CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

IN ONLINE COURSES:

A GRID AND GROUP EXPLANATION

By

STEPHONI LYNN CASE

Bachelor of Arts/English Education
Bethany Nazarene College
Bethany, Oklahoma
1983

Master of Arts/English Education
Southern Nazarene University
Bethany, Oklahoma
1992

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
May, 2010

CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

IN ONLINE COURSES:

A GRID AND GROUP EXPLANATION

Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Susan Stansberry

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Lucy Bailey

Dr. Edward Harris

Dr. Blayne Mayfield

Dr. A. Gordon Emslie

Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I began graduate school in 2003, I claimed a promise, and have kept this handwritten reminder close by during all of these years:

"So do not throw away your confidence, it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He promised." Hebrews 10:35-36.

First, I would like to acknowledge that God has kept His promise in my life, and I am thankful that He knows me and cares for me and calls me His own.

This has been a defining experience for me as I have grown to understand myself better through the process of learning. I have also understood and appreciated even more the precious people in my life as they supported me through all of the coursework, tests, research and writing.

I first thank my husband and closest friend, Jay, who was often the 'single parent' when I had class or studying to do. He encouraged me to stick with school when I really thought about quitting. I thank my children for adjusting to a new schedule every semester and for their persistence in communicating with me even when it took me a long time to break away from whatever critical subject I was concentrating on. Scott, Travis and Ali have added levity and promise at just the right moments. I love you each so much!

I also wish to thank my extended family members who have not only supported me, but helped me in many practical ways so that I could accomplish this dream. My mother and stepfather, Joyce and Marvin, have been my prayer warriors; my Aunt Mak has been my empathizer. My in-laws, Charles and Melba, have encouraged me and rescued the kids countless times, and my dad, Jack, was always so proud. Gayla's editing was a time-saver in the final moments. Others have listened patiently as I answered questions like, "What's your dissertation about?" One of my favorite moments, just before I began writing Chapter 1, was when my Uncle Bobby sat beside me, and we read through his 1974 dissertation. He said, "You can do this." I am blessed to have been surrounded by family that believed in me and embraced my dream.

I must acknowledge a few personal and professional friends who have made such a difference –Sylvia, Jim, Heather, April, Carolyn, Dennis, Jan. Thank you.

I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Susan Stansberry, for wanting to be part of my research. She has been interested and helpful and inspiring every time I work with her. Her guidance and her friendship have been treasures for me. Dr. Ed Harris and Dr. Lucy Bailey have also believed in me and been incredibly patient and helpful as I reached to really know and understand. Dr, Jamey Jacob was the perfect friend and encourager in this academic world. Dr. Thomas Warren gave me my start.

Finally, I would like to thank the instructors and students who were participants in this study; their willingness to share their time and experience has been so valuable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

Chapter Page

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly digital world, education finds itself in the crossfire between the isolation inherent in solitary online coursework and the need for social interaction to make meaning and learn. All types of students are reaching for courses and programs that are convenient and flexible with 21st century lifestyles. While the Internet can function as a central pathway for students to accomplish their academic goals, the culture created within educational environments also has great influence on students as they pursue their goals and the meaning and learning those students gain from their experiences. Online education is a well established aspect of contemporary education and student participation continues to grow at a phenomenal rate. From 2005 to 2006, enrollment in higher education online courses around the globe increased 35%, involving 3.2 million students (Allen & Seaman, 2007). By fall 2007, nearly 3.9 million students participated in online courses at institutions of higher education in the United States (Allen & Seaman, 2008; U. S. Department of Education, 2008). Clearly, online courses and online programs of study are becoming an increasingly common way to obtain an education at any number of institutions of higher learning. Even students with extensive backgrounds in traditional educational environments continue to flock to online courses to complete their programs because they suit their lifestyle needs or learning preferences.

As online education continues to expand, educators have raised questions regarding the most effective activities and practices to use in these courses. Activities in online education are often adapted from theory and research associated with traditional pedagogical practices. For example, activities and practices that build community and promote collaborative learning are used in both traditional and online courses and linked to constructive student engagement, which can result in positive learning culture in both environments (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Lim & Kim, 2003; Pierce, 2008; Shrum & Hong, 2002). However, practices sometimes take different shape and form in the space and place of virtual environments. Typical instructional strategies employed in online courses include discussion forums, collaborations, email exchanges, assignment submissions, podcasts, PowerPoints, wikis, messaging, journals and blogs. The decision about which activities to use reflect the instructor's pedagogical approach in a given environment. These strategies may be used to promote a learner-centered approach in onland courses. Similar to the freedom an online instructor has in planning the activities associated with a traditional class, an instructor teaching in an online environment has the freedom to use activities in a manner that can work best in developing a sense of place, online community and student success (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004).

Activities that require communication and collaboration are foundational elements in learner-centered classes, both onland and online. Promoting a sense of online community is possible when instructors enhance peer communication and collaboration through discussion forums and collaborative activities. Lehtinen, Hakkarainen, Lipponen, Rahikainer, and Muukkonen (1999) posit that modern technology can actually augment student communication and collaboration:

> Computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) is one of the most promising innovations to improve teaching and learning with the help of modern information and communication technology. Collaborative or group learning refers to instructional methods whereby students are encouraged or required to work together on learning tasks. It is widely agreed to distinguish collaborative learning from the traditional 'direct transfer' model in which the instructor is assumed to be the distributor of knowledge and skills. (p.2)

CSCL and other online communications are realistic approaches to the asynchronous environment of an online classroom. Managing communication activities such as discussion forums and wikis in an online environment involves an intriguing understanding of space, place and time in contrast to the onland classroom of real time and a physical space. These activities have potential to foster the development of an interactive (Swan, 2002) course culture for a generation of digital learners that are receptive to a wide array of classroom endeavors (Hansford & Adlington, 2009).

Space, Place and Time

Emerging technologies have altered the views of space, place and time and these changes are important considerations in thinking about the adaptation of traditional methods to online environments. They have also been important considerations of geographers, physicists, architects, and archeologists (Kunkel, 1954; Hartshorne, 1959; Tuan, 1977; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003). Definitions of space, place and time are numerous (Hartshorne, 1959; Kunkel, 1954; Low and Lawrence-Zunigais, 2003; Tuan, 1977). Nevertheless, most concepts explain space as a component of place (Casey, 1997). For example, what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as humans endow that

physical space with meaning and value over time. In the traditional sense, all educational activities occur in space, place and time. In educational institutions, space and place relationships form in classrooms, laboratories, sports fields, gyms, auditoriums, and band halls. In addition, the schedule of the academic year—starting dates, spring breaks, terms--provides the constructed and contextual timeline in which activities take place (Harris, 2005). Traditional educational environments foster synchronous human interaction and location-specific knowledge of time and space. Time and space were dependent upon being in a specific location.

However, transportation mechanisms, including ships, planes and automobiles, have facilitated migration and travel since the 17th century, and in the process, made way for knowledge acquisition to occur in many locations. In recent times, the advent of the Internet has blurred many traditional notions of space, place and time, and new perceptions of space and place call for complementary inquiries, ways of constructing knowledge, and pedagogical practices. In online environments, knowledge is relative to virtual time and place – not absolute (Patton, 2002). It is shaped by an Internet connection and participants' communications in an established virtual environment as well as by learners' historical and social context and their understanding of that environment.

In this study, notions of space, place and time are central to understanding the virtual communities and culture of online courses. They also provide a rationale for employing naturalistic methods. An illustration of how many institutions utilize these alternative understandings of space, place and time in their vernacular can be seen in an advertisement from ECPI College of Technology, an organization that offers many

complete online programs for students in addition to onland programs at three separate physical locations. In their introductory orientation screen for online students, ECPI writes,

> Online courses are those in which students and instructors are not in the same physical space at the same time; instead, they interact online (via the Internet) and students do not have to come to the campus to attend class. If you have a PC and a reliable Internet connection, you will be able to interact with your instructor and other students to complete the activities and objectives of the course at any time and from any place. Many students who have taken online courses in the past mention that they love the flexibility that online courses offer them. (ECPI Online Orientation, 2009)

This short statement assures potential students of the convenience of online courses, and the new notions of space, place and time are repeatedly expressed implicitly and explicitly. The advertisement draws clear distinctions between the traditional meanings of space, place and time, and the presumed new meaning contextually generated via virtual environments. For example, the terms ‘flexibility’ and ‘any time’ and ‘any place’ convey the unrestricted characteristics of an asynchronous virtual environment. The implications of these changing conceptions of time, space and place are clear. In a traditional classroom, some might argue that the long-established variables of space, place and time are absolute, inflexible and predictable. Although students and teachers also invest traditional environments with varied meanings, in online courses, space, place and time seem amalgamated and malleable. In the new, online sense, the terms are blurred; in virtual environments, the meaning of space merges with that of

place. If long held definitions of space prevailed, the asynchronous environment of the social network MySpace would be more accurately termed MyPlace because it would exist in a finite and restricted virtual environment. These concepts of space, place and time create new possibilities for considering and establishing online cultures and new challenges for considering the building blocks of culture in online classrooms.

Some might argue that space, place and time are more absolute and can be known and studied objectively in traditional educational environments, and modes of studying these variables are harmonious with inherent assumptions of traditional research (Casey, 1997). It follows that modes of researching these variables in the different realm of cyberspace should be compatible with such environments. As explained in a later section, naturalistic inquiry provides a methodology with the ontological underpinnings useful for studying an online environment. The cases reported will also address the significance of communications and collaborations and as a means to explain the cultures that exist and develop in online courses.

To some extent, technology and pedagogy are evolving with ever-increasing online enrollments; however, these technological developments do not guarantee effective courses. Despite extensive research as well as major technological and pedagogical advancements in the field of online education, concerns and challenges still exist, and some online courses are more effective than others at creating community and establishing a collaborative culture. One factor that fosters a sense of community in online environments is establishing an interactive culture (Swan, 2002; Ziegahn, 2001).

Classroom Culture

Classroom culture refers to the belief systems, values, cognitive structure and meaning that exist within each classroom whether it is a more traditional onland classroom or an asynchronous online classroom. Cavanagh (1997) identified three key elements of school culture as (1) the presence of group, organization or community with a communal or collective reason for existence, (2) common values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors, and (3) social interaction between and within groups. Culture is important in explaining students' engagement in their course work and the sense of community they experience in their online courses. Another significant influence in classroom culture is the instructor as he/she is "inextricably linked with pedagogy" (MacNeill, Cavanagh & Silcox, 2003). The webbed effect of these overlapping elements produces a culture unique to each learning environment.

Studies in online education report conflicting findings. While online education is a common component of most institutions, research indicates that online courses are successful in some cases and unsuccessful in others (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Garrison & Vaughn, 2008; Hoskins & vanHoof, 2005; Thompson & Lynch, 2003). Research has focused on the learning outcomes of entire online courses and programs, but there is a need to explain distinctive patterns of student engagement, communication, and community within individual online courses.

Problem Statement

Modern technology is changing educational culture and practice in a variety of ways. While education continues to occur in the actual space and place of traditional university settings, the Internet allows online education to be conducted in the cyberspace

of virtual environments (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Moran, 2008), which is creating new meanings of space, place and time. These environments allow students to access courses and communicate with all course participants almost anytime and anywhere. As a stand-alone convention, the Internet has had a transformative effect on global culture in the 21st century; however, isolated use of the Internet and online courses has not had the same transformative effect in education. Where people of the world have embraced the Internet in multiple ways, educators have not used it to its potential (Garrison & Vaughn, 2008; Hoskins & vanHoof, 2005; Stansberry, 2001). The intersection of the Internet and distance education has resulted in a plethora of online courses, and institutions of all types have not only made online education a permanent component of their higher education curriculum, but are now developing these courses to build vibrant virtual learning communities (Bourhis, Dubé & Jacob, 2003; Reynard, 2009; Zheng, Perez, Williamson & Flygare, 2008).

However, while most institutions offer online education as a standard component of their programs and curriculum, research indicates that online courses are effective in some cases and ineffective in others (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Garrison & Vaughn, 2008; Hoskins & vanHoof, 2005; Thompson & Lynch, 2003). Study findings indicate that individual online coursework may not always correlate directly with student engagement and academic achievement, and that specific elements must be present for an online course to successfully create a positive course culture (Barnard, Paton & Lan, 2008; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). One way to explain the inconsistencies in levels of online success is in terms of online culture (Shrum & Hong, 2002; Weisenburg & Hutton, 1996). Some online cultures may promote student engagement, communication and

collaboration that mediate academic achievement (Barnard, Paton & Lan, 2008) and others may inhibit these factors (Bender, 2003; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Leung & Lu, 2008; O'Banion, 1999; Palloff & Pratt, 2005). Regarding the contexts of traditional settings, anthropologist Mary Douglas (1982; 2003) posits that some cultures promote intercommunication and collaboration and some hinder these practices (Harris, 2005). Douglas's typology of grid and group has been useful in explaining cultures in both traditional and virtual environments (Harris, 2005; Stansberry, 2001).

This study will seek to fill a gap in scholarship and contribute to emerging literature on culture in online learning using Douglas' typology to understand and explain distinctive patterns of faculty and student engagement, communication and community that occur within various online courses. Researchers in higher education need to create and/or document factors that facilitate the success of online courses as educators and instructional designers expand curriculum and pedagogy in virtual environments. (Allen & Seaman, March 2007; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). The study will define and explain the cultural characteristics of each of the specific undergraduate general education courses in higher education under study. Identifying the characteristics of successful online courses in terms of culture will assist instructional designers, course developers and teachers in the creation of future courses. Douglas' typology "helps educators meet conceptual and methodological challenges inherent in cultural inquiry and educational practice" (Harris, 2006, p.131). Applying grid and group to online courses will provide a way to explain the cultural characteristics of online courses using a tool for explanation that has potential for extended use in the continued development of online education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic research study is to use Douglas' (1982) typology of grid and group to explain distinctive patterns of student engagement, communication and community in the culture of four online courses at a private, liberal arts university.

Research Questions

- How are student engagement, communication and community manifested in each course culture?
- How successful is each course in creating positive course culture?
- How do grid and group explain the online culture of courses under study?
- What other realities (outside of grid and group) are manifested?

Epistemological Perspective

The epistemological perspective in this study is constructionism, which is a philosophical approach that "emphasizes the hold our culture has on us; it shapes the way in which we see things" (Crotty, 2003, p.58). Constructionism is characterized by the claim that humans make, rather than discover, meanings that originate in cultural processes. It is a contrast to the epistemology of objectivism, which is based on the approach that "meaning and therefore meaningful reality exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness" (Crotty, 2003, p.8). Crotty (2003) uses the example of a tree's existence in the forest whether anyone is aware of it or not, and he explains that objectivism is the epistemological approach that believes that the tree has existed as an object even without humans knowing about it. Constructionism holds that humans do not discover meaning, but instead they construct meaning. "Truth or meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (Crotty, 2003,

p.8). Fish (1990 as cited in Crotty, 2003) explains that culture precedes human thought and generates meaning of thoughts, emotions and objects. In this view, thoughts, emotions and objects are socially constructed. The researcher is oriented toward the idea that realities are constructed from culture.

Theoretical Framework

Social constructionism is a common theoretical framework for researching educational environments and for positing models or the way people learn. How educators imagine students, for example, shapes how they approach the work of teaching. If a primary goal is to "acculturate students" into the academic community, "social constructionism privileges dialogue among student writers as a means of discovering ideas and developing thinking" (Hewett & Ehmann, 2004, p. 58). In online environments, social constructionism is helpful for framing student and instructor use of discussion forums, blogs, wikis, and on-line collaborative activities (Australian, 2003; Palloff & Pratt, 2005) as learning tools. Constructionism, as an epistemological lens for this research, allows the researcher to conceptualize online classes as a laboratory for studying how students' communications make meaning for them in terms of content development. In online learning environments, some researchers suggest that learning occurs as students communicate in discussions and collaborate in projects for course assignments.

Social constructionism is compatible with Mary Douglas' (1982) Grid and Group Typology in that Douglas posits that culture is a social construction. Douglas' (1982) and Lingenfelter (1996) have used grid and group to study the physical cultures of various social environments. They identified the characteristics of the cultures in terms of

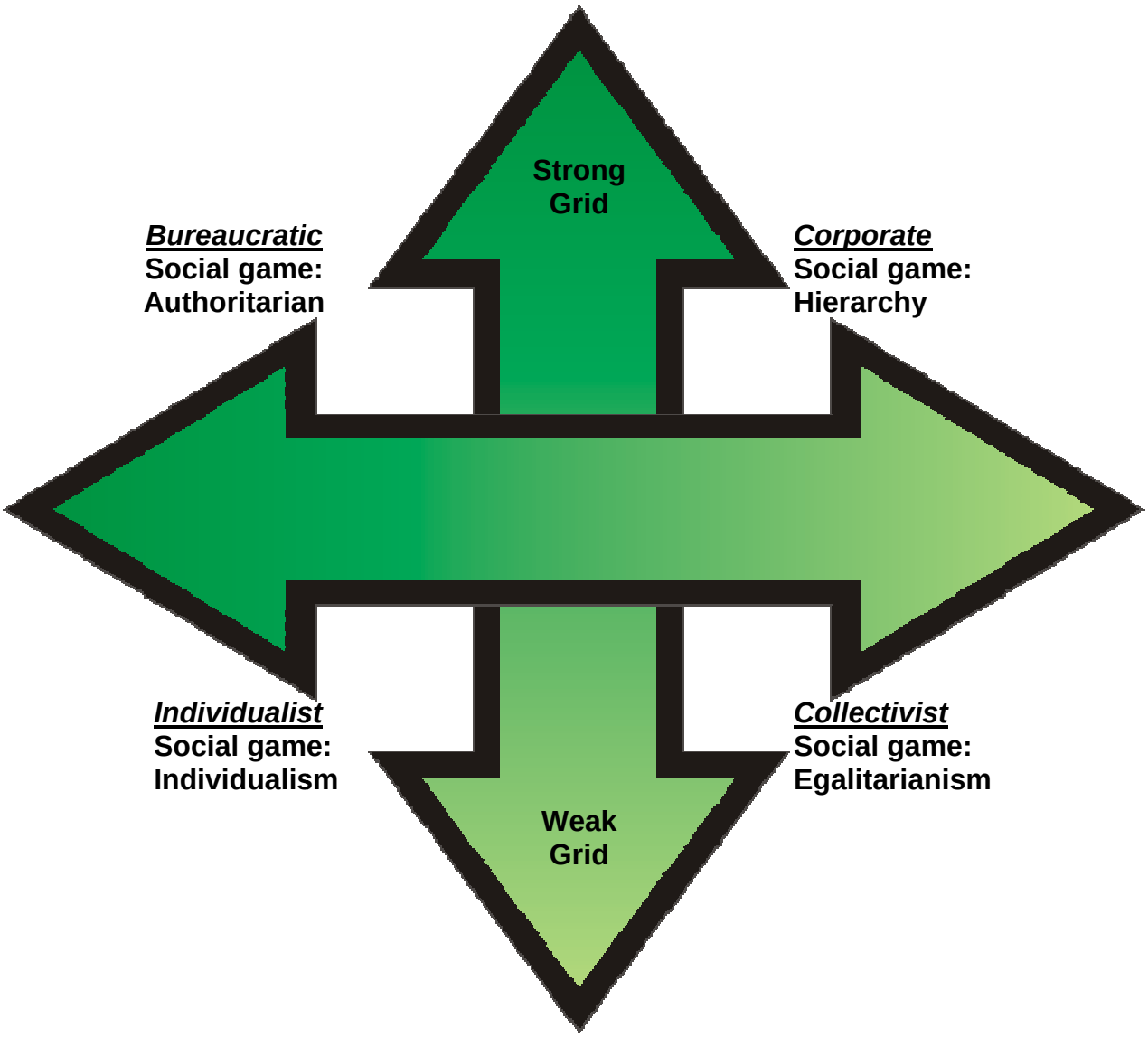
collaboration and relationships to authority. In the same manner, the virtual culture established within online classrooms can use grid and group to chart the collaborative and authoritative characteristics of a specific group of learners that are connected by the Internet. The matrix will work to identify the characteristics of any established culture – whether physical or virtual.

Mary Douglas' Grid and Group Typology (1982) has been used in several areas of educational research and in other research concerning technology, environment and religion (Limwudhikraijirath, 2009; Stansberry, 2001; Waelateh, 2009). It was first developed as a typology to "enable researchers to meet the conceptual and methodological challenges inherent in cultural inquiry" (Harris, 2006, p.139) in a matrix that classifies cultures as individualistic, corporate, collectivist or bureaucratic. Grid and Group provides a productive lens to explore student engagement, communication and community manifested in specific online courses. Interestingly, many critics and cultural analysts inadvertently use Douglas' terminology in addressing online isolationism, bureaucratic mindsets, and especially, the mass collaboration of cyber culture as a new online collectivism (Lanier, 2006; Tapscott & Williams, 2008). The terms bureaucratic and collectivism are identical terms to Douglas' culture descriptions for two of the four explanations she provides. While the more recent literature uses the term 'isolationism' and Douglas' term is 'individualist,' their meanings are similar.

The quadrants identified below in FIGURE 1.1 (Harris, 2005, p. 41) illustrate the characteristics of communities based on the interactions and the structures of authority present in each context. A more detailed description of the typology is presented in chapter two.

FIGURE 1.1

TYPES OF SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS AND THEIR SOCIAL GAMES



In the typology, grid reflects the degree of freedom and autonomy that participants experience. In strong grid online contexts, the learners operate in an instructor-centered paradigm where they receive all information from an authoritarian source and are evaluated based on the availability to respond with the knowledge-based information. At the weak end of the grid continuum, learners have individualist freedom

to explore topics and applications of information in light of the objectives of their coursework and will likely communicate directly with only the instructor, much like a traditional correspondence course.

The group dimension of the model "represents the degree to which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the larger social unit" (Harris, 2005, p.36). In the group continuum of an online course, the model identifies the communication and collaboration activities of online learners and their group goals and social incorporation. The grid dimension of the model "refers to the degree to which an individual's choices are constrained within a social system by imposed prescriptions" (Harris, 2005, p. 34). In the grid continuum of an online course, the continuum identifies the relationship of online learners to the authority figures within the course. The intersection of these two continuums provides a matrix by which to classify cultures based on the location of the majority of the cultures' characteristics within each environment. FIGURE 1.1 illustrates that intersection and the four environments.

In the weak grid and weak group quadrant, the individualist environment, communications would exist only between instructor and student. In the individualist dimension of the grid and group model, online learners operate independent of each other and receive and respond to communications only from the authoritative figure – the instructor. At the upper end of the group continuum, in strong grid and strong group, the corporate environment of an online course would reflect an environment where groups communicate with each other as individuals and then communicate with the instructor as a unified group.

In the collectivist environment, which Douglas (1982) and Harris (2005) identify as weak grid and strong group, individuals in an online classroom would communicate with other course participants but tend to act more independently. In this environment, online learners may also be reluctant to include, trust or share with guests who visit the course. In the bureaucratic environment of strong grid and weak group, the instructor would be the authority and would communicate with the group individually; the group members would not necessarily communicate with each other. The courses used in this study will be described according to location of their characteristics on the grid and group matrix and described using the terms of bureaucratic, individualistic, corporate or collectivist.

The purpose of this study is to use Douglas' (1982) Typology of Grid and Group to explain distinctive patterns of student engagement, communication and community within various online courses. Using Douglas' (1982) typology, this study will explore the culture in online courses according to the perceptions of the participants. It will use online instructors and online students as participants. Douglas' typology will serve this purpose by offering a lens through which to view and explain these patterns as well as "recognize and clarify the dissonance and complexity of everyday life in educational settings" (Harris, 2006, p.146). The value of grid and group is its ability to offer researchers a tool to consider the complete social context, as well as how students experience communications and discussions within an online environment.

Methodology

Patton (2002) explains, "New applications of qualitative methods continue to emerge as people in a variety of endeavors discover the value of in-depth, open ended

inquiry" (p. 203). New applications for qualitative methodology in the reality of virtual environments are emerging as researchers explore this unfolding terrain. Naturalistic inquiry is an example of one qualitative methodology used to study these contexts. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) early conception of the naturalistic researcher was that he/she "elects to carry out the research in the natural setting or context of the entity for which the study is proposed…" (p. 39). Since their treatise was written well before the era of online education, Lincoln and Guba were clearly referring to actual socio-physical contexts rather than the virtual contexts of cyber space. Nonetheless, numerous studies have used naturalistic inquiry to explore and explain the virtual contexts of online classrooms (Lim & Kim, 2003), an online learner's "natural" environment. In many of these studies, however, little or no rationale has been offered for the viability of transferring naturalistic methods from the tangible contexts of educational institutions to the virtual contexts of cyberspace.

Naturalistic inquiry is an appropriate paradigm to use in studying online environments. The virtual space, place and time connotations associated with online environments reflect the meanings that emerge from communications, collaborations and student engagement included in this specific study. The philosophical axioms that define naturalistic inquiry complement exceptional online pedagogy.

Data Collection and Analysis Strategies

In order to narrow the focus of the best practices in education to communication within online courses, data was collected from the population of four online courses taught by different instructors in a small, private, liberal arts university. The cases for this study were chosen because of the undergraduate, general education status of the

courses and the convenience of working with willing and interested instructors and students in a known environment. The courses were general education, undergraduate courses. Additional data was collected from interviews with the instructors and students enrolled in the four courses.

Following the steps outlined in Harris' *Key Strategies to Improve Schools* (2005), the researcher determined the units of analysis, observed the selected online courses, examined all documents related to the online courses, had instructors and students complete a questionnaire and conducted interviews. I used Mary Douglas' Grid and Group Typology (1982) to analyze the relationship between online communication and course culture. Research was conducted in the fall of 2009. The research process incorporated trustworthiness criteria, which included prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, member checks, thick description, dependability and confirmability audits, and a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Details of data collection and analysis are further explained in chapter three.

Significance of this Study

Potential Significance to Theory

Some educators argue that using a learner-centered, social constructionist approach is critical to the success of students (Carwile, 2007). Within this approach, the learner is imagined as the vibrant center of the learning process rather than a passive recipient of material. Learners learn by discovery and collaboration, and the instructor is the facilitator in this process (Carwile, 2007). The intersection of constructionism and grid and group typology is significantly influenced by the role of the instructor. A course

will likely begin with the strong lead of an instructor who is perceived as an authority figure and the only one with whom interactions matter, but as the course develops over time, the other members of the course—classmates and community members—become valuable in their contributions toward the development of content and responses to that content.

Within the constructionist model, educators are involved in multiple approaches, which include the cooperative/collaborative model. As Douglas (1982) posits that culture is constructed through social interaction, the social constructionist model of learning likewise argues that "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 2003, p. 42). Learning results as individuals exercise, verify, solidify and improve their mental models through discussion and information sharing. The socio-cultural model of learning argues that learning best occurs when the learning is meaningful, more deeply or elaborately processed, situated in context and rooted in the learner's cultural background and personal knowledge (Carswell, 2001, p. 3). This model is engaging for the learner, and learning occurs as students are involved in course activities rather than by the lecture-then-test model of instruction and learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995). According to Bruffee (1984) in "Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind," the strategic and effective use of collaboration and written conversation allows learners to think well as individuals. The author also contends that students need a social context for writing and that peer discussion groups provide that context.

Selfe (2003) believes that students must not only use and understand technologically driven courses and activities, but they must have the ability to understand, from a critical perspective, the social and cultural contexts for online discourse and communication and the ways in which electronic communication environments have become essential parts of our cultural understanding of what it means to be literate" (Selfe, 2003, p.24). Selfe's argument relates to the importance of students' perceptions of the online classroom as a bona fide classroom with the potential for using social constructs as a way to learn the content of a course through discussion and collaboration. Also, learners construct the reality of their learning experiences through human interaction, and in online courses, these human interactions often occur in asynchronous exchanges via email, discussion boards or other venues provided on various Learning Management System (LMS) programs (Bender, 2003). Learners exchange information and process that information which informs their own perceptions of their learning. APPENDIX A is included as a reference as a glossary of terms related to online courses, the Internet and technology.

Social constructionism posits learning as a social process, positing that learners in a virtual classroom, build their own learning based partly upon these communications and collaborations that are part of an online course. In this view of learner and context, as the postings and exchanges occur throughout a course, the learners shape their learning as they are influenced by the various communications--communications to them as individuals and communications to the entire group associated with their online course.

This study will use a theoretical framework that has proven useful in understanding and explaining educational culture. Combining Mary Douglas's Grid and

Group Typology (1982) with the epistemological perspective of social constructionism can potentially be valuable in understanding and explaining how particular online course cultures may allow the mediation of student engagement, communication and collaboration to positively affect student achievement. Grid and Group has not previously been used to explain the culture of online courses.

Potential Significance to Practice

While teaching practices in these environments have improved significantly, there is still much to be learned regarding the best practices for online, asynchronous instruction. This qualitative study reported narrative portraits of distinctive patterns of student engagement, communication and community, which can potentially make the visions of O'Banion (1997) and others come to life.

Summary

Chapter one has introduced the idea of considering culture as part of online courses, including the relevance of space, place and time. Using constructionism as the epistemological lens, this researcher intends to use Mary Douglas' Grid and Group Typology (1982) as the theoretical framework for explaining the culture of four online, undergraduate, general education courses that occurred in the summer of 2009. The chapter also proposed that methods appropriate for naturalistic inquiry be used to collect and analyze data. In closing, the significance of the study as it relates to culture and learner engagement is examined and will be reported as an intention to continue educational reform to a learner-centered pedagogical approach.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

At this time, the trend of online education is towards growth, but it will eventually plateau. Institutions that were on the forefront of online learning continue to explore the expansion of online course and program offerings. Institutions with declining enrollments initiate online programs as an attempt to remain fiscally sound during changing times. Whatever the reason for developing and continuing online courses, O'Banion (1997) projected that use of technology would be a significant factor in creating learning centered institutions. From the classroom through all levels of university life, theorists and researchers had a vision for what technology could offer to learners as the 21st century arrived. The use of technology, the Internet, and web-based learning have indeed expanded in education dramatically each year (Allen & Seaman, 2008). Even considering the predictions, those same researchers from the early to mid-nineties are possibly even surprised at the tremendous growth rate of technology use in the classrooms, and the impact of online learning for institutions, instructors, and students (Barr & Tagg, 1995; O'Banion, 1997).

Online courses are now a firmly established component of higher education, and given the fact that course designers and writers are creating and teaching these courses

from varied backgrounds of educational philosophy and technological savvy, research over the paradigms existent in online courses would provide information as to whether or not these online courses are reaching their potential for being learning centered and reaching that potential with the many telecommunications possible within an online environment. In traditional, synchronous settings, various technologies may be used to facilitate a class, but the definition of a complete online course is a course in which "at least 80 percent of the course content is delivered online" (Allen & Seaman, 2008, p.4).

Education has also been greatly impacted by the Internet and technology. What began as computers in the classroom in the late 1980s has evolved to laptop initiatives, learning management systems (LMS), and online courses that connect groups of students from anywhere in the world. The purpose of this study is to use Douglas' (1982) Typology of Grid and Group to explain distinctive patterns of student engagement, communication and community within various online courses. Communication is possible via email, social networks, texting, and blogging, scyping, discussions and more (Australian, 2003). Parallel with the growth of technology and its use in education, correspondence and distance learning courses are a permanent part of education, and the demand for online learning will continue to grow (St. Amant, 2007), and education will need to move quickly to maintain pace with the advances in both technology and in communication with others, particularly those within online learning communities (Thornburg, 1994). The literature indicates the nature of the changes modern technology has brought to education which has led to the rapid growth and development of online courses and programs. The literature also indicates the characteristics of effective online

courses and how those courses are determined to be effective within the developing cultures of these virtual learning environments.

The Internet and Education: Potential for Educational Improvement

Classrooms during The Technological Age and before used well-known tools for teaching and learning such as textbooks, chalkboards, overhead projectors, televisions and video tape recorders. Classrooms also used record players and tape recorders and film strips as well. By the end of the Technological Age computers were used in the classroom for presentations or individual research or workstations for students. Now, during The Communication Age, computer technology as well as mobile technology offers learners and instructors the opportunity to participate in remote conversation with others in their learning communities. These conversations may include discussions, emails, wikis and blogs as contributions regarding a body of information. These virtual, technological, communication trends include networks that are now more powerful than print media, and create a course culture where digital images, sounds, and exchanges dominate text (Ezell, 1989).

Online courses began as a merged outgrowth of correspondence courses, distance learning, Learning Management Systems and traditional, face-to-face courses. Online courses first appeared on the educational horizon in the 1990s. By way of several applications, instructional designers and tech savvy instructors, courses were developed that accomplished the objectives of courses in an online format and now universities are committed to offering "convenient, high quality learning opportunities for diverse populations" (Scarafiotti, 2004, p. 2).

At the beginning of this process, the Technological Age defined the global state of existence, but by 1994, the Technological Age had given way to The Age of Communication (Stansberry, 2001). Communications via the Internet make it possible for businesses to be more productive--and quickly productive--by using the various tools available to them that make exchange of information instantly (Ezell, 1989; Kontos & Mizell, 1997; Schrum, 2005). In business, the Age of Communication has created a flattened business structure and brings the consumer closer to the manufacturer (Thornburg, 1994). The same is true in education during this new age of communication; technology brings the learners and the content together with "new, faster, bigger and better ways of moving information" (Kantor, 2005; Thornburg, 1994). They also make immediate communication continuous and easy. Distance learning grew in strength and popularity as technology made group meetings from remote locations possible. Data from a study done at Rio Salado College in Tempe, Arizona revealed a huge increase in enrollment when the Internet became the delivery mode of distance courses (Scarafiotti, 2004). Now online education offers access to learners in all environments all around the world and is not limited by "time and distance, physical location of the instructor or housing of and access to learning resources" (Stansberry, 2001, p. 33).

Modern Technology Changing Course Culture

Influence of Internet in Education

While online education is now an established component in most institutions of higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Garrison & Vaughn, 2008), research indicates that online courses may not always achieve their potential in terms of successful academic achievement and learner acceptance (Barnard, Paton & Lan, 2008; Garrison &

Vaughn, 2008; Hoskins & vanHoof, 2005; Thompson & Lynch, 2003). Initially, the Internet had a greater impact socially than it had in education; institutions welcomed the prospects of reduced cost to reach more students, but concern about how to address quality have also been an issue (Garrison & Vaughn, 2008). Barnard et al. (2008) have found student achievement in online courses directly related to self-regulatory behaviors in online environments. Such self-regulatory behaviors were influenced by students' perceptions of their online course communications and collaborations.

Educational improvement by way of online courses may not always consider the individual needs of the learner. The success of online courses is conditional in studies by Thompson & Lynch (2003) and Hoskins & vanHoof (2005) found that learners' self-efficacy, individual learning styles and technological tools and experience cause reluctance to participate and leads to minimal or no academic improvement. Educators who develop online courses may not consider the "foundational concepts of learning theories such as those based on constructivism, which emphasizes individual differences in learning styles" (Hoskins & vanHoof, 2005). Online learning may not be appropriate for all learners.

Online Education and Practice

While online education is the new normal in most higher education institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Garrison & Vaughn, 2008), research indicates that online courses may not always achieve their potential in terms of successful academic achievement (Barnard, Paton & Lan, 2008; Garrison & Vaughn, 2008; Hoskins & vanHoof, 2005; Thompson & Lynch, 2003). The absence of specific elements or the lack of student involvement in those elements, such as dialogue and communication, may

indeed be cause for concern regarding online learning. The Internet has made an incredible impact on higher education in this 21st century, but many believe it is not achieving its maximum potential within online classroom cultures of today (Garrison & Vaughn, 2008; Hoskins & vanHoof, 2005).

Some educators today are just as reluctant to accept online education as educators from earlier days were reluctant to accept distance (Jeffries). Historically, distance education shows many new concepts and technologies pulled taut against a consistent reluctance to change, and history also promotes technology as promising more than it has produced. "Distance learning was once a poor and often unwelcome stepchild within the academic community but now is becoming increasingly more visible as part of the higher education family" (Bullen, 1999, p. 7). Beginning with correspondence courses in the early 1700s, trending to television education, and then to distance education and now online education, studies by educators tended to show that student achievement from classroom television courses was as successful as from traditional face-to-face instruction. In the 1950s, only minor differences in student achievement were identified, and informed critics offered research showing that learning by television compared favorably with conventional instruction (Lal, 1989). With the advent of distance learning via satellite and internet courses, educators continued to question whether that mode of delivery was an effective teaching and learning tool (Jeffries) despite additional research results (Bullen, 1999) that showed little or no difference in student learning and performance between traditional classes in a regular classroom and television courses.

In spite of the negative perceptions and concerns of observers and participants in online education, higher education has been promoting reform using technology as a

vehicle for at least the past fifteen years (Barr & Tagg, 1995; O'Banion, 1997). O'Banion and other educational theorists have also led the reform focusing on a learning centered paradigm and student engagement (Palloff & Pratt, 2005). Student engagement does occur in the broad context of an entire university experience, but it also occurs within the scope of single courses, and online courses using a Learning Management System (LMS) can be part of that engagement process (Coats, James & Baldwin, 2005). Providing a consistent LMS experience across all disciplines in order to facilitate student engagement and a focus on learners may not be the primary objective of the universities. "Most of the discussion about LMS (in relation to online learning) seems to occur without consideration of their effects on students" (Coates, James & Baldwin, 2005, p. 28). Educators need to address online learning via an LMS from the perspectives of students by answering such questions as 'Do LMS influence students' feelings of inclusion in broader academic communities?' and 'What are [faculty and students'] perceptions of LMS mediated interactions with staff and other students?' (Coates, James & Baldwin, 2005). Creating positive online course culture using an LMS as well as various technological tools is possible when institutions are "open, inclusive and educationally informed" (Coates, James & Baldwin, 2005, p.33).

Online Courses and Programs

The online courses and programs impact all levels of education, the instructors and the students, and online courses are now widely used in higher education to enhance programs and build enrollment for a wider audience (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Quitadamo & Brown, 2001; Kriger, 2001). Predictions (Kriger, 2001) indicated that by 2002, 85% of two- and four-year colleges would offer distance education courses to two million

students, up from 500,000 in 1998. Another study actually found 70% of all United States institutions offered completely online courses (Lankamp, 2008). The University of Maryland was the first public university to create a for-profit online program university--The University of Maryland University College – in 1999 (Kriger, 2001), and since then many existing institutions and virtual institutions have developed online courses, certificates, programs and satellite institutions to offer these distance education products. Table 2.1 from Kriger (2001, p. 9) identifies several institutions and programs that offer various types of online programs.

