notes	Assessment #2, TBA Evaluation Survey Portfolio
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>define, describe, apply, use, and evaluate the discussion method of teaching (1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.8, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.9, 2.11, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4).</li> </ul>	Understand and use the discussion method (1.1-3.4)	Discussion Board, Lecture Notes; Readings	Handouts; McKeachie Feldman et al (1998)	Assessment #3, TBA Evaluation Survey Portfolio
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>define, describe, evaluate, use, and</li> </ul>	Understand and use effective	Discussion Board,	Handouts; McKeachie	Assessment #4, TBA Evaluation Survey

Program Outcomes	Knowledge Objectives	Performance Objectives	Learning Activities	Assignments	Assessments (Multiple)
	<p>evaluate the effective questioning (1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.8, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.9, 2.11, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>define, describe, apply, use, and evaluate small group instruction, peer teaching, collaborative learning, etc. (1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.8, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.9, 2.11, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4).</li> </ul>	<p>questioning method (1.1-3.4)</p> <p>Understand and use these methods (1.1-3.4)</p>	<p>Readings; Lecture Notes Martin et al (1988)</p> <p>Discussion Board, Lecture Notes; Readings</p>	<p>Readings; Problems Pinar, 1998</p> <p>Handouts; McKeachie, et al.</p>	<p>Assessments (Multiple Measures)</p> <p>Assessment #5, TBA Evaluation Survey Portfolio</p>
2.0. Skills: Facilitators of Learning (2.1-2.11)	See above (repeat)	See above (repeat)	See above Board	Readings; Discussion Board Kemig, 1983	Assignments See Course Requirements Final Exam Course Evaluation
3.0. Dispositions: Enhancers and Nurturers of Affective Behaviors (3.1-3.8)	See above	See above	Blackboard (Online) In -Class	Discussion Board Forums; Ethics	Activities on Blackboard Site; Disposition Survey



In order to achieve good pedagogy, online teaching takes additional time and teachers have to restructure course content as we did when we redesigned this course (Wright, Sunal & Wilson, p. 1). Some of the issues that we had to address were coping strategies, ease of navigation, skills required to complete the course, available online resources, feedback from instructors, and collaborative, interactive learning opportunities (Wright, Sunal & Wilson, p.1). We use the Blackboard system which allows us to respond to these issues by using the (1) Content Areas (syllabus; course documents (assigned readings); assignments with feedback); (2) Course Tools (announcements; tasks; discussion board ( collaborative and interactive learning opportunities, skills required to complete the course); collaboration; digital drop box (to submit assignments); (3) User Management (list/modify users; create users; enroll users); (4) Assessment (course statistics to track students' use of site; grade book); and (5) Help (support; quick tutorials; contact system administrator) as shown in Figure 1 below.

### **Course Description and Special Instructions**

This course provides students with the opportunity for supervised practice of instructional theory and techniques in an actual postsecondary classroom setting. Students are to teach or observe a teacher for one, but not more than two sessions during a semester of course enrollment. Students are informed in the syllabus that this is an online course delivered via the World Wide Web using the Blackboard (Bb) platform. To log on to the course site, they should go to <http://www.gram.edu>. They are supplied with a user name and password when they register for "DEED 618. College Teaching", that will allow them to access the course site. On the site they will find the course syllabus which includes a schedule (with readings and other assignments) and weekly learning activities. The weekly learning activities include a welcome message, short biography of instructor, presentations (lecture notes) and handouts. The site is also the medium for electronic discussions and electronic submission of assignments. Blackboard does not like Mac computers, so students should use a PC. Anything they submit as an attachment or via the digital drop box should be done in Microsoft Word (98 or earlier) and double spaced.

In the Course Documents sections on the course website, students are provided with the information needed to access a number of Grambling State University electronic resources. Students are asked to complete the assigned readings; complete a supervised teaching practice utilizing several instructional theories and techniques. Students must submit a portfolio documenting the activities and reflections and a video/CD of actual teaching; and complete all written work that must conform to the convention of standard, written English including grammar, punctuation, syntax, etc. All written work must meet accepted scholarly standards of authorship and include appropriate citations and references to the works of others. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense punishable at this university by failure of the course in which it occurs and dismissal from the university. There is no tolerance for plagiarism and we will apply full penalty on those guilty of this form of academic dishonesty.



