

Project Summary: Title III Stipend

Project Title: Hybrid Learning: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love History

Faculty: Darren L. Bardell

Yes. The title of this project was a little tongue-in-cheek, but it was also very deliberately linked to a central theme from the movie from which it was based. In Stanley Kubrick's brilliantly dark, dystopic vision, *Dr. Strangelove: . . .*, the Soviet Union and the U.S. are on a collision course with Thermo Nuclear war and thus global annihilation. They succeed. Events are set in motion by human action but spiral out of and more importantly, beyond human control because of advanced "defense" technologies. This timeless fear of "technology gone wild" persists even today and yes, even among some of my colleagues (and students) at Ohlone College. This hybrid course was designed to be sensitive to this persistent insecurity. Furthermore, it is my firm belief that teaching is social and therefore one-on-one and group interaction should trump passive machine-on-one interaction. The physical classroom is where most learning occurs and should occur so lecture, group discussion, note-taking, talking, listening, and watching are valued social learning activities I count on to engage and one hopes, advance knowledge. That said, technology can assist the classroom (and therefore the human/social) experience and did improve learning in my U.S. History course.

The project went well and I accomplished most of my Student Learning Outcomes. My stated purpose for this project was "to utilize technology to improve my teaching and student learning." The plan was to provide students with a variety of intellectual stimuli, delivered electronically, but engaged individually and socially. In other words, give students the best of both worlds: limitless visual and aural source material utilized (or taught) in a social environment. The Web CT site I created for this class allowed for the storage of thousands of photographs, charts, maps, graphs, video clips, and audio files. During lecture, I flashed this material on the overhead projector or played it over the speakers in order to "stamp" this onto a particular historical themes or abstract theory under discussion. For example, during a lecture about the Vietnam War and the impact of media on declining public support for the war, I flashed the famous image of a suspected VC captive being summarily executed by the chief-of-police in Saigon. Along side this image I presented a photograph of a naked and horribly (Napalm) burned Vietnamese girl running down a dirt road and away from a U.S. air strike on accidentally conducted on her village. Given the availability of electronic media on the web, the possibilities for this type of learning are limitless. The added benefit of this particular Web CT platform is student access. If a student wished to view these images again to question my interpretations or to simply formulate his or her own, they could. All the sources I use in the class as well as some of my lectures are archived and stored on the course Web CT homepage. As a result students were able to listen to them as often as needed.

In all my history course, I have three student centered outcomes:

1. *knowledge of U.S. History (the who, what, where, and when of historical scholarship);*
2. *understanding of the significance of this content in relationship to broader course*

themes (the “why” question); 3. ownership of individual interpretations of historical events—students’ voices resonating with original, thoughtful, and creative ideas supported by relevant data and expressed clearly using formal and informal writing styles.

The second two outcomes are best suited for development within the classroom setting. However, the first outcome, “knowledge of U.S. History” can be partially assessed electronically using web ct technology. Just to be clear, 70% of a student’s grade in my U.S. History course is assessed by his/her performance on two in-class historical essays: a midterm and a final exam. Here, students must answer a broad and complex historical question by writing several formal, college level essays. They are expected to support generalization using relevant historical examples as evidence for an historical thesis they are trying to prove. This historical evidence is what I refer to as the “who, what, where, and when” of historical scholarship. These are the blocks they will use to build their argument and one of the best and most efficient ways to test acquisition of this knowledge is multiple choice tests taken online. This material is based on the textbook and forms the database upon which students must draw as they construct their in-class essays. In a class of 120 students, I would have spent more than half of my class-time administering these tests. Web CT allowed me to give these tests online freeing up valuable class-time for lecture and group discussion. It also afforded students a more flexible time frame in which to take these test. As long as students finished these test by a specific deadline, they could work on them at their convenience. Finally, this system kept the students “honest” because the only way to pass these tests was to read the course textbook and retain most of the information they read. If I don’t give these tests, I find out too late students do not have a basic grasp the historical facts they will need to critically analyze and present on their in-class exams.

Suggestion and Failures. Technology fails and computers crash. I few of the students lost online test when the computer they were working on crashed and some students had trouble accessing all of the course material because of a compatibility issue or outdated hardware/software issues. Not all students have access to computers at home so I have to limit the amount of work I expect them to do on the Web CT site. Finally, not everyone is visual learner, in fact, some students become very passive when presented with *only* visual sources. Therefore, it is important to balance visual, textual, oral, tactual, and aural learning not relying too heavily on one or the other.

Sincerely,
Darren L. Bardell
Assistant Professor, History