**IMPROVING THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM**

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Introduction

This paper addresses the importance of online pedagogy that can be utilized to make online course development successful. This research study opens with a review of related literature that details the challenges facing online educators and course developers. Correspondence courses, training files, radio, television, and most recently the Internet have all played a key role in the history of distance education (Blake & Blackwell). Over the past decade, the Internet has changed the face of education as traditional institutions are in a rush to offer online courses to meet the needs of students who demand online education. The number of program offerings and online students have increased dramatically over the last decade. Over the past decade the Internet has changed the face of distance education. The number of programs offered as well as the number of online students has skyrocketed. As the Internet has grown, programs are becoming more advanced, telecommunication speeds are increasing, and interactive applications are more readily available. As applications and programs become more advanced the face of online learning should follow suit. Advances in online platforms, programs, and interactive tools are providing online educators with an opportunity to design courses as if the instructor was in the room. “Current educational literatures stresses the importance of a task based approach to instruction, rather than an emphasis on content delivery. However as institutions attempt to meet the demand for online courses, many offerings still focuses on presenting online content resources with minimal opportunity for interactions and active learning” Salter, Richards, and Carey.

The launching of the following below has created enthusiasm among educators and academic programs offering technology courses:

* new systems
* technology tools,
* applications

This enthusiasm and need to stay abreast of new technology may sometimes blur good judgment when introducing the most recent technologies into the classroom. While the inclusion of new technologies into the classroom can be beneficial in many ways, the rush to update the curriculum and increase online enrollments may produce unforeseen and unplanned dilemmas.

Furthermore, many distance education instructors need to become educated as to the balance between the practical use of technology as well as knowledge of the concepts behind the technology. Denning (2001) noted that:

“Learning the professional practices of a specialty of information technology is every bit as important as learning the intellectual core of computing. The mark of a well-educated professional will be a balance of the two. The current academic inclination to disdain skill-specific training does not fit a profession. The education of computing professionals must count for practices as well as descriptive knowledge. It must include training as well as general education”.

Table 1: Traditional Course Grades by Student and Class Level - 2003-2008

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  Course Total |  A B | C | D | F | W | W % | Total |
| 100-199 | 23650 | 20598 | 14586 | 6432 | 8279 | 5175 | 6.57% | 78720 |
| 200-299 | 4162 | 4551 | 4028 | 2106 | 2010 | 2043 | 10.81% | 18900 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 300-399 | 5272 | 5020 | 3246 | 998 | 702 | 771 | 4.82% | 16009 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 400-499 | 1691 | 1293 | 706 | 142 | 100 | 133 | 3.27% | 4065 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Total | 34775 | 31462 | 22566 | 9678 | 11091 | 8122 | 6.36% | 117694 |

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