**DEED618: College Teaching (CRN# 30176) Spring 2008 - Wilton Barham (Instructor)**

<b>Content Areas</b>	
<a href="#">Syllabus</a>	<a href="#">Assignments</a>
<a href="#">Start Here!</a>	<a href="#">External Links</a>
<a href="#">Course Documents</a>	
<b>Course Tools</b>	
<a href="#">Announcements</a>	<a href="#">Collaboration</a>
<a href="#">Course Calendar</a>	<a href="#">Digital Drop box</a>
<a href="#">Staff Information</a>	<a href="#">Glossary Manager</a>
<a href="#">Tasks</a>	<a href="#">Messages</a>
<a href="#">Send Email</a>	Course Objectives
<a href="#">Discussion Board</a>	
<b>Course Options</b>	
<a href="#">Manage Course Menu</a>	<a href="#">Course Copy</a>
<a href="#">Course Design</a>	<a href="#">Import Course Cartridge</a>
<a href="#">Manage Tools</a>	<a href="#">Import Package</a>
<a href="#">Settings</a>	<a href="#">Export Course</a>
<a href="#">Recycle Course</a>	<a href="#">Archive Course</a>

<b>User Management</b>	
<a href="#">List / Modify Users</a>	<a href="#">Enroll User</a>
<a href="#">Create User</a>	<a href="#">Remove Users from Course</a>
<a href="#">Batch Create Users</a>	<a href="#">Manage Groups</a>
<b>Assessment</b>	
<a href="#">Test Manager</a>	<a href="#">Course Statistics</a>
<a href="#">Survey Manager</a>	<a href="#">Gradebook</a>
<a href="#">Pool Manager</a>	<a href="#">Gradebook Views</a>
<b>Help</b>	
<a href="#">Support Manual</a>	<a href="#">Contact System Administrator</a>
	<a href="#">Quick Tutorials</a>

Figure 1. The Blackboard Delivery System's Display of Control Panel

## **Course Requirements as Related to Course Objectives and their Corresponding Program Outcomes**

Students are expected to (1) complete all assigned readings, participate in all on-line activities; (2) complete all assignments; (2) apply several teaching methods in a postsecondary classroom for one, but not more than two sessions; (3) and submit a portfolio documenting the activities, reflections and a video/CD of actual teaching. Students can observe a colleague' class if they do not have their own assigned class.

Each week the class discussed the assigned readings from McKeachie's "Teaching and learning in the college classroom" and McKeachie and Svinicki's "Teaching tips: strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers" and from other books or articles. Each class member was assigned to lead the group in discussing some of the readings for a particular week. All students read all of the assigned readings for each week. The selected discussion leader for a particular week will post a brief written summary (200 words maximum) of the highlights of the reading along with two questions related to the reading for the entire class to discuss. Posting must be done at least one day before the discussion forum is scheduled to begin. These should be thought-provoking questions that will allow students to reflect on the reading, discuss implications, and to critique author's interpretation or presentation.

Discussion leaders and other students are encouraged to read the comments of their fellow students before they respond to the questions and engage in meaningful dialogue with each other. Discussion leaders and discussion participants earn credit for a discussion forum as follows: (a) The discussion leader must post a summary and two discussion questions and responds at least once to every member of the class who answers the questions; and (b) the discussion participants must respond substantively to at least two class members' responses to the two questions. (Tomlinson, 1989)

### **ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF BLACKBOARD: GAINS AND USE OVER TRADITIONAL APPROACHES**

Blackboard is a powerful, feature-rich web-based course management system that can be used to deliver campus based courses completely online or as a supplement for on-campus courses. The Internet is utilized for class sessions, lectures, homework, labs, and test of regularly scheduled courses. Some of the advantages and disadvantages of the system are as follows. (Abboud 2008; Daniel 1997; Page 1996; [www.tfhe.net/report/downloads/report/chapter1.pdf](http://www.tfhe.net/report/downloads/report/chapter1.pdf))

We agree with the following list of advantages and disadvantages as they are reported in the literature. We list them here with no modifications in some areas. Attributions are given to the original authors and institutions.

#### **Advantages**

- Courses can be accessed 24 x 7 anytime, anywhere. Traditionally instruction is limited to the confines of the scheduled time that the course is offered.
- Faculty can choose to use as much or as little of the Bb environment: online announcements, course content such as syllabi, handouts, and presentations; multimedia such as images, animation, audio, video, etc.; facilitate online discussions about course content or course related topics; collect and grade assignments/assessments; manage the gradebook and post grades online. When students login, they are able to view the syllabus, course documents, assignments and materials. Distribution of course content no longer requires excessive duplicating, packaging and possibly mailing of resources.