Table 2.1.
A Sampling of Institutions that Offer Online Programs (Kreiger, 2001, p.9)

Institution	Characteristics	Number and Type of DE Programs	DE Enrollment	Accreditation
e-Cornell	For-profit spin off; no courses offered yet	Will offer certificates, not degree programs	NA	Not accredited as a separate entity
NYU Online	For-profit spin off primarily for corporate market	Two graduate; many corporate programs	166 (in graduate programs)	Not accredited as a separate entity
University of Illinois Online	Umbrella organization for different U of Illinois campuses	One professional degree; 10 master's; bachelor's completion program	6,000 courses taken online	North Central
University of Maryland University College	Claims online program is world's largest online university	14 bachelor; 10 graduate	7,955;* UMUC now claims enrollment of 40,000	Middle States
Rio Salado Community College	One of the first and largest online community college programs	Six associate degrees; 12 certificates	200 online courses, 8,000 students per semester	North Central
SUNY Learning Network	One of the three largest DE programs in the country (with Phoenix and UMUC)	1,500 courses from accounting to Web design	Approximately 10,000 course enrollments per semester	Middle States
Virtual Temple	For-profit spin off; no courses offered yet	NA	NA	Not accredited as a separate entity

*Figures for 1999-2000, US Department of Education, Report in Congress on Distance Education Demonstration Programs, January 2001. Other statistics reported directly by institutions.

Internet and Education: Discrepancies in Education Improvement

Educational culture has changed dramatically away from chalkboards and overhead projectors to the Internet, intranets, email, smart boards, presentation software

and Learning Management Systems that provide complete digital support to any type of course or program a school chooses to offer. Ultimately conferencing and communications are quick and have no geographical boundaries. In a study of experienced educators (Schrum, 2002), of the eight currently-used online teaching strategies, five included technological communicative types of activities: posting biographies, frequent interaction, collaboration, required participation, and question-asking forums. The influence of the Internet in providing online communication in education has added a new dimension to education in terms of venues for learning and pedagogy possibilities.

Institutions offer individual courses in a decentralized, departmental fashion or from a centralized department that manages all aspects of the courses from design to enrollment to teaching. Institutions are also offering entire degree programs in an online format – students only attend classes online.

Online courses, however, are not successful endeavors academically just because they use fresh technology and the Internet. For online courses to be offered as merely another verse of the same instruction-centered song using the lecture instructional paradigm of the 20th century would not be an advance or reform in education. "The Learning Paradigm ends the lecturer's privileged position honoring in its place whatever approaches serve best to prompt learning of a particular knowledge by particular students" (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p. 2). Effective teaching in the 21st century is a collaborative event (Katz, 2001) where students have the opportunity of discovery learning – more complex and more real – where they can develop skills that are most worthwhile and usable in their future workplaces. As debates about online courses are

becoming more contentious in education, the pedagogy and potential for reform via online learning must be considered as a means to use the characteristics and capabilities of online courses to connect with the 21st century paradigm objectives of student engagement. "We must create an environment in which students succeed and in which they develop, along with a healthy self-interest, an understanding of the sociological and cultural necessities for preserving the community" (O'Banion, 1997, p. 140).

Student Engagement in Online Communities

Creating a learning environment with a positive course culture is a necessity (O'Banion, 1997), and student engagement is the foundation of building such a community and course culture. The best practice (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) of online courses that helps to accomplish these goals includes interactive activities such as wikis, discussion forums, chats, messaging, emails and journals (Australian, 2003). Using a wiki to allow students and instructors to build course content throughout the duration of a course allows students to be participants in their own learning – makes them responsible for finding and learning and reporting their own information and ideas. A simple example of the instructor centered method in creating an online course would set up such a course to publish information that students had to open, view and then test over comprehension of the material. The engaging nature of interactive content development would allow students to gather and then cipher through relevant and necessary ideas, images and text to create the information necessary to build the course curriculum for everyone in the class. Both the collaboration of students and the direction of the instructor as the wiki develops would be critical and beneficial.

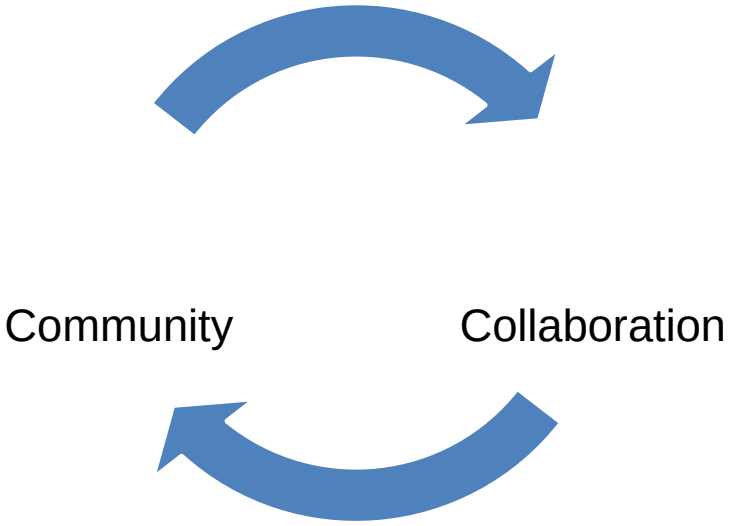
When online courses were first offered, the emphasis was on content development or material available online to which learners had access. In recent years, however, a positive trend of emphasizing communication and interactions has become an important part of online education (Australian, 2003). By developing courses that included all participants as learners, the following elements have become a positive focus for online courses:

- The recognition of the importance of social interaction within the learning process.
- An increasing emphasis on a constructivist model of education, rather than the transmission of knowledge.
- A recognition that in the online world, information is pervasive and readily accessible, but that making sense of it is the real challenge. (Australian, 2003 p. 3)

"The first 10 years of online courses was focused on using the internet to replicate the instructor-led experience. Content was designed to lead a learner through the content, providing a wide and ever-increasing set of interactions, experiences, assessments, and simulations. E-learning 2.0, by contrast (patterned after Web 2.0) is built around collaboration" (Brown & Alder, 2008). Pedagogy that involves collaboration using online communications parallels face-to-face educational philosophy that meaning and knowledge is socially constructed (Hoskins & van Hooff, 2005; Kennedy, 2000; Thompson & Lynch, 2003). Advocates of social learning claim that one of the best ways to learn something is to teach it to others (Brown & Alder, 2008). Wang and Zao (2003) see the success of distance education as based on the content of the dialog between

teacher and student and the effectiveness of the communication system in an educational process. In their book, *Collaborating Online: Learning Together in the Community*, Palloff and Pratt (2005) illustrate the cycle of community and collaboration as the key to online learning. See FIGURE 2.1.

FIGURE 2.1 THE CYCLE OF COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATION



Initially, as faculty and instructional designers began to create online courses, they replicated their traditional onland courses into online courses – all of the same elements and types of activities for learning were found in both courses. With theory and pedagogical advances away from the instructor centered paradigm toward the learner centered paradigm, *The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* (Chickering & Gamson, 1991) has helped many educators improve their teaching skills in traditional environments. In a study about engaging students using an LMS and these seven principles, Crawford & Thomas-Maddox (2000), produced positive results using

Chickering's best practices (1991) and advanced technological options to create a learning centered online environment that engaged students by creating a culture of communication. The advance of online communities support teaching and learning activities, the teachers and learners themselves, and the delivery of learning and sharing (Australian, 2003; Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996). Use of technology promotes collaboration of both students and instructors as they go through the learning process in online courses (Kontos & Mizell, 1997; Schrum, 2005).

Definition

Known by a variety of terms during its evolution, distance learning began as traditional correspondence courses based on independent study, added television courses, and now includes telecourses on closed circuit and Internet technology as well. (Casey, 2008). The Garrison and Shale definition of distance education (1987) offers a minimum set of criteria and allows more flexibility. They suggest that:

- Distance education implies that the majority of educational communication between teacher and student occurs non-contiguously.
- Distance education involves two-way communication between teacher and student for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the educational process.
- Distance education uses technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication. (pp. 10 – 11)

An American Federation of Teachers study states (Krieger, 2001) that too little is known about the effectiveness of distance learning and that more independent research is needed (Krieger, 2001; Twigg, 1996). At the same time, Clark and Lyons (1999), in their

research, posited that media forms are mere vehicles that deliver instruction, but do not influence student achievement any more than the truck that delivers our groceries causes changes in our nutrition. They believe that it is not media, but variables such as instructional methods that foster distance learning.

One of the issues in understanding online education is how it is defined. Its history has evolved from correspondence background dating back to the 1700s, and technologically based distance education began as early as the early 1900s (Jeffries). Online education began as a way to produce a traditional classroom online – or even as a way to transpose correspondence courses online – but now online education is in a genre all of its own. The issue is not to just discover a way to teach the same way online that we do onland, but to discover a way to teach effectively online using methods that embrace the characteristics of 21st century students (Jeffries).

Another problem in dealing with online education is that those involved are operating under an understanding of Distance Learning or Correspondence Courses or Independent Studies from an earlier age. Critics will often say that 'nothing can replace the face-to-face nature of the traditional classroom. Another common concept is that in online courses, teachers and students just send assignments back and forth and take objective tests. This idea does reflect an instructor-centered approach to teaching. Online education, however, has the potential to be interactive among a group of learners and reflects a learner-centered approach. Built on the learning theory of social constructionism, online interactions via communications within the course provide learning opportunities and achievement for online students.

Challenges

Innovation in a learning paradigm in any institution is met with questioning; include the introduction of online courses into the system, and the changes are met with additional questions of effectiveness and validity. “If a school has a culture in place, and there is ample evidence to suggest it does, those involved in the rigorous maintaining of the status quo are not going to be eager candidates for innovation” (Schrum, 1991, p. 37). Institutions are ready to include online courses and programs due to the potential revenues (Krieger, 2001), but academic officers and faculty fear the lack of quality or effectiveness of learning online (Quitadamo & Brown, 2001).

One of the challenges and concerns raised is about the importance of building online community inclusive of instructors and the participating students. If the only exchange within a course is to send assignments and tests back and forth, then an online course is little more than a correspondence course (Jeffries). To create a venue for interactions that builds the course culture of communication as well as the content remains as the motivations and challenges of an online course. Vygotsky (1978) proposed a theory of learning that learners experience cognitive growth when they “learn to think by incorporating what [is heard] from others” (Hoskins & vanHoof, 2005, p. 189). Social constructionism (Crotty, 2003) now connects with discussions in online classes in that to build content and to learn using dialogue is a significant learning strategy that increases academic achievement (Doolittle, 1999).

With the interest in online courses from the perspectives of both the business side of the institution as well as the academic side, some studies do show a discrepancy between communication and learning (Kreijns, Kirschner & Jochems, 2003; Thompson

& Lynch, 2003). When the mechanisms for online communication are in place within a course, there is no guarantee the students will actually use those mechanisms to complete the course; the course developers may take it for granted that course participants will use the interactive activities built into online courses (Kreijns, Kirschner & Jochems, 2003). Related to that first issue is the second issue of instructors teaching online courses may neglect the social and psychological learning opportunities within the course (Kreijns, Kirschner & Jochems, 2003).

Personal challenges also become an issue in online courses because instructors as well as students involved in an online course may struggle with techniques of how to start and maintain a positive discussion (Australian, 2003). McDermott identifies the individual challenges that online instructors and learners may face as fundamental to creating "real dialogue about cutting edge issues." These fundamental challenges include a need to build trusting online relationships, a need to discuss problems openly, and a willingness to share ideas and thoughts that are not fully developed in a public forum (McDermott, 2001). This ability to learn via online discussion and communication may not come naturally to some students, and instructors must be willing to facilitate the group culture by guiding and building online community.

According to Australian Flexible Learning Network (2003) the most significant factors for building effective online learning communities are:

- Ensuring [the instructor] and the community participants have the necessary skills for communicating and working effectively online.
- Ensuring that time factors are considered and supported.

- Learning and refining techniques for managing diverse groups of people and assisting others to work effectively online too.
- Understanding and building a tolerance factor recognizing the fact that it takes time to establish a good working community and relationships.

  (Australian, 2003)

Results from a study done by Luppicini in 2007 indicate that the negative aspects of online courses from a faculty perspective include a heavier workload, increased costs, a reduction in or absence of administrative support, problems with technology, and a limited amount of interactions with students. A related study (Shaw & Pieter, 2000), found that students readily identified several negative factors as well such as inadequate infrastructure, unreliable computers, inconsistent access to online materials, and a struggle to shift to a different learning environment. The feelings of isolation and the need to build discussions within online courses were enhanced by the creation and use of blogs (Luppicini) to allow students to build connections with each other and with their instructor.

The online learning environment has been an issue of concern as educators and administrators advance into that arena with objectives and courses that need to accomplish higher order thinking skills and learning (Quitadamo & Brown, 2001). Having the technology for online courses available is not the only requirement necessary for success in the online environment. Course developers and instructors must use the most appropriate opportunities and applications to allow the instruction to affect student learning. "Technology itself does not cause the development of advanced cognitive

abilities; rather, a major determinant of higher order thinking skills development is the quality of discourse that occurs in well designed, properly structured online learning environments" (Quitadamo & Brown, 2001, p. 2). Many online environments are just used by educators as curriculum or discipline-specific repositories of information that is provided for students to acquire and then learn, thus promoting the teacher-centered, lecture based, passive approach to learning (Lan, 1999).

Culture and Education: A Potential Way to Answer the Discrepancies

In his book *Digital Culture* (2008), Charlie Gere argues that people around the world – particularly in developed countries – live in an "increasingly digital culture" (p. 14). Digital media is changing every aspect of the world, and it is so integrated with our lives that it influences and changes how we think about ourselves individually and socially.

Gere (2008) also argues that this digital world in which people live is a complete transformation from a physical environment to a digital environment. To understand digital culture as a whole can only occur as we examine the heterogeneous elements which make up the entire culture. Understanding the context in which these various elements occur and *how* the elements interact with each other to produce a culture is the premise of digital culture studies. This premise, in fact, can be extrapolated to online course culture in that the researcher can study the various elements that make up the online class culture as defined by student engagement, communication and collaboration. It is possible to study how these elements affect online course culture in terms of group involvement and individual response to authority.

A final point to note in Gere's approach to digital culture is that due to the nature of constant and rapid changes in digital culture and technology, researchers may have to map and chart changes and developments as a method of defining and describing the digital culture as a whole or elemental aspects of a digital culture such as education and online courses (2008). He states that "information of every kind and for every purpose is now mostly in digital form, including insurance, social services, utilities, real estate, leisure and travel, credit arrangements, employment, education, law, as well as personal information"(p. 14). Digital technology has become important and useful in our lives, and Gere (2008) continues to argue that the world as a whole and in compartmentalized communities operates as a digital culture. "Digital culture can stand for a particular way of life of a group or groups of people at a certain period of history" (p. 16).

David Silver and Adrienne Massanari (2006) provide a collection of histories, theories and studies in the field of cyberculture that offers multiple trajectories for research in internet studies. In considering the critical approaches and methods, Part II of Silver and Massanari's collection opens with an insistence on quality in qualitative research while reaching beyond traditional environments to gather data. In her contribution , "Finding Quality in Qualitative Research" Baym (2006), discusses the tendency of internet researchers to publish their studies in discipline specific journals, leaving internet or cyber-culture research to be published in a great variety of disciplinary forums which maybe unfamiliar to those searching for internet specific studies. Case studies on Internet policy and design from central Asia (Putnam, Johnson, Rose, & Kolko, 2006) and connections between cyber life and real life in online gaming communities in Hong Kong (Fung, 2006) are two among several such studies.

In his introduction to the works collected by Silver and Massanari (2006), Steve Jones posits that the ultimate reason to engage in learning about theory and practices associated with internet use, history and development is to "expand the scope of our knowledge and our questioning" (p. xiii). He concludes by suggesting that in conducting these studies on the internet, we must include both theory and practice. He suggests that as Grossberg (1993) addressed issues of communication, we may use the same technique to address cyberculture issues by

- Recognizing that reality is made through human action
- Continually being drawn to the 'popular' or common way people live and struggle in the contemporary world
- Being committed to a contextualism that precludes defining culture and the relation between culture and power (pp. 89-90).

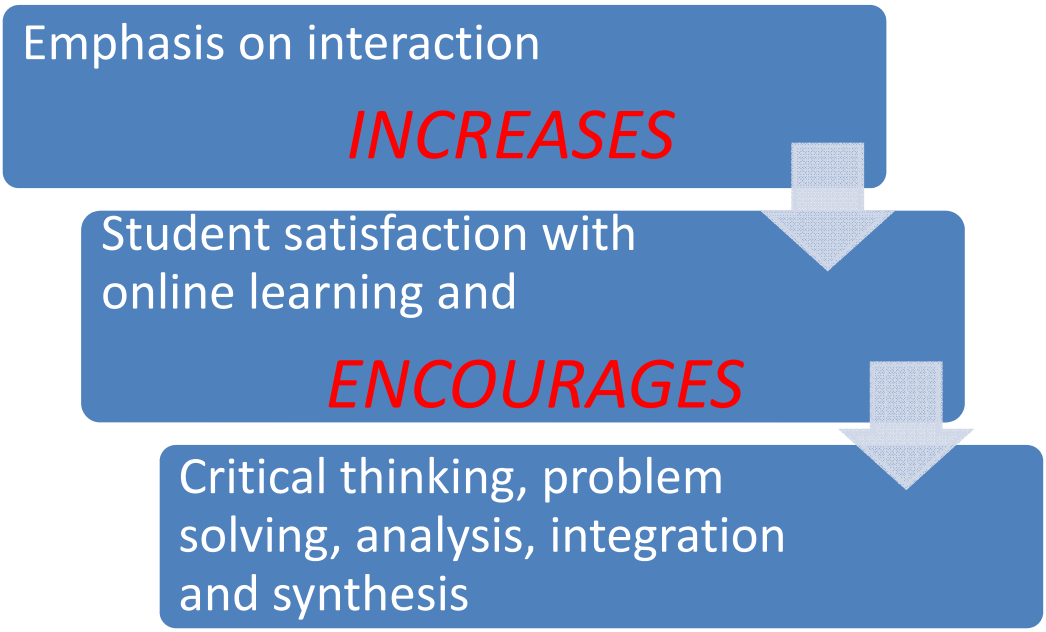
The reality made through human action can reflect the social constructionist theory relevant to online classes and learning, and the study of student engagement, community, and collaboration will also allow a study – this case study – to examine the dynamic characteristics of the specific cyberculture of an online class. The study of an online class before classifying the culture will also reflect Grossburg's advice regarding contextualism in online course culture.

A particular note of information that has emerged from the literature in two specific studies is that faculty has responsibility in creating and maintaining a positive online culture (Dow, 2008; Ziegahn, 2001). Online courses that operate in an asynchronous format and offer students the opportunity to reflect on the messages are influenced by the invitation and mediation of the discussions by instructors. Information

Communication Technologies (ICT) associated with online courses as a significant factor in online learning, are secondary in effectiveness. Teaching specific strategies are what improve and affect online courses in a positive way (Sulĉiĉ, 2009).

Another consideration in understanding keys to teaching and learning online is that while learning environments are important in both face-to-face and online classes, they are not the same online developers and instructors should "explore when and what educators need to do to make online really worthwhile (Salmon, 2004, p. xi). Offering a mere curriculum transfer in an online course ignores the proven practices that are apparent in effective online education. In a 2003 study, Fang Zhao identified common problems that students encountered in their online courses. Some of the problems related to technical, hardware issues while many others were a communication nature such as lack of interaction with instructor, delay in receiving feedback and limited flexibility in curriculum design. Institutions tend to rate quality of online courses on retention rates, student progress, employability of graduates, and rating of teachers in a questionnaire at the end of the courses (Zhao, 2003). The students' complaints about quality are not necessarily equivalent to institutions' criteria, and Zhao (2003) concludes with a call for a holistic approach to evaluating the quality of online courses and programs. The students and instructors are looking more towards culturally descriptive characteristics to identify quality (Arbaugh, 2001) found that certain virtual immediacy behaviors such as instructors' use of personal examples, humor, openness toward students, encouragement of students and their ideas, discussions, feedback from instructors and other students. Arbaugh (2001) explained the process of developing culture in a virtual classroom as represented in the FIGURE 2.2 below.

FIGURE 2.2. PROCESS OF DEVELOPING CULTURE IN AN ONLINE CLASSROOM.



Considering the culture in online courses, and the fact that culture is developed by communications and directions from the instructors or authorities in the class, we must also consider the learners of today as members of a digital society; they are more than capable and willing to approach an online course as a group endeavor with communications and collaboration going from students to students as well as from student to instructors (Hansford & Aldington, 2008).

In a comprehensive study reporting 73 courses offered at State University of New York Learning Networks, Swan (2002) identified 22 course design factors that correlated the "social development of learning communities through online discussion" (p. 23) The three factors that were significantly related to students' perceptions of success of their online courses were course design feedback and contact from course instructors and

active discussion among course participants. The findings of this study support the importance of interaction for successful and effective online learning.

The interaction necessary to promote the building of online culture was also identified in terms of "interaction with content, interaction with instructors, and interaction among students" (Swan, 2002, pp. 24-26). Interaction with content results listed then concepts found to be supportive in web-based instruction. Interaction with instructors was positive in that the computer-mediated communication promoted a greater social presence and could project identities into building online communities. Interaction among students was perceived as more equitable and democratic than traditional classroom in that it gave participants the opportunity to reflect on classmates' discussion postings before making their own, posted contributions.

Explaining Culture in Online Courses

Conceptual Framework

Studying school culture is a common and accepted practice in education today. Schools, classrooms, school groups have been used as settings for many studies about the cultures existent within those environments. With the infusion of online courses and online programs into all areas of education, it was only a matter of time before the cybercultures also became a focal point for anthropological studies. As an advocate for cyberculture studies in all environments, Steve Jones (2006) applies the admonition communication theorist L. Grossberg (1993) to allow our sense of history and politics to inform our own work in cultural studies. The Internet is now a fundamental element in life everywhere (Baym, 2006) and is inextricably woven into the educational culture of online courses. Using Mary Douglas's typology of grid and group may be new to

cyberculture research, but her culture theory has practical influence of many other disciplines and environments, therefore extending it to online environments is acceptable.

Anthropologists as well as other researchers have elaborated on Mary Douglas's typology of grid and group to classify a number of cultures. Her cultural theory has been applied in cultures such as environmentalism (Douglas & Wildavsky), values in European countries (Grendstad, 1990), technology policy (Schwarz & Thompson), school administration (Harris, 1995), religious communities (Hood, 1996; Lingenfelter, 1996), high technology firms (Caulkins, 1997), work cultures (Mars, 1982). Doctoral students have applied grid and group theory to studies in instructional technology (Stansberry, 2001), assumptions among professors and international students (Kautz, 2008), rural schools (Diel, 1998) and teacher culture (Purvis, 1998). This culture theory could be applied to effectively classify the culture that exists within online courses.

Mary Douglas' (1982) theory would specifically address the grid dimension of behavior – how students behave within this online course. It would also address the group dimension of identity – how students perceive their position within this online course. By classifying course culture in online classes, I plan to analyze the importance and the existence of student engagement as it relates to the development of online course culture. In the broad context of an entire university experience student engagement does occur, but it also occurs within the scope of single courses, and online courses can be part of that engagement process (Coats, James & Baldwin, 2005). Positive online course culture may be the result of individual or collective variables. Gender, age, technological proficiency, quantity of interactions, quality of interactions, and engagement of both students and teachers all contribute to the creation of online course culture (Palloff &

Pratt, 2003; 2005). The grid and group matrix will classify the variables to yield and analysis.

As a social anthropologist, Mary Douglas (1982) created a conceptual framework that has been successfully adopted by qualitative researchers in education to study the cultural and conceptual intersections in educational practice (Harris, 2005). This study of analyzing course culture in online courses and the factors that promote learning in such a culture works well with Mary Douglas' grid and group typology because the framework identifies individual characteristics of online learners within the group context of a specific environment – in this case, an online course. In the grid and group conceptual framework, Douglas (1982) argues that identifying the position of individuals within a group and the experience those individuals have within the group can influence the perceptions of the participants within the group being studied. By understanding the culture of particular online classes, instructional designers, course instructors and students can improve (Harris, 2005) their online courses or understand the characteristics of their successful online course experiences.

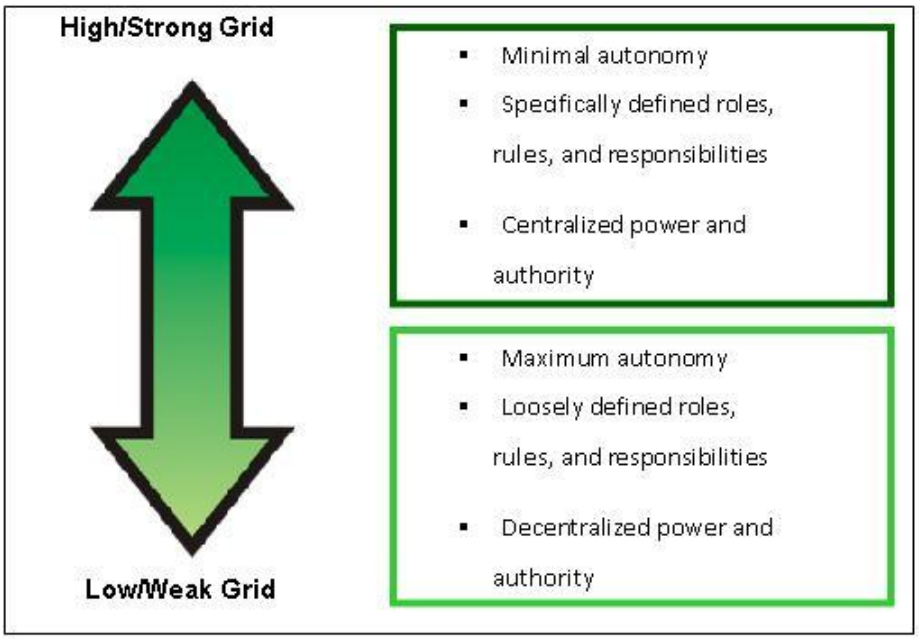
Grid Dimension

The grid dimension of grid and group describes the position of an individual based on choices of the individual as well as the rules and expectations the organization may leverage onto the individual. The high end of the grid continuum is where individuals are controlled by rules and strict guidelines. Individuals located in the high grid portion of the continuum would not interact with other individuals and would operate under the strictest of requirements and obligations. Their individual behavior would be based only on what they perceived they were supposed to do for themselves; it

would not include any flexibility or experimentation (Douglas, 1982). The behavior of individuals in high grid is controlled by organizational rules (Harris, 1995). In high grid environments within a school setting, individual teachers have little flexibility in their curriculum or activities – the teachers are controlled from the positions above them that administer rules and requirements (Harris, 2005).

The lowest end of the grid continuum is where the individual is not encumbered or responsible to specific rules. Individuals in this area have "more autonomy and higher degrees of personal freedom" (Stansberry, 2001). Douglas (1982) described the low end of the grid as a place where individuals the members of their groups. FIGURE 2.3 (Harris, 2005, p. 37) illustrates the characteristics of the grid continuum reflective of school culture.

FIGURE 2.3. THE GRID DIMINSION OF SCHOOL CULTURE



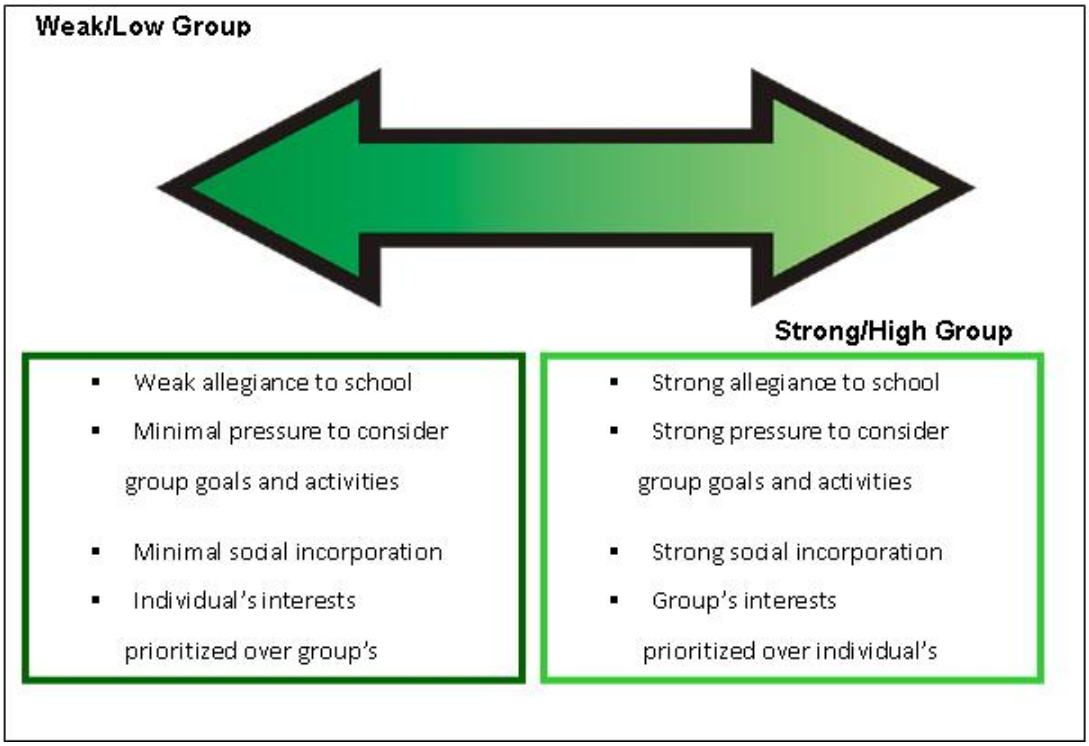
GroupDimension

The group dimension "represents the degree to which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the larger social unit" (Harris, 2005, p. 36) and is reflected as the vertical continuum high to low or strong to weak of Douglas' (1982) typology. The "group variable indicates individuals' interactions to expose the extent to which they are willing to devote effort and energy to creating or maintaining a group synergy" (Stansberry, 2001, p. 49). As the group dimension moves toward the stronger end of the continuum, members are more accountable and responsible as role players in their group (Stansberry, 2001). Stronger groups are more helpful to each other and more committed to working together to accomplish their goals. In extremely strong group relationships, the survival of the entire group and all of its members is critically important (Douglas, 1982; Harris, 2005; Stansberry, 2001). Other

examples of strong group include monasteries, communes, schools with deep, time-honored traditions, and communities with active cultural centers (Harris, 2005).

In low group, an individual may be aware of the group rules and expectations but makes no choice to fulfill those expectations. Low or weak group examples could include groups with short-term activities or commitments (Harris, 2005) such as an accreditation committee or a board of governors whose membership changes regularly. A school culture with low group would lack strong tradition or have a fluctuating faculty or staff, or exist as an institution with few common goals and more individual ambition (Harris, 2005). FIGURE 2.4 (Harris, 2005, p.39) illustrates the characteristics of the group continuum reflective of school culture.

FIGURE 2.4. THE GROUP DIMENSION OF SCHOOL CULTURE



On the high end of the group dimension, the success of the entire group is critical to the group – more so than the success of only individual members. High group has specific requirements for membership into the group and rejects the intrusion of outsiders (Stansberry, 2001). High group requires a serious commitment to the success of the group as a whole and all members are expected to act in ways that promote the best interest of the group (Gross & Rayner, 1985). Low group experience allows for individual interests and those individual interests and commitment to the group may vary as the individuals' interests vary. Low group does not provide encouragement for the individual, and the individual is not committed to the group beyond individual preferences.

A visualization of Mary Douglas' typology of grid and group is depicted in Figure 2.4 below. The description of each quadrant in the grid and group matrix is also detailed below (Douglas, 1982; Harris, 2005; Stansberry, 2001).

Collectivist: The lower right quadrant, strong group, weak grid

- Individuals base their identity on their participation within the group.
- Individuals do compete for status, but their actions are strongly influenced by the group and performed to please the group.
- The continuance of group goals and tradition is critical and valued.

Corporate: The upper right quadrant, strong group, strong grid

- Individuals base their identity on their participation within the group.
- Individuals perceive support and encouragement from their group
- The hierarchy system is understood by the members of the group in that they know that their success also causes the success of the group.

- The survival of the group and the maintenance of tradition are very important to all members of the group.

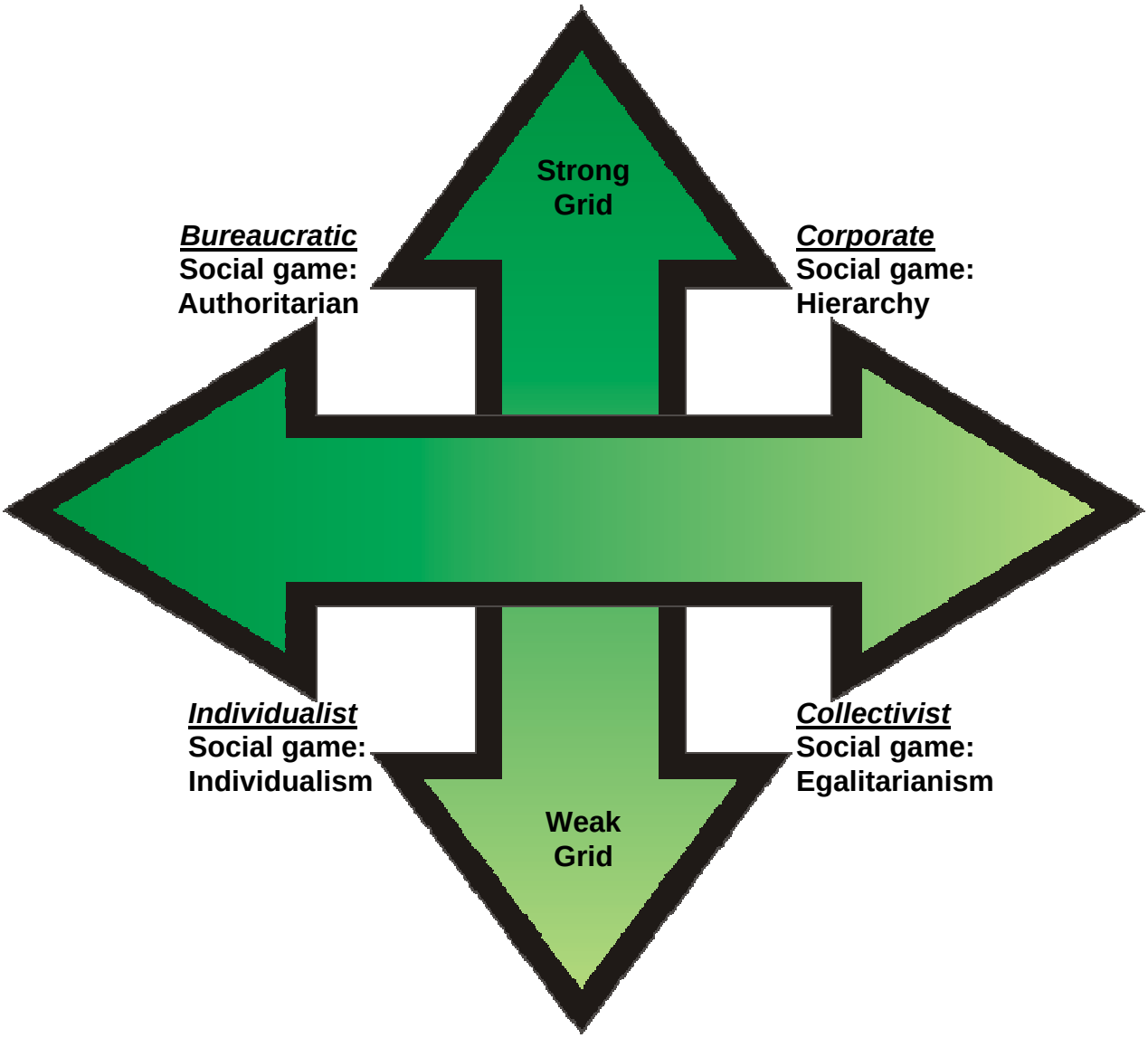
Bureaucratic: The Upper left quadrant, high grid, low group

- The individual is very limited in personal decisions and activities.
- Personal autonomy is minimal
- Individual behavior is based upon the assigned role and fulfillment of that role.
- Group survival and the influence of the group are minimal or non-existent
- Status is based on hierarchy classified by race, gender, family heritage, or ancestry

Individualist: The lower left quadrant, low grid, low group

- The individual is not constrained by the group, rules or traditions.
- Status and rewards for the individual are competitive; the individual can accomplish great things or fail miserably without affecting the group
- Connection with or survival of the group is not important

As organizations or individuals are identified with particular quadrants or grid and group characteristics, extremes or outliers may exist. The location of the greatest number of individuals within a particular quadrant of the matrix will identify the overall characteristics of the course culture being studied. FIGURE 2.5 (Harris, 2005, p. 41) represents all four quadrants and identifies the major characteristic of each.



Moore (1990) posits that the success of distance education is based on the content of the dialog between teacher and student, and the effectiveness of the communication system in such an educational process. Using the data from his study in an a posteriori approach, Moore's data could have been classified using the grid and group typology to classify individual communications of students or teachers on the grid continuum of the

framework, and then classified the collaborative communications on the group continuum of the framework. Classifying the results of all the participants would yield a result of the general course culture within the context of the courses Moore examined (1990).

Summary

The first phase of online courses attempted to simply duplicate onland classes and methods in an online environment. Diaz and Cartnal (2000) found that many instructors and course developers believed that the same teaching styles and methods from their onland classes would work just as well in their online classes. Students were, in fact, dissatisfied with authoritative, teacher-focused online instruction and were more willing to communicate openly in the "facilitative, problem solving-based instructional approaches" (Quitadamo & Brown, 2001, p. 2).

Positive online course culture may be the result of individual or collective variables. Gender, age, technological proficiency, quantity of interactions, quality of interactions, and engagement of both students and teachers all contribute to the creation of online course culture (Palloff & Pratt, 2003; 2005). A study of undergraduate online psychology courses indicated a difference of achievement based on the discussions within the course. Students who did not read or use the online discussions at all scored slightly higher than the students who used online discussions passively – just to read. Students who not only read the discussions but participated in them scored the highest of all on achievement (Hoskins & vanHoof, 2005). Students have also been found to be successful based on their own, self-regulatory behaviors within an online course (Barnard, Paton, & Lan, 2008). Self-regulatory behavior makes a significant impact on communication, collaboration and academic achievement and perceived success may

depend on the realization of the significance of these communications by those in education who are skeptical. Online courses may not be the cure all for education in the 21st century as some might have hoped; a progressive, learner-centered pedagogy will still have to be used regardless of the course delivery method.

The literature reviewed for this study identifies an evolutionary history of online courses from correspondence courses and their established position in higher education. The literature also identifies the results of current studies that suggest that online courses may have a positive course culture in some instances and a negative or indifferent course culture in other instances. Student engagement and achievement within an online course varies from course to course and success is not guaranteed simply because community systems reside in an LMS. Research does consistently reveal the necessity of communications within online courses to promote the student engagement that leads to positive online course culture. Understanding the culture of online courses by way of analyzing the practices associated with Internet use can help social scientists and educators "expand the scope of our knowledge and our questioning" (Silver & Massanari, 2006).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the methodological approach and the procedures used to collect and analyze data for the study. First, this chapter explains basic features of naturalistic inquiry. The researcher then details the methodological approach to this study. Data collection procedures described include the questionnaire, interviews, observations, and documents; Data analysis presents techniques such as prolonged engagement and a reflexive journal used to explain the data. The criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry and how those criteria are met is explained. The chapter will conclude with a section on researcher reflexivity to position her involvement in this topic and study.

