

BY RANDAL D. CARLSON & JUDI REPMAN

Preparing Students for Asynchronous, Computer-Mediated Coursework: Design & Delivery of a "Distance Education Bootcamp"

DONALD J. WINIECKI & YONNIE CHYUNG

Editor's Note: In our last column, we discussed several items that distance educators "wished they had known" before teaching an online course. Several of these insights were related to the amount of time and effort that need to be devoted to helping students learn-how-to-learn in an online situation. Our guest authors this issue describe one institution's attempt to provide this kind of experience for students entering an online program. Donald Winiecki and Yonnie Chyung describe how Boise State University sends their students to "distance education bootcamp." In addition to describing how bootcamp operates, Winiecki and Chyung also assess the effectiveness of bootcamp from the perspective of students. Designing and implementing a program like this obviously requires a serious commitment. These results seem to indicate that this effort does pay off. Please contact us if you'd like to share your own experiences in a future column.

DONALD J. WINIECKI
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL &
PERFORMANCE TECHNOLOGY

YONNIE CHYUNG
VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL &
PERFORMANCE TECHNOLOGY

Students entering distance education are often isolated from their teachers, classmates, and technical support. Feelings of isolation and difficulty overcoming the technical issues of computer-mediated instruction are common for distance education students and may endanger their success and completion of coursework (Granger & Benke, 1998; Eastmond, 1995). Distance education is proposed as a "more accessible" form of education. However, because of these technological obstacles, becoming a distance education student may be considered a somewhat more elitist form of education – only accessible to those who are able to overcome these problems independently. To improve the accessibility of distance education and to improve student satisfaction and feeling of accomplishment, it becomes necessary to assist beginning and ongoing students to prepare for class. These preparations include familiar tasks such as registration and student advisement, and also include technological support in acquiring, configuring and mastering the tools, media and methods of distance education.

Success in a distance education class requires a student to adapt his or her learning style to accommodate the unique constraints and conditions of an asynchronous, computer-mediated classroom. For example, while a distance student can interact with classmates through the instructional medium, he or she is still geographically isolated from classmates. To some students, the social experience of "being in a class" is an important attribute of learning (Mehan, 1980; 1979), and this isolation can have undesirable side effects on a student's learning experiences (Granger & Benke, 1998; Eastmond, 1995).

Being a member of a community also requires three different types of interactive skills (Winiecki, 1999; Hymes, 1974). First, the person must master the behavioral skills of interaction. In a virtual learning community, the behavioral skills of manipulating communications technology are similarly necessary. Second, the person must know the language used by his or her classmates and instructor, and how to use it in asynchronous "discussions." In an asyn-

RANDAL D. CARLSON AND JUDI REPMAN
BOTH TEACH GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE
COURSES IN THE INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY
PROGRAM AT GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY.

E-MAIL: rcarlson@gasou.edu
E-MAIL: jrepman@gasou.edu
(<http://www2.gasou.edu/eltr/tech/rcarlson/frame.html>)
<http://www2.gasou.edu/eltr/tech/jrepman/repmanhome.html>)