- User friendly interface for organizing course content and navigating the course site. File cabinets and paper folders are no longer necessary for organization and storage of course materials.
- Blackboard course web pages can be developed using many products such as the Microsoft Office Suite (Word, Access, Excel, and PowerPoint), FrontPage, Macromedia Dreamweaver, etc. Providing additional visual aides and resources no longer require added equipment in the class.
- Faculty is able to view course statistics of individual users. They can determine the date and time of individual student's last login, whether or not students are addressing specific components, and the date and time assignments are submitted through use of the Digital Drop box.
- Students can check their grades online. Grades are easily managed by faculty and students.
- Bb reduces travel time for many students. Instead of driving to class, students can simply log on from their homes
- Learners world wide have access to course content at the same time as on campus learners. Revisions and updates are done from a central location (faculty, institution) which ensures changes are uniform and current for all students  
([www.tfhe.net/report/downloads/report/chapter1.pdf](http://www.tfhe.net/report/downloads/report/chapter1.pdf))

### **Disadvantages**

- Inadequate resources at the institution or for the student.
  - Blackboard Help Desk – Faculty and students should know who to call when problems arise.
  - Knowledge of network traffic that the systems can handle bandwidth available for access and transmission, stability of the Internet connection, system requirements and maintenance.
- Adequate time to develop the course web site (i.e., learn proper course design and prepare appropriate course content). Existing course materials cannot simply be transferred to Blackboard. This material can be a good starting point for developing web course content. The instructor will need to evaluate the learning objectives to be achieved; skills to be developed; nature of group work, if required; and determine if the materials are currently in a form that can be converted to the web-based course site.
- Inappropriateness for disciplines/courses that need physical activity (i.e., drama performance).
- Lack of aural language exchange. Students are accustomed to working in groups to facilitate convergent learning; however there is forced and unavoidable social contact.
- Requires students to be self-disciplined in regard to time. Traditional methods structure time for students. ([www.tfhe.net/report/downloads/report/chapter1.pdf](http://www.tfhe.net/report/downloads/report/chapter1.pdf))

According to Abboud (2008), online education is steadily gaining in popularity, legitimacy and prestige. Because of the benefits to learn from home and on your own schedule, many professionals and academic experts agree that distance learning is gaining equal footing with traditional “brick and mortar” on campus degrees. Andrea Martino of the University of Maryland, University College (91 online undergraduate and graduate courses) said that there is “absolutely” no difference between online and traditional learning.” In his book, “The No Significant Difference Phenomenon,” Professor Thomas L. Russell, director emeritus of instructional telecommunications at North Carolina State University, presented research on

numerous studies comparing traditional and distance learning, and determined that there is generally no significant difference between the two modes of education. Dr. Farad Saba, founder of Distance-Educator.com noted that most universities do not differentiate between online and traditional learning. Saba further noted that “in that sense, the degrees are comparable”. He indicated that research on systemic comparative analysis and the so-called face-to-face education has shown no statistically significant difference between online and traditional learning. Nationally recognized universities that offer full programs through the Internet have commented that the quality of work is typically higher from the online student than the traditional student who is physically attending a class. In addition the degree earned online is the same credential earned when attending a traditional class. (Daniel 1997; Page 1996)

Quality online instruction requires more than just directing learners to execute steps. Factors that affect course quality include:

- Course design – Instructors should follow “good design principles” in their forethought and planning to enhance success for all learners.
- Course delivery (i.e. teaching, faculty, performance – implementation of the design)
- Course content – Course elements must work together to ensure that students achieve the desired learning outcomes (learning objectives, learner interactions and activities, resources materials and technology and assessment and measurement).
- Course management system – Tools and media should support the course objectives.
- Institutional infrastructure -
- Faculty training and readiness – Instructors should be properly trained to develop courses for online delivery and teach online courses.
- Student engagement and readiness – Instructors should be sure students have the proper training or access to training that assists them in using the course materials effectively. 1

According to Leslie E. Vance, PhD, Program Coordinator, Information Technology, Western Governors University, five years ago, online degrees were greeted with skepticism. Not anymore. That’s practically because almost all traditional universities are now offering online courses or degrees. He indicated that many employers appreciate that online students must demonstrate a great deal of self-discipline to succeed online – and that’s an attribute employer’s value. We embraced some of his suggestions. (See USA Today, 2008, 6D).