Naturalistic inquiry is characterized by its emergent design, and outcomes are influenced by multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Naturalistic inquiry was utilized because of its exploratory potential in understanding and explaining emerging themes. The advantages of using this approach for this study is the construction of realities (Erlandson et al., 1993) made possible by the analysis of data that is collected in the context of the case being studied. In naturalistic inquiry, case study is the preferred reporting mode because it can capture the individual responses and perceptions among participants and variations from one program or course to another (Erlandson, et al.,

1994). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain the advantages of qualitative research, and they apply to this study:

- Qualitative research builds on tacit knowledge by presenting holistic and lifelike descriptions that allow the reader to experience the context vicariously.
- Qualitative research allows for the demonstration of the interplay between researcher and participants
- Qualitative research provides the "thick description" necessary for judgments of transferability between the sending and receiving contexts.
- Qualitative research provides the grounded assessment of context by communicating contextual information that is grounded in the particular setting being studied.

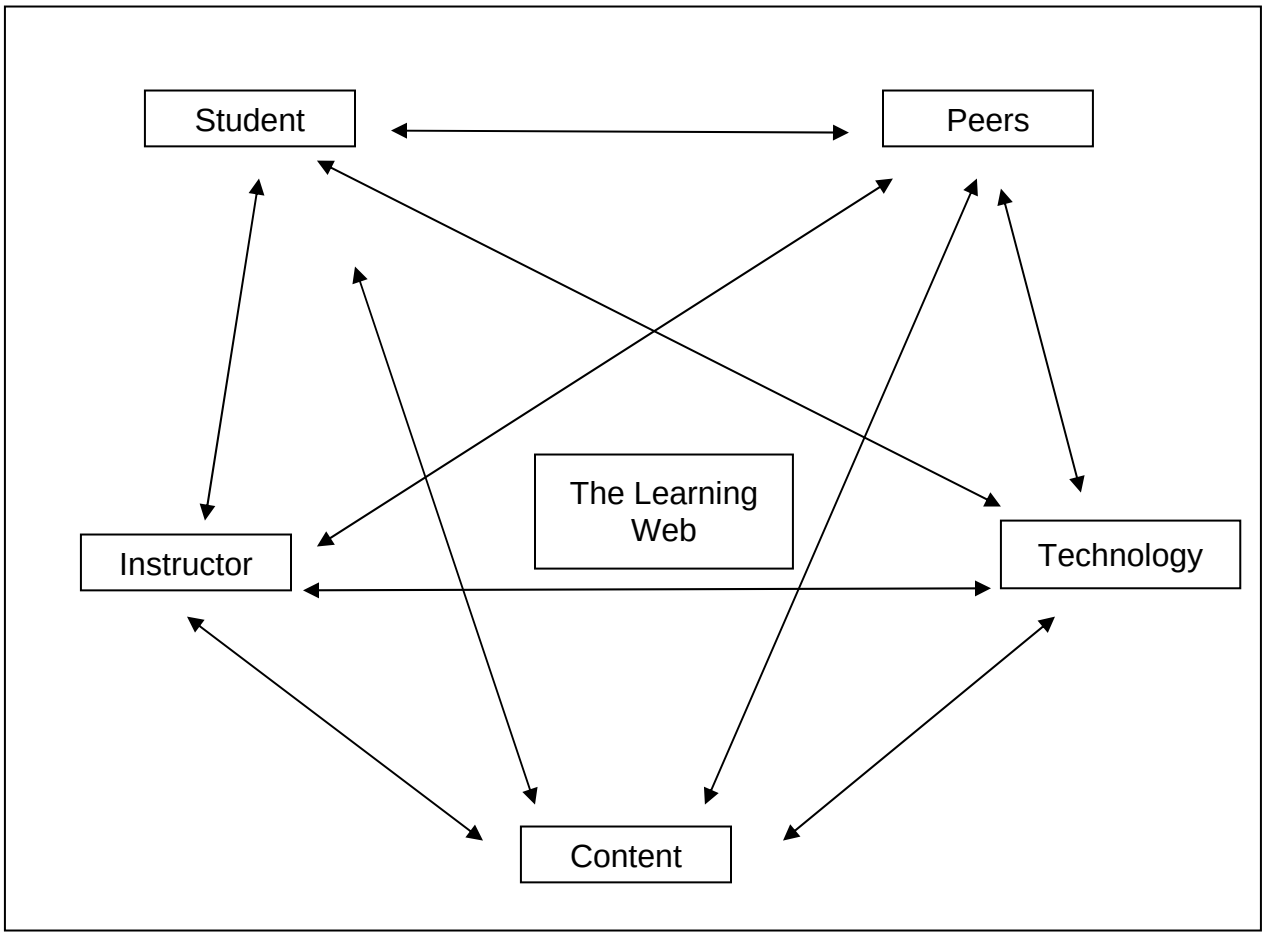
Complementary Axioms: Naturalistic Inquiry and Successful Online Instruction

The factors of contextual meaning, the investigator's construction of design, the interaction between investigator and the context and the dynamic shaping of data "underscore the indeterminacy under which the naturalistic inquirer functions; the design must therefore be 'played by ear'; it must unfold, cascade, roll, emerge" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 208-209). Since the design of naturalistic inquiry emerges throughout the research process, this paradigm is complementary to the process online students experience as they collaborate in their courses and construct meaning. Considering each of the axioms that Lincoln and Guba (1985) cite for both the traditional and the naturalistic paradigms, the context of online courses aligns well with the naturalistic

paradigm. For instance, regarding the naturalistic paradigm, reality is multiple, holistic, and constructed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Likewise, online courses are often characterized as environments where the communications are "many to many" (Bender, 2003, p. 157), and reality is likened to a place where "collaboration is the clay that allows constructed learning to occur" (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004, p.5).

In best online practices, the instructor works as a facilitator and is a participant-learner along with the students (Palloff & Pratt, 1999). Like the successful instructor in online instruction, the naturalistic researcher is closely connected to the participants he/she is researching (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The interaction and learning within an online course is recursive and develops like a web rather than in a linear fashion. Palloff and Pratt (1999) illustrate this "simultaneous shaping" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in FIGURE 3.1 from *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace* (p. 132). Every participant in the environment connects and interacts with each other to create an online place where learning is constructed.

FIGURE 3.1 THE LEARNING WEB



The complementing ontological and epistemological assumptions of naturalistic inquiry and virtual settings, as well as the methods and design of naturalistic inquiry are exceptionally suitable for this study. Again, the ontological assumption of naturalistic inquiry is that realties are multiple, constructed, and holistic. One approach to conceptualizing online environments is that they are also often multiple, constructed, and holistic. For example, prolonged engagement in the asynchronous environment provides the time and the repetition necessary to study the culture of that environment. In terms of understanding virtual environments, spatial location remains inherently ambiguous until the observer's intent, or method of inquiry defines the perimeters of time and space.

Data Collection Procedures

In this study, data were collected and analyzed primarily from four sources: a grid and group questionnaire, interviews, observations, and documents. Each of these data sources are explained below. A small, private liberal arts university in the Midwest was selected because the institution was operating a fledging online program of undergraduate, general education courses for the third consecutive summer; online courses Liberal Arts University are offered primarily in the summer session. It was a convenience sample. The instructors did not have the additional responsibilities of classroom teaching during their session of teaching online, and the researcher had familiarity with the Moodle LMS that the participant instructors would be using. Students were included in the study to compare and contrast their perceptions of community and culture to the perceptions of their instructors. Of the six instructors invited to participate in the study, five accepted the invitation; four were selected for the final study based on the fact that those four courses were developed and taught by the instructors and included interactions using discussion forums. Of the 40+ students invited to participate, eight completed the survey and four agreed to be interviewed.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire (APPENDIX B) for this study included 16 items and a place for a comment or response following the final question. Following Institutional Review Board approval, four faculty members were contacted to request participation in this study. Participants volunteered further for other parts of the study. Faculty participants were informed that the questionnaire would be about a recently completed online course. All aspects of participation were voluntary, and four faculty members elected to

participate. They were given hyperlinks/URL addresses to the online and web based questionnaire via an email response from the researcher.

The first, informal emails identifying interest in participation began in July 2009. In late September of 2009, the researcher made telephone contact to verify participants' interest, to begin the questionnaire, and to schedule the interview. Emails then went out the each of the students enrolled in the online classes. These emails requested students to to respond to the questionnaire. The questionnaires were available online October 27, 2009, and faculty and students completed the questionnaire by November 5, 2009.

All participants took the survey by clicking on a link embedded in the email requesting their participation. The final section of the questionnaire included space for any additional response the participants wanted to make. There were also fields where the participants could indicate their willingness to be interviewed and provide contact information. Of the 45 students invited to participate, 14 completed the questionnaire and ten volunteered for interviews. The data from the questionnaires were collected electronically and saved for coding.

Interviews

The questionnaires presented to participating faculty and students yielded valuable data, and the interviews that followed added another layer of information and depth. The purpose of interviewing is to find out what cannot be discovered from observation (Patton, 2002), and the data collected did reveal depth and intensity of responses that could not be completely captured in the limited range of options on electronic surveys. All four instructors were interviewed; four of the students who had completed the survey and indicated a willingness to be interviewed were interviewed as

well. The interview questions (APPENDIX C) were slightly different for faculty and students. All participants were volunteers and were given pseudonyms. The institutions and any related data were coded in such a way to preserve anonymity. Each interview was recorded using Garage Band, digital audio recording software, on a MacBook laptop computer and then transcribed into a rich text document that could be coded by hand onto note cards or imported to an open source, qualitative research software program.

The interviews with each of the instructors occurred in their offices on the campus of Liberal Arts University. Three of the interviews were scheduled in the late afternoon, at the end of the school day, and one interview was scheduled at 10 o'clock in the morning on a Tuesday. The afternoon interviews were more relaxed in tone for both parties involved and lasted about an hour each; the instructors for these three courses were also males. These three interviewees closed their office doors and gave the researcher their undivided attention. In a morning interview with the fourth instructor in the study was unique; she used as many words as the men but spoke very quickly. Her interest faded after about thirty minutes, and she was distracted during the interview with activity in the hallway, noticeable because of her open office door. Her interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The researcher had sent the interview questions and a reminder the day before the interviews, but none of the instructors had reviewed the questions. They displayed positive attitudes about the interview process as well as about their involvement in teaching online courses for LAU.

The four students interviewed were all females, and each interview was different. The first one was at a coffee shop and took an hour and a half to complete. The student had completed two of the online courses used in this study and she commented at length

on each of them. She was a very serious student, and her intensity and interest in the interview was apparent as she clarified answers and backtracked to confirm my understanding. The second student interviewed was in a hurry and wanted to do the interview after her night class. The interview took place in the break room at her classroom building and the entire interview lasted fifteen minutes. She was all smiles and decisive. The third interview was a telephone interview because the student was on the west coast and that was her preferred interview option. She had a supportive frame of mind as she answered the questions and was hesitant to answer on some of the questions because she was concerned that the information might not be what the researcher wanted to hear. She was assured that there were no wrong or bad answers, and the interview continued for thirty minutes. She wanted to keep talking after we were done, and she asked about the researcher's family and the holidays. The last interview was an email interview, and it was the only way the student could respond because she was playing soccer at the national tournament in Atlanta, Georgia and late night email responses were her preferred method of communication. This type of interview was more difficult to read the intricacies of responses because there was no audible tone or body language. All of her responses to the questions were concise and very positive.

The interview questions were different for the instructors and students. Instructors were asked six questions, and students were asked seven questions. The instructor questions were more direct about their opinions and objectives for establishing community within their online courses. In each of the interviews there were moments where the exchanges strayed from the topic, but only briefly. Question three, "What methods/activities do you use to promote learning?" was difficult for them to answer, and

the researcher re-directed verbally and would say, “to promote accomplishment” or “to promote communication.” The other questions worked well.

The students’ questions were less direct in questions about communication as the researcher tried to ask questions in such a way that their answers would provide communication information. Questions three and four were both about learning, and four seemed repetitive in that after the third question the two live interviewees appeared confused as if question four were the same as question three. There were no complaints and even though there was one more question than the instructors, the students answered much more quickly.

Observation

According to Patton (2002), observations as data collection techniques include “fieldwork descriptions of activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community practices, or any other aspect of observable human experience” (p. 4). The asynchronous nature of the courses in this study was critical in the observation practices. The researcher observed the online courses as a virtual, asynchronous classroom after all course activities were completed. A synchronous situation—a classroom—is where all the members of a class are in the same classroom at the same time, hearing all of the same information and listening to the same instructor. An asynchronous situation—an online class—the instructor and the students may have perimeters of time but involvement in the course happens virtually and over a longer period of time. For example, an onland course may meet for two hours and forty minutes per week while an online class is ‘in session’ twenty-four hours a day for a week. Students enter the virtual classroom to review materials and post discussions at any time

during that class session. This asynchronous meeting is convenient and flexible, but it can also be less effective if participation is low or procrastinated.

In this study, these types of observations were documented in field notes and thick descriptions. The participants had shared information throughout a six-week summer course, and the interface of their LMS and their online course was their only connection to the instructor and each other. Creswell (2002) suggests that technology offers a creative, visual method of observation that can appeal to the researcher and the participants as a convenient and effective way to collect data. Due to the nature of the topic of this study--online course culture and community--observation of faculty and students occurred in a virtual classroom that could be observed asynchronously. Instead of observing a traditional, face-to-face classroom of students and an instructor, the researcher focused on the discussion forums where online class participants exchanged information and responded to each other's posts, as well as audio recordings and videos that were the elements in this virtual environment. One disadvantage of observing an online classroom is that it was impossible to interpret nonverbal cues from the information provided on the computer screen. Also, access to online courses and to instructor or student views was initially complicated to obtain.

To observe an online class, this researcher had to view the courses and all activities through the Learning Management System (LMS) the institution subscribed to. Asynchronous activities that were observed and included online discussions, the course gradebook, written lectures, podcasts and audio files, submitted assignments and course documents. Synchronous activities that were available to be used by instructors included live chat sessions, office hours, and final presentations. These synchronous activities

could have been recorded digitally and made available for observation by the researcher, asynchronously, but none of the instructors used these types of activities.

Observation of the participants during the interviews was also a data source for this study. Participants' physical reactions, facial expressions and overall interest in the topic were observed and recorded in the field notes. Prior to the observations of the courses, the researcher obtained access to the courses from the LMS director at the institution. Observations of course occurred asynchronously with the researcher viewing the course and course records after the course was completed. Not all of the course records were available to the researcher because of an error on the part of the LMS director. When the director copied the courses, the report logs—times and durations of participant logins—were not included in the archived data. All electronic communications in discussion forums were copied electronically, stored in secure network storage, and preserved for use in this study. Field notes were taken during the time spent viewing the online courses and the notes were completed, coded by hand, analyzed and imported into the case study report.

Document Collection

Documents used as data and collected for research include any written materials, records, correspondence, publications, reports, diaries, letters, artwork, memorabilia, and written responses to open-ended surveys (Patton, 2002). Other possibilities included artifacts, photos, publicity materials, files, letters, notes, and sentimental objects. For the purposes of this study, the documents first studied were course websites located on the LMS or institutional website associated with each course. Each course website was analyzed in is virtual location in LAU's Moodle LMS. Documents were defined as non-

interactive texts and materials; the documents associated with each online course that were non-interactive in nature were syllabi, podcasts, assignments, videos and content hyperlinks. Additional documents considered were resources such as web links to personality inventories, quizzes and tests that were interactive and classified as observable data. Other documents considered in this study were the instructional and introductory materials that were delivered to students at the beginning of their courses via mail or email. Historical data such as enrollment figures, assignment grades and final course grades were collected as well. The researcher chose to use these documents because they were the documents included in the course and part of what the students encountered as they proceeded through course work. Through these document encounters they understood their responsibilities as well as the course content and began to understand or participate in the course culture.

Data Analysis

The interview data was transcribed, coded and combined with data from the questionnaires, observations and documents to be analyzed throughout the entire process. The data accumulated and all results were combined into various reports and organized in electronic files and stored on the primary server and a backup drive. An open source, qualitative software product, Weft QDA, was originally considered as a way to code all of the rich text document files, but using color coding and note cards proved more meaningful. Data was color coded and categorized according to the categories that emerged. The transcription documents were also color coded into categories that emerged from analysis such as access, community, and culture. The color coding was useful and assisted in organizing such a large amount of data in the presentation of cases. Decisions

for coding were based on the categories used in Mary Douglas' (1982) Grid and Group Typology, and because the purpose of this study was to apply grid and group to the cases selected, the analytical approach was deductive. Reports of data analysis, coding information, field notes, and thick descriptions were stored in electronic files and backed up as well. Part of the field notes and the researcher journal were also kept on http://operationdissertation-stephoni.blogspot.com/. The data from the surveys were tabulated and plotted on the grid and group matrix to identify the classification of the culture for each course. The researcher used these data sources to maintain trustworthiness criteria; the result of each collection was a case study report.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiry is based on the "rigorous methods of a study, the credibility of the researcher, and the philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p.553). Certain criteria must be met for research to be considered trustworthy, and these criteria can be built into a naturalistic study. Guba and Lincoln (1985) have identified the qualities of trustworthiness as credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability. Also, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the credibility criterion is the most important aspect of establishing trustworthiness for the reader or stakeholder of a study. Table 3.2 (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as cited in Erlandson et al., (1993) provides a summary of the techniques that establish trustworthiness.

Table 3.2 THE SUMMARY OF TECHNIQUES FOR ESTABLISHING TRUSTWORTHINESS

Technique	Results	Examples
Prolonged Engagement	Build trust Develop rapport Build relationships Obtain wide scope of data Obtain accurate data	Length of time in the field Avoid premature closing
Persistent Observation	Obtain in-depth data Obtain accurate data Sort relevancies from irrelevancies Recognize deceits	Purposeful, assertive investigation
Triangulation	Verify data	Using different or multiple sources (interview notes, videotapes, photos, and documents), methods, or investigations Absence of data
Referential Adequacy	Provide a "slice of life"	Unobtrusive measures such as brochures, catalogs, yearbooks, photos, memos, etc.
Peer Debriefing	Test working hypothesis	Formal or informal discussions with a peer
Member Checking	Test categories, interpretations or conclusion (constructions)	Continuous, formal or informal checking of data with stakeholders such as at the end of an interview, review of written passages, or the final report in draft form
Reflexive Journal	Document researcher	Daily or weekly

Technique	Results	Examples
	decisions	written diary
Thick Description	Provide data base for transferability judgment Provide a vicarious experience for the reader	Descriptive, relevant data
Purposive Sampling	Generate data for emergent design and emerging hypothesis	Maximum variation sampling that provides the broadest range of information based on relevance
Audit Trail	Allow auditor to document trustworthiness of study	Interview guides, notes, documents, note cards, peer debriefing notes, journal, etc.

The researcher used the techniques for establishing trustworthiness (Erlandson, et al. 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 1985) throughout this study. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation were straightforward and convenient, as they could occur in a virtual, asynchronous environment. As digitally preserved events, the researcher could observe all aspects of the course from the time IRB approval came through until reporting was complete. I used triangulation of data--interviews, surveys and observation of course documents—to verify trustworthiness. Course documents such as downloadable PDFs, hyperlinks and template blocks provided referential adequacy, as did the discussion forums present in each online course. Member checking on data collected from the interviews was managed throughout the data collection, analysis and reporting process by telephone calls or emails to participants for additional information or clarification. The audit trail was available in the form of descriptions to those approved within the

perimeters of the study requirements. Finally, particularly positive and satisfying techniques of trustworthiness were member checking with advisors who were committed to this topic and the reflexive journal or blog that was maintained throughout the study. Disconfirming evidence was sought and found in a few of the responses of a student who completed the survey. The effect was minimized as the responses were calculated using the grid and group analysis tool, posted in the matrix, and averaged in with the other responses.

Researcher Perspective

Contemporary qualitative methodology (Patton, 2002) demands researcher reflexivity on multiple aspects of the research process. In terms of researcher perspective on the phenomenon of online learning, I was involved in education before there was a computer on most campuses, and in these twenty seven years my teaching practice and philosophy have been greatly influenced by the National Writing Project and the Internet. Following my first year of public high school teaching (1983 – 1984) I participated in the Oklahoma Writing Project (OWP), which transformed my writing pedagogy and provided me with the tools and inspiration to teach using a learner-centered approach. Since I had so little theoretical influence and study in my undergraduate work, and since my OWP experience was overwhelmingly positive, I was naïve regarding the uniqueness of the pedagogy I embraced and applied to my teaching. It was not until years later when I read of educational theorists insisting on reforming the dominant instructor-centered pedagogical paradigm in the 21st century that I realized I was one who had already made that shift.

For the Internet to have influenced me as a practitioner and as a researcher, first computers had to become a part of educational environments. Within the first seven years of my teaching, not only did all schools have at least one computer, but every classroom had a least one computer and most schools had a computer lab. Inside and outside of education, the influence of the Internet grew at exponential rates. The inclusion of the Internet into the classroom, instructor computers and projectors, Smart Boards, and Learning Management Systems all tumbled into the classrooms very quickly.

Within my personal teaching experience, I welcomed computers in the classroom as fast as I could get them. In teaching composition using a process pedagogy, word processors made a positive impact on students, and they appreciated every opportunity to use computers. Within a few years, students began to participate in online activities such as blogs, wikis, LMS and other websites. By 2003, using Microsoft Word to generate all types of submitted assignments was the classroom norm, and the university where I was employed adopted Blackboard as a Learning Management System (LMS). I embraced the idea of an LMS as a convenient repository for class materials, instructions, and grade management.

When I began graduate work in January of 2003, I was accepted as a Technical Writing Ph.D. candidate in the English Department. Ironically, while my first course did not use an LMS, we studied aspects of online documentation and completed a major project using the principles and convenience of the Internet.

Alongside my professional experiences, institutions world-wide were developing and offering online courses and programs at an incredible rate. Through the combination of my full-time work at a small, liberal arts university and my graduate studies in

technical writing, I began to develop online courses for that university in the areas of composition and technical communication. Now, my professional activities and graduate studies have focused on the theories surrounding successful use of online pedagogy. I have been directly involved and observant of both successful and unsuccessful attempts at building online communities and have formulated opinions regarding best practices that are part of high quality online education.

As I have pursued this study, I was interested to know the cultural characteristics of various online courses. I believe that my involvement as both an online course instructor and researcher of this specific educational culture provides an advantageous insider perspective to this body of research as well as necessitate diligent reflexivity (Patton, 2002) as the primary instrument of inquiry. As a researcher, I must work to separate my own experiences and philosophies from the practices I have observed and utilize, as Patton (2002) suggests, my experience in this field of inquiry to strengthen analysis. My hope is to create awareness of the potential for a positive culture in online courses to improve teaching and learning in that venue.

After explaining the reasons for choosing the case study as the reporting mode in this qualitative research project, I described procedures used to collect and analyze data. The data were collected and analyzed from four sources: questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documents. The data analysis was conducted using prolonged engagement, triangulation, referential adequacy materials and peer debriefing techniques for establishing trustworthiness (Erlandson, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Summary

In this chapter I explained the methods used to classify the culture in four online classes that occurred during the summer session of 2009. All four courses occurred at the same small, liberal arts institution at a university in the Midwestern portion of the United States. To gather the data for this study, I observed the online classes in their virtual environments, interviewed the course instructors and one student from each course in the study. Volunteers—students and instructors—completed a survey using the grid and group tool developed for this purpose (See APPENDIX B.) The data results from the questionnaire were entered into the grid and group matrix. This data was combined with the data from the interviews and observations and coded for analysis in the explanation. I used Douglas' (1982) typology of grid and group to explain distinctive patterns of student engagement, communication, and community within various online courses. Naturalistic inquiry was a viable means to examine these ideas about interactions, communities and learning centered activity. This qualitative study provided the narrative portraits of four online courses to illuminate the significant patterns of student engagement, communication, and community and their relationship to course culture which could reinforce the importance and influence of technology and online education in the 21st century.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF CASES

The Internet provides a venue for any institution, corporation or individual to deliver any type of service around the globe. Educational institutions are now using the Internet to offer online courses and complete degree programs to students at all levels, with higher education operating as the most significant player in this exploding venue of academic and financial opportunity. Institutions are developing online courses and many course designers and course instructors recognize the need for creating not only the virtual structure of a course, but they also see a need to create a positive culture and community within the course. The development of a positive culture of communication and engagement is not a given, and it may or may not occur in online courses. The purpose of this study is to use Douglas' (1982) Typology of Grid and Group to explain distinctive patterns of student engagement, communication and community within various online courses. Examining online courses during the summer of 2009 at a small, liberal arts institution will allow us to identify the characteristics of the cultures of those courses and then to explain which of those characteristics reflect a successful course in terms of communication and engagement.

Description

Colleges and universities offer their online courses through a Learning Management System (LMS), proprietary or open source. *PC Magazine* (2010) defines an LMS as an "information system that administers instructor-led and e-learning courses and keeps track of student progress." For instructors and course designers, an LMS is the multifaceted tool used to organize courses, and it contains all of the elements involved in an online course, such as lectures, discussions, communications, grades, assignments, tests etc.

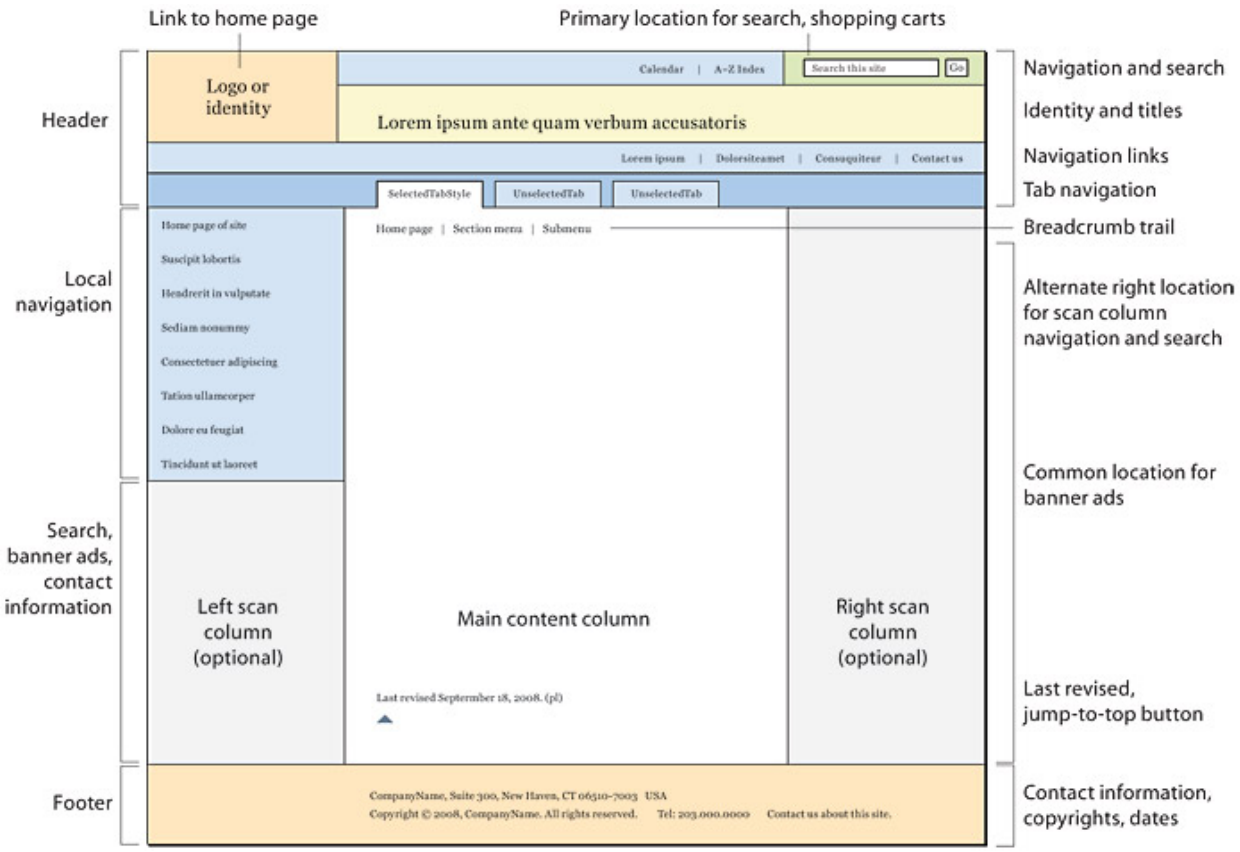
Moodle is an open source Learning Management System (LMS) that can be used for thousands of students in a university or twenty-five students in a single elementary school classroom. The platform may be used for complete online courses, or it may function as a technological tool in face-to-face contexts. Based on a social constructionist tradition as interpreted by Moodle creator Martin Dougiamas, Moodle offers many "activity modules (such as forums, databases and wikis) to build richly collaborative communities of learning around their subject matter" (Moodle). It may also be used as a content delivery system built around a SCORM package or as an assessment too. Users must either download the application to an accessible personal computer or use a web hosting company. "It [Moodle] has become very popular among educators around the world as a tool for creating online dynamic web sites for their students" (Moodle).

Liberal Arts University chose Moodle as its LMS in 2005, when it opted away from the expensive Blackboard LMS product. Moodle is distinguished by its visual appeal and user-friendly characteristics such as a built-in web editing and multiple instructional tutorials. Various templates with themes are available for course designers

to choose from, or developers can customize the appearance for any particular class or program. All websites share common layout characteristics with somewhat predicable variations. In *Web Style Guide* (Lynch & Horton, 2008) a figure depicting a typical web page and its elements illustrates the possibilities that designers have to consider as they structure their websites, as seen in FIGURE 4.1 below.

FIGURE 4.1. MAJOR PAGE ELEMENTS

A canonical page design and major page elements (Lynch & Horton, 2008, p.153)



Following is a description of LAU's specific use of Moodle at the time of data collection. The Moodle course layout chosen by Liberal Arts University includes its own selection of elements. The Moodle logo was located in the header of the site in top left corner. The remaining items in the Moodle header were navigational links available only

for the course designers and teachers and are unavailable to students. Navigation links and tabs that may often be found across the top of a web site, just beneath the header, do not exist on Moodle's course sites; users do not move from page to page by clicking tabs at the top of the site. A breadcrumb trail under the header identifies for the Moodle users where they are in the site – in assignments or resources or discussions, for example. Local navigation is located in both the left scan column and the right scan column of a Moodle course. This navigation is designed as blocks (Moodle terminology), and course designers decide which blocks they want to include in their courses. The main content column runs down the center of the page, and all of the elements are positioned in the main content column of the course. The course designer chooses an organizational structure--weekly, theme or topic--and adjusts the settings accordingly. The top of the main content column has an expandable topic outline box, and beneath that are the expandable boxes that contain the course content per the selected organizational setting.

At LAU, once students enroll in an online course and first open the LMS to begin working, they must have some sense of where to begin and what to do. The rules of the game for an online class may be communicated to the students through an invitational email informing them when to log on and begin course work. Some institutions also send letters using the postal service. An institution's enrollment system usually automatically enrolls students in the LMS version of the online course, and once students open an online course, they must have an indication of how to proceed.

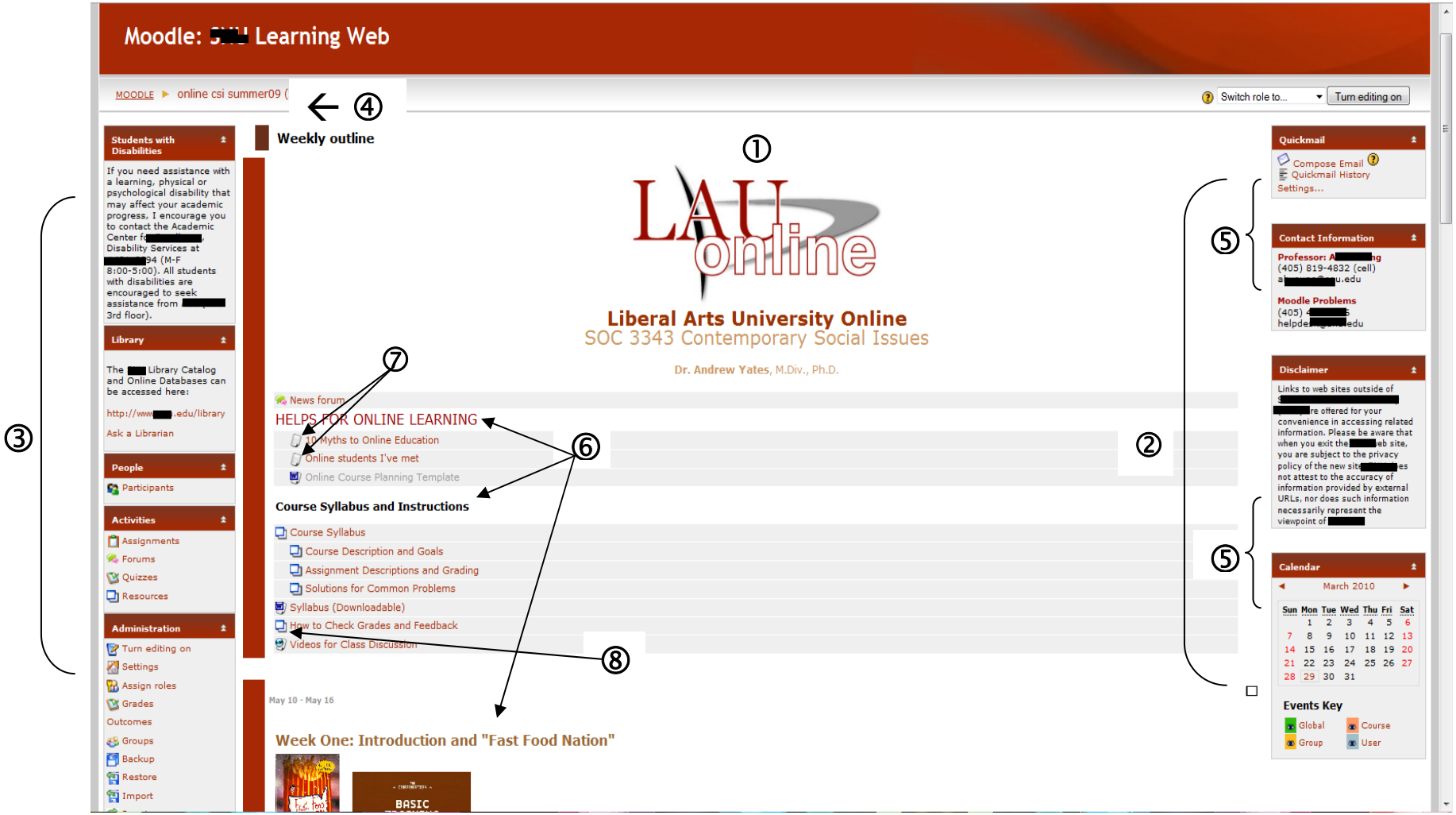
The online program of courses at LAU was newly developed in 2007, and for the summer of 2009 a specially designed template was provided for all instructors. The LAU online course template used red and shades of Bryant and gray as the color scheme.

Within the Moodle design, the template included only the name of Moodle in the header and the breadcrumbing just beneath the header. On either side of the main content column, blocks were provided in the scan columns that allowed for navigation around the site. The template had six blocks in the left scan column: 'Students with Disabilities,' 'Library,' 'People,' 'Activities,' 'Administration,' and 'My Courses.' These blocks contained either informational text or links to other web pages. The right scan column in the template had three navigation blocks: 'Quickmail,' 'Contact Information' and 'Disclaimer.' The 'Quickmail' block had links to the internal email system; the contact block had the name and contact information of the instructor, and the disclaimer block had a brief paragraph that explained that LAU does not sponsor nor endorse all of the websites linked in the course.

The main content column of the course template began with the 'Weekly outline' box at the top of the main content column. The name of the university was in block letters and a bold, dark red font. The name of the course was in a slightly smaller, dark tan font, unbolded. The instructor's name was just beneath the course title and in a 12-point bolded, dark tan font. The program logo followed the instructor's name, and then the syllabus, course and news forums and links to student success sites were provided. To proceed to the first week or first activity of the course, participants did not have to go to another page, they simply scrolled down the main content column. Labels were created to use as headings to organize group of links. When the course window was maximized, the Weekly outline, with both scan columns, took up most of the screen. Scrolling down the main content column, the Week 1 section took up a little more than one screen, with the last few links falling below the fold. FIGURE 4.2 is a screen shot of one of the

courses studied. The organizational elements of the website are labeled, and the figure illustrates the description provided above.

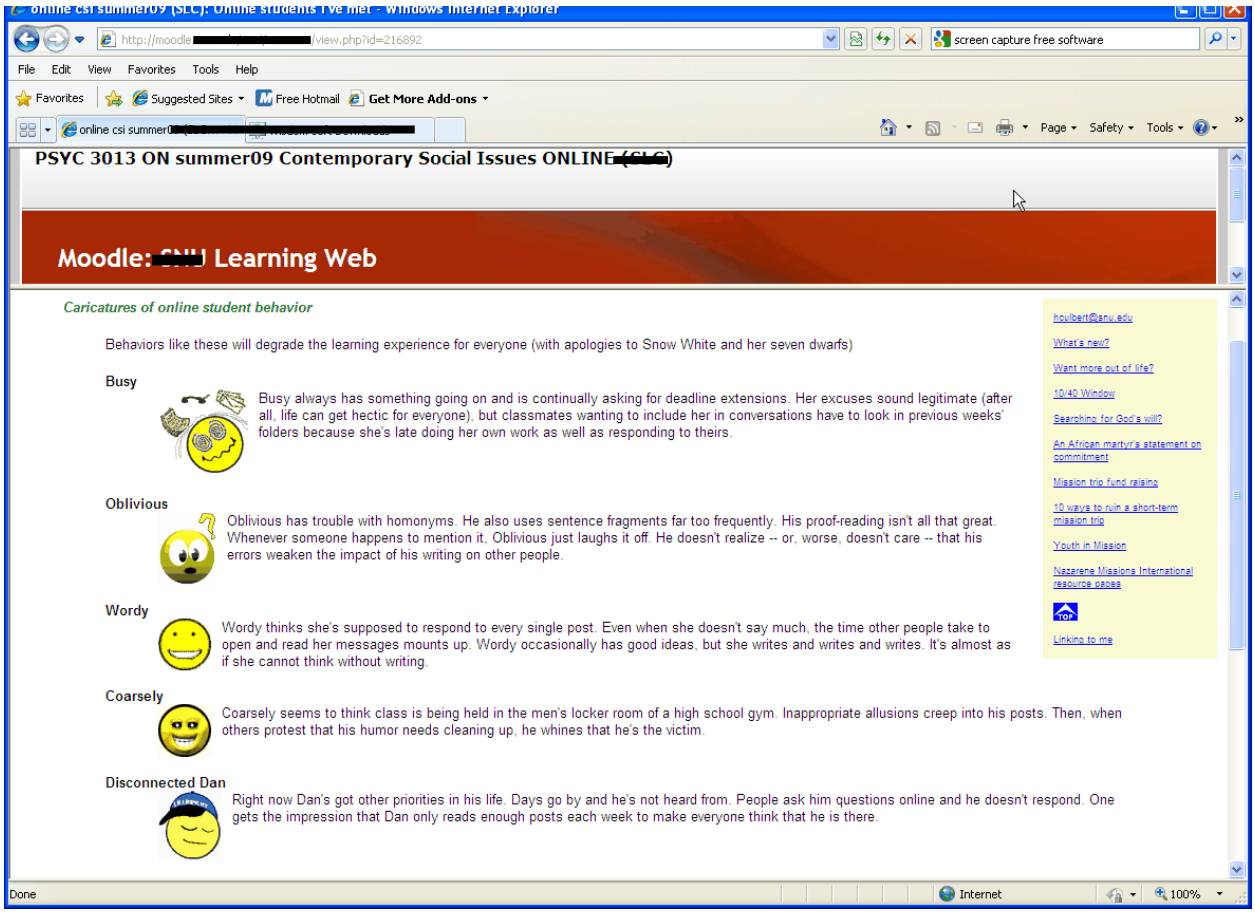
FIGURE 4.2 TEMPLATE SAMPLE FROM MOODLE COURSE



①Main content column
②Right scan column
③Left scan column
④Breadcrumbs⑤Blocks
⑤Blocks
⑥Labels
⑦Links
⑧Activity icon

Included in the LAU Online course template were links beneath the label HELPS FOR ONLINE LEARNING. The first link identified ten myths that many may believe about online education. The second link provided a list of types of students who have taken online courses and described what has caused some of them to be more successful and what has caused some of them to fail. The links opened in a separate window and were descriptive as well as attractive. For example, the link 'Online students I've met' that was provided on the template led course participants to read about positive and negative characteristics of online students. FIGURE 4.3 below is an excerpt from that link illustrating what students could review to learn about being an online student.