### **PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS OF USING BLACKBOARD IN A DEVELOPING NATION**

The creation of new universities by religious organizations is a particularly important phenomenon. For example, the United Methodist Church established the African University in Zimbabwe, with department heads selected from among nationals of different African countries. Well-established religious universities – Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim – operate in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. A similar phenomenon involving Catholic universities occurs in Latin America.

Distance learning, in which students take classes primarily via radio, television, or the Internet, has expanded enormously during the past decade. (Both Nelson Mandela and Robert Mugabe earned their degrees in this way, at the world’s oldest distance-learning university, the University of South Africa.) The five largest programs in the world are all based in developing countries, and all of these have been established since 1978 (see Table 2). They claimed an aggregate enrollment of roughly 2 million students in 1997, and account for about 10 per cent of enrollment growth in developing countries during the past two decades. Daniel and many other researchers reported that educators have long been using radio and television to reach students in

remote areas, but new satellite- and Internet-based technologies promise to extend distance-learning systems to a broader group of students, ranging from those in sparsely populated, remote areas to those living in dense urban agglomerations. In the USA, for example, the University of Phoenix is vigorously promoting its online courses, while in the UK, the publicly funded Open University has over 100 courses that use information technology links as a central part of the teaching – with 4000 students per day connecting via the Internet.(Daniel, 1997).

Distance learning has great potential in the developing world, offering a powerful channel for bringing education to groups that have previously been excluded. In the future it is almost certain to take place increasingly across borders. Already over 12 per cent of the UK's Open University students are resident outside the country. It is also easy to conceive of high-quality developing country institutions offering educational programs and degrees in other parts of the developing world. While a desirable development, this would create a variety of problems relating to quality control and other forms of supervision.

Table 2 - Ten Largest Distance-learning Institutions <sup>a</sup>

Institution	Founded	Students	Budget (million US\$)	Unit cost (per cent) <sup>b</sup>
Anadolu University, Turkey	1982	578 000	30 <sup>c</sup>	10
China TV University	1979	530 000	1 <sup>d</sup>	40
Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia	1984	353 000	21	15
Indira Gandhi National Open University, India	1985	242 000	10	35
Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand	1978	217 000	46	30
Korean National Open University	1982	211 000	79	5
National Centre for Distance Learning, France	1939	185 000	56	50
The Open University, Britain	1969	157 000	300	50
University of South Africa	1873	130 000	128	50
Payame Noor University, Iran	1987	117 000	13	25

Note: a. Figures are for 1994, 1995, or 1996; b Cost per student as a percentage of average for other universities in that country; Open Education Faculty only. Central unit only .John S. Daniel, *Mega-Universities and Knowledge Media: Technology Strategies for Higher Education*, London; Kogan Page, 1996, as cited by Dennis Normile, *Schools ponder new global landscape*, Science, 277, July 18, 1997.

We recognize and embrace the expansion and differentiation of higher education that is occurring at the same time as the pace of knowledge creation is dramatically accelerating. The categories into which new knowledge falls are becoming increasingly specialized, and a revolution has occurred in people's ability to access knowledge quickly and from increasingly distant locations. (Daniel, 1997; Page, 1996) These changes are fundamentally altering what many nations' economies produce, as well as where and how they produce it. Organizations are changing, as are the skills needed to run them and the way they utilize human capital (USA Today, 2008).

Industrial countries have been by far the greatest contributors to, and beneficiaries of, this knowledge revolution. To the extent that this trend continues, the income gap between industrial and developing countries will widen further. We agree with Daniel and others that higher education institutions, as the prime creators and conveyors of knowledge, must be at the forefront of efforts to narrow the development gap between North and South.

In most developing countries higher education exhibits severe deficiencies, with the expansion of the system an aggravating factor. Experts, including J. S. Daniel, all indicate that a demand for increased access is likely to continue, with public and private sectors seeking to meet it with an array of new higher education institutions. Rapid and chaotic expansion is usually the result, with the public sector generally underfunded and the private (for-profit) sector having problems establishing quality programs that address anything other than short-term, market-driven needs. A lack of information about institutional quality makes it difficult for students to make choices about their education, making it hard to enlist consumer demand in the battle to raise standards. Developing countries are left with a formidable task – expanding their higher education system and improving quality, all within continuing budgetary constraints.

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