FIGURE 4.3. ONLINE STUDENTS I HAVE MET. An excerpt from the 'Online students I've met' link provided on the LAU course template in the Weekly outline.



Description of each of the four cases below is explained in the organizational context of an athletic game. *The Playing Field* section will describe the course in general. *The Players* will describe the instructor and the students in the course. The *Rules of the Game* will explore the details of the syllabus and the way in which students understood how to maneuver through the course. *The Game* section will provide details about the researcher's observations and the data about course access, communications, content and culture. Finally, *The Calendar* section will describe the chronological plan and activity of the course.

Case One: U S History II

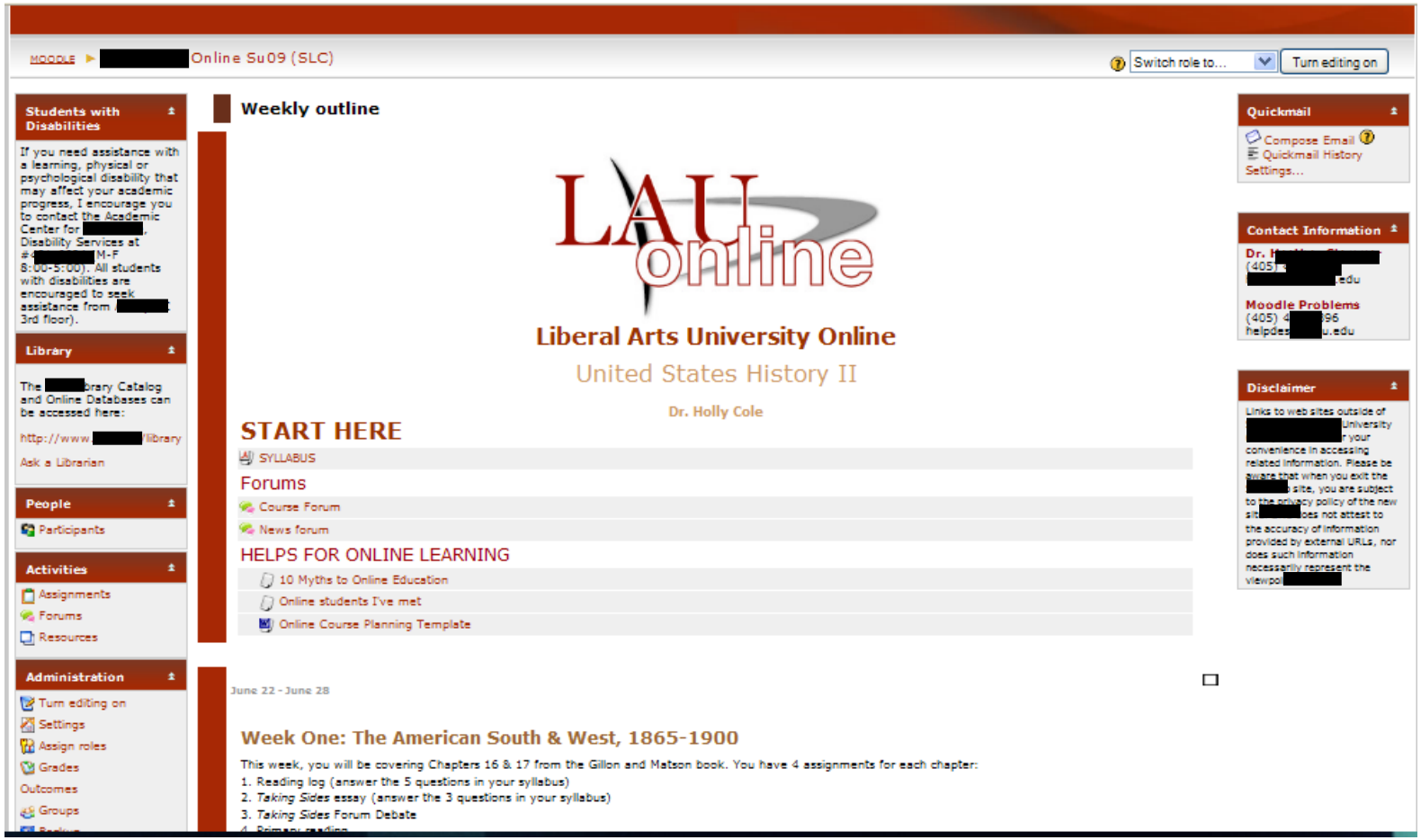
The Playing Field

Dr. Holly Cole's (a pseudonym) United States History II course used the LMS Moodle as described, including the online course template that LAU provided. This template provided the color schemes, the logo, the fonts, the weekly organizational structure, and the blocks for information and access that remained stationary on either side of the main content column.

The point of entry for the course – the view that appeared each time anyone entered the course and covered about seventy-five percent of the screen – included the name of the institution, the name of the course and the name of the instructor. Dr. Cole's contact information block on the right of the main content column included her email address and her office phone number. Dr. Cole added a label just beneath the course name and institution's logo; the words START HERE, large font, all caps and bolded in red to match the template helped students quickly identify where to begin reading. Just

beneath that command, Dr. Cole added the Portable Document File (PDF) link to her syllabus. Another large but un-bolded label titled 'Forums' introduced the two general forums that were provided for students to ask any course questions or for Dr. Cole to post course news and announcements. She chose to include two of the helpful links to success the template provided under this same label. Troubleshooting was not available as a separate link, but students found clarification within the syllabus about course details, and within the syllabus Dr. Cole advised students that they should contact her in the event they have any course questions or encounter any confusion regarding the class or the online process. Each of the links works perfectly and quickly. FIGURE 4.4 below provides a screen shot of Dr. Cole's course for a clear visual presentation of U.S. History II.

FIGURE 4.4 U.S. HISTORY OPENING SCREEN



Scrolling down through the main content column of the course, the design of her weekly sections used a distinctive light brown color in Trebuchet, bolded font as a label for the week number and topic. Beneath the label for each week, Dr. Cole used a small, black Ariel font to speak in second person to the students, indicating that these were instructions from her to the students. Her words explain the chapters that were covered and the assignments and activities that must be completed for that specific week. Dr. Cole mentioned that she "tried to clearly articulate what [she] was looking for in each assignment." The same types of assignments were included each week, and in the syllabus she specifies that the assignments were to be completed in the order she has them listed.

The reading and analysis of a primary document is an example of one of her routine, weekly assignments. Each week she provided a link to a different primary document, and the students were required to view the link and respond to the document in a brief essay that analyzed the meaning of the document in the context of that period of history. She established routine and explained that students "got into a pattern [or a] rhythm so that they knew they were doing the same thing every time."

Dr. Cole organized her assignments in the same order each week. First, students were to complete a reading log and submit a brief response essay through the assignment link by uploading it into Turnitin.com. Turnitin.com is an Internet service that identifies plagiarism as it scans uploaded documents such as essays and research papers. Next, Dr. Cole assigned each student a topic and a position on that topic. Students were to complete a brief essay in which they argue *for* their position of that topic; she called this the 'Taking Sides Essay.' For example, the instructions might be for students to argue for or

against Booker T. Washington's contributions to the promotion of African in post Civil War society. Immediately following the completion of their 'Taking Sides Essay,' students were to post a summary of their position on the topic into the 'Taking Sides Forum Debate' in rebuttal to someone who had been assigned the opposite position of the same topic. Within the same discussion forum students also had to post a rebuttal to someone who had posted in opposition. Finally, each week students were instructed to complete a reading of an assigned primary document and then to write an analysis of that document. All of these assignments, with the exception of the 'Taking Sides Forum Debate' were uploaded by way of the assignment link using Turnitin.com. Students completed four assignments for each chapter, and two or three chapters were included in each week's activities. The quantity of activities for her course was consistent each week, with exceptions occurring the week of the mid-term exam. In that week, students did not have a debate forum to complete.

As course participants scrolled from the top of the main content column down through the weekly sections of the course, the assignments for each week were visible and were divided into chapters; each chapter had a large label that identified the chapter number and the broad topic of the chapter. Just beneath each chapter label was a PDF link that outlined the chapter. Each outline is brief and students needed to read the text to understand any details regarding the names or events the brief outlines include. All of the assignment and discussion links were under a chapter label. Dr. Cole's course did not include any type of audio component.

The Players

Two types of participants exist in an online course: instructors and students. Each online course section at LAU included one paid instructor and as many as fifteen undergraduate students could enroll in the course for credit. Dr. Holly Cole, the instructor for U. S. History II, included no personal or professional information for her students other than the contact information (email and office phone) identified in the syllabus and in the contact block in the top right portion of the course. She has been Assistant Professor of History for Liberal Arts University since the fall of 2006. The LAU website details information about her as follows:

- B.A., Liberal Arts University, 1997
- M.A., University of Research, 1999
- Ph.D., University of Research, 2008

Dr. Cole's experience in education is primarily teaching in the traditional classroom. She has taught undergraduate courses in history, carrying a course load of twelve to fifteen hours per semester. Her general education course, Western Civilization, ranges in size from fifteen to thirty students. Her upper division history courses range in size from ten to fifteen. She has also written the curriculum and taught an online history course for Ivy State Community College in Midwestern City.

The learning management system Dr. Cole first used at LAU was Blackboard, but when the university changed to Moodle, she began using it as her learning platform. Moodle functions as a place to manage all of the logistics of an onland class, and she used the grade book, the email feature and the weekly organization feature to distribute

documents and instructions to students regarding their course schedule during the weeks of a regular semester.

Dr. Cole also used Moodle for her online summer classes. She designed her own courses and used the forums, the assignment upload features, the link to files, email, and grade book. She explained her reasons for teaching online in the summer as a decision to support,

> the Gen Ed Director – he really wanted to make sure that we [LAU] were offering some of the Gen Ed courses over the summer. Particularly with U S History, the last couple of years we have not been able to offer as many sections due to limited budgets and limited personnel.

Another one of Dr. Cole's reasons for teaching online courses was to assist students in completing coursework from distant locations. Her class in the summer of 2009 included students from Germany and Ecuador and several places in between. She did not want to teach on campus during the summer since she had a young child at home and did not have daycare availability in the summer.

As an instructor of online courses at LAU, Dr. Cole commented only mimimally about the manner in which her institution encouraged or facilitated teaching online courses and did not avail herself to any of the faculty development opportunities to prepare for her role as an online instructor. She thought that "additional funding" was the provision the university offered her to prepare for teaching online. Dr. Cole used the basics on Moodle to deliver her coursework to students, and she was fairly comfortable with that learning platform. She consciously tried "to keep assignments limited to very simple technological skills. So uploading documents to Turnitin, posting to the

discussion… [she does not] have webcasts or all those other handy gadgets that …some faculty have used in their online courses." She maneuvered through the LMS on her own and learned how to use the various elements to accomplish her objectives. She was insistent on the user-friendly necessity of everything she asked students to do in her course, as she explained,

> I think [online course gadgets] are great, but for a class in which I am never going to see the students, and I don't have the opportunity to walk them through how some of things are going to work, and I don't know how their technology is going to work, and I can't assume that they all have brand new computers. Obviously, the student in Ecuador was just having a tough time getting an internet connection, let alone …. I think that most of the time she was just at an Internet café.

Ten students–six males and four females--enrolled in the online summer section of U. S. History II with Dr. Holly Cole. All ten students were junior or senior students and were taking this upper division general education course as part of their degree completion. Three of the students were international students, and English was their second language; the female international student, taking the class from Ecuador, did not complete the class successfully and attributed her problems to the lack of consistency in her Internet connection from her home country. All of the students were veterans of traditional education and were well aware of the commitment necessary to be successful in a college class. One of the female students enrolled in the class, Candace Stiles, was a senior nursing student with an interest in completing her general education requirements during the summer so that she could focus on her major courses of study during the

traditional academic term. She explained that that "nursing is an overwhelming major and we have so many classes every semester, and I just wanted to be able to lighten my load [during the fall and spring] for yet another semester." She had heard through the campus grapevine that Dr. Cole was an "awesome professor" and decided to take that class since it was available online.

The Rules of the Game

Dr. Cole's course used the LAU online course template with the logo and course information. In the main content column, however, just beneath the introductory elements she used a label START HERE to direct students into the information about the course procedures. Of the four courses in this study, hers was the only one that used a direct command in a major label to instruct students where to begin and what to do. This was also the only place in her course where a direct command was used. The syllabus was included in this area, and the students' success hinges on reviewing the guidelines in the syllabus for help. The details under each assignment description were very clear about the expectations the instructor has for completing essays and discussion postings. Within her syllabus, Dr. Cole included the specific response questions she wanted students to use for each essay they wrote. When she said, "[The rubric] basically had 4 items. The fourth one was organization. So that they knew each time where their strengths and weaknesses might be," she was thinking in terms of a rubric, but no rubric was available within the online the course or referenced in the syllabus.

The HELPS FOR ONLINE LEARNING label, part of the online course template for all courses at LAU, included the '10 Myths to Online Education' and the 'Online Students I've Met' links. The links for these help tools opened in separate windows and

were descriptive as well as attractive. The Week 1 section of the course continued in the main content column and was located directly beneath the HELPS FOR ONLINE LEARNING label and links. The Week 1 section had two labels of the same size. The first label, a medium Bryant color, identified the week number and the topic for study. Just beneath that label was a brief text that addressed students in second person regarding the chapters for the week and the list of activities that were included in the week's work. This text seemed to be from the instructor's point of view and was in a tone of the instructor speaking directly to her group of students. Each chapter had four separate activities: a reading log, an essay on assigned argument, a debate forum and an essay in response to a primary reading. Beneath the list was another label, in bold and red, and it announced the week number again and the purpose of the items beneath it. 'Assignments' was another label in a larger, un-bolded red font, and it was titled 'Chapter 16,' for example. Beneath the chapter number label were the five items and assignments for that chapter. The first item was a PDF link to an outline for the chapter, followed by the links to the reading log assignment, the 'Taking Sides Essay' assignment, the forum debate assignment, and the primary reading essay assignment. Chapter 17 was included in the Week 1 section, and the organization and assignments and activities were identical to the Chapter 16 assignments and activities. FIGURE 4.5 is a screen shot of the Week 1 section of Dr. Cole's course.

FIGURE 4.5 SCREEN SHOT OF WEEK 1 U.S.HISTORY II

Each week of the six week course was structured identically to the Week 1 section. Dr. Cole used repetition of activities to organize her course. In her syllabus and her introductory email, she encouraged students to "start with their reading log – the learning log for the chapter, and then [she] suggested that they read their primary document and respond to it, and then they did their 'Taking Sides' which was their historical debate. They wrote up a short essay on the historical debate whichever side they were on, and then they did their discussion posting."

All of the links were titled according to topic; no verbs were used to direct student activity. As a student, Candace Stiles had no complications with the assignments or with the technological aspects of maneuvering through the course. She did, however, comment that she believed the course activities were beneficial. She said, "[the questions Dr. Cole provided in the syllabus} really made me look into the chapter and [made me think] What

am I studying? How does this go along with what was in the previous chapter? You know, like how are these relating together over time?"

The Game

The class begins. Students were automatically enrolled in the Moodle LMS when the LAU registrar activated their course enrollment through the institution. The course officially began on June 22, and Dr. Cole sent an introductory email to remind students of the course opening and to tell them to begin doing the coursework. The students then proceeded to the course via the Moodle LMS and were directed to START HERE where they were immediately immersed in the course activities for each week. She not only had four activities for each chapter (two chapters per week), but she wanted the activities completed in a specific order. The pace was the same each week, even when the mid-term and final exams were included. During those weeks she required fewer assignments and filled the empty spaces with the exams.

Reviewing the gradebook feature in the online U.S. History II course and the links to assignments and forum, I observed the completion rates of enrolled students, assignments and forums for the entire course. The completion rate of the course was 80%. The completion rate of submitted assignments was 70.5%, and the completion rate for the discussion forums was 53%. Student involvement in the discussion forums was not consistent; some students chose to skip the forums even though it was a summary of an assignment they should have just submitted. These forums required one posting on an assigned topic and one reply to another assigned student. One student expressed her dislike of the discussion forums, and she said she "found them pointless and busy work and you had to respond to what other people said, and [she] just wanted to go solo and

[she] liked doing the class all on [her] own." Since the discussion forums were more of an extension of essay writing than a dialogue, the student felt like the discussion was interesting only if she wanted to "see other people's take on the chapters."

The instructor's interpretation of the value and potential of the discussion forums was not the same as her students' views. She instructed them to write a 'Taking Sides Essay' – she assigned the topic and the side to each student. After completing the essay and submitting it electronically through Turnitin.com, students were to immediately go to the 'Taking Sides Debate Forum' and post a summary of their essay. Then Dr. Cole gave them instruction about how to reply to others in the forums. Her explanation for this was,

> And then the second component that I was interested in again was communication. Both – obviously with it being online – it was written communication either in the form of essays they were writing as well as their postings on discussion forum. They had to respond to my question first, and then once they made their official post, they could see everybody else's. And then they had to respond to one of the other student's postings.

The syllabus' instructions for the related essay and forum activity were delivered in writing, and this text excerpted from the syllabus illustrates the details of her instructions in FIGURE 4.6 below.

FIGURE 4.6. SYLLABUS EXCERPT. Detailing Forum Debate discussion postings.

> ***Taking Sides*** **Essays -** Historians interpret the events of the past. Therefore, each historian's explanation of why something occurred when and as it did differs from what other historians have said, creating frequent clashes over what is the real historical "truth." Your additional reader, called *Taking Sides*, looks at a few of these debates within the historical community. Before you begin reading, go to the Moodle link for the

particular *Taking Sides* assignment you are about to start. There, you will find out which side (yes or no) you are to take this time (**NOTE: which side you take will vary so check Moodle before you begin reading!**). I recommend that besides reading the "yes" or "no" side that you also take a few minutes to read the introduction to the issue and, after you read the issue, read the postscript. Once you have completed the reading, write an essay that explains the position of the historian you read. Your essay must include the following:
1. the historian's argument (thesis)
2. examples of evidence the historian used to prove his/her argument
3. why you think the historian did or did not successfully prove their thesis.

After you have submitted your written response, immediately click on "Forum Debate" and post an answer to the *Taking Sides* question. Students will receive three points for their initial posting on the forum and 2 points for one response to a fellow student who read and wrote from the opposing side. Your response must be of substance to receive the 2 points. "I disagree" is not enough. You need to explain why you agree or disagree based on the evidence provided by the authors you read. **(Another NOTE: Do not wait until the last minute to make your initial post to the Forum Debate. If everyone waits until Sunday night, you or your fellow students might not have enough time to post responses before the Monday 5:00 p.m. deadline)**

Each *Taking Sides* essay is worth 10 points. Your Forum Debate postings are worth a total of 5 points (3 for the initial post and 2 for the response).

This specific activity and assignment within Dr. Cole's online U.S. History II was her method in promoting "communication, either in the form of essays they were writing as well as their postings on the discussion forum."

Access. The instructor initiated involvement in the course via email on the date the course began. Her instructions led students to the course through the LMS that was familiar to the students, and once entered into the course the students expected to follow the prompts of the headings. The primary heading students needed to read to begin the entire course was START HERE. Student access to the course was successful in some cases and unsuccessful in others. Students in the United States and Germany did not have any connectivity issues, but the student from Ecuador "kept losing her ability to get

connected." Access to the course was also an issue in relation to time zones, explained Dr. Cole, "The student in Germany was six hours ahead; the student in Ecuador was 2 hours ahead. There were a couple of students that weren't in CST, so I tried… I kept the times as flexible as possible. It's why I didn't do any kind of live chat or anything like that. That seemed too cumbersome when you have people with very different kinds of schedules."

Communication. Dr. Cole's communication with online students occurred on an individual basis through emails. She described the comments she made to students about their assignments as her communication with them. She explained, "I would write comments back to them about their reading logs. If a student – if it was evident from reading the log that the student had picked up on the key points of the chapter, then I really didn't say much." During the course included in this study, she communicated a minimal amount with students.

Within the course when communication did occur between instructor and students, it was through emails. It appeared that clarification occurred by email between individual students and the instructor. As an attempt to promote communication, Dr. Cole created the News Forum and the Course Forum at the top of the main content column. She had added that component to her course after hearing presenters from a workshop suggest such an activity to promote communication between students. She said, "They [students] seemed to wait more for me to solve the problem. And I definitely had a lot more individual emails from students than I did postings to those questions [in the News Forum and Course Forum]."

Students were not necessarily interested in communicating with each other and viewed the course mostly as a type of correspondence course between themselves and the instructor. One student explained that she "separates [herself] from them." Questions from online classmates frustrated her because she was "just trying to get through this work" on her own. Candace Stiles said, "Cole asks you questions and when you have to think about it personally. And that's how it's different for every person. So I don't really feel like I need the other people… like I did it completely on my own the whole time."

Ironically, that same student responded with an interest in interaction with classmates in order to complete writing assignments. She said it would "be nice to sit down and be like 'I cannot figure out the answer to number three. What did you put?' And then that could help." Her distinction on the issue of communication was that she "doesn't like group presentations," but she is not opposed to working together to find answers to questions.

The discussion forums in U.S. History II offered places for students to communicate on specific sides of assigned topics. The forum responses had a tone of formality and seemed to lack a sense of realistic dialogue and exchange. The primary reason for this could be because of Dr. Cole's decision to assign topics without asking a question. Students were given a topic and a perspective and assigned to defend it from a specific point of view. She never interjected her comments into the discussion forums, choosing instead to email students individually when she "had concerns about their postings" and wanted to comment. In the past, she had an isolated situation where she believed a student was directly attacking the political beliefs and interpretation of another

student, so rather than deal with that in the discussion forum, Dr. Cole preferred to send an email to the individual student that said, "Be careful with this."

Content. The content of U. S. History II was developed through reading the text books. Students responded to their readings by writing short, directed essays and participating in discussion forums. Dr. Cole used essay tests for both her mid-term exam and her final exam. Her primary objective was to "think about history critically," and she wanted the variety of materials required – text books, primary documents, excerpts from online sources – to work together to help students make "a cohesive explanation and analysis" of the historical events they were studying. Her second objective was for students to communicate "in the form of the essays they were writing as well as their postings on the discussion forum." Those two objectives allowed Dr. Cole to focus each activity on straightforward goals.

The students' perspectives on learning the content were much more pragmatic. As a general education course for Track III students, this U.S. History II course was one of several required courses students need for graduation. Their goal was to complete the course as quickly and painlessly as possible. When questioned about learning the material in class and how much she learned, one student explained that she "learns the material for that semester, and give me one year later, and I can't tell you very much about it. My focus is medical." She finds history interesting but does not worry about remembering what she learned since it doesn't relate to her professional future as a nurse.

Culture. The elements of culture in an online class included the communications that occurred in discussion forums with everyone as well as the communications with the professor. Essays and responses that were submitted only for the instructor to view are

elements that influence the development of that culture as well. Within those communications, tone and authority were embraced by the instructor and made a significant impact on course culture and whether or not students felt confident to ask questions, to contact each other or to work in collaboration. This specific course did not include any collaborative projects or discussions with multiple replies and exchanges.

The organization of the course and the apparent systematic appearance of activities influenced the course culture in that students were aware of the schedule and the expectations. This course maintained characteristics of a typical correspondence course from an earlier age in education except for the brief discussion forums.

The Calendar

This United Stated History II general education course, when offered during the traditional academic term, ran the standard sixteen week format. Students met two or three times per week for a total of two hours and forty minutes per week; a final exam was given the last week during a specially scheduled two hour exam time period.

The section U.S. History II that was used for this study occurs during the summer session of 2009, June 22 – August 2, and it was an online course. Students enrolled in the course via their on-campus advisor, and they received confirmation and start-up materials by mail and by email.

Each new week began on Tuesdays, with all assignments for the week due at midnight on Mondays. Dr. Cole set up her weeks to run from Tuesday to midnight on Mondays so that "students would have a full week and the weekend." She did not scatter her assignment due dates throughout the week, but she highly recommended in the syllabus and in the Week 1 instructions that students should complete the assignments in

the order she arranged them in each week's section. She also suggested that students should begin working on the assignments early in the week so they would be more meaningful and productive, particularly when they were posting to the 'Taking Sides Debate Forum.' Students were free to make their own decisions regarding the schedule, and many waited until the final 48 hours of the week to complete and upload assignments.

She liked this schedule except that it meant she did not receive their first full set of assignments until eight days after the course began. The Tuesday to midnight Monday approach also meant that the class ran a few days longer than the calendar had stated, but she said, "None of the students seemed to have a problem with that and it seemed to work quite well – providing them enough flexibility in their schedule to get things done."

Students took this online summer course to complete a general education requirement. Most chose the summer session so their course load for the coming fall would be lighter or so they could graduate. The pressure of completing the same amount of coursework in just a six week time frame was what the students wanted, but as Candace explained, "I wanted it to be shorter, but sometimes I felt overwhelmed with how much material she put into one week. So I wished in some ways it would have been longer. That was overwhelming."

The instructor and two students from U. S. History II completed the grid and group survey (APPENDIX B) following the completion of the course. According to Harris' (2005) instructions for using the survey tools to score responses and plot the results, Tables 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 were created and calculated to find the average of their grid scores and their group scores. The scores were then plotted on a graph. The

results for U.S. History II revealed that the instructor and both students rated the cultural qualities of the course as bureaucratic and authoritarian. (See FIGURE 4.7.)

U.S. History II Instructor

Table 4.1 Grid Scores

Question	Score
1	7
2	7
3	6
4	3
5	5
6	5
7	8
8	5
9	2
10	3
11	4
Sum	55
Average	5.10

Table 4.2 Group Scores

Question	Score
12	1
13	4
14	1
15	2
16	1
17	5
18	5
19	6
20	1
21	4
22	6
23	1
Sum	37
Average	3.08

U.S. History II Student

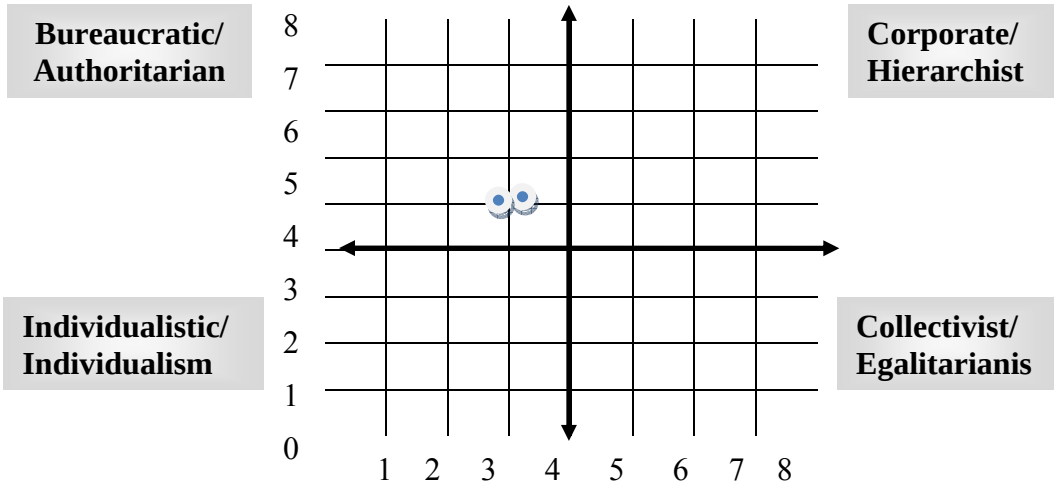
Table 4.3 Grid Scores

Question	Score
1	7
2	8
3	4
4	2
5	2
6	7
7	7
8	7
9	7
10	1
11	4
Sum	56
Average	5.10

Table 4.4 Group Scores

Question	Score
12	1
13	2
14	1
15	5
16	1
17	2
18	7
19	7
20	1
21	2
22	5
23	1
Sum	35
Average	2.92

FIGURE 4.7. POSITION OF SCORE AVERAGES FOR U.S.HISTORY II.



Case Two: Ministry, Church and Society

The Playing Field

Dr. Hal Cobain's Ministry, Church and Society (MCS) general education course did not use the 2009 template for online courses that LAU provided; instead he retained the template he had used in previous summers. When course participants opened MCS, they saw a large, red rectangle with the name of the course inside in white letters. In the main content column, beneath the course name were three small photos: a church sanctuary, a children's choir, and a group of people gathered together. This area also included the dates of the course, June 22 to August 2, 2009. This was Dr. Cobain's second section of the same course to teach during the summer of 2009, and his first one (May 7 – June 22) was identical. In the topic outline box, beneath the course dates, the instructor's name, office phone number, cell phone number, home phone number and email address were listed.

Just beneath the course name and instructor information was a note from the instructor, written in a conversational tone that welcomed the students to the course. This note offers direct instructions on where and how to begin to maneuver through the course. Dr. Cobain gave students a list of five things to do, and two of the five items had links to related documents. For example, the first item said, 'Print the syllabus' and when a student rolled the cursor over the word 'syllabus' the link expanded and students could click the mouse to open a PDF of the course syllabus. Beneath the note from the instructor, links titled 'Course Information', 'Assignment Samples', and a quiz titled 'Student Statement of Intent to Academic Integrity' were visible. Two final links were beneath a small label titled 'Course Information to be read by all Students.' These helpful links were designed by Dr. Cobain and the 2009 online course template used by other instructors included both the 'Online Students I Have Known' and 'Time Management and Online Courses' links as well.

Each of his weekly sections used a different color to distinguish one week from another. Week 1 of MCS began with a large, blue rectangle with white words inside that read WEEK ONE: Begins June 22. Beneath that rectangle, Dr. Cobain included two brief paragraphs to direct the students how to proceed through the week. His tone was again conversational, and it was identical in form to the note that was an introduction to the course. A unique feature underneath this note was a link labeled 'Audio intro from the professor.' When the student rolled over this link, he/she could open an audio file and hear Dr. Cobain's voice as he repeated the instructions for students to hear. This audio file was slightly less than three minutes in length.

The next blue rectangle in Week 1 used all capital letters to communicate the assignments for the week: WHAT YOU NEED TO DO. Beneath that heading was a link to a numbered list of what students should do in Week 1. Following the 'To Do List' were the icons and titles of five discussion forum links for the week. Dr. Culberson clarified in his syllabus and in his audio recording that all assignments were to be posted in forums, and that students must not only submit all assignments, but that they should read their classmates' assignments as well. Each of the links identified the activity and the due day of the assignment. For example, the third item in the list of activities was written 'Reading reflection 1 (due Tuesday).'

On either side of the main content column, in the left and right scan columns, were the blocks that Dr. Cobain chose to have available to his students. Since he did not use the 2009 template, he chose the blocks he believed his students would benefit from the most. On the left side of the course was the 'Students with Disabilities' block, the 'Library' block, and the 'Activities' block. On the far right side of the screen, the top right block was the 'Quickmail' block where students could email anyone in the course and check their own email history, a 'Course Summary' block that included the course description, a 'Search Forums' block, an 'Online Users' block, a 'Recent Activity' block, another 'Library Link' block, a 'Technical Support' block, and finally a 'Disclaimer' block.

The final rectangle blue box in the Week 1 section had the words SUPPLEMENTAL LEARNING RESOURCES written inside and beneath the box were three items: an 'Optional Essay' forum, a 'Worldview Boutique' video available in an LAU library link, and 'Christianity versus culture' link. This provision of supplemental

learning resources was never explained and while the opportunities might be interesting to pursue, it was never clear how or why students might choose to investigate these extra resources.

The color coded rectangle boxes were the same for all six weeks of the course; the first one identified the week number, the second one identified what students should do, and the third one offered supplemental reading or activity options for the students. The repetition for students was complete in that the instructor also put a brief instructional paragraph under the first box to communicate with the student, and he also placed a 2 – 5 minute audio link in the same place to communicate instruction to students in another format.

The Players

Two types of participants exist in an online course: instructors and students. At Liberal Arts University, each online course section includes one paid instructor as many as fifteen undergraduate students enrolled in the course for credit. Typically the instructor also designs the course curriculum. The instructor for MCS, Hal Cobain is a Professor of Missions for Liberal Arts University, and has been on faculty at LAU since the fall of 1988. The LAU website listed academic and professional history is as follows:

- B.A., Liberal Arts College, 1968
- M.Div., Evangelical Theological Seminary, 1972
- M.R.E., Evangelical Theological Seminary, 1979
- Graduate study, Theological Seminary, 1982
- D.Min., Seminary, 1986
- Pastor, 1972-74

- Missionary to Germany, 1974-84
- Missionary to Belize, 1984-88
- Liberal Arts University, 1988 to present

Dr. Cobain's experience in education included both teaching in the traditional classroom and extensive online teaching experience. He taught undergraduate courses in both General Education and Missions onland at LAU, carrying a course load of twelve to fifteen hours per semester. His general education course, Man, Church, and Society (MCS), ranges in size from fifteen to thirty. His upper division missions courses range in size from fifteen to twenty-five.

His online teaching experience goes back 10 or more years; he has taught online courses at a Bible college, a seminary and at Liberal Arts University. Each institution uses a different LMS, and he has found "there is no perfect platform out there. The Bible college uses Blackboard. LAU uses Moodle here. The seminary uses a different one – one they have developed. There are features about each one that I like better." He also believed that using an LMS has forced him to adapt his teaching style and that "sometimes what [instructors] do is influenced by what the platform will allow you to do."

Dr. Cobain also explained his reasons for teaching online. The courses either were added to his contracted course load or he received extra pay for teaching online courses. Most of the time he enjoyed teaching online, and he explained his decision to teach online as a need to "gravitate to what [the] students are doing." He has progressed through the development of online teaching since he began in the days of dial up, about ten years ago.

As a veteran online instructor, when LAU began developing and offering online courses, he has used the platform that LAU provided. At first it was Blackboard, but within a few years, he supported the university's decision to adopt the open source LMS, Moodle. He felt like the university's decision was based not only on finances but also on flexibility for the designers and usability for the students. The university also provided a laptop computer if necessary, but he never claimed one because he continued to prefer the one he purchased for himself. He also had attended the workshop that LAU provided in the spring of 2009 where two speakers came and spoke on the characteristics of quality online courses. Ironically, he was supportive of the template that LAU had developed and provided for online courses, but he had continued to use his own design from two years ago.

As an instructor, Dr. Cobain made his own decision of the best way to approach online courses based on his studies in education, long before online courses were even a possibility. He believes that peer to peer learning "is the most valuable learning that goes on." He embraces peer to peer pedagogy and explains how it works in an online environment. He said,

> One of the things that has intrigued me about the online thing Is that it does allow me to have students read everything that every student does. So most of my online stuff … I have them submit into a forum not a dropbox so that every student can read what every other student does. So that not only… I also have an example assignment up there, but if I have a student that says, "I am not sure what to do on this…" I will say to them, and "Three students have already done the

work and they are within the perimeters, so go and look at what students have already submitted.

Twelve students – nine males and three females – were enrolled in Dr. Cobain's second summer session of online MCS. Most of the students were juniors or seniors, taking this upper division general education course as part of their degree program. The final grade distribution for the twelve students is seven A's, one B, one C, one D, and two F's. Their reason for taking a summer class was to complete requirements for graduation or to take a general education course during the summer in order to free up time for major courses of study during the coming academic term in the fall. While the perceptions of the class were positive for the instructor, one student explained that "the best thing [was] getting it over with." She thought the curriculum and her involvement were merely editorial and that she did not need a class to help her express her thoughts or opinions on religious topics. She felt like the "worst part was just having to interact with…classmates about the material when the material wasn't deep enough for [her] to interact about."

The Rules of the Game

The Rules of the Game – or how to go about taking an online course – should be clear to students once they enter the course site via the LMS. Students had already been enrolled through LAU's registration system or when their advisors enrolled them in the course. Dr. Cobain's MCS course was quick and direct with students in that when the course opened, he had only the red rectangle box with the course title, a few small photos in a single row and then all of the links lead directly into course activity. Links to his syllabus appeared in three separate places on the top screen of the Moodle course: once in one of the side blocks on the right and twice in the top window section. His students

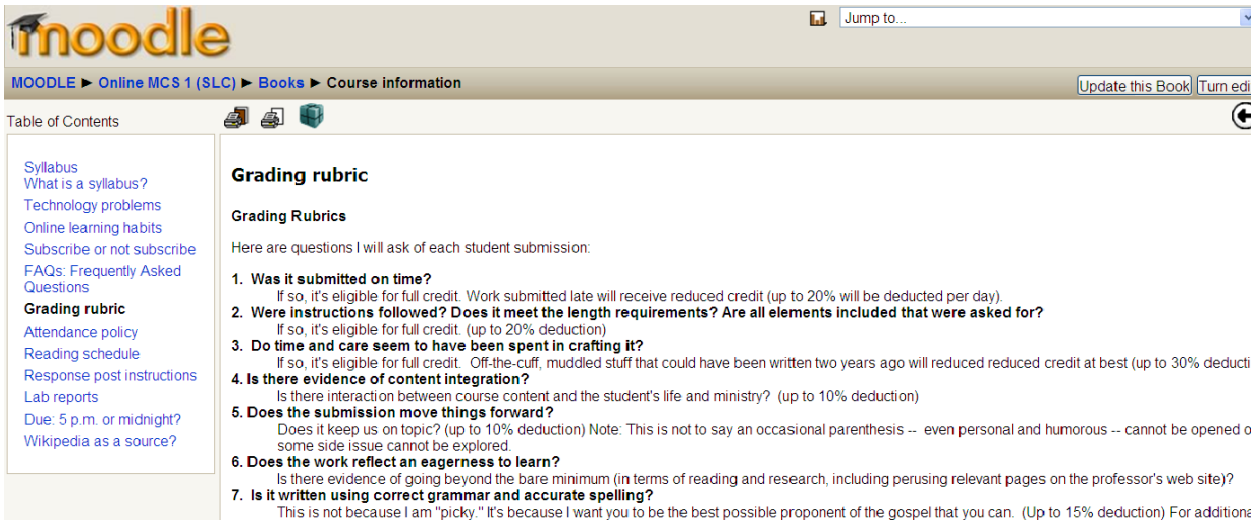
knew to begin working in the course when he sent out an email to the entire group and invited them to begin their coursework.

Dr. Cobain's syllabus clearly explained the assignments and expectations of the course. He also attached brief audio files that explained to students the importance of opening and printing out the syllabus for quick reference to use as they worked on various course activities each day. He made it clear in the syllabus and in the audio file that students were to log on and participate in the course at least five out of seven days of the week. He explains that as the instructor, he had access to the individual activity records of each student, detailing the dates and times they logged on, and that he used these records to record attendance grades for each week.

The syllabus included the course information, contact information for the instructor, information about the types of assignments and due days of each assignment each week. Although he recommended printing out a hard copy of the syllabus, he also provided a link to a syllabus website that had a menu bar for students to open specific parts of the syllabus that answered questions the students might have. This link was a feature unique to the Moodle LMS, and it was the 'Book' activity option. Course designers could create a book link and within this book were chapters with various topics that belong in the book. This particular activity block resembled a traditional webpage when it was completed in that it had navigation on the left and the remaining right side of the screen was the main content column. For example, in Dr. Cobain's 'Course Information Book', he had a list of fourteen chapters in the menu column. Students could click on the menu items individually to receive detailed information on the topic in

question. Below is a screen shot of the syllabus created using the book activity feature in Moodle. The 'Grading rubric' link is open in the screen shot in FIGURE 4.8 below.

FIGURE 4.7. ILLUSTRATION OF BOOK ACTIVITY IN MCS.



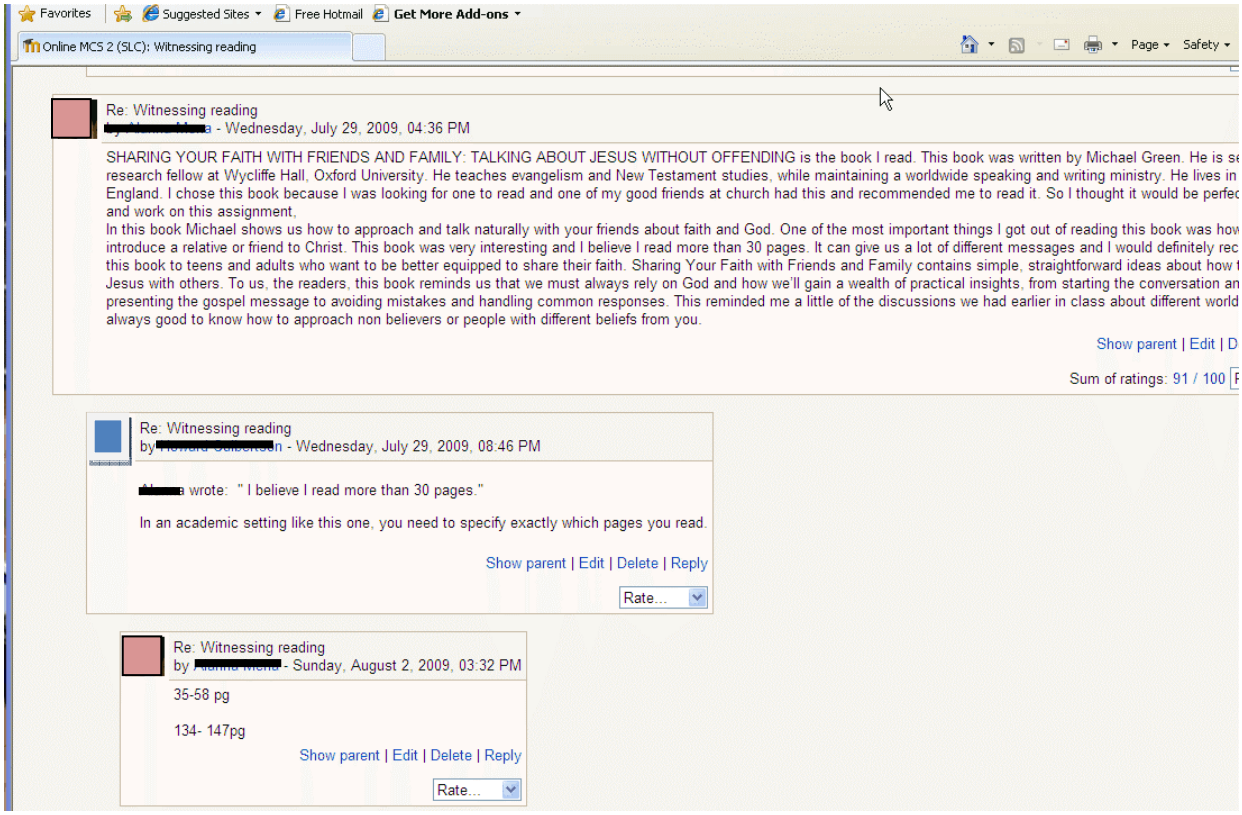
A unique requirement Dr. Cobain had for his online students made them accountable to him for their readings for the week. Not only did the students have to complete the related assignments, but they were required articulate to him specifically about their reading activity; students were required to write a sentence at the beginning of a discussion indicating that they had read the assignment and/or the other postings in preparation for the posting. He explained his requirement and his reasoning when he said,

> Online…I think one of the things I have struggled with at two other schools I have taught at is holding students accountable for reading everything. Uhm…because I hold them accountable for reading everything everybody posts. That is part of the classroom. When you are part of a physical classroom you are not supposed to be looking out the window or reading a novel – you are supposed to be listening. So I have them affirm every week 'I have read everything this

week.' Some of the students really balk at it. They say some of the things that students write is not worth anything. Or they say 'I don't have to read everything that people post to know what they are trying to say.'

He maintained his requirement despite student resistance because he believes that making students accountable also made them more likely to follow through and complete the assignments. He stayed connected to the students in the forums throughout the course and was consistent in his expectations. A forum near the completion of the course reflects his insistence that students meet all requirements, as seen in FIGURE 4.9 below.

FIGURE 4.9. ACCOUNTABILITY EXCHANGE.



Students considered the reading responses differently than Dr. Cobain. They made their required posts, but they were not inclined to reply to other posts when it was not required. One student, who was comparing her MCS experience to another online

course she was taking at the same time explained that she did not benefit from the discussions because all she had to do was "write 300 – 500 words about a couple of things that caught [her] attention. So [she] would look at what someone else had posted that day – and it wasn't private either." She felt like that her professor could not discern from her posting whether or not she had read the material or understood it. Her workaround on the integrity issue was to use Googlebooks to find a page from her assigned reading, read that, and then write her 300 words. The student explained, "I know that sounds horrible but that worked. So since I could do the bare minimum and get away with it, that's what I did."

The Game

The Class Begins. Students were automatically enrolled in the Moodle LMS when the LAU registrar activated their course enrollment through the institution. The course officially began on June 22, 2009; Dr. Cobain sent out an email welcoming them to the class and encouraging them to begin. He made his own posting in the introductory forum, and he also asked students to include something about themselves that other people may not easily know about them. He visited this introductory forum often and replied to students' individual introduction postings. He also noted when students had not included all of the requested information and asked them to revisit the forum and add the information. The instructor's requests were visible to all of the students; therefore, those who posted later had read the introductions and made sure to include all of the required components. Week 1 included five different assignments, all submitted within discussion forums so that the students could read each other's submissions. The

completion rate for all five assignments during Week 1 is 88.3%, with one student responsible for three of the missing assignments.

Reviewing the grade book feature in the online MCS course, the completion rate of all assignments was well over 92.4%. The course began with twelve students and by the end of the first week, one student dropped the course, but the remaining eleven completed the course. Since all assignments were submitted through the discussion forums, students could view each other's work, but were unable to view the grades assigned to the work. Dr. Cobain responded in agreement to students' postings or tried to promote additional discussion by posing a related question for clarification. The overall average of all students' grades (the mean grade) was 79.99% for the course. The instructor's assessment for each assignment was based on the rubric available in the course syllabus.

The same elements and activities made up the requirements for each week, and Dr. Cobain required that the assignments be completed in the same order. The consistency of student involvement was noteworthy. The course activities throughout the six weeks were evenly-paced; the sixth and final week included a final paper that was supposed to reflect each student's response to the material throughout the course.

Access. The instructor initiated involvement in the course via email a few days prior to the actual course start date. Students responded by posting to the 'Introduce Yourself' forum on June 22, and Dr. Cobain interacted with many of them by replying to their postings with comments or questions. Such exchanges occurred throughout the many remaining forums, but the quantity of postings and replies met the requirement more often than spontaneously erupting out of the discussion.

Access to the Internet appeared to be the key to access of online courses for students and instructors, in Dr. Cobain's opinion. He believed that since students were more and more inclined to use the Internet for social purposes, that they would choose to use it for other purposes, including education. He believed that "many professors will kind of gravitate to what students are doing."

Also regarding access, students would occasionally contact their instructor with a special needs request regarding access to the Internet. Dr. Cobain, due to his extensive international travels while teaching online classes, did not accommodate students with excuses regarding access to the Internet. His anecdotal explanation was,

> My students tell me 'I am going on vacation, I can't …' and I say "Baloney. I have been all over the world teaching online. I have been in the Amazon jungle last semester. I taught courses out of Ecuador. I have been at retreat centers. The Netherlands. It's amazing. I always found access. There's always an Internet Café. There's always a Panera Bread or a McDonald's. There's always an airport. You may have to pay for it, but there's always a cost for whatever. Or you can beg. I have begged a hotel. I just went to a hotel and asked if there were any way that I could log on to …could I pay you something? And they just gave me the password and I sat in the lobby and did my work. I have never missed a day because of the lack of access. Sometimes you have to ask or plan. The public library. At a youth camp, I had to drive to a small town library. So I tell students that I don't really take the 'I don't have access' excuse.

Communication. Communication was Dr. Cobain's first and primary goal as a means to create community within his online courses. He explained that his "primary

objective outside of the disciplinary thing was that creation of a community in which they talk and chatter with each other and with [the instructor]." He used multiple activities or methods to communicate with his students. From the students' first entry into the course, his tone of welcome was apparent as students noted the links to open the syllabus, the audio links, and the large number of forum discussion links. He viewed online courses as a way to communicate with those who otherwise might not be able to participate in university course work, and he wanted to "reach people that [he] otherwise would not reach."

Emails were part of the communication experience in his online course, but they tended to be just between him and individual students. Students emailed him when they had a question about grades or when they were unclear about an assignment. He also noted that students used email among themselves about grades or assignments, and he would just pick up on that communications by coincidence.

Dr. Cobain said that the "downside" about online courses was that they caused him to "miss body language." Communication through body language cannot occur in an online course, and this made discerning the tone of a discussion more difficult online than in a traditional classroom setting, particularly if he had critical or corrective information to share. However, he also asserted that the asynchronous characteristics of online courses allowed him to check in several times a day and had benefits for communicating that face-to-face did not. Dr. Cobain explained the difference,

> One of the neat things about [online] is that I know what every single student is thinking. In the average face to face classroom I will have some students that may go several class sessions without saying anything and I don't know what they

are thinking. In an online class, I know what they are thinking. So that keeps me going.

Most significantly, Dr. Cobain believed that communicating in an online course was the key to building community in an online course. His course would not develop the way that it did without that "sense of community" because his course required that students share experiences at a personal level, and communication was important.

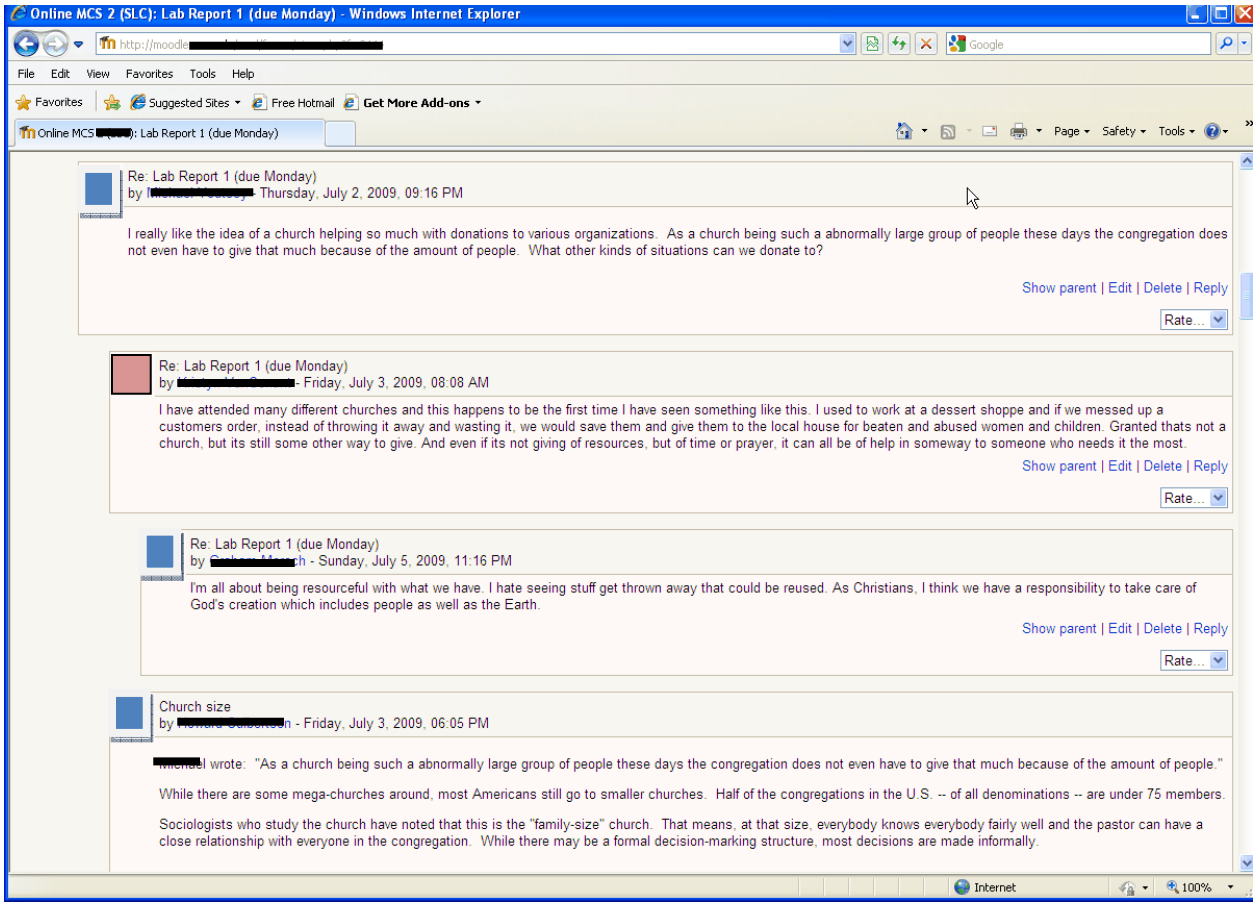
One of the students from MCS was interviewed, and she commented on an email exchange she had initiated with another online classmate – an exchange that Dr. Cobain knew nothing about. She had thought about a case study assignment for MCS and wanted to talk to someone about it. She tried to contact a classmate that she knew from previous face-to-face classes to discuss the frustration of "skimming over the top of things so superficially." In the end these online classmates did not communicate outside of the class and just completed the assignments.

Content. The primary method that Dr. Cobain used to build the content of Man, Church and Society was through the discussion forums. He used the capabilities of the discussion forum activity as a vehicle for students to submit assignments, and then he also required them to read each other's assignments since the forums were public. Using the discussion forums to create content also provided a type of communication venue for the students as they read each other's assignments and had the opportunity to reply to each other. Even though all assignments were submitted in public discussion forums, Dr. Cobain still had different types of assignments for students to complete each week. Students were required to complete and write up four interviews, four case studies, a weekly lab report, a weekly reading response, and a weekly summary response. The

interview assignment provided an opportunity for the students to communicate face-to-face with others and then report back to the online class in a discussion forum. Dr. Cobain's insistence on face to face interviews was based on his objective for the students to do the work instead of the person being interviewed doing all of the work. Without realizing it, one of his online students sent interview questions to Dr. Cobain's wife by email. He explained that "she [spent] an hour or an hour and a half thinking about these answers and the student had dashed [the questions] off in five minutes. He's now gonna get her [response] back and cut and paste and get a good grade without having spent any time with her." That experience led him to require students to conduct interviews either face-to-face or through Skype.

His years of experience in teaching this online course helped him to anticipate the potential of content development within the course through the topics of certain readings each week. As a veteran teacher he could often anticipate the issues that were going to be raised. He knew what he was looking for in the discussion forums and was ready to integrate his curriculum objectives into students' posts. This was also why it was important to him for students to read each other's posts. An example of Dr. Cobain's involvement in the discussion forums as well as his objective of directing the communications in the forums to manage content is illustrated in FIGURE 4.10 below.

FIGURE 4.10. DISCUSSION FORUM TO BUILD COURSE CONTENT.



One student included in this study, made decisions on the content of the MCS course based on her feelings about expectations from the instructor. She had no previous experiences with this instructor onland – in fact she was not completely certain which specific religion professor was teaching the online course. She did not believe that her contributions in the discussion forums were valuable because the instructor was "just telling you what to think and not giving you the opportunity to say what you think…So [she] wasn't really interested in the class" because it did not seem genuine.

Also, she regarded the submission of assignments to a public forum as a way to eliminate the need for reading the assigned material each week. She decided she could

make that accountability statement without guilt if she read all of the postings, even if she had not read the assigned chapters from the text. She used the content posted on the forums to build her own knowledge for the course by "looking at what someone else had posted that day and maybe Googlebooks that page and then write like 300 words on that one book." She figured out a way to do the minimal amount of work to earn an A, and that "is exactly what [she] did."

Throughout her experience in MCS, Amanda Green examined her ideas about how the course could have been more meaningful, especially in the light of potential communications that could have occurred on the interesting and controversial topics. She viewed communication on controversial issues as a way to improve her engagement with the course and her interest in the content of the course. She thought the course "could have easily made [her] care about it by putting things that were a lot more controversial out there. Based on her other online experiences, she wanted to enter into exchanges that were meaningful and where she could establish her position and discuss it with others. One of her theories about communication was that "people come together when they strongly opposed something," therefore since the course participants interpreted some of the discussions as superficial, the interest in discussions was minimal.

Dr. Cobain's involvement in building the content was also to reply to the assignments students submitted and ask leading, reflective questions about what the students write. He was confident that the students were reading all of each other's posts and felt like that they were learning about the three primary objectives he had identified in the course description: MCS, the fourth of LAU's General Education religion courses, takes an in-depth look (1) at the church (ecclesiology), (2) the context in which the

church must minister today and (3) how the believer can be a functioning part of Christ's body and articulate his or her faith in the larger world outside the church.

Culture. The development of the culture within Dr. Hal Cobain's Man, Church and Society occurred over the six week duration of the online summer course as students used discussion forums to communicate with each other and to submit their assignments. The topics presented by the instructor regarding the readings were designed to be thought provoking and the instructor hoped the students appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their opinions whether or not they had actually read the texts. Dr. Cobain seemed to perceive students' reactions one way, while students perceived the course development an opposite way. One student believed that she would connect to the course better if she had cared about her involvement in the course. As it was, she felt like the discussions were insulting to the depth of her belief system, and she did not trust the people in the class to take her seriously. She said, "It seemed more of what you should and shouldn't do inside church than about how church should interact with society and what roles…ministries play in society." Ultimately, she thought the course activities did not reflect the course title.

In an online course that Dr. Cobain had recently completed at another institution, he noted an interesting culture that developed. He has watched as a sense of friendship developed among his online students because of the way they had to read each other's work and discussion postings. The tone and atmosphere that was built replaced body language that only occurred in face-to-face situations. He told the story of a series of exchanges that occurred to reveal the developing culture in an online course,

I had a guy that made a remark that was a bit sexually oriented and also sexist. It wasn't quite 'She realized she was going to be raped and she should have just enjoyed it' but it was something close to that. I thought this is too explosive to get into an online discussion. One thing about online discussion is that I might write today, and he may not reply until tomorrow and I may not…days go by quickly. So, I just wrote him a personal email and told him that this was very inappropriate and I said it was demeaning and that [he] really owed the class an apology. Well, he took my personal email and posted it in the forum and asked the class what they thought and they shut him up really quickly.

There was a couple of ladies who said to him that he was very inappropriate and that one of them…it did have something to do with sexual abuse and one of the ladies said, 'You know I was..[sexually abused] and I don't appreciate you making it kind a humorous thing.'

I think he thought he was going to enlist the community [against the instructor] but it didn't work.

In Dr. Cobain's online MCS class, the elements that create a culture were community oriented. All course participants, students and the instructor, were part of each activity and assignment. While the grades were private, all replies and comments were public to all participants.

The Calendar

This Man, Church and Society (MCS) general education course, when offered during the traditional academic term, ran the standard sixteen week format. Students met two or three times per week for a total of two hours and forty minutes per week; a final

exam was given the last week during a specially scheduled two hour exam time period. Multiple sections by as many instructors are offered onland; in the summer of 2009, LAU offered two sections of MCS online, and both were taught by the same instructor, Dr. Hal Cobain.

The online section of MCS that was used for this study occurred during the summer session of 2009, June 22 – August 2. Students enrolled in the course via their on-campus advisor and received confirmation and start-up materials by email from their instructor.

Within the course, the calendar was managed on a weekly basis. Within the weekly sections there were three colored labels – each week's labels were color coded. For example, all of Week 1's labels were red, Week 2's were blue, and so on. The labels of the first week included the starting date of the week, but none of the remaining labels that began the week's study indicated the date the week began. The labels were organizing factors that helped to move the student through the week; the three labels each week were WEEK 1 BEGINS JUNE 22, WHAT YOU NEED TO DO, and SUPPLEMENTAL LEARNING RESOURCES.

The schedule for each week was indicated each week in two ways. In the main content column, beneath the WHAT YOU NEED TO DO label, a link opened for each student (when clicked) to display a list of all of the activities and the order in which they should be done and submitted. Following that link, the icons and links to the forums connected students to their assignments and discussions. For example the assignment links for Week 1 were 'Introduction Forum (due now),' 'Discovering Spiritual Gifts (due Monday),' 'Reading reflection 1 (due Tuesday),' 'Interview of non-believer: 7 questions

from Sire (Thursday)' and 'End-of-week summary One (due no earlier than Friday evening or no later than Sunday night).' The parenthetical indication of due days was not consistent throughout the remaining weeks – they were included sporadically – but the order of similar assignment events was identical throughout the remaining weeks.

Dr. Cobain's reasons for requiring students to complete certain activities on certain days of the week supported his theory that students taking online classes should "be present" in those classes almost every day of each week. He attributed students' success to online attendance and insisted that students should be involved in coursework almost every day of the course.

The weeks following Week 1 were arranged in the same manner and assignments were scheduled in the same order. The first two assignments of each week were due on the Monday and the Tuesday of that week, and the final assignment was due by Sunday evening. An interesting note in the syllabus expanded on the meaning of "Sunday evening", and Dr. Cobain's explanation added a tone of humanity and understanding to make his class seem more personal. He explained the Sunday evening due date in his syllabus in simulated questions and answer portion of the syllabus found under the book link in the near the top of the course. His words from the link reflected his due date and time policy,

> [Student question]: I do tend to be a bit of a night owl and live in another time zone. So, for the cut-off time each "day," should we aim for what time it is in the Central Time Zone where LAU is located?

[Instructor Answer]: Some online professors will go by the date on the time stamp on the actual submission. I do not. I know there are night owls out there. So, I figure that anything in by 3 or 4 a.m. was actually written at the end of someone's day rather than at the beginning.

I guess you could say I use a modified Jewish definition of day. Whereas the Jews calculate days from sundown to sundown, I tend to count from sunup to sunup!

A final note about the instructor's course calendar regarded the final examination for MCS. In his weekly, introductory comments for Week 6, he explains his decision to abandon his normal final examination and stated that students should write a longer week's summary essay that reflected the entire course.

The instructor and two students from Ministry, Church and Society completed the grid and group survey, APPENDIX B, following the completion of the course. According to Harris' (2005) instructions for using the survey tools to score responses and plot the results, I used tables (Tables 4.5, 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8) and calculated to find the average of their grid scores and their group scores. The scores were then plotted on a graph. The results for MCS revealed that the instructor and the student rated the cultural qualities of the course as bureaucratic and authoritarian (See FIGURE 4.11)

MCS INSTRUCTOR

Table 4.5 Grid Scores

Question	Score
1	6
2	8
3	4
4	7
5	7
6	8
7	8
8	4
9	4
10	2
11	4
Sum	62
Average	5.64

Table 4.6 Group Scores

Question	Score
12	2
13	3
14	4
15	3
16	1
17	2
18	8
19	4
20	1
21	8
22	7
23	4
Sum	47
Average	3.92

MCS STUDENT

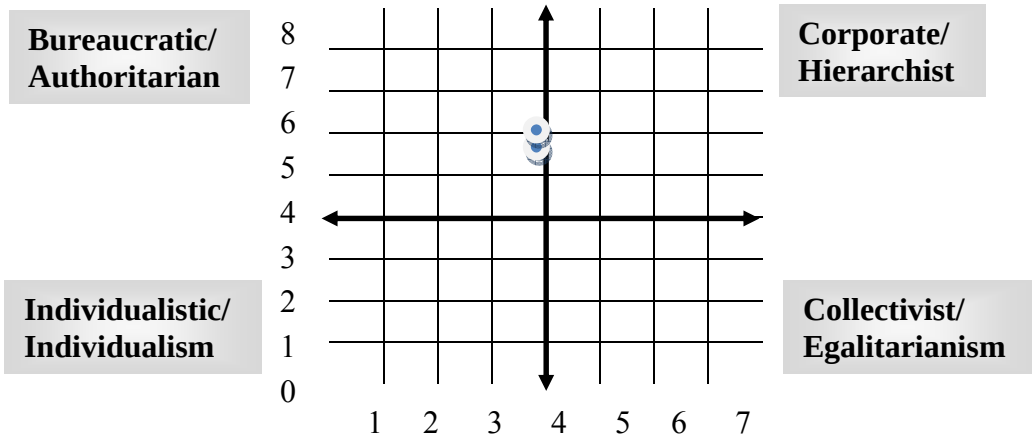
Table 4.7 Grid Scores

Question	Score
1	8
2	7
3	6
4	5
5	4
6	8
7	8
8	7
9	2
10	3
11	8
Sum	66
Average	6

Table 4.8 Group Scores

Question	Score
12	2
13	6
14	2
15	8
16	1
17	1
18	7
19	1
20	6
21	5
22	6
23	2
Sum	47
Average	3.92

FIGURE 4.11. POSITION OF SCORE AVERAGES FOR MCS.



Case Three: Introduction to Biblical Interpretation

The Playing Field

Dr. Mark Mykles' Introduction to Biblical Interpretation course used the 2009 template that LAU provided, including the same of the color schemes, the logo, the fonts and the weekly organizational structure. The main content column included the name of the institution, the name of the course, the instructor's name, and the instructor's professional email address. The title of the course deviated from the template and was in a noticeably small font, particularly different from the much larger uses of the course title in the other online courses within this study. In the contact information block in the right scan column, a personal email address, fullbloodking@hogwizzards.net and a phone number, was listed just below the fictional name 'Severus Snape.' Just beneath the logo and the course title area is a 'General Questions - Class FORUM' link where students can post questions or the instructor can post information. Dr. Mykles included the links to '10 Myths to Online Education' and 'Online Students I Have Met' provided by the

template and they were located under the label titled HELPS FOR ONLINE LEARNING. This portion of the Bib Interp course was the briefest of all of the online courses included in this study.

Each of Dr. Mykles' weekly sections used the same method of organization, and parts of each heading are repetitive. First, in a distinctive light brown color in Times New Roman, bolded font, the week number and the topic created a label. Then, in a dark red color of the same bolded font, the week number and the word 'Assignments' was a label. Beneath these two labels there was list of five to ten assignment links, including discussion forums, quizzes, and questions related to the readings. The way a student maneuvered through the week's assignments was not addressed anywhere, so students had to open the MSWord document and read the notes and the guided questions. Then, the students had to figure out that those guided questions were helpful to use for posting in the corresponding forum.

Beneath the list of assignments was a brightly colored label with the words LEARNING RESOURCES inside the label. Each week the bar was a different color, and this visual characteristic was a carryover from the template used when Dr. Mykles taught this course in summers prior to 2009. Week 1 used a navy blue LEARNING RESOURCES label, Week 2 used a bright yellow label, and Week 3 used a green label, and so on. The resources and links underneath these labels ranged in quantity from as many as twenty-two to as few as three. Most of the resources were audio recordings that the instructor had made himself or links to audio recordings he had collected from other websites.

Each item every week included the icon that the LMS programs to accompany each specific activity. The icons were effective in that they related to the activity they represented. For example, the audio recordings had not only the name of the file but the image of a small speaker to identify the type of activity to the students. FIGURE 4.12 below illustrates the Assignments and the Learning Resources in Week 2 of Dr. Mykles' Introduction to Biblical Interpretation course.

FIGURE 4.12. WEEK 2 ASSIGNMENTS AND RESOURCES

Dr. Mykles' Introduction to Biblical Interpretation online course also included the blocks in the left and right scan columns. He used the blocks provided by the template: 'Students with Disabilities,' 'Library,' 'People,' 'Activities,' 'Administration,' 'Courses,' 'Quickmail,' 'Contact Info' and 'Disclaimer.' The 'Quickmail' feature was located in the top right portion of the course for high visibility and quick and easy participant access.

The Players

Two types of participants exist in this online course: instructors and students. Each online course section included one paid instructor as many as fifteen undergraduate students enrolled in the course for credit, and the instructor also designed the course. Bib Interp began and ended with eleven students, six were males and five were females.

The instructor for Introduction to Biblical Interpretation was an Associate Professor of Old Testament for Liberal Arts University, and had been on faculty at LAU since the fall of 1998. The LAU website identified his academic history is as follows:

- B.A. Northwest Liberal Arts College, 1992
- M.A. Santa Barbara Liberal Arts College, 1994
- M.A. Liberal Arts University, 1995
- Ph.D. Coursework, School of Theology and University of the Mountains
- Ph.D. University of Birmingham, U.K., 2006
- Liberal Arts University, 1998 to present

Dr. Mykles' teaching experience included teaching in the traditional classroom at multiple institutions and online teaching for the past five years at two institutions. He taught undergraduate courses in religion and carried a course load of twelve to fifteen hours per semester. His general education courses, Introduction to Biblical Interpretation

and Man, Church and Society ranged in size from twenty-five to forty. His upper division religion courses ranged in size from fifteen to twenty.

He used learning management systems to facilitate his classes at LAU and at another Bible college where he taught online. The Bible college had its own LMS, but LAU first began using Blackboard when an LMS was introduced to the institution. In 2006, Dr. Mykles was cooperative when LAU changed to the open source LMS, Moodle, and used it successfully in both his onland classes and his online classes. He wrote his own curriculum for all of his courses at LAU and had embraced the user-friendly qualities of Moodle.

Dr. Mykles' decision to teach online was deliberate, and he wanted to be prepared to teach in the way students want to learn. He shared his reasoning and said he identifies several reasons that he decided to teach online courses for LAU and the Bible college, not the least of which is the growing numbers of traditional and non-traditional students that are enrolling in online classes and programs. Dr. Mykles explained,

> The very fact of the matter is that there were millions and millions of tuition dollars that are being spent around the world on online courses. And I think that to *not* learn to teach online at least in some form – even if it's a hybrid form is dangerous for me in terms of my own career. If I don't learn to teach online, my career trajectory might be different. So I teach online for professional reasons, for student reasons, for financial reasons.

Dr. Mykles had participated in all of the opportunities LAU had made available to him to learn about teaching online. LAU encouraged his development of online courses by establishing an online platform for use, formulating leadership committees, providing

laptop computers for online instructors, paying him to develop an online course, scheduling him to teach those courses he developed and bringing in workshop presentation speakers who encourage and offer online teaching strategies. He considered LAU's facilitation of teaching online as very helpful.

Dr. Mykles had personally taken initiative in learning about online pedagogy and had purchased various books which he shared with me as we discussed the issues and challenges online teachers face. Of the instructors interviewed, he was the only one that mentioned independent study of online pedagogy.

Eleven students – six males and five females -- enrolled in the online summer section of Introduction to Biblical Interpretation with Dr. Mark Mykles. All eleven students were junior or senior students and were taking this upper division general education course as part of their degree completion. The students were veterans of traditional education and were well aware of the process students go through to engage in coursework. One student explained that she took the online course because she thought it was less work than the same course taught onland during the fall or spring semesters. She said, "I had heard that when you take it in the fall you had to go out and do a service project as part of the class. If I took it online then I could get it done…and be done with it."

The instructor also held certain opinions about what helped students to be successful, and one of his suggestions related to the profile picture that students could post of themselves in their Moodle personal profile. This personal profile picture was visible to the left of each discussion forum posting participants made. Most of the course participants cooperated with Dr. Mykles' request and uploaded a headshot. Dr. Mykles

explained that his opinion was based on a desire to help students engage with each other and the course. He said,

> I think it helps (when students reply in forums) if they have the icon of their image associated with their posts. There might be situations where this is problematic is they have issues with their ethnic or cultural bias – they get visibly seen with their picture there, but I think it helps people as they are having their online discussions or forums to think that they are really engaging Joe, Sally or Fred and not just some random idea.

The Rules of the Game

Students who entered Bib Interp online were made aware of how to proceed through the course in a general way when they opened the syllabus link in the main content column. There were no directive headings or obvious steps to take, and knowing what to do was dependent upon experienced students' intuitiveness in opening the correct links. Basically, Dr. Mykles' course was best navigated if students scrolled down through the main content column and explore the various links. If students opened the syllabus and clicked back and forth through the options, they could figure out how the course works.

Dr. Mykles was conversational in his tone in the syllabus, and he advised students twice to make plans to login to the course and work a minimum of fifteen minutes each day. He also advised them to plan ahead so that they could be prepared when the assignments were due on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday of each week. He clarified with students that each weekly section would be closed at midnight on Monday, and he was the only instructor that managed his course in this manner and did so in order to

manipulate student involvement. This procedure prevented students from looking back on previous weeks and activities of the course when they really needed to be looking ahead to coming assignments. Dr. Mykles made his rules for late work clear, and again, in a conversational tone, explained that students should "have *all work* completed by Monday night" since he closed the previous week completely on Tuesday morning.

Mykles' course includes the HELPS FOR ONLINE LEARNING label provided by the 2009 online course template, and it promoted links to the two sources that might be of interest to students who are taking a class online. The titles of all of the other links were brief noun phrases, identifying the site or document connected. Many of the links were to podcasts of content lectures. One student explained that she "listened to all of the podcasts and they were very helpful, not only for class but to apply to life." The same student also was comfortable with knowing what to do, and she said that, "it was very easy to figure out what the assignments were and the discussions online did help because [she] was able to get a new perspectives on the lectures and book."

The instructor explained his course activities in such a way that his focus on specific content and delivery was apparent. To facilitate content delivery to all students, Dr. Mykles had discussion forums, and he also made use of quizzes and written assignments based on numerous guiding questions. He tried to provide content in a variety of ways – textbooks, videos, and podcasts – and then he followed up with some kind of online forum or a dialogue based forum. He was intentional in requiring responses from students on all of the content so that he could monitor their engagement with the material. The writing assignments that were responses to his guided questions were used to engage students as well, and the students submitted their assignments in a

public discussion forum. Then they responded to or critiqued the writing of another student.

The Game

Class begins. Students were automatically enrolled in the Moodle LMS when they LAU registrar activates their course enrollment through the institution. The course officially began on May 10, but Dr. Mykles sent out an introductory email to all class participants a few days prior to May 10. The students joined him on the Moodle course and the first introductions were posted on the 'Introduce Yourself' forum by 8:30 a.m. on May 12, 2009. Dr. Mykles posted his own introduction and is personal and descriptive. His students modeled his posting by contributing meaningful introductions of their own. Dr. Mykles also replied to each student's introduction with a meaningful comment or questions. In the remaining discussion forums throughout the course, he required students to post the number of words in their post at the end of the post (copied from their draft out of a MSWord document). The content of each post was a direct response to a reading assignment or an audio file. Posts were 500 - 700 words in length and each one received a reply from Dr. Mykles. Some of them received a reply from classmates as well. Student participation in the discussion forums was nearly 100% throughout the six weeks of the course.

One example of Dr. Mykles' game plan was his use of the gradebook, and he used that feature in Biblical Interpretation in a unique manner. He explained in his syllabus that he might keep all of the grades posted in the LMS gradebook, but that he might opt out of the LMS grade book and keep his own 'paper' gradebook. His explanation below is excerpted from the syllabus,

Gradebook: With the exception of the quizzes, due to past difficulties the professor has had with the gradebook – the professor intends to maintain an offline-"paper" gradebook. Grades will be emailed to each student at the end of each week if they are maintained offline. If the gradebook function is set up and working correctly on Moodle, of course, grades will be accessible there.

Bib Interp was laid out in a weekly format with the topic of the week identified with the week number. Beneath the title, was the heading ASSIGNMENTS and the list of assignments was provided. The items under the assignment heading included everything--notes, discussion forums and quizzes, each associated with an icon provided by the course template. The icon for the discussion forum was a green and a pink caption bubble. The icon for the quizzes was a clipboard with a check mark in the center.

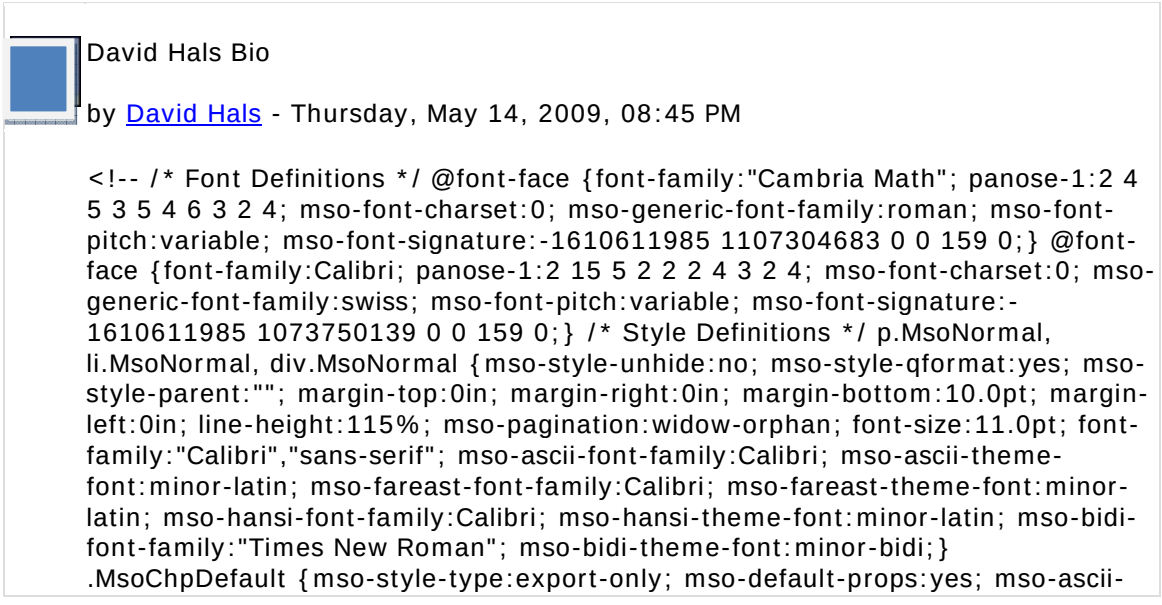
The next label was LEARNING RESOURCES inside of a distinctively colored box. Learning resources were mostly links to digital audio files, but PDFs of notes and questions, as well as MSWord document links with discussion questions were also included. The icons were provided by the course template, and the small speaker on top of a piece of paper was the audio file icon. The PDF and MSWord icons were the branded ones used in all applications and the Internet.

The same elements and activities occurred each week, but the resources vary from week to week. Each week students read from *New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha* and posted a response to a discussion forum. They also read assigned chapters from a text book, posted a response to a discussion forum, and took a quiz for every assigned chapter. The consistency of student involvement was noteworthy. The

course activities were evenly-paced over the six weeks and there was not a mid-term or a final exam.

Access. The instructor initiated involvement in the course via email a few days prior to the actual course start date. He suggested that students open the course and post to the 'Introduce Yourself Forum,' and intending to do so himself, he accidentally posted to a forum in another online course he was teaching. When he realized this on May 12, four students had already posted their own introductions. He then posted his introduction, explained the situation, and began replying to all students' posts. His tone when replying to students was very thorough and he worked to make their access to posting and replying easy while explaining his own responses. Students responded by following his example and posting their own introductions into the 'Introduce Yourself Forum.' FIGURE 4.13 below illustrates one of the introduction discussion forum postings that reflected a coding problem. Dr. Mykles communicated openly with the student and helped the student understand how to solve the problem.

FIGURE 4.13. INTRODUCE YOURSELF FORUM.



David Hals Bio

by David Hals - Thursday, May 14, 2009, 08:45 PM

<!-- /* Font Definitions */ @font-face {font-family:"Cambria Math"; panose-1:2 4 5 3 5 4 6 3 2 4; mso-font-charset:0; mso-generic-font-family:roman; mso-font-pitch:variable; mso-font-signature:-1610611985 1107304683 0 0 159 0;} @font-face {font-family:Calibri; panose-1:2 15 5 2 2 2 4 3 2 4; mso-font-charset:0; mso-generic-font-family:swiss; mso-font-pitch:variable; mso-font-signature:-1610611985 1073750139 0 0 159 0;} /* Style Definitions */ p.MsoNormal, li.MsoNormal, div.MsoNormal {mso-style-unhide:no; mso-style-qformat:yes; mso-style-parent:""; margin-top:0in; margin-right:0in; margin-bottom:10.0pt; margin-left:0in; line-height:115%; mso-pagination:widow-orphan; font-size:11.0pt; font-family:"Calibri","sans-serif"; mso-ascii-font-family:Calibri; mso-ascii-theme-font:minor-latin; mso-fareast-font-family:Calibri; mso-fareast-theme-font:minor-latin; mso-hansi-font-family:Calibri; mso-hansi-theme-font:minor-latin; mso-bidi-font-family:"Times New Roman"; mso-bidi-theme-font:minor-bidi;} .MsoChpDefault {mso-style-type:export-only; mso-default-props:yes; mso-ascii-

font-family:Calibri; mso-ascii-theme-font:minor-latin; mso-fareast-font-family:Calibri; mso-fareast-theme-font:minor-latin; mso-hansi-font-family:Calibri; mso-hansi-theme-font:minor-latin; mso-bidi-font-family:"Times New Roman"; mso-bidi-theme-font:minor-bidi;} .MsoPapDefault {mso-style-type:export-only; margin-bottom:10.0pt; line-height:115%;} @page Section1 {size:8.5in 11.0in; margin:1.0in 1.0in 1.0in 1.0in; mso-header-margin:.5in; mso-footer-margin:.5in; mso-paper-source:0;} div.Section1 {page:Section1;} -->

Hello, my name is David Howards. I'm currently a senior with one more semester left before I graduate. I'm an accounting major and also an assistant coach for the women's tennis team here at LAU. As I'm writing this to you, I'm currently in Mobile, AL for the women's National Tournament. The team is currently ranked eighth and we lost our second round match to Duke University in a very tough and close match. I'm very proud of our tennis girls and it's been a great joy coaching them for the past four years.

I was born and raised my entire life in Midwestern City and I love it. I had actually never planned on going to LAU until the summer before my freshman year at LAU. I had some family issues that caused me to choose a school closer to my family and LAU seemed like a great fit. That summer, Scott Brown who is the head coach of the LAU Women's tennis team asked me to come and help me out as an assistant coach for the year and I gladly accepted.

It's been quite a long but good growing experience since I've arrived on campus at LAU. I started my own business with a friend of mine named David Branson. We currently own an aircraft detailing company named Premier Automobile Detailing which is based out of Wiley Post Cars. I am also currently employed as a Project Manager for a commercial flooring company called Foster's Floor Systems. I have been there for about one year. I love working there and the people I work with are great.

After I graduate, I plan on staying at Foster's Floor Systems but I have no clue on what else the future might hold for me. I know that in my life, I want to be able to travel the world and see the sights because how I see it, we only live once, so live it up.

Word count - 327

Edit | Delete | Reply

Re: David Hals Bio

by Mark Mykles - Thursday, May 14, 2009, 09:26 PM

David ~

Looks like you experienced the same problem I sometimes experience!

If you cut/paste certain documents from word processors into moodle, it brings in all the font/code stuff. No worries from me on this - for you or for anyone else. But, if you cut/paste into a program like "notepad" it somehow deletes the code. It has to do with ASCII or UTF8 code - which really means very little to me, but that is what I've been told! ha!

Great to have you in class. Good for you on the aircraft detailing business and what do you do more precisely for Allen's floor systems?

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

Re: David Hals Bio

by David Hals - Friday, May 15, 2009, 09:35 AM

Good to know about the cut/paste function on moodle. I'm in training to be a Project Manager there which is someone who submit bids and sees about the flow of any certain flooring project assigned to each person. We oversee everything from submitting bids to the ending product when we finish putting a floor in. Foster's Floor Systems is the biggest commercial flooring company in Kansas and its been a great experience since I've arrived at the company.

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

Students also had access to each other and to the instructor through email. The 'Quickmail' feature in the Moodle LMS, located in a block in the top of the right scan column, allowed students to communicate with all course participants quickly and easily, either individually or collectively. Students appreciated the email access and used it to communicate with the instructor when they had questions. Even though he was unaware of the details, Dr. Mykles was certain that students were using email among themselves.

Students felt like they had adequate access to the course and the instructor through email or the discussion forums. Dr. Mykles provided a general forum at the top of the course to encourage students to post questions or comment about anything in the course. He noted that "not a single student showed up in that forum at all." Students also expressed that they only emailed the professor rather than communicating with classmates. One student said, "I didn't email other classmates because the professor's directions (and emails answered from him) were clear enough."

Communication. Within the course, communication between instructor and students occurs through emails and discussion forums. Communication between students occurs primarily through the discussion forum with occasional emails to a classmate who

was a personal friend to clarify an assignment or get some answers when they were behind schedule.

At least three discussion forums were used each week to allow students to respond to the content of the course through a public forum. They were to write their own posting in a MSWord document first, obtain the word count, copy the text and then past the word count and their writing into the discussion forum. Dr. Mykles was specific about his posting and response requirements. He required students to create their own discussion questions and then required them to answer the discussion questions created by their classmates. Students' experiences with the discussion forums were positive, and they responded in a positive way and said that "class discussions helped tremendously."

Content. The content of Introduction to Biblical Interpretation was developed through readings, podcasts, audio files, notes, questions, and discussion forums. The two books Dr. Mykles used as texts were Fee and Stuart's *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* and *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*. Quizzes over the assigned readings from these texts were used to assess student learning; discussion forum postings were used to help frame the content in a way the instructor believes will help students to learn even more. Dr. Mykles objective was two-fold, and he explained it by saying, "[My] primary objective…is that learning takes place and that means both the acquisition of data fact, but also the assimilation of data incorporation ability to articulate, re-articulate or assess the factual content over and above knowing the facts." He used a Bible verse to illustrate his objective. He said, "essentially it means that students need to demonstrate the *FACT*, for example, that John 3:16 contains the verse

that ‘God so loves the world’ but [then] they assimilate an understanding of that fact [in their writings or postings.]”

In his syllabus, Dr. Mykles reminded students that Introduction to Biblical Interpretation online was the same course that was taught during the fall and spring semesters during a sixteen week term. He made certain that his six week online course covered the same material and concepts as the sixteen week version. He reinforced to the students that the benefit of an online class was not that students do less work, but that they were allowed “the freedom to work in unique ways in an asynchronous way – but [the course] will attempt to replicate the same key learning issues that would take place in another format for teaching this course.”

He went on to explain that audio and video lectures were built into his course and they were a positive component. Students’ responses to the audio lectures were positive. Elle Banda shared her experience and said that she listened to all of the lectures but would occasionally skip portions of the recording if she was losing focus. She felt like the discussion forums were “incredibly helpful in learning more about the subject at hand and discussing problems that may arise when reading/listening to the material.” She appreciated the feedback she received in discussion forums from her classmates as well as her instructor.

While Dr. Mykles made the discussion forums a vital part of each week’s activity, he did not prioritize the power of the discussion forums to create or measure specific learning objectives, particularly when it came to factual knowledge of content for which he believed students should be responsible. Dr. Mykles viewed discussion and learning as separate from each other. His negative experience at one institution had impacted the

decisions he had made about weighting grades and discussions in this online class. He told the story and explained,

> This isn't so much related to my class, but I have also taught for Nazarene Bible College – a different institution – not meaning to critique their entire program. And it's a concern for me in educational ways. I think one of the things about online education and course/curricular – these couple of books I have – they talk all about the course communication the dialogue – all of that is great. So I understand that, however, when the final grades are calculated, and the grades get weighed heavily towards participation and discussion, I think that there is an issue that needs to be addressed about how much learning took place and how much discussion took place. Because in my experience of students I have had at NBC and given the perimeters of the assignments and the point allocation, in my anecdotal observation, if a student shows up to class, does minimal work – and by minimal I mean if a student show up to the online class and submits the very very minimal amount of response – and then replied to everyone else's content with minimal effort and I can get a high C or a B in that class. Because the way the assignments are graded at NBC it's all about my engagement and discussion with other people. So I can say a lot of stuff that is worthless without knowing a lot of content, and yet. For example in that program there is a Weekly Reflection that is worth 25% of the grade in that class.
>
> Well, it is basically a weekly reflection. "I really like the way we discussed this….and this made me think more about this…. I still have these questions…" But you are not really explaining your proficiency – you are just

responding to it. And it's 25% of the grade. Participation. Attendance – are also part of the grade. I looked at the details once. If a student shows up to class, responds to the posts, but basically fails their own writing assignments, the way that system works that student can still get a C even a B in the class. THAT's concerning to me.

The discussion is great. But there has to be fact and data and you have to assimilate that. I am concerned that the ability of students in online work to talk about some of the facts or to know all of the facts or more importantly to discern all of the facts.

Culture. At one point in an interview, Dr. Mykles said he did not think class community was important; the next moment he said that he wanted to give them opportunity to discuss an issue openly without concern for grades. This would indicate to this researcher that a culture of respect for, and interest in classmates' comments does exist in Bib Interp. Students and the instructor openly admitted that they did not believe that a culture of community was important in Introduction to Biblical Interpretation. The requirements of the course were clearly specified in either the syllabus or in the weekly podcasts Dr. Mykles provided. These podcasts were partially produced by him, his voice and his text; some of them were audio files or videos he had obtained from Yale University and the Free University digital audio files. This technique in content development and course communication was significant, but participants were unaware of the sense of culture that was created in terms of community. Instead, students felt like Dr. Mykles helped them because he would check in with them in the forums or periodic emails throughout the course.

That communication and the details of the course did create a culture of confidence as far as students were concerned regarding their success, even if they did not realize it. The instructor explained his perception of the class community in his online course, and he did not believe that he had a lot of camaraderie within his courses. He saw that students engaged only as much as was necessary and did not encourage each other genuinely or make strong connections with what other students posted.

The Calendar

Introduction to Biblical Interpretation was a general education course, when offered during the traditional academic term, ran the standard sixteen week format. Students met two or three times per week for a total of two hours and forty minutes per week; a final exam was given the last week during a specially scheduled two hour exam time period.

The online section of Biblical Interpretation that was used for this study occurred during the first summer session of 2009, May 11 – June 21, and it was an online course. Students enrolled in the course via their on-campus advisor and received confirmation and start-up materials by mail and by email.

Within the course, the calendar was managed on a weekly basis with due dates for all assignments occurring on Thursday, Saturday or Sunday. Even though the due days were at the end of each week, the instructor recommended that students login each day to the class. He was specific about that recommendation in the syllabus and he emphasized it in an interview with the researcher as well, He believed that students needed to remember that they were involved in this class and that at least fifteen minutes of login time each day was a necessity. He said, "What helps online students to be successful is to

see it as a routine of their daily participation – and not this sort of virtual class. It's NOT a virtual class. It's a REAL class that is being offered VIRTUALLY. I think that distinction is important."

Dr. Mykles noted in the syllabus that students had until midnight on Monday night to get everything in, but he recommended that they submit assignments per his ideal schedule. His syllabus identified the schedule as:

> ·Each week, by Thursday – submit your *NOAB* assignment – then discuss with your peers.
> ·Each week, by Saturday – submit your Fee & Stuart assignment – then discuss with your peers.
> ·Each week, by Saturday – submit your Audio-Video-Lecture assignment – then discuss with your peers.
> ·Each week, by Sunday – take the quiz over Fee & Stuart.

Each new week officially began on Tuesdays, but he opened the week for viewing the Friday before the week actually began on Tuesday. Also, to control late work and confusion, he closed the week at midnight on Monday night. In the syllabus, he explained his reasoning to the students by telling them that with scheduling submissions for Thursday and Saturday made it possible for discussions to flow out of those assignments. He felt like that just turning in assignments did not demonstrate learning—students must be engaged.

Even though the instructor recommended that his online students log on each day and begin submitting assignments before their final due dates, most discussions and assignments (95% +) were submitted on the day of the week they were actually due. At the end of the time, just after the time assignments were due, Dr. Mykles posted a culminating response to the points that all of the students had made in their postings and replies.

The instructor and one student from Introduction to Biblical Literature completed the grid and group survey (See APPRENDIX B) following the completion of the course. According to Harris' (2005) instructions for using the survey tools to score responses and plot the results, I used tables (Tables 4.9, 4.10, 4.11, 4.12) and calculated to find the average of their grid scores and their group scores. The scores were then plotted on a graph. The results for Bib Interp revealed that the instructor rated the cultural qualities of the course as bureaucratic and authoritarian and the student rated the cultural qualities as corporate. While the student identified grid characteristics similar to the instructor, she rated the course slightly higher in terms of group on four questions about discussions, communications, connections and responsibilities the members had to each other. (See FIGURE 4.14)

BIB INTERP INSTRUCTOR

Table 4.9 Grid Scores

Question	Score
1	6
2	5
3	4
4	2
5	4
6	8
7	7
8	2
9	2
10	4
11	4
Sum	48
Average	4.36

Table 4.10 Group Scores

Question	Score
12	3
13	3
14	1
15	3
16	2
17	6
18	7
19	4
20	1
21	7
22	7
23	3
Sum	47
Average	3.92

BIB INTERP STUDENT

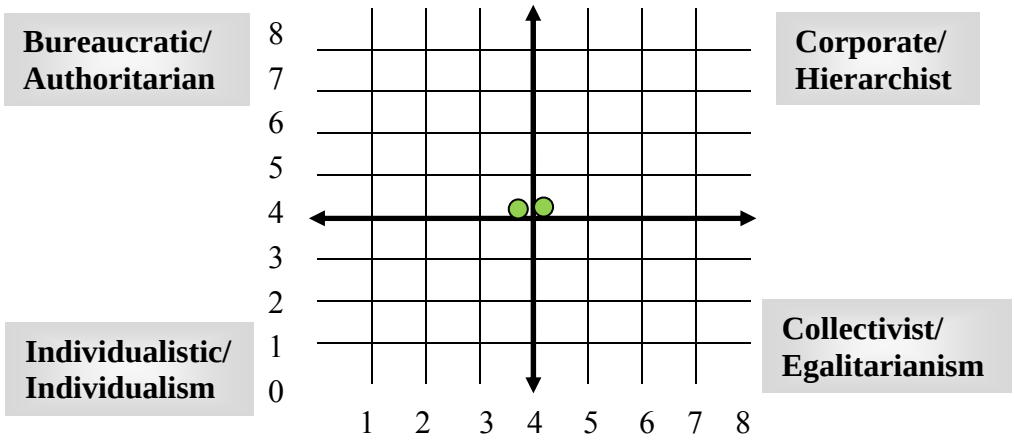
Table 4.11 Grid Scores

Question	Score
1	6
2	8
3	1
4	1
5	1
6	7
7	7
8	7
9	2
10	1
11	3
Sum	44
Average	4

Table 4.12 Group Scores

Question	Score
12	3
13	5
14	3
15	3
16	2
17	2
18	6
19	7
20	3
21	6
22	7
23	2
Sum	49
Average	4.08

FIGURE 4.14. POSITION OF SCORE AVERAGES FOR BIB INTERP



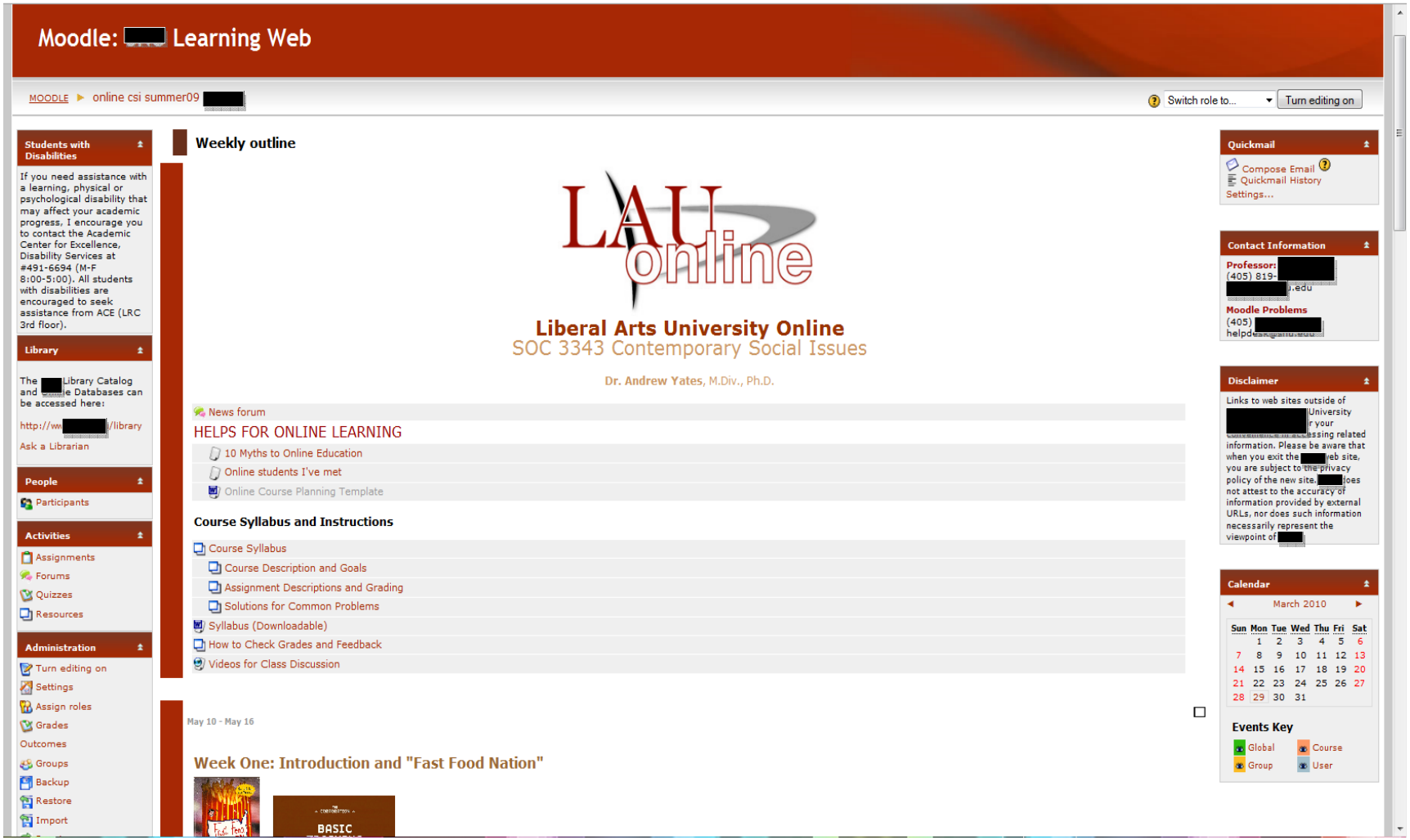
Case Four: Contemporary Social Issues

The Playing Field

Dr. Andrew Yates's Contemporary Social Issues (CSI) course used the template that LAU provided, including the color schemes, the logo, the fonts and the weekly

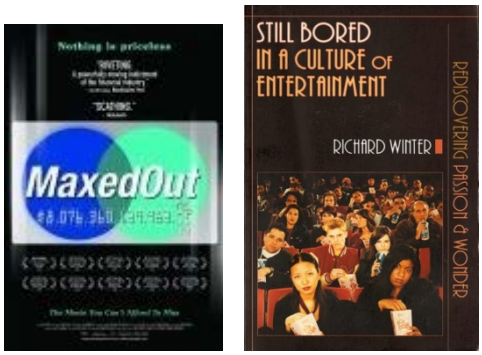
organizational structure. The main content column included the name of the institution, the name of the course and the instructor. Dr. Yates's contact information block on the right of the course screen contained his email address and his personal cell phone number. Beneath the large course name and the instructor's name was a News Forum link he added where students may ask course questions. Below that, the two links to success for online students were also included just under the heading HELPS FOR ONLINE LEARNING. A sub-heading titled 'Course Syllabus and Instructions' included six links to course documents: (1 and 2) the syllabus and a downloadable copy, (3) assignment descriptions and grading information, (4) a solution to common problems document, (5) information about how to check grades and feedback, and (6) a link with instructions about downloading all of the videos necessary for the course. Each of these links worked perfectly and quickly, particularly the hypertext markup language (html) links with assignment descriptions. FIGURE 4.15 below is a screen shot of what the CSI Moodle course looked like when participants first entered.

FIGURE 4.15 SCREENSHOT OF CSI MOODLE PAGE



Each of his weekly sections used a distinctive light brown color in Times New Roman, bolded font to identify the number of the week and the texts he would be using that week. He also added interest by including colorful pictures of the book covers of the texts his students would be required to read each week. A sample of these colorful pictures is provided below in FIGURE 4.16.

FIGURE 4.16. TEXTBOOK COVERS. Visual inserted into each week of Dr. Yates's CSI course.



Beneath the visuals each week were the instructions and activities for the week. The quantity of activities for his course slightly varied each week, depending on his objectives and the texts. Each week a link to 'Assignments for the Week' was the first item in the list of activities, followed by one or two discussion forums, four to six assignment upload links, and one or two video links. Each link was identified by the icon provided in the template to indicate what kind of activity the link represented; he gave links titles rather than indicating what the user should *do*. For example, one of his assignment links where students must actively upload a completed assignment said '"Why the Rest..." Intro & Ch 1' when it could have said, 'Submit Response to '"Why the Rest…" Intro & Ch 1.'

An optional block that Dr. Yates added along both sides of the scrolling main content column included the calendar box that students could follow to check their assignment due dates at a quick glance. He also retained the 'Quickmail' feature from the template and located it in the top right portion of the course for high visibility and convenient student access.

The Players

Two types of people exist in an online course: instructors and students. Each online course section in this study at LAU included one paid instructor and as many as fifteen undergraduate students enrolled in the course for credit.

The instructor for CSI has been a Professor of Sociology on the faculty for Liberal Arts University since the fall of 2006. According to the LAU website, Dr. Yates's included the following:

- A.B. Sociology, University of Iowa, 1985
- M. Div., emphasis in Missions, Evangelical Divinity School, 1987
- A.M. Sociology, University of Iowa, 1992
- Ph.D., Sociology, University of Iowa, 1993
- Associate Professor of Sociology, Penial College, Iowa, 1994-2006

Dr. Yates reported that his experience in education had been primarily teaching in the traditional classroom. He had taught undergraduate courses in both general education and sociology, carrying a course load of twelve - fifteen hours per semester. His general education courses, Contemporary Social Issues and Introduction to Sociology, ranged in size from fifteen to thirty. His upper division sociology courses ranged in size from ten to fifteen students.

In 2006, he began teaching online by using by using the Moodle LMS to facilitate course information distribution, assessment and content management. Since that time Dr. Yates has increased his use of Moodle in his onland classes and has also used it to develop and teach the curriculum for two online classes.

He has taught online in the summer for the extra income and to enhance the accessibility of general education courses by making them available to students who need them during the non-traditional time frame. The reasons he expressed for teaching online included compensation, but went beyond that as well. Dr. Yates explained that he appreciates that in online classes instructors can "get more things going where they [students] are clearly responding to each other – you know what's happening. In face to face it might be happening in groups, but I can't always know that for sure."

Dr. Yates described the training and opportunities that his institution provided for him to prepare for teaching online. Before training, the university provided a one-time course development salary, and following that training on Moodle was available in a tutorial format. LAU provided laptops, the LMS, and according to Dr. Yates, "that was probably the main support they did." I perceived that his training in online pedagogy was minimal at best; he indicated no faculty development workshops, reading materials or direction from an instructional designer or IT director. The development of his online courses was made possible because of his technological savvy and interest in discovering the potential of LAU's LMS. It also seemed that Dr. Yates was aware of trends in higher education to produce online courses, but ultimately he felt most comfortable with at least some face-to-face interaction with students if at all possible.

Ten students – four males and six females – were enrolled in the online summer section of CSI with Dr. Andrew Yates. All ten students were junior or senior students and were taking this upper division general education course as part of their degree completion. The students were veterans of traditional education and were well aware of what was necessary to be successful in a college class. Students appreciated the flexibility that online courses offer, but as Amanda Green said, "I think that online class is one of the most difficult things I have done just because of the amount of time I had to pour into it." Students were surprised when they realize it might take multiple hours per day to complete all of the assignments and earn a high grade. Amanda appreciated the academic level of this course and enjoyed the course in spite of being a busy student that was "taking the two classes and doing McNair research."

The Rules of the Game

When students approach an online course, somehow they must find out how to proceed through the course. Institutions or instructors have a variety of methods. Some may send a letter through the mail with detailed instructions, others my email the instructions, and some may have everything available on the course website for students to explore on their own. Dr. Andrew Yates used all three methods to engage students in the course. He posted nine separate links or documents in the Topic outline box of the main content column of CSI that initiated students into the course in general and then prepared them for the specifics of CSI. The HELPS FOR ONLINE LEARNING heading promoted links to the two resources that would be of interest to students who were taking a class online. The first link identified ten myths that many may believe about online education. The second link provided a list of types of students who had taken online

courses and described what had caused some of them to be more successful and what had caused some of them to fail. The links opened in a separate window and were descriptive as well as attractive. These links were provided as part of the template for online courses.

Beneath the HELPS FOR ONLINE LEARNING label, a Course Syllabus and Instructions label introduced the remaining seven resources for students. The first document provided, as both a link and a downloadable MS Word file, was the course syllabus. The syllabus included typical course and instructor information, contact information for the instructor, and an opening statement about the syllabus being a general outline. The professor reserved the right to make adjustments to the course as needed. It continued with the course description, course goals, texts required, videos required, grading scale and the list of assignments. Following the list of required assignments was a detailed list of descriptions and expectations for the assignments. These descriptions explained requirements in terms of form and content.

Following the course descriptions were the tentative schedule, academic policies, travel and Internet considerations, computer problems, late assignments, academic integrity and classroom expectations, and finally a section offering tutoring and help with disabilities.

There were three items that appeared to be a subset of the syllabus link: 'Course Description and Goals', 'Assignment Descriptions and Grading', and 'Solutions for Common Problems' Each of the first two items was a separate link beneath the syllabus link, but when I explored them I realized they were excerpted from the syllabus. The titles for the items described the contents more specifically than 'course syllabus' and were potentially more helpful to online students who were unwilling to wade through the

details of a long syllabus but wanted to acquire specifics. The third link in the subsection was really a troubleshooting section for students to refer to if they encountered problems with Moodle or uploading assignments.

The remaining links in this nuts and bolts section of the online course included a link that instructed students how to monitor their course grades. The title for this link was instructional in that it used language that reduced questions for the student. The final link provided students with access to the multiple videos they would need to access part of the course content. He had every item and every link students would need verified and ready so that the course and contents would be useful to them. Dr. Yates was deliberate and extremely detailed in his design and explanation of the course and its requirements. He explained that he thinks "the online students really need the professor to be organized up front. Everything has to be crystal clear."

Some of the links used language that was more of a title; other links use language that was more directive. Amanda Green commented on her reaction to the course plans. She felt like "it was too much stuff to do for the amount of time. We were required to read four or five books in six weeks. That's not too bad, but then we had to write four pages about each chapter!" Dr.Yates stated in his introductory email that students should plan to spend at least an hour a day on their CSI course work, but Amanda soon realized that "between the reading and doing the assignments, four or five hours out of [her] day were gone."

The Game

The class begins. Students were automatically enrolled in the Moodle LMS CSI course when the LAU registrar activated their course enrollment through the institution.

The course officially began on May 10, but Dr. Yates sent out the introductory email and posted his own introduction on the Introduce Yourself forum in Week 1 on May 7. The students joined him on the Moodle course and posted their own introductions within twenty-four hours of the instructor's posting, two days before the beginning of the class. The first forum, related to *Fast Food Nation* and *Basic Training* began and ended well, with the students participating as their syllabus and instructions instructed them. Students not only posted their own responses, but they evaluated and replied to the postings of the other students. Most of the postings occurred on the due date of the postings, rather than early in the range of days and times. Of the five written assignments and one graded discussion forum, only one student missed submitting two assignments for a 96.6% completion rate of assignments for Week 1.

As the class progressed, the gradebook reflected the completion of the discussions and assignments. Reviewing the gradebook feature in the online CSI course, the completion rate of all assignments was well over 90%. It appears that the student involvement in the forums and the high percentage of completed assignments indicates that both interest in the course and commitment to completion of the course are significant. Dr. Yates required an equal number of video viewings as books to be read, and students' responses and completion rates reflect the acceptance and interest in this variety in activities. One student commented that she liked "that every week and a half he [Dr. Yates] had a movie for us to watch and a paper to write over it. I enjoyed that assignment the most because it was different – a nice break from having to read chapters."

CSI was laid out in a weekly format with the title of the books as the topic for the week. Beneath the words were pictures of the book covers or video posters that applied to the readings or viewings for that week. Beneath each picture were the links to the assignments for that week, followed by the links for the forums, and videos for the week. The icons associated with each activity were the same throughout the course, but were arranged in the order in which students should complete each activity rather than grouped according to type.

Each week included the same elements and activities, only not necessarily in the same order. The consistency of student involvement was noteworthy. The course activities were evenly-paced with the sixth and final week including a final paper that reflects an integration of concepts and responses from the entire course.

Access. The instructor initiated involvement in the course via email three days prior to the actual course start date. Students responded immediately by following his example and posting their own introductions onto the Introduce Yourself forum. Throughout the remainder of the course, students could email the instructor using the 'Quickmail' email function located in the upper right activity block of the class window. Emails could be sent to other members of the class, but students tended to use it only to communicate with the instructor. The instructor used the 'Quickmail' function to email everyone in the class simultaneously to remind them of a deadline or to update them on a technological issue regarding Moodle. He also provided all necessary login information for the password protected videos.

Dr. Yates stated that a reliable LMS and Internet access were critical factors in student success, and he explained, "Obviously, the computer system has to be working

because sometimes the system crashes and burns and Moodle has been known to go down when kids are trying to turn in stuff." As an experienced online instructor, Dr. Yates had learned workarounds "to program the course so that it allows assignments to be turned in late and they are just flagged." To set rigid deadlines creates a lot of "trash [he] has to clean up" so he programmed his course to accept late work and give students access even when uncontrollable elements occur.

Communication. Within the course, communication between instructor and students occurred through email and discussion forums. Communication between students occurred primarily through the discussion forum with occasional emails to a classmate who was a personal friend to clarify an assignment or get some answers when running behind schedule. Two of the female students regularly exchanged emails about the course, and one of them explained, "There was one other girl that I would call her back and forth. We had had another class together. The other people in class I didn't know in person, so I never called them. But I called her and she would [help.]" Students were impressed to actively participate in the forums, and one student said, "I really felt the need to [talk in the discussion forums] and it did become important because I was wondering, 'Ohhh….I wonder what this person is going to say about this topic,' and I enjoyed it." She further expressed the significance of the discussion forums when she said,

> Well in his class it was really important to know what everyone else was thinking because the issues were so intense and interesting. And you wanted to talk to other people. So in each forum for each week everyone would talk and we would have a limit of certain number we had to address. It was really very interesting

material and you wanted someone to talk to about it. It's like something is in your head and driving you crazy and you wanted to get it out and talk to someone about it.

Discussion included students and the instructor. In the case of CSI, the students posted more often than the instructor, but they anticipated his interaction when he prompted further discussion by interjecting questions or comments into the forums. The time necessary for the instructor to facilitate the quality development of discussion forums was significant, and Dr. Yates monitored the discussions closely so that he could interject appropriate comments to turn the discussion the direction he felt necessary to help students meet their learning objectives. He found that "online teaching is much more labor intensive than classroom teaching," and he acknowledged the difference in monitoring the comments of all online students as opposed to participating in a face-to-face classroom discussion where students speak one at a time, and not all students necessarily speak. He said, "In a lot of ways [online discussion] actually went better [than] in a classroom setting – because I can read and be assured that they have had 'conversation' on the topic, but I can't be sure of that in live small groups."

He also was cautious about his involvement in the forums. He thought an instructor, could suddenly shut down the discussion if students were fearful of failure or if they thought the professor was the only one who had anything meaningful to say. Dr. Yates used the term 'overly intrude', and he made it a point to avoid overly intruding because he wanted to encourage students to process the content. His intention was to only post interjections that were answers to thoughtful questions or directives for

additional research. In reviewing his discussion forums, he had very few replies or posts in them.

Content. The content of CSI was developed through reading and viewing books and videos that focused on social issues people face in today's world. Dr. Yates avoided a traditional text book and allowed the content of the course to evolve through the books, videos, students' discussions and their response essays. He did not use objective tests or quizzes. As he explained, his plan began from a desire to avoid '"content and to teach people to think about wisdom." In soliloquy fashion, Dr. Yates explained his objectives for the course,

> I walk into class much less concerned about people learning a bunch of facts or learning anything in particular about a social issue that is going on. I wanted them to have a chance – I almost called it 'Coffee Shop Class' – I wanted it to have a chance to read some books that would be pertinent to their lives and to get them to think about the way that their families operate, or the way they use the media, or the way that they approach what they eat. Or whatever. And they are thinking through the way our culture teaches them to do things and they think about 'Is that the way I really want to do things or not?'

Dr. Yates's approach was flexible and confident. With his approach to the objectives, he realized the concept of 'lecturer' was not appropriate. He attempted to adapt the small group discussions in a face-to-face class to the discussion format potential in an online class. It took time and attention to monitor the development of issues students were discussing and responding to. He also shared a critical realization when he acknowledged the significance of reading each student's response online where as in a

face-to-face setting he would only hear the responses of those who chose to participate in the discussion.

Culture. One of the elements of culture in an online class includes the communications that occur in discussion forums with everyone as well as the communications with just the professor. Essays and responses that were submitted only for the instructor to view were elements that influenced the development of that culture as well. Within those communications the tone and authority embraced by the instructor made a significant impact on course culture and whether or not students felt confident to ask questions, to contact each other or to work in collaboration. This specific course did not include any collaborative projects, but the encouraging statements made in discussions indicated to the professor that community was developing.

Time was an issue in developing community, and Dr. Yates believed it "builds up over time... as [students] experience the same books and same videos." Instead of establishing a feeling of commitment within the space of a classroom, it is developed in virtual time frame. This particular course was offered to upper division students who have been taking classes on a small campus during the traditional semester. A culture of communication and interaction online may likely be impacted by the acquaintance of students during the regular semester.

Students' perception of community was defined in terms of knowing what the other students were thinking about the issues. Ms. Green's comment reflected her interest in the class in tone and in her reflex response when she said, "It's like something is in your head and driving you crazy and you want to get it out and talk to someone about it." She felt comfortable and engaged enough to value the discussions in CSI.

In Dr. Yates's online CSI class the elements that created a culture were somewhat individually oriented and somewhat group oriented. He was the only one that was always a part of the every event, while students worked within an online culture that featured both individual activities and group activities.

The Calendar

This CSI general education course, when offered during the traditional academic term, runs the standard sixteen week format. Students meet two or three times per week for a total of two hours and forty minutes per week; a final exam is given the last week during a specially scheduled two hour exam time period. The section of CSI used in this study occurred during the summer session of 2009, May 10 – June 20, and it was an online course. Students enrolled in the course via their on-campus advisor and received confirmation and start-up materials by mail and by email.

Within the course, the calendar was managed on a weekly basis with due dates for discussions and assignments occurring throughout the week. Dr. Yates designed CSI so that each new week began on Mondays, with the final assignment of a week due at midnight on Sunday. The schedule within the course was intentional, as Dr. Yates explained, "In this particular case I said [to students], 'You have to do is your initial post by Tuesday night at midnight -- you have to post your initial post for that week's reading. And then you have to respond." He went on to explain that by the end of the week the students completed as many as five posts in response to their classmates' work. "So two of those posts would have to be in by Wednesday at midnight, and then two more have to be in by Friday at midnight, and the last one had to be in by the weekend. But [students] couldn't do all of them by Wednesday; some of them had to be put off until the end of the

week." Dr. Yates's weekly calendar was managed in such a way that students had to participate multiple times and consistently throughout the week.

When I commented about the rhythm he imposed upon them, he explained the necessity in order to make responses more meaningful. He said, "Part of what I ran into is that they would post after the fact and the system was letting them post something and no one was ever seeing it or responding to it. So when they did that, I would give them no points for it, unless they had been sick or something and I would tell them that this kind of defeats the whole purpose of responding and seeing how you are doing."

For students at LAU, the calendar of the course was important in two ways. It must work with their other courses as well as with their jobs. Online courses do offer flexibility in terms of asynchronous meeting, but the dates of the course were arranged according to the summer schedule of courses at LAU. The summer offering of CSI, May 10 – June 20, was critical for some students because it was a required general education course and with the limited quantity of offerings at this small institution, they had to look ahead a semester or two to make sure they could take all of the courses they needed. Amanda Green had selected this time slot for specific reasons, as she explains, "LAU cut so many sections last year or last spring, so the ones I need to graduate they weren't going to offer in the time slots I needed with the other classes I had to take. So my option was to take online classes."

The instructor and all students enrolled in the course were invited to complete the grid and group survey. The instructor and two students from CSI completed the survey, found in APPENDIX A, following the completion of the course. According to Harris' (2005) instructions for using the survey tools to score responses and plot the results, I

used tables (Tables 4.13, 4.14, 4.15, 4.16) and calculated to find the average of their grid scores and their group scores. The scores were then plotted on a graph. (See FIGURE 4.17) The results for Contemporary Social Issues revealed that the instructor and the student rated the cultural qualities of the course as bureaucratic and authoritarian. While the student identified group characteristics identical, on the average, to the instructor, she rated the course higher in terms of grid on three questions about course materials, personalization of materials, and course rules and procedures.

CSI INSTRUCTOR

Table 4.13 Grid Scores

Question	Score
1	3
2	7
3	3
4	2
5	3
6	6
7	6
8	6
9	7
10	2
11	4
Sum	49
Average	4.45

Table 4.14 Group Scores

Question	Score
12	2
13	6
14	1
15	5
16	1
17	4
18	7
19	3
20	2
21	7
22	6
23	2
Sum	46
Average	3.83

CSI STUDENT

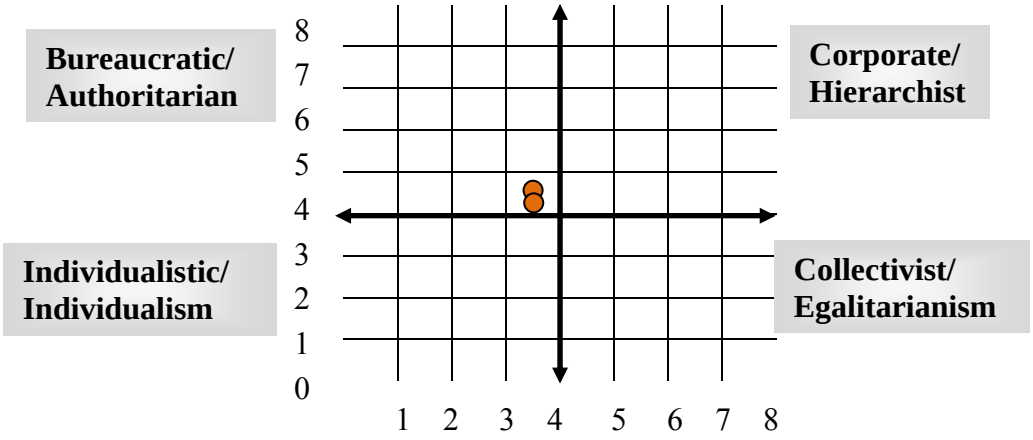
Table 4.15 Grid Scores

Question	Score
1	2
2	7
3	2
4	1
5	1
6	8
7	8
8	7
9	3
10	1
11	6
Sum	46
Average	4.18

Table 4.16 Group Scores

Question	Score
12	2
13	3
14	1
15	7
16	1
17	2
18	8
19	7
20	3
21	7
22	3
23	2
Sum	46
Average	3.83

FIGURE 4.17. POSITION OF SCORE AVERAGES FOR CSI.



The survey results for all of the participants in this study is combined and included in APPENDIX D and E.

Summary

The presentation of these cases describes four online courses that were taught the summer of 2009 at the same institution, a small liberal arts university in the Midwest. The LMS used by the institution was described and then the visual elements within each of the courses were described in detail. The description included the appearance of the course when participants entered and information about the instructors and the students. A breakdown description of each course syllabus and guidelines for success as well as information about the chronology of the course was included. The lengthiest part of each case description was the activity of the course that includes all assignments, discussions, perceptions and communications. A description of the culture of the course or perceptions of the importance of culture in the course completed the presentation. Each case description was completed with the information collected from the grid and group survey. The results were calculated and posted on a table; the summary numbers from the tables were then located properly on the grid and group matrix.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

Summary of the Study

This chapter uses the data to answer the study's research questions developed to explain four undergraduate, general education online courses taught at a small, liberal arts in the summer of 2009. Then discussion of analysis is presented that includes the data collected as well as the researcher's perspective. The significance of the study and the limitations and ideas for future studies conclude this chapter. The purpose of this study is to understand how student engagement, communication, and community are manifested within these four courses, considering the success of each course in terms of a culture that may or may not have developed during the course experience. Data were collected through observation of the courses, interviews of course participants, and a grid and group questionnaire to survey each course instructor and a student from each course. These methods were used to explain the online communities in these courses and to also explain any additional realities that may have emerged from the data. Findings are discussed through each research question with each of the four cases.

Question 1: How are student engagement, communication and community manifested in each course culture?

Case One: U.S. History II

The percentages from the course gradebook indicates the level of student engagement in this course. The online section of U.S. History II that occurred during the summer of 2009 at LAU was taught by an instructor who wrote the online course and who also taught the course onland during the regular academic term. Of the ten students enrolled in the course at the beginning of the summer session, eight passed. Fifty assignments were made for each student for a total of five hundred grades for the course. Of those five hundred grades, thirty percent or one hundred and fifty were not submitted. Half of the assignments not submitted were from the two students who failed the course. The mean course grade was 62.5% overall. The high percentage of assignments that were not submitted in combination with the low average for the course grades indicates that student engagement was low.

The communication between students in the course was non-existent; students communicated with their instructor via email when they had a question about an assignment or their grades. The instructor communicated with the students through email when she wanted to address a discussion posting, respond to their questions, or deal with an LMS or technological issue. A sense of community among students in the course did not exist, but each student felt a connection or responsibility to the instructor. The Taking Sides Debate Forum assignment the instructor gave that required students to take sides on an issue and then post their positions and a rebuttal was not submitted forty percent of the time. This assignment was the only discussion forum assignment that was

used in the course, and all other assignments were submitted as essays through Turnitin. It appeared that the students did not value communication in terms of exchanging information for content development. The instructor created the mechanism for exchange, but she was not involved in the exchanges at all.

A sense of community online was not an issue for the instructor nor the students in U.S. History II. The instructor indicated that she initiated most of the communications in the class; the student interviewed indicated that she initiated most of the communications in the class. Clearly they were opposite in their perceptions of communication, but they were both low grid on their thoughts that assignments were completed individually rather than in collaboration. Both subjects in this case rated identically low group on the statement, "Most decisions are made by the instructor." In an online course, communications are foundations in the creation of course community; the community in this case, U.S. History II, is low group in that individuals work on their own behalf to assure themselves of the best grade possible.

Case 2: Ministry, Church and Society (MCS)

The online section of Ministry, Church and Society that occurred during the summer of 2009 at LAU was taught by an instructor who wrote the online course and who also taught the course onland during the regular academic term. Of the thirteen students enrolled in the course at the beginning of the session, eleven passed. Forty-three assignments were made for each student for a total of 559 grades for the course. Of those 559 grades, 16.3 percent or ninety-one were not submitted. Forty-one—almost half--of the 91 assignments not submitted were from a student who turned in only two assignments the first week of class and failed without withdrawing from the course. The

mean course grade was 82% overall. Omitting data of the student who failed with only two assignments, the submission rate was 91% for the remaining twelve students. The high percentage of assignments that were submitted indicates that involvement, which some may interpret as student engagement was high, particularly regarding accountability and completing assignments. The instructor awarded high grades for all submitted assignments.

Dr. Cobain designed the online version of Ministry, Church and Society in such a way that each assignment was submitted through a discussion forum. Not only could he read everything that students submitted, but the students could read each other's submissions. Part of the course requirement was for students to write an accountability statement each week declaring whether or not they had read all of their classmates' discussion postings. When students did not include the words 'I have read all of the postings this week' at the top of their weekly summary posting, Dr. Cobain would reply to their post and request their accountability statement. Another course requirement was for students to respond or reply to a certain number of their classmates' posts each week. The large percentage of submitted assignments and postings could be interpreted as a reflection of student engagement. This component of the MCS course is considered high group in that it established the structure for students to interact, but the perception of the actual interactions by the student s was low group because they did not consider the postings as significant connection with classmates or something they could learn from. Students felt like all of the postings were busy work.

The communication between students in the course occurred in the discussion forums and was more of a simulated discussion since this 'discussion' was also the way

they submitted their assignments. The instructor communicated with students through the discussion forums with his comments, and he replied to students if they contacted him by email. Dr. Cobain's class was very open and transparent, with the actual grades being the only information that was kept private. The instructor did learn of situations where students had communicated with each other privately about their grades on assignments. While a great number of postings and replies occurred in the discussion forums, it was because the instructor received assignments in this way, and the students did not perceive those postings and replies as communication. This amount of communication would often lead group members to identify their culture as high group, but since the students could make their postings and replies without much personal investment, they often considered the posts as busy work. The fact that all of the assignments were submitted as posts may have led students to the idea that the discussion postings were 'work' and not necessarily communications.

Case 3: Introduction to Biblical Literature (Bib Interp)

The online section of Introduction to Biblical Interpretation that occurred during the summer of 2009 at LAU was taught by an instructor who wrote the online course and who also taught the course onland during the regular academic term. Of the twelve students enrolled in the course at the beginning of the session, two withdrew and the remaining ten passed. The grade distribution was two A's, five B's and three C's for a course average of 82.59%. The number of assignments and percentages of submitted assignments was unavailable because the instructor opted out of the LMS gradebook the researcher had access to for the data for this course. He had warned the students in the syllabus that he may choose to use a "paper gradebook" if he thought that Moodle was

not functioning properly or if it was more efficient for him to change. The high success rate is positive; 100% of students passed.

The communication in Bib Interp included discussion forum postings and email exchanges. In the interview Dr. Mykles said he felt like that students who knew each other outside of his online class were communicating, but that he was never part of their out of class communications. He also was a significant part of the online discussion forums he required of students. Ironically, he gave the discussion forums the least weight in the gradebook of any instructor participants of this study, but he controlled the discussion content with his comments more closely than any of the other professors. Also in the interview, Dr. Mykles indicated that he insisted communications be about the course content. He established a friendly tone in the 'Introduce Yourself' forum, and he replied back and forth with each student's introduction. He made no comments about emails he received from students or sent to students throughout the course.

A sense of community is observed throughout the discussions as the instructor addresses students by name when he replies to their postings. Students follow suit when they address each other by name as they reply to each other's postings. Students also express frustration to each other, knowing that the instructor will interject into the conversation. One student states he would never have "read all of that into the Biblical chapter" if he had not read the accompanying commentary, and another student replies in agreement and goes on to say that she appreciates all of this information because it has helped her to view scripture differently than ever before. These same students would *say* that they were not concerned with building community in their online courses, but they

did not realize that when they had these types of discussion exchanges that they were in fact, building community.

Case 4: Contemporary Social Issues (CSI)

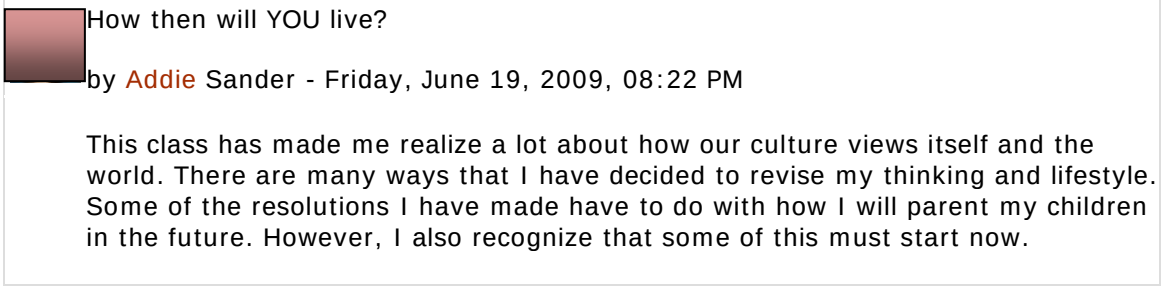
The online section of Introduction Contemporary Social Issues that occurred during the summer of 2009 at LAU was taught by an instructor who wrote the online course and who also taught the course onland during the regular academic term. Of the ten students enrolled in the course at the beginning of the session, ten passed. The grade distribution was seven A's, two B's and one C for a course average of 90.83%. Of the 350 assignments required for the course (35 per student), eleven of them were not turned in and received a grade of zero. The high success rate was positive; 100% of students passed, and the grade distribution reflected 70% of the students as making A's. These percentages indicate that students were engaged in the class activities.

The communications of the course occurred in the discussion forums for each week. This instructor only had one or two discussion forums for each week, but he expected ten postings each week. His terminology in his requirements was very general in that he referred to all involvement on discussions as 'postings.' This made accountability particularly laborious on his part as the instructor since students could either post or reply and expect him to keep up with the quantity of posts. Throughout the course participation in the discussion forums was active and consistent; however, their comments were more brief and general than the comments in Introduction to Biblical Literature or U.S. History II. The instructor never participated in any forum except for the initial introductory forum. Students did not communicate with each other outside of

the forums as far as the instructor knew, and if they had a question they emailed him directly and he responded to them individually as well.

The sense of community in CSI exists because of the forums and because the curriculum and topics were conducive to openness and discussion among course participants. The course included topics such as divorce, eating and food, Islam, love and marriage and materialism. These young adults, all between the ages of 19 and 22, enjoyed commenting back and forth on their required readings and viewings each week. It was notable that the instructor was never part of any of the online discussions, and his requirement of ten postings per forum each week forced interactions among students. Below, FIGURE 5.1 is an example from one of the last discussions for the course. Knowing the instructor would not be in the discussion, Addie Sander—the student who finished with the highest grade for the course—launched into her post by asking her own question, answering it, and then posting that same question to her classmates. This reflects a sense of community among the students that the grid and group matrix results did not reflect. It was also noteworthy that the students created this community on their own, with the instructor only providing the mechanism. The participation rate was 100% compared to 40% in U.S. History II, and that was attributed to the topic for each of the courses because the instructor was not involved in discussions in either course.

FIGURE 5.1. DISCUSSION FORUM FROM CSI. Illustrates community building among students.



My most difficult resolution has to do with the last book that we read. I have a very hard time taking a Sabbath and allowing myself to rest. Over the summer, this won't be too difficult, but once school starts up again, this is something that I will have to make a very concerted effort at this.

What are some of the resolutions you guys have made after this class?

Edit | Delete | Reply

Rate...

Re: How then will YOU live?

by Nancy Risner - Saturday, June 20, 2009, 08:59 AM

I have a slight interest in politics, but not a big one. I have started to pay more attention to this. I want to give more attention to bills that are trying to get passed and the reasoning behind them. This also goes with learning more about politicians and what exactly we are voting for. I don't think belonging to a party means that is always the best choice. Every candidate should be researched, just like every bill. A lady in *Maxed Out* talked about trying to promote a bill, but it was impossible because all the wealthy people came and paid big bucks for lobbying. The system seems flawed, but I think if we spent more time caring about these things, our nation would be better for it.

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

Rate...

Re: How then will YOU live?

by Valerie Pierce - Saturday, June 20, 2009, 11:42 AM

Most of my resolutions had to deal with how I will parent my children as well. I believe that a bit of my thinking is due to the fact that I have pretty much molded most of my identity and are very strong in my beliefs. If we educate our children in ways that their morals will be strong then they will be able to teach their children accordingly. I believe that we have to make some changes in our society but I do believe that these changes have to come from the family. I did make other resolutions but the main ones do have to do with my family ways.

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

Rate...

Re: How then will YOU live?

by Adam Easton - Saturday, June 20, 2009, 01:06 PM

What I found through this class and the readings is how our culture has fallen away from our Christian faith and morals. I feel that to be different from the culture we must get back to those principles. This class made me think about how I view the

world and those in it, especially those who have different beliefs than me. It has challenged everything I think about in every aspect of life.

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

Rate...

Re: How then will YOU live?

by Charles Goodyer - Saturday, June 20, 2009, 08:49 PM

One of the resolutions I have made is to stay away from being bored. I never really find myself bored but I now have a greater understanding on why our society finds itself bored and maybe even distracted from the real things that are out there.

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

Rate...

Re: How then will YOU live?

by Shannon Mason - Saturday, June 20, 2009, 10:51 PM

I think one thing I will take away from the class is that I just need to have a greater awareness of things going on around the world. I spend so much of my time thinking about myself and being in my own bubble, I need to remember there is a bigger world out there very different from my own.

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

Rate...

Question 2: How successful is each course in terms of positive course culture?

Case 1: U. S. History II

When considering a positive course culture, U.S. History II, taught online in the summer of 2009 at LAU, did not exist in terms of including the entire class in that culture. The data that answers that question suggests that there were ten separate cultures in that class, and each culture was comprised of one student and the instructor. All assignments were privately submitted and since the instructor did not make any contributions to the discussion forums, students perceived her as less than involved in the

entire group and more involved in an individual manner. The weekly discussion forum assignment had about a 40% completion rate over the course duration. The community and communication were much like educators would expect to find in a correspondence course. So a course culture in terms of everyone being involved with each existed at a minimal level. The student interviewed firmly stated that she "just wanted to do [her work] and get it over with" but at the end of an interview she also stated that it would have been so nice to "call my friend and say like 'What did you think about this?'" This data indicates that the student was receptive to a culture that included communication from other course participants if she had been able to realize a benefit to such communications.

Case 2: Ministry, Church and Society (MCS)

Is this course successful? Does it have a positive course culture? Considering the decision on the part of the instructor to make all discussions and assignments public, he was trying to create a strong course community. He set up the tools that could facilitate group discussions, but the students did not necessarily feel interested or connected with each other—they felt like they had to make the required quantity of postings and were confident they would receive a good grade if they did so. The location of the plotting points on the grid and group matrix were close enough to strong group, and the efforts to create many discussion opportunities was apparent, that this course leans toward strong group but not necessarily accomplishing success in terms of communication and positive course culture from the perspective of the students. The instructor, however, was pleased with the postings and considered the course successful in terms of communication and community.

Case 3: Introduction to Biblical Interpretations (Bib Interp)

When considering a positive course culture in Introduction to Biblical Literature, the discussion forums were used consistently throughout the course. Students participated in the discussions well and followed the instructions Dr. Mykles had given in the syllabus. He appreciated the value of community when he was involved in the discussions, and when he replied, he addressed students by name. When students replied to each other, they converged with his manner of communication and addressed their online classmates by name as well. Comments were more than just "Good job" and "Interesting point." The instructor and the students reflected on the specific strengths of student postings as well as thoughts and questions that the material may have raised. The discussion forums appeared to achieve Dr. Mykles' objectives of content management while also creating a positive course culture where students communicated with each other to learn the material. One such exchange from a discussion forum in Week 3 of Bib Interp is an example of how a positive course culture of was established and emerges from the data in FIGURE 5.2 below.

FIGURE 5.2. DISCUSSION FORUM FROM INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL LITERATURE.

Fee & Stuart Forum - Week 5 - April Benson

by Allie Smith - Saturday, June 13, 2009, 11:23 AM

Week 5 - Fee & Stuart Forum - Week 5

April Benson

Word Count: 520

Chapter 7 – Gospels

The question of why there are four gospels has always been big issue for me. The answer that Fee and Stuart give is a simple pragmatic one: different Christian communities each had a need for a book about Jesus. The gospel written for one community or group of believers did not necessarily meet the needs in another community. I feel that this answer sheds a new light on the four gospels for me. This answer is more logical than anything I have come up with on my own. Another question that was answered was why these writings were selected. The three principles in composition of the gospels are selectivity, arrangement, and adaptation. The evangelists selected those narratives and teachings that suited their purposes. At the same time the evangelists and their churches had special interest that also caused them to arrange and adapt what was selected. This feature of the Bible still amazes me. The fact that MAN put the writings together to make the cannon and they followed GOD's leading to achieve that.

Chapter 8 – Parables

The parables are often preached about in the church and I have heard many sermons on one parable with different lessons and endings to these "stories." It seems like that should not happen, like Jesus would have told the story with one purpose. So how do you know who is right and what was meant when Jesus told it? I know that this chapter tries to clarify that, but it really did not for me. The best advice that I took away from chapter 8 on how to interpret the parables was 1. Sit and listen to the parable again and again. 2. Identify the points of reference intended by Jesus that would have been picked up by the original hearers. 3. Try to determine how the original hearers would have identified with the story, and therefore, what they would have heard. Even with taking this away from the chapter I still feel as though I won't get it right and I won't know how to know if I got it right. Any suggestions?

Chapter 6 – Acts

One thing that really struck me in this chapter was Luke's intent while writing Acts. Luke's intent in the book of Acts was to lay down a pattern for the church to mimic their lives after in order that they may live as God requires them to live as Christians. This model that Luke lays out for all Christians is still some of the most powerful guidelines that we as Christians today base our life on. We have be going over this for 5 weeks and I have heard so much of this throughout my life and I am still in awe of the power of the Word of God that has been passed down by SO many generations. Luke's writings still relate to our key issues and us today! I wonder if any of these authors knew the true power of the One they were writing for and about and that the words they were writing were the inspired Word of God.

Show parent | Edit | Delete | Reply

Re: Fee & Stuart Forum - Week 5 - Amy Brooks

by Mark Mykles - Saturday, June 13, 2009, 03:56 PM

April ~

I look forward to some others (I hope) replying to your questions - and - after a day or two, so will I - but will wait for some discussion to happen. Good!

Show parent | Edit | Delete | Reply

Re: Fee & Stuart Forum - Week 5 – April Benson

by Elle Bryant - Sunday, June 14, 2009, 05:04 PM

April,
I understand what you're saying about chapter eight. However, is there a precise interpretation? Or does it vary from person to person a bit? I wonder if maybe the parables could be applied to different people in different ways. I would suggest going to a few pastors and seeing what they have to say about it, then compare their responses. You did a great job showing that you understood the material.
-Elle Bryant

Show parent | Edit | Delete | Reply

Re: Fee & Stuart Forum - Week 5 – April Benson

by Mitchell Frank - Sunday, June 14, 2009, 10:26 PM

As far as identifying with parables I would think that for each story and each hearer there would be a variance of indentifiable features. I think at the core of the parable there is a central theme, but as for getting it right or wrong, I'm not sure that is possible either way. What I mean is that I do not think there is a 100% right way to identify with a parable, and the same is true for the reciprocal. The story can have different meanings for people who are at different places in life. I think the universality of these stories in terms of them being relatable to a huge audience is why they are still being discussed at such great lengths. Oh, by the way, I enjoyed your post.

Show parent | Edit | Delete | Reply

Re: Fee & Stuart Forum - Week 5 – April Benson

by Larry Hill - Sunday, June 14, 2009, 10:28 PM

I completely understand how you feel. I do not know how I could get all the information Dr. Mykles knew about Matthew 13 on my own. I think though, that we do not realize how hard it really is to interpret the Bible correctly. It will take some work and investigation. But, I think it is necessary. But, like Fee & Stuart said, there is not one definite way to interpret one certain parable. There are wrong ways, but, just because we have a different interpretation than someone else does not necessarily mean you are wrong. So, my suggestion is to keep on learning and keeping on.

Show parent | Edit | Delete | Reply

Re: Fee & Stuart Forum - Week 5 – April Benson

by David Brown - Sunday, June 14, 2009, 10:58 PM

April,

Acts is probably one of my favorite New Testament books because, like you said, in Acts Luke lays the pattern that the church should mimic. I liked the question you brought up about wondering if the authors knew the impacts that their writings would have on future believers. I think it could only be by the power of God and devotion to him that the writings could have survived throughout history.

David Brown

In each student's initial content or summary post, Dr. Mykles required them to include the total word count at the top of the post. He was the only one to require the word count, and he reminded students to include the word count if they had neglected to do so.

Case 4: Contemporary Social Issues (CSI)

This particular case exhibited that Contemporary Social Issues was successful in terms of culture in spite of the fact that the instructor was not present in any group communications. He awarded points or ratings for all assignments, but his comments in his interview were true reflections of his actions in the course; he said he did not want to "overly intrude," and he did not intrude at all. The culture that developed to the point that the final class posting was led by a student who was declaring herself and asking for the declarations of her classmates is attributed to the large quantity of posts the instructor required throughout each week and the topic of the discussions. These college students were at a developmental point in their learning and in their lives where they wanted to explore their thoughts on social issues.

In the example forum in Figure 5.4, the students all contributed briefly but openly, characteristic of their earlier forum. Addie Sander was the most expressive contributor

throughout the course with the lengthiest posts. This example forum did not exhibit the students calling each other by name, which they do in earlier forums, similar to the findings in Mark Mykles' student postings in his course forums. This positive course culture was made possible by the communications in the discussion forums as well as the types of topics the students wrote about. Their interest in current social issues was greater than the interest of students in U. S. History II who had to write about implications of historical events in today's world.

Question 3: How do grid and group explain the online culture of course within this study?

APPENDIX D and APPENDIX E provide a table of the questions and the results from each of the participants. At a quick glance, the similarities and differences of ratings are visible. Specific examples have been discussed below that explain or illuminate various characteristics of each course.

Case 1: U. S. History II

Question 21, a group question, asked if course participants seemed to have engagement with the other online course participants. The response to this question indicates the perception of community and working together within the course. The instructor rated the degree to which all course participants were engaged with each other as a four; the student rated engagement as a two. The student rated the group questions the same or lower than the instructor 75% of the time. U.S. History II was the only course in this study where the student answered Question 9 as high grid, reflecting her perception of emails and discussions as initiated by her, the student. The instructor was low grid and perceived that she initiated emails communications.

Grid and group is useful in explaining the culture of U.S. History II Online as a bureaucratic and authoritarian culture. True to Douglas' (1982) description of this quadrant of the matrix, this course places "little or no value on group goals or survival" (Harris, 2005, 42). The instructor is the only authority in the online classroom and all activities and communications happen through her.

Case 2: Ministry, Church and Society (MCS)

The results of the survey indicate a discrepancy of three or more points in two of the grid questions; the instructor and the students did not see the course the same way. The instructor ranked students in the middle when identifying their level of motivation as intrinsic (low grid) or extrinsic (high grid.) The student who responded to the survey ranked the motivation of participants as extrinsic, a high grid assessment. The same discrepancy occurred on the question about course rules. Question 11 (grid) asked, "Are rules few or numerous?" The MCS instructor ranked his course in the middle, a four, when explaining whether there were few rules and procedures or numerous rules and procedures. The student, however, ranked the course extremely high on the grid as having numerous rules and procedures. When using the matrix of grid and group, this culture in this course was plotted in the high grid, low group quadrant as a result of the participants' perceptions of the course as having little or no autonomy and the need to adhere to rules and procedures. The MCS student was high grid on most responses with the exception of considering discussions and forums as lead by students (Question 9) and course activities occurring through individual effort (Question 10.)

Case 3: Introduction to Biblical Interpretation (Bib Interp)

Grid and group was a bit more challenging in explaining the culture of Introduction to Biblical Literature as a bureaucratic and authoritarian culture. The instructor's average scores were plotted and located in the bureaucratic and authoritarian quadrant of the matrix. The student's average scores were plotted and located in the corporate quadrant of the matrix by .08 of a point. While the culture did not reflect group qualities such as allegiance to school or group interest prioritized over individuals (Harris, 2005), this course culture did reflect "strong social incorporation" (Harris, 2005, p. 39) in the discussion forum postings. Interpretation of Question 19 was different for the instructor and the student. The question, "Does communication flow primarily through individual, informal networks or corporate, formal networks?" The instructor viewed the discussions as individual and informal, whereas the student viewed the discussion forum as highly corporate and formal. The instructor's perception of the culture in his online course as bureaucratic and authoritarian was in line with his stated objectives; he was very clear that content prioritized communications. He did not realize the potential for discussion to build content so effectively, and was therefore unaware that he could risk a higher percentage of the course evaluation on this methodology. His involvement in the forums was frequent and engaging; his students modeled his actions, but they also felt more pressure and formality in the forums.

On another group question both the instructor and student in Introduction to Biblical Interpretation scored the same score – a seven on an eight-point scale—that "the responsibilities of the instructor and students are clear and communal with much

accountability." This is a high group response from both participants and coincides with the corporate quality of "corporate boundaries" being maintained.

Case 4: Contemporary Social Issues (CSI)

The grid scores for CSI were remarkably close in range with one question having a disparity of four points. The question was, "Emails and discussion forums are initiated most often by the instructor or most often by the student?" The CSI instructor rated high grid, indicating he thought that most of the emails and discussions were initiated by the students; the CSI student rated low grid, indicating just the opposite—that she thought emails and discussions were initiated by the instructor. Their perceptions of who started communications was different for each side.

The average of the group scores was identical for the instructor and the student, but on three separate questions their responses were three or four points different. Question 13 (a group question) asked if course participants considered socialization and work within the course as "separate and dichotomous activities or incorporated and united activities." The instructor perceived the course activities he designed as mostly incorporated and united while the student perceived the same course activities as mostly separate and dichotomous. Question 19 asked if communications flowed primarily through "individual, informal networks or corporate, formal networks." The instructor considered the communications to be informal and individual, while the students considered them to be more formal and corporate in nature. Lastly, Question 22 asked if course participants were responsible and accountable to each other; the instructor ranked his response high, indicating that course participants were responsible to him and to each other. The student ranked her response low, indicating that she was not responsible to

others in the course for anything; she believed she was only responsible to the instructor or to herself.

Again, this course was plotted on the grid and group matrix in the bureaucratic/authoritarian quadrant, just like all of the other courses. The points plotted were based on an average and there were some stronger, more extreme responses that were not reflected in the average.

Except for U.S. History, all of the students perceived that the instructor initiated most of the emails and discussion forum. Each study participant rated the course activities low grid as "completed through individual effort, with the Bib Interp instructor rating individual effort the highest with a four. Another consideration is the fact that instructors, overall, consider that the students are communicating and collaborating, but the students do not consider themselves as working with others in their courses.

Question 4: What other realities (outside of grid and group) are manifested in this study?

The interesting explanation that emerges from U.S. History II is the fact that the instructor valued social interaction but did not believe that it could be achieved in an online setting. She even assigned students positions in arguments they were required to make in the Taking Sides Debate Forum, but she did not get involved to model what this 'taking sides' debate might look like. Any responses from her to students happened through individual emails, and the only time she sent email comments was when and if students had replied in such a way that she was concerned that the discussion participants would feel attacked. Dr. Cole did remark in her interview that she had not had a need to send any of these types of emails this past summer. She also remarked in her interview

that she could never teach online exclusively because she enjoyed the face-to-face interaction of teaching a traditional class. This was a high group characteristic, and even though this instructor defined herself in this manner, she did not design her online course to foster the same intensity or quality of interaction that her face-to-face classes enjoy.

Even though the professor in Bib Interp was very detailed and specific about how he wanted students to post in the forums—he wanted them to copy their text from a MSWord document and paste into their discussion posting and to include the numerical word count for each posting—the students followed his instructions without a problem. He did not carry the tech savvy worries that the instructor from U.S. History carried. All of these students had passed a computer proficiency course in order to be enrolled in the online course, so instructors should be able to expect the students to know how to use all of the elements Moodle and common software applications had to offer. As for the content of the postings, Dr. Mykles requirements also indicated that students would produce thoughtful and original reflections of their readings and could do so in plenty of words, if that were required of them. The difference in the quality of posts between Introduction to Biblical Literature and Ministry, Church and Society was significant in both quantity of words and depth of thought. This difference could have several attributes, one of which would be that the Bib Interp instructor required more and modeled the behavior he expected from his students.

The reality of student interest in the topics covered in Contemporary Social Issues cannot be overlooked. After reviewing their discussion forums, it was noted that their responses were a reflection of the content of their readings and viewings as well as their own life experiences. In the discussion forum about foster children and divorce, one

student contrasted the text views on how children respond to authority to her own experiences of how her young cousins responded to her mother's authority when their own mother and father divorced and this student's mother took in the children. The topic was real to this student, and as she shared from her heart in the discussion forum, a sense of community was established that might not be easily done if the topic had been accounting or history.

Also, the instructor opted to use current non-fiction to teach the content of Contemporary Social Issues rather than a traditional textbook. Students were reading books they could pick up off the rack at Barnes and Noble, and they felt like their topics and issues *were* contemporary and current. Topics and titles made a positive impact on the success of this course. In spite of the lack of instructor presence in the course, the sense of community was achieved by the personal nature of the topics and the interest and willingness of students to interact in the discussion forums.

Considerations about Course Culture

The temperament of the instructor, the attitude of the students, the room itself, the activities and the way everyone communicates characterize an onland classroom. The time of day the class meets, the number of sessions, and even the temperature of the room are potential factors in a physical classroom setting. The curriculum delivery and the engagement of students in their curriculum influence a class culture as well. An online classroom culture is also characterized by several things. It is characterized by students who have a 'get it done' attitude and are enrolled in a course they need in order to complete a program of study. These students want to complete their requirements, but they also want the flexibility and independence that online courses offer. They do not

enter an online course with thoughts of being part of something significant or growing with a community of learners; students enter an online course with an intention to "get the course over with" (Candace Stiles). Students in an online class are likely intent upon taking courses on their terms—what fits with their schedules and offers flexibility. Students who take online courses have often compared the online courses to the same onland counterparts and have decided that the online version is either easier or better suits their lives than the onland course. All of the student characteristics considered would indicate that online students are intentional in their decision to take online courses; online students do not take online classes by chance.

An online classroom is characterized by the LMS through which the course is established; an LMS is the virtual classroom where students meet asynchronously but with flexibility and regularity. Implications for teaching with different LMS may not make a difference for instructors because the LMS is usually determined by the institution offering the courses. Faculty may have an increased awareness for what type of course culture they are reaching for and can use the tools in their LMS to achieve those goals. The LMS is the interface the students view as soon as they enter the course. That interface, the screen, the LMS has an appearance that students will or will not respond to when they enter a course. Certain LMS platforms are programmed with school colors or logos and the instructors and course developers have very few options in the appearance of their courses. The Moodle LMS used by the institution in this study had a strong visual appeal for students and instructors alike. The colors and designs were variable and had less of an institutional tone than the commercial LMS platforms. The point of entry of an LMS would have the same type of effect on instructors and students as the physical

classrooms used in onland contexts. The students in this study were comfortable with Moodle and did not give the LMS any extra thought or concern. They were familiar with the platform because they were current students on campus and Moodle was used in their onland courses as well. The instructors did not question the use of Moodle, although one instructor indicated his dislike for the gradebook feature and another instructor did not want to be distracted with using activities that were "too techy" for students.

The culture of an online classroom will be influenced by the organization the instructor uses to communicate with students and to present the content of the course, as well as the schedule of assignments and whether or not the expectations are sufficient or even reasonable. Communications between instructors and students and between students are indicators of the culture that exists. In the courses included in this study, communications were defined as email exchanges and as interactions that occurred in discussion forums. The discussion forum communications were directly linked to the sense of community that developed for each course. In the U. S. History II case, the discussion forum was a cut and paste assignment, and the instructor was never involved in those discussions. The topics were not particularly relevant to the students and they did not perceive the value of the discussions beyond just completing them. There were more discussion forums in the other classes, and students were required to make more posts and were awarded higher grades for their posts. This seemed to create a discussion forum culture at least that would be classified as high group on this grid and group survey. These group discussions may or may not have had a sincere tone or intensity.

Development of online course culture may also include communications between the instructor and the student or just between students. The results of this study indicate

that students usually do not communicate with each other outside of class. The students that interviewed thought about making email contact with other students but never did or never received a reply. One of the instructors said that he was certain that students were communicating outside of class even though he was unaware of the specifics. Students rarely participated in the News Forums or Question/Answer Forum provided at the beginning of the course; when students did have questions they contacted the instructor and expected an answer in the same way.

Discussion

Students take online courses for a variety of reasons. They may need the course to graduate, they want to maintain eligibility or they may think it will be easier than taking it onland. Students do not think about participating with a group when they enter an online course. When asked about communications within their online courses, students indicated they were not interested in communicating with their classmates. Two of the female students interviewed were very expressive about their unwillingness to be too involved in a course group. One female explained her feelings concisely when she said, "I don't mind answering questions with others, but I do not want to work on projects together." Three of the students who completed the questionnaire for this study had the same opinions about being involved in the courses and were also unwilling to be interviewed.

In the CSI course, students were building a community and exchanging ideas and sharing information and did not even realize that they were building a community. They were not looking to define what was happening; they were just participating and doing

what was required of them. One of the realizations, therefore, is that community, whether students acknowledge it or not, existed.

The four courses included in this study were all general education courses and the students were all between the ages of 19 and 23, fairly young. They viewed general education courses as something to check off of their lists of required courses—the liberal arts concept did not mean much to them. These students viewed themselves as low as possible on a class hierarchy; they understood the instructor to be the only other course participant that mattered. They realized the instructor was in charge of the course content, organization and ultimately their course grade. The courses were viewed as stand-alone experiences and there was no mention at all of interest in or loyalty to the sponsoring institution; students took these classes at this institution because of convenience. They had no expectation of community and would even express a desire not to have to deal with the development on an online community.

None of these courses included any kind of collaborative activities, ones that would lead to a joint assignment or project. The literature about online courses and their relationship to building community and success in online courses indicated that collaboration was essential in creating community and supporting a culture encouragement for classmates. However, in a six week, undergraduate general education course, a collaborative project in addition to the course work would not be feasible, especially since the instructors were not interested in collaboration beyond group discussions. Collaborative projects would be classified as high group and either high or low grid, depending on the instructor's involvement in the collaborative assignment.

Therefore, even though the literature prioritizes the importance of collaboration, it may not be feasible in every type of online course.

Collaboration in an online setting would be feasible in a semester long (sixteen weeks) course or in a cohort-based online program. With all of the technological possibilities of the 21st century, collaboration could thrive online, but it would also have to include the persistence of the course designer and instructor to work effectively. Some instructors do not want to participate in the course as often as necessary to create a community where members are dependent upon each other for the success of the course and their learning.

Communications are a large part of how an online culture is established. The way that the instructor organizes the course influences those communications. If the instructor organizes the course to include a large number of discussion forum postings, that helps build a certain type of course community. If the instructor organizes a course where there is very little discussion in forums and most of the assignments and activity is completed in a one-on-one fashion, then it is more of a correspondence course where students submit everything to the instructor individually than a class with several students. The more discussion postings that were required, the higher the percentage rate of compliance. In the course where students only had to post to one discussion forum per week, the completion rate was 40%, compared to other courses that had multiple postings per week (as many as ten) and ad 90% completion rates.

Also emerging from this study was an understanding of the value of a certain quantity of discussion forums included in online courses. The history course included in this study required just one forum posting for each chapter studied, and students had to

merely paste the exact same text from an essay they had just submitted to the instructor into the discussion forum. The instructor's objective was for students to post their position on an issue and for other students to read various positions on the same issue. The discussion forums for this course were formulaic and structured; students nor the professors felt any type of connection as a result of this information exchange. The email communications that occurred in U.S. History II were for course or assignment clarification. This seemed isolating for students and the instructor, but that was what they all wanted; no one wanted to build course relationships or community.

The CSI course required only one discussion forum each week, but students had to post to that forum ten times during the week, and they could not do it all in one setting. They had to post a certain number of posts by Tuesday, a certain number by Thursday, and another certain number by Saturday, totaling ten by the end of the week. The researcher had observed that the instructor never entered these discussion forums. With that knowledge, the researcher anticipated that the discussions would be flat, similar to the discussions in U. S. History II, but what emerged from CSI was the fact that if students were connected to the topics it made a huge difference in the quality of their postings as well as the tone of sincerity in their postings. The instructor never participated in the discussion forums. So in the CSI class with their topics being contemporary, social issues, all of these young adults were interested in these topics that affected their lives and their understanding of the world. They shared their responses to the readings and their personal observations and experiences that connected them with those topics.

There is also an indication that undergraduate, general education courses in this study do not have a strong sense of group and they do have a strong sense of bureaucracy.

Students participated in the group discussions, but they were more autonomous in their opinions about working to complete the course and make good grades. These courses were homogeneous enough (age, gender, disciplines) that they were positioned in the same classification, with the exception of one Bib Interp student who was positioned in the high group continuum at 4.08.

Another influence in the development of culture in an online course is the involvement of the instructor. In the Bib Interp course the instructor was very involved in every forum discussion; he would monitor it and make small comments—directive comments, sometimes he was repetitive on purpose—he was involved in all of his forums. He had a fairly strict requirement in his forums. The word count had to be posted in each forum and it had to be a minimum of about 400 words, and students averaged more than 500 words per posting. He made certain that the discussions that occurred in these forums furthered his content objectives.

It seems as if two elements were significant in fostering student engagement in the discussion forums. First, the instructor's involvement was a primary key to success. In Bib Interp the instructor had strict requirements but he also participated as often as the students in reading and responding to their posts. In addition to instructor involvement, the topic and the students' interest in the topic were additional keys to the success of building a positive course culture in online courses.

Undergraduate general education courses were going to be high grid because the courses exists in a typical classroom environment where the teacher was in charge and awarded the grades, so students were going to look to the instructor first and consistently throughout the course – before they looked anywhere else. But by their very nature, all

courses are to a degree high grid – bureaucratic and authoritarian. Therefore, the most likely combination for a successful online course that lasts just a semester or a summer session would probably be one that has mostly bureaucratic/authoritarian qualities and collectivist/egalitarian qualities as well.

Significance to Research

This study contributes to the prior research (Australian, 2003; Pallof & Pratt, 2005) in that it focuses on collaboration and student engagement in online courses but becomes unique as it identifies undergraduate, general education courses as the online courses for study. Pallof and Pratt, 2005, and many others studied the culture in online graduate courses – often online graduate education courses. This study contributes research on specific online classes – not a group of teachers who all teach at the same school or the role technology plays in creating and defining a culture, but its focuses is online, undergraduate, general education courses. It is also significant in that as a case study, it explains the culture established online in these four courses. It is not a culture reflecting an atmosphere of serious graduate students, or a culture for a cohort of learners going through a program together. Other studies investigate online culture, to be sure, but this study adds to the literature by explaining the cultural characteristics of online, undergraduate, general education courses.

Significance to Theory

Course culture in online courses is under-theorized at this point, but theory will catch up to practice and research soon. With a social constructionism foundation, online course cultures have been evaluated according to the same elements as onland courses – space, place, time, atmosphere, interactions, authority, and collaborations. As online

theory develops, it may be found that there are cultural elements in online courses that do not exist in onland courses and vise versa. Recently, Jones (2006) proposed that researchers of cyberculture address the same issues of communication as communication theorist Grossberg (1993), and that these same researchers include both theory and practice in their studies. Grossberg (1993) suggested,

- Recognizing that reality is made through human action
- Continually being drawn to the 'popular' or common way people live and struggle in the contemporary world
- Being committed to a contextualism that precludes defining culture and the relation between culture and power (pp. 89-90).

Most recently, Gere's theory, (2008) of digital culture, parallels Grossberg (1993) and Jones (2006) in that understanding the context of online elements and the interactions of those elements produces a culture, and the fluid nature of digital groups.

Significance to Practice

This research study used a social anthropology model to explain online course culture. Using Mary Douglas' Grid and Group Typology to classify the culture of each course, all four courses were classified as bureaucratic/authoritarian. High grid, low group was not necessarily a negative culture for the courses in this study. The nature of an instructor-centered course is that the instructor is the authoritarian figure and the students all focus on their individual relationships to the instructor who evaluates them and awards the grade. The participants perceived their courses as high grid, low group, but some of the communications that occurred and some of the responses on the survey indicate that high group activities were apparent in all of the classes.

Is the corporate or collectivist culture even possible in a one-time, undergraduate, general education online class? Probably not. Courses such as these will have to function with an authoritarian figure and a few activities that would be classified as high group. If an instructor or course designer wanted to design courses with a corporate or collectivist intention, then he/she would have to organize the course, for example, where participants would research and present course content to classmates and then those classmates would be responsible for the information learned from those presentations. The participants would be dependent upon each other for success. Practically, this would not work well in a short term course because building that kind of trust and commitment online takes time. A six week summer session would not be suitable.

A realistic goal for courses such as the ones in this study would be to include some high group activities in the course requirements. Those activities would likely be most beneficial if they were also completed *with* the instructor or if the topics were of high interest to the students. Instructors who wanted to achieve a certain culture would have to be proactive in designing for such a culture since the history of education, even with the advent of online education, lends itself to instructor centered paradigm, mostly bureaucratic/authoritarian. The goal of achieving courses that have grid and group qualities of a corporate/hierarchist culture would require careful planning and/or diligent presence on the part of the instructor.

Online culture should not be characterized as good or bad; instead, characterizing online courses as effective or not effective in promoting community would be a better, more specific description. When students were able to engage in a course, and communicate with each other and the instructor, their grades were higher, their learning

and writing appeared to be more meaningful, and they communicated directly with others in a positive way. There is a great deal of work to be done in developing pedagogy where students build their content knowledge by progressing through the discussion forums. The discussions can ideally be more than quick posts that meet a quota; they can be posts that are reflective of readings and thoughts.

Classifying online courses according to their cultures represented through the grid and group typology will make it possible for course designers and instructors to explain the characteristics of courses they have taught, and it will make it possible for course designers and instructors to identify strengths of other grid and group characteristics and re-design courses to promote the development of those characteristics. Much the same way that a school could use grid and group to describe its culture and use the findings for improvement (Harris 2005), online classes could use grid and group in the same manner.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

The four cases used this study were from the same institution, a small liberal arts, Christian university in the Midwest. This institution did not have any type of an established online program in place; there was no director of online courses, no training required, and no assessment of courses—nothing official or established. The courses were simply allowed by the academic dean and the department chairs. Future studies could investigate student engagement, community and communication established in online classed where there is a more significant institutional support and involvement. It would be interesting to study the course cultures of online classes in a larger, public institution that offered many online courses and had a supportive, online program in place.

Since this study did not reveal a variation in culture because the courses were so homogeneous, future study with a larger or heterogeneous group could reveal much different cultural characteristics. Also, future studies could retain the data from one of the cases in this study and could duplicate the study with a Master's cohort toward the end the program and an upper division, undergraduate chemistry course to compare and contrast characteristics. This same data could also be used to further develop the theory of course culture online learning.

Future studies regarding the accommodation of students to their instructors' leadership would be valuable in professional development. Duplicating this study in online courses at different types of universities and different types of courses would further inform theory and practice.

REFERENCES

Allen, I. E. and Seaman, J. (2007, March). *Making the Grade: Online Education in the United States, 2006, Midwestern Edition*. Needham, MA: Sloan Consortium.

Allen, I. E. and Seaman, J. (2007, October). *Online Nation: Five Years of Growth in Online Learning*. Needham, MA: Sloan Consortium.

Allen, I. E. and Seaman, J., (2008, November). *Staying the Course: Online Education in the United States, 2008.* Needham, MA: Sloan Consortium.

Aragon, S., Johnson, S., & Shaik, N. (2002, December). The Influence of Learning Style Preferences on Student Success in Online Versus Face-to-Face Environments. *American Journal of Distance Education*, *16*(4), 227. Retrieved June 6, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.

Arbaugh, J. (2001). How instructor immediacy behaviors affect student satisfaction and learning in web-based courses. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 64, pp. 42-54.

Australian Flexible Learning Framework Quick Guides Series. (2003). What are the conditions for an characteristics of effective online learning communities? *Australian National Training Authority*. <flexiblelearning.net.au/guides/community.pdf >

Barnard, L., Paton, V., & Lan, W. (2008, June). "Online self-regulatory learning behaviors as a mediator in the relationship between online course perceptions with achievement." *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*. 9(2).

Barr, R.B., & Tagg, J. (1995, November/December). From teaching to learning – a new paradigm for undergraduate education. *Change,* 27(6).

Barron, D. (1989, November). Distance education: Removing barriers to knowledge. *School Library Journal*, *35*(6), 28. Retrieved June 6, 2009, from MAS Ultra - School Edition database.

Baym, N.K. (2006). Finding quality in qualitative research. In D. Silver & A. Massanari (Eds.), *Critical Cyberculture Studies* (pp.79 – 87). New York: New York University Press.

Bender, T. (2003). *Discussion-based online teaching to enhance student learning: Theory, practice and assessment.* Sterling, Virginia: Stylus.

Bourhis, A., Dubé, L., & Jacob, R. (2003). The Success of virtual communities of practice: The Leadership factor. *Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management*, 1, 23-34.

Brown J.S & Adler R, 2008, 'Minds on fire: Open education, the Long Tail, and Learning 2.0′, Educause Review, Jan/Feb 2008, pp 16-32 <http://connect.educause.edu/Library/EDUCAUSE+Review/MindsonFireOpenEducationt/45823?time=1206661710>

Bruffee, K. (November 1984). Collaborative learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind.' *College English* 46(7), 635-653.

Bullen, M. (1999). What's the difference? A review of contemporary research on the effectiveness of distance learning in higher education. Washington, DC. Found at http://www.ihep.com/difference.pdf.

Carswell, A. D. (2001). *Facilitating student learning in an asynchronous learning network.* Dissertations Abstracts International, 62(03), 1110.

Carwile, J. (2007). A Constructivist approach to online teaching and learning. *Inquiry*, 12(1), 68-73.

Casey, D. (2008, March). A Journey to Legitimacy: The Historical Development of Distance Education through Technology. *TechTrends: Linking Research & Practice to Improve Learning*, *52*(2), 45-51. Retrieved June 6, 2009, doi:10.1007/s11528-008-0135-z

Casey, E. (1997). *The Fate of place: A Philosophical history*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Caulkins, D. (1997). Is small still beautiful? Low growth firms and regional development in Scotland's Silicon Glen. In J. Andelson (Ed.), *Anthropology matters: Essays in honor of Ralph Luebben* (pp. 53-63). Grinnell,IA: Grinnell College.

Caulkins, D. D. (1999). Is Mary Douglas's grid/group analysis useful for cross-cultural research? *Cross-Cultural Research*, 33(1), 108-128.

Cavanagh, A. (1997). Behavior in public: Ethics in online ethnography. Research Methodology Online. http://www.cybersociology.com/files/6_2_ethicsinonlineethnog.html

Chickering, A.W., & Ehrmann, S.C. (1996). Implementing the seven principles: technology as lever. AAHE. Retrieved April 27, 2009 from the World Wide Web: http:www.aahe.org.BulletinSevenPrinciples.htm

Chickering, A.W., & Gamson, Z. F. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin.* <http://www.csuhayward.edu/wasc/pdfs/End%20Note.pdf >

Clark, D. L., & Cline, D. (2003). *A Writer's Guide to Research and Development Proposals*. Retrieved February 12, 2007 from http://education.astate.edu/dcline/GuideProblem.html

Clark, R., & Lyons, C. (1999, July 1). Using Web-Based Training Wisely. *Training*, *36*(7), 51-56. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ587204) Retrieved June 6, 2009, from ERIC database.

Clark, S., Cossarin, M., Doxsee, H., & Schwartz, L. (2004, April). Integrated Learning Management Systems. *International Review of Research in Open & Distance Learning*, *5*(1), 0-0. Retrieved June 6, 2009, from Education Research Complete database.

Coates, H., James, R., & Baldwin, G. (2005, March). A Critical examination of the effects of learning management systems on university teaching and learning. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 11(1), 19-36.

Conrad, R., & Donaldson, J. A. (2004). *Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction.* San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Crawford, M., and Thomas-Maddox, C. (2000). Engaging the students – online. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association, Seattle, WA Nov 9 – 12.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crotty, M. (2003). *The Foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage.

Diaz, D., & Cartnal, R. (1999, Fall99). Students' Learning Styles in Two Classes. *College Teaching*, *47*(4), 130. Retrieved June 6, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.

Diel, S. L. (1998). *Successful rural schools using the Mary Douglas Grid and Group Typology*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK.

Doolittle, P. (1999). Constructivist pedagogy. Retrieved March 12, 2009, from http://edpsychserver.ed.vt.edu/workshops/tohe1999/pedagogy.html

Doolittle, P. E., & Camp W. G. (1999). Constructivism: The Career and technical education perspective. *Journal of Vocational and Technical Education*, 16(1), 23 -46.

Douglas, M. (1982). *In the active voice*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Douglas, M. (2003). *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. London: Barrie and Rockliff.

Douglas, M. & Wildavsky, A. (1982). Risk and culture: An essay o the selection of technological and environmental dangers. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Dow, M. (2008). Implications of social presence for online learning: A Case study of MLS students. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 49(4), p231.

ECPI Online environment: Online orientation. (July 27, 2009), ECPI College of Technology. Retrieved July 27, 2009, from http://www.ecpi.edu/online/assess/courses.cfmErlandson, D.A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide to Methods*. Newbury Park: SAGE Publications.

Ezell, M. P. (1989). Communication age trends affecting extension. *Journal of Extension*, 27(3).

Fletcher, A. (2005) *Guide to Students as Partners in School Change.* Olympia, WA: SoundOut. Retrieved February 20, 2008 from http://www.soundout.org/MSIGuide.pdf

Garrison, D. R. & Shale, D. (1987). Mapping the boundaries of distance education: Problems in defining the field. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 1(1), 5-11.

Garrison, D.R. (1993). Quality and access in distance education: Theoretical considerations. In Keegon, D. *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education* (pp. 9 – 21). New York: Rutledge.

Garrison, D.R. (1997). Computer conferencing: the post industrial age of distance education. The Journal of Open and Distance Learning, 12(2), 3-11.

Garrison, D. R., & Vaughan, N. D. (2008). *Blended Learning in Higher Education, Framework, Principles, and Guidelines*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Gere, C. (2008). *Digital Culture.* London: Reaktion.

Grendstad, G. (1990). *Europe by cultures. An exploration in grid/group analysis.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Bergen.

Gross, J. L., & Rayner, S. (1985). Measuring culture: A paradigm for the analysis of social organization. New York: Columbia University Press.

Grossberg, L. (1993). *Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.

Hansford, D. & Adlington, R. (2009). Digital spaces and young people's online authoring: Challenges for teachers. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 32(1:1), 55-68.

Harris, E. (1995, January 1). Toward a Grid and Group Interpretation of School Culture. *Journal of School Leadership*, *5*(6), 617-46. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ516003) Retrieved June 6, 2009, from ERIC database.

Harris, E. L. (2005). *Key strategies to improve schools: How to apply them contextually.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Harris, E. L. (2006). Mary Douglas's typology of grid and group. In V. A. Anfara, Jr. and N. T. Mertz (Eds.), *Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Hartshorne, R. (1959). *Perspective on the nature of geography*. Association of Geographers.

Hewett, B.L., & Ehmann, C. (2004). *Preparing educators for online writing instruction.* Urbana, Illinois: National Council Teachers of English.

Hood, C. (1996). Control over bureaucracy: Culture theory and institutional variety. *Journal of Public Policy*, *15*, 207-230.

Hoskins, S., & van Hoof, J. (2005). Motivation and ability: Which students use online learning and what influence does it have on their achievement? *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 36(2), 177-192.

Jeffries, M. Research in Distance Education. Digital School. Retrieved April 21, 2009, from http://www.digitalschool.net/edu/DS_history_mJeffries.html

Jones, S. (2006). Forward: Dreams of fields: possible trajectories of internet studies. In D. Silver & A. Massanari (Eds.), *Critical Cyberculture Studies* (pp. ix – xvii). New York: New York University Press.

Kantor, A. (2005). In the Communication age, connection is everything. *USA Today: Cyber Speak*. Retrieved May 7, 2009. <http://www.usatoday.com/tech/columnist/andrewkantor/2005-12-08-mesh-networking_x.htm?POE=click-refer>

Katz, R. (2001, Fall2001). Changing Practices and New Frontiers. *New Directions for Higher Education*, Retrieved June 6, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.

Katz, A. & Becker, W. (1999). Technology and the teaching of economics to undergraduates. *The Journal of Economic Education*, 30(3), 194-199. Retrieved May 6, 2009 from http://www.indiana.edu/~econed/pdffiles/summer99/katz.pdf

Kautz, K. D. (2008). *A grid and group explanation of educational assumptions among professors and international students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK.

Kennedy, C. (2000). Implications for new pedagogy in higher education: Can online technology enhance student engagement & learning. ERIC Document 443 382.

Kontos, G. & Mizell, A.P. (1997). Global village classroom: The changing rolls of teachers and students through technology. *Tech Trends*, 42(5), 17-22.

Kreijins, K., Kirshmer, P.A., & Jochems, W. (2003). Identifying the pitfalls for social interaction in computer-supported environments: A Review of research. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 19, 335-353.

Kriger, T. J. (2001). *Virtual revolution: Trends in the expansion of distance education*. Retrieved April 23, 2009 from http://www.aft.org/higher_ed/downloadable/VirtualRevolution.pdf

Kunkel, R. (1954). An Experimental study of the effect on the attitude of listeners of repeating the same oral propaganda. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 35-36, p. 175+.

Lal, J. C. (1989). Distance education: A study of the effectiveness of a university's instructional television fixed system. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, United States -- Oregon. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from Dissertations & Theses: A&I database. (Publication No. AAT 9010132).

Lan, J. J. (1999). *The Impact of Internet-Based Instruction on Teacher Education: The 'Paradigm' Shift.*

Lanier, J. (May 30, 2006). Digital Maoism: The hazards of the new online collectivism. Retrieved September 8, 2009 from http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/lanier06/lanier06_index.html.

Lankamp, R. (2008). Controlling the number of teaching hours in online writing courses. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 2(1).

LaRose, R., & Whitten, P. Re-Thinking instructional immediacy for web courses: A Social cognitive exploration. Communication Education, 49(4), 320-338.

Lehtinen, E., Hakkarainen,K., Lipponen, L., Rahikainer, M., and Muukkonen, H. (1999) Computer supported collaborative learning: a review. *CL – Net Project.* Retrieved February 18, 2009 from http://www.comlab.hut.fi/opetus/205/etatehtava1.pdf

Leung, M. Y. & Lu, X. (April 2008). Teaching toolbox. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 17(8).

Lim, D., & Kim, H. (2003) Motivation and learner characteristics affecting online learning and learning application. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 31, 423 – 439.

Limwudhikraijirath, A. (2009). *A Grid and group explanation of students' and instructors' preferences in computer assisted instruction: a case study of university classrooms in Thailand*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK.

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Lingenfelter, S. (1996). *Agents of Transformation: A Guide for Effective Cross-Cultural Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Low, S.M. & Lawrence-Zuniga, D. (2003). *The Anthropology of space and place locating culture*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Lu, H. (2004, April). Open Multi-Agent Systems for Collaborative Web-Based Learning. *International Journal of Distance Education Technologies*, *2*(2), 36-45. Retrieved June 6, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.

Luppicini, R. (2007). Review of computer mediated communication research for education. *Instructional Science,* 35, 141-185.

Lynch, P. & Horton, S. (2008). *Web Style Guide: Basic Design Principles for Creating Web Sites*. London: Yale University Press.

MacNeil, C., Cavanagh, R., & Silcox, S. (2003). Pedagogical principle leadership. *Management in Education*, 17(4), 14-17.

Mann, B. (2000). Phase theory: A teleological taxonomy of web-course management. In B. L. Mann (ed.) *Perspectives*. Toronto: Canadian Scholar Press, pp. 3- 25.

Mars, G. (1982). *Cheats at work: An anthropology of workplace crime*. Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin.

McCarty, B. (2000). *About Teaching: 4Mat in the Classroom*. Illinois: About Learning.

McDermott, R. (2001). Knowing in community: 10 Critical success factors in building communities of practice. *Leveraging Knowledge*. Retrieved May 12, 2009. http://www.co-i-l.com/coil.knowledge-garden/cop/knowing/shtml

Moodle. (2009) Retrieved February 18, 2009 from http://docs.moodle.org/en/Chats .

Moran, C. (2008, November 7). Data mining as a teaching tool in distance education. *The Chronicle of Higher Education: Information Technology*. Retrieved February 18, 2009 from <http://chronicle.com/free/v55/i11/11a01501.htm>

Moore, M.G. 1990. Correspondence study. *In Adult Learning Methods,* ed. M. W. Galbraith, 345-365. Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company.

Moran, C. (2008, November 7). Data mining as a teaching tool in distance education. *The Chronicle of Higher Education: Information Technology*. Retrieved February 18, 2009 from <http://chronicle.com/free/v55/i11/11a01501.htm>

Murdock, J. L. (2007). Online versus on-campus basic skills course: A comparison of skills acquisition, course effectiveness, and learning community engagement. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wyoming, United States -- Wyoming. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from Dissertations & Theses: A&I database. (Publication No. AAT 3259794).

Nasseh, B. (1997). A Brief history of distance education. Ball State University. http://www.bsu.edu/classes/nasseh/study/history.html

O'Banion, T. (1997). *A Learning college for the 21st century*. Phoenix, AZ: The Oryx Press.

O'Banion, T. (1999) *Launching a learning centered college* (League for Innovations in the Community College Monograph). Laguna Hills, CA: PeopleSoft.

Palloff, R.M, & Pratt, K. (1999). *Building learning communities in cyberspace: Effective strategies for the online classroom*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (2003). *The Virtual student: A Profile and guide to working with online learners*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (2005). *Collaborating online: Learning together in community*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Parr, J.M. (1999) Extending educational computing: A Case of extensive teacher development and support. Journal of Research on Computing in Education, 31(3), 280-291.

Parr, J. M. (1998). Going to school the technological way." *ERIC*. Retrieved June 6, 2009, from EBSCO database. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED419519&site=ehost-live>.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Paulson, M. F. (2002, July) "Online Education Systems: Discussion and Definition of Terms." *NKI Distance Education*. Retrieved February 10, 2009 from http://nettskolen.nki.no/forskning/Definition%20of%20Terms.pdf

Pierce, D., (2008, November 7). These traits make online teachers successful. *eSchoolNews*. Retrieved on February 18, 2009 from http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/top-news

Purvis, J. H. (1998). *An analysis of teacher's rewards using Douglas' Grid and Group*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK.

Putnam, C., Johnson, E., Rose, E., & Kolko, B. (2009). Adapting user-centered design methods to design for diverse populations. In special HC14D issue of *Information Technology and International Development.*

Quitadamo, I.J., & Brown, A. (2001). Effective teaching styles and instructional design for online learning environments. National Education Computing Conference on Building on the Future. July 25 – 27, 2001 in Chicago, IL.

Purvis, J. H. (1998). *An analysis of teacher's rewards using Douglas' Grid and Group*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK.

Reynard, R. (2009, January 21). Communities of learners redefined: Customized networks that impact learning. *Journal of Transforming Education Through Technology*. Retrieved on March 23, 2009 from http://thejournal.com/articles/2009/01/21/communities-of-learners-redefined-customized-networks-that-impact-learning.aspx

Salmon, G. (2004) *E-Moderating: The Key to teaching and learning online*. London: Routledge.

Scarafiotti, C. (2004). A Three-prong strategic approach to successful distance learning delivery. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 7(2).

Scheffler, F. L., & Logan, J. P. (1999). Computer technology in schools: What teachers should know and be able to do. Journal of Research on Computing in Education, 31(3), 305-327.

Selfe, D. (2003). Techno-pedagogical explorations: Toward sustainable technology-rich instruction. In Takayoshi and Huot (Eds.), *Teaching Writing With Computers: An Introduction* (pp. 17 – 32). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Shrum, L. (1992). Innovation and the process of change: A Case study in distance education. In the *Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*. San Francisco.

Schrum, L., (2002). From the field: Characteristics of successful tertiary online students and strategies of experienced online educators. *Education and Information Technologies*, 79(1), 5 – 16.

Schrum, L., (2005). Technology as a tool to support education. *Education World*, Retrieved April 21, 2009, from http://www.educationworld.com/a_tech/tech/tech004.shtml

Shrum, L. & Hong, S. (2002). From the field: Characteristics of successful tertiary online students and strategies of experienced online educators. *Education and Information Technologies*, 7, 5 – 16.

Schwarz, M., & Thompson, M. (1990). *Divided we stand: Redefining politics, technology and social choice*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Shaw, G. & Pieter. W. (2000). The Use of asynchronous learning networks in nutrition education: Student attitude, experiences and performance. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 4(1). http://www.aln.org/alnweb/journal/Vol4_issue1/shawpieter.htm

Silver, D. & Massanari, A. (Eds.). (2006). *Critical cyberculture studies*. New York: New York University Press.

Skinner, E.A., & Belmont, M.J. (1993). "Motivation in the classroom: Reciprocal effects of teacher behavior and student engagement across the school year." *Journal of Educational Psychology, 85*(4). p. 572.

St. Amant, K. (2007). Online education: in an age of globalization: Foundational perspectives and practices for technical communication instructors and trainers. Technical Communication Quarterly, 16(1), 13-30.

Stansberry, Susan. (2001) A Grid and group description of higher education faculty preferences toward instructional technology use. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma. Proquest's Digital Dissertations, http://www.lib.umi.com

Sulcic, V., & Lesjak, D. (2009). E-Learning and study effectiveness. The Journal of Computer Information Systems, 49(3), p. 40.

Swan, K. (2002). Building learning communities in online courses: The Importance of interaction. *Education, Communication and Information*, 2(1).

Tapscott, D. & Williams, A. D. (2008). *Wikinomics: How mass collaboration changes everything*. New Delhi: Penguin Group.

Thompson, L., & Lynch, B. (2003-2004). Web-based instruction: Who is inclined to resist it and why?. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 29(3), 375-385. Retrieved November 10, 2008.

Thornburg, David. (1994). Education in the Communication Age. Starson Publications: San Carlos, California.

Tuan, Y. (1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Twig, C. A. (1994). The changing definition of learning. EDUCOM Review, 29(4), 1-5.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2008). *Distance Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions: 2006-07.* Retrieved on January 22, 2009 from http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=80

Vygotsky, L.S., (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Waelateh, B. (2009). *A Grid and group explanation for educational preferences in English as a foreign language teaching: A case study of Thai University classrooms*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK.

Wang, C. & Zao, L. (2003) Distance education: Basic resources guide. *Collection Building*, 22(3), 120-130.

Weisenberg, F., & Hutton, S. (1996). Teaching a graduate program using computer-mediated conferencing software. *Journal of Distance Education*, *11*, 83-100.

Zhao, F. (2003). Enhancing the quality of online higher education through measurement. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 11(4), p.214.

Zhen, Y., Garthwait, A., & Pratt, P. (2008). Factors affecting faculty members' decision to teach or not to teach online in higher education. *Online Journal of Distance Learning,* 11(3).

Zheng, R., Perez, J., Williamson, J., & Flygame, J. (2008). WebQuests as perceived by teachers: implications for online teaching and learning. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 24, 295-304.

Ziegahn, L. (2001). 'Talk' about culture online: The Potential for transformation. Distance Education, 22(1), p. 144.

APPENDICES

Definition of Terms

1. **Asynchronous Environment** – "A web or email based environment through which teaching interaction may occur" (Hewett & Ehmann, 2004, p. 173). An asynchronous environment allows for non-real time communications between the instructor and students and just between students. Typical asynchronous activities are blogs, wikis, email, and discussion forums or discussion boards. Learners can exchange ideas without depending upon others in the class to be involved or online at the same moment.

2. **Blogs** – Technically, a blog is a website that is initiated and maintained by an individual. The word itself is a contraction of the words 'web' and 'log' and can be used as a verb and as a noun. Bloggers use their blogs to post information, comments, photos, or video on any topic. Visitors can comment within someone's blog and exchanges and communications occur regularly.

3. **Discussion Boards or Discussion Forums** – Places within an online course that are provided for discussion between and among learners and instructors. All exchanges are visible to all students enrolled in the course. The instructor usually establishes or begins the topic or the discussion and exchanges occur as required or as students engage and 'discuss' issues. Moodle, an open source LMS, explains the benefit of this type of discussion as "a sense of community and purpose [that] can be fostered amongst participants. This sense of community can be fostered through tutor/teacher initiative and scaffolding or primarily through the students/participants themselves depending on the intentions of the activity" (Moodle).

4. **Chat** – An online 'room' that "allows participants to have a have a real-time synchronous discussion via the web. This is a useful way to get a different understanding of each other and the topic being discussed – the mode of using a chat room is quite different from the asynchronous forums. The Chat module contains a number of features for managing and reviewing chat discussions" (Moodle).

5. **Course Culture –** Within an Online Learning Community, the atmosphere influenced by the behavior and/or beliefs of students and instructors involved in a specific course, onland or online. Interactive. Constant, subtle changes and affectations.

6. **Emails** – Using the Internet or an intranet, the sending and receiving of messages electronically. Emails can be exchanged between two people or many people. The sender can Courtesy Copy or Blind Copy any number of recipients in addition to the primary recipient.

7. **Grid and Group Typology** – "A theoretical frame that helps in understanding a … culture (Harris, 2005, p. 33). The matrix developed for Mary Douglas's (1982) typology allows researchers to evaluate and understand unique aspects of a particular environment, process associated with that environment and specific improvement strategies applicable to that environment (Harris, 2005).

8. **Journals** – In the context of an LMS, journals are mode of communication available between the instructor and the student. The instructor usually sets up and requires journals, which can be graded, but they are not intended for communication between students in an online environment.

9. **Learning centered instruction** – An approach to learning where the college's purpose is to "create environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves, to make students members of communities of learners that make discoveries and solve problems" (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p. 2) The success of an environment is judged on its impact on learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p. 6).

10. **Learning Management System** – "Learning Management System (LMS) is a broad term that is used for a wide range of systems that organize and provide access to online learning services for students, teachers, and administrators. These services usually provide access control, provision of learning content, communication tools, and organizations of user groups" (Paulson, 2002). LMS is the common term, and some use the term 'learning platform' synonymously. Examples of LMS are WebCT, Blackboard, D2L, and Moodle, but there are others that are both proprietary and open source.

11. **Messaging** – Used as a verb, to send a message using any form of electronic communication. This can include text messaging, instant messaging, or messages within an LMS.

12. **Onland courses** – Courses in the sense that each class meets face to face on a scheduled basis in a physical classroom, lab, or group meeting or setting. Classes can range in size from eight or nine students to an auditorium full of several hundred students.

13. **Online Course** – Courses in which "at least 80 percent of the course content is delivered online" (Allen & Seaman, 2008, p.4)

14. **Online Learning Community** – More than just a gathering place for people with similar interests, an online learning community also is distinguished by the engagement of collaborative learning and "the reflective practice involved in transformative learning" (Palloff & Pratt, 2003, p. 17). The key word is 'engagement' in that learners are connected and involved socially in their online learning environment. In positive online community, the student realizes that his or her learning is part of an entire group process and that all members of the group learn and produce together (Palloff & Pratt, 2003, p.23).

15. **Online Communication –** Use of the Internet to express or exchange ideas or information with others. Types of online communication include, but are not limited to email, discussion boards or forums, wikis, and blogs.

16. **Student Engagement** – "Describes meaningful student involvement throughout the learning environment, including students participating in curriculum design, classroom management and school building climate" (Fletcher, 2005). This term has been used prolifically throughout recent educational literature, but an exact definition from students or teachers is elusive. "Students who are engaged show sustained behavioral involvement in learning activities accompanied by a positive emotional tone. They select tasks at the border of their competencies, initiate action when given the opportunity, and exert intense effort and concentration in the implementation of learning tasks; they show generally positive emotions during ongoing action, including enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, and interest" (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

17. **Synchronous Environment** – Associated with real time class meetings that occur in a web-based environment. Parties can speak with each other and often use

software such as “Smarthinking’s synchronous whiteboard environment or Microsoft’s NetMeeting” (Hewett & Ehmann, 2008, p. 175).

18. **Teaching centered instruction** – An approach to learning where information or knowledge is presented and students then learn by what is told to them. It is content oriented (Leung & Lu, 2008) and is still practiced around the world and in both onland and online venues. Under the instruction or teaching centered paradigm, “colleges have created complex structures to provide for the activity of teaching conceived primarily as delivering 50-minute lectures – the mission of [this type] of college is to deliver instruction” (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p1).

19. **Wikis** - A web page where all students in one course can create a project, edit information, post new information without needing to know HTML. An instructor may begin a wiki with a front or home page and then other participants (students) can add to that home page or add additional pages.

Grid and Group Assessment Tool - Online Course Culture

Below are 23 items that reflect a continuum from 1 to 8. For each item, read the entire item and choose the statement that you think best represents the online course you took at Liberal Arts University in the Summer of 2009. Then on the continuum, mark the button that represents the degree to which that statement applies to your online course.

Following these questions, you will find 7 demographic questions that will help classify data, but will remain completely secure and confidential.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Stephoni Case at stephoni@cox.net or 405.990.1443.

Definitions:
autonomy - independence or freedom, as of the will or one's actions: the autonomy of the individual.
initiated - to begin, set going, or originate
ambiguous - open to or having several possible meanings or interpretations

---

Survey Consent Please complete this survey based on your experiences and perceptions from the online course you took at Liberal Arts University in the Summer of 2009. NO IDENTIFYING INFORMATION WILL EVER BE RELEASED. IT WILL BE KEYED AND SECURELY STORED IN AN OFFSITE LOCATION. The results of this study will be available to you. By completing this questionnaire, you are accepting these terms.

- ☐ I accept these terms.
- ☐ I do not accept these terms.

Grid Considerations

1. Authority Authority structures within the online course are:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Decentralized/non-hierarchical	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Centralized/hierarchical

2. Activities and Responsibilities -- Course activities and responsibilities are:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Ill-defined	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Well defined

3. Autonomy -- Course participants have:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Full autonomy in course participation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	No autonomy in course participation

4. Course discussion -- Course participants have:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Full autonomy in their discussion postings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	No autonomy in their discussion postings

5. Ownership -- Course participants are:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Encouraged to participate/take ownership of their course	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Discouraged from participating/taking ownership of their course

6. Course materials -- Students obtain course materials through:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Individual communications or email from the instructor	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	A learning management system (Moodle) communication, just like all other course participants

7. Instruction -- Instruction is:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Personalized for each student	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Not personalized for each student

8. Motivation -- Course participants are motivated by:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Intrinsic/self-defined interests	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Extrensic/institutional rewards

9. Communications -- Emails and discussion forums are:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Initiated most often by the instructor	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Initiated most often by the student

10. Assignments -- Course activities and assignments are completed through:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Individual effort	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Collaboration

11. Rules and Procedures -- Rules and procedures are:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Few	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Numerous

Group Considerations

12. Online Environment -- Within the online class, course participants mostly:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Work alone	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Work collaboratively

13. Socialization and Work -- Course participants consider socialization and work within the course as:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Separate and dichotomous activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Incorporated and united activities

14. Rewards -- Extrinsic rewards (such as grades) primarily benefit:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
The individual	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Everyone in the course

15. Organization -- Learning and discussions are planned/organized around:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Only the teacher's goals/interests	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	All course participants' goals/interests

16. Course performance -- Course participants are evaluated primarily on their:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Individual assignments and activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Group assignments and activities

17. Work -- Course participants work:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
In isolation of goals and objectives	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Collaboratively toward goals and objectives

18. Discussions -- Course discussions are:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Individual exchanges between instructors and one student at a time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Group exchanges that include all course participants

19. Communication Flow -- Communication flows primarily through:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Individual, informal networks	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Corporate, formal networks

20. Instructional Resources -- Within the course, instructional resources are controlled and developed by:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Instructor	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	All course participants

21. Connection -- Course participants seem to have:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
No engagement with the other online course participants	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	A great deal of engagement with the other online course participants

22. Responsibilities of instructors and students -- Responsibilities of instructors and students are:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Ambiguous/fragmented with no accountability	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Clear/communal with much accountability

23. Decisions -- Most decisions are made:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
By the instructor	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	By all course participants

24. Name -- Name

25. Course Title -- What is the name of the online course you taught/took?

26. Request -- Would you be willing to participate in a brief interview regarding this online course experience?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

27. Contact Information -- What is your email address?

28. Mobile Contact Information -- What is your cell phone number? (For reminder text, if you consent to interview.)

29. Online Course Experience What other online courses have you taken and where did you take them?

30. Final Question Do you have any additional comments you would like to make about your online course experience or opinions?

Submit

Powered by Google Docs Report Abuse - Terms of Service - Additional Terms

Interview Questions

Instructor Questions

1. What are your primary objectives (not disciplinary) in your online courses?
2. How does your institution encourage and/or facilitate your teaching online courses?
3. What methods/activities do you use to promote learning?
4. Why do you teach online courses?
5. What helps your online students to be successful?
6. Does online community seem important in your course? Why/not?

Student Questions

1. Why are you taking an online class?
2. Is it important or beneficial for you to work with you online classmates?
3. What helped you learn the most in an online class?
4. Did you learn the material in your online class? If so, then how?
5. What were the best/worst activities or assignments in your online class?
6. Who was most influential toward your success or failure in your online class?
7. Easy to follow?

CHART OF GRID QUESTIONS AND ALL PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES

APPENDIX D

Survey Question 1 = low grid; 8 = high grid	U.S. History Instructor	U.S. History Student	MCS Instructor	MCS Student	Bib Interp Instructor	Bib Interp Student	CSI Instructor	CSI Student
1. Authority structures within the online course are decentralized/non-hierarchical ⇔ centralized/hierarchical.	7	7	6	8	6	6	3	2
2. Course activities and responsibilities are ill-defined ⇔ well defined.	7	8	8	7	5	8	7	7
3. Course participants have full autonomy in course participation ⇔ no autonomy in course participation.	6	4	4	6	4	1	3	2
4. Course participants have full autonomy in their discussion postings ⇔ non autonomy in their discussion postings.	3	2	7	5	2	1	2	1
5. Course participants are encouraged to participate/take ownership of their course ⇔ discouraged from participating/taking ownership of their course.	5	2	7	4	4	1	3	1
6. Students obtain course materials	5	7	8	8	8	7	6	8

CHART OF GRID QUESTIONS AND ALL PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES

APPENDIX D

Survey Question 1 = low grid; 8 = high grid	U.S. History Instructor	U.S. History Student	MCS Instructor	MCS Student	Bib Interp Instructor	Bib Interp Student	CSI Instructor	CSI Student
through individual communications or email from the instructor ⇔ a learning management system (Moodle) communication, just like all of the other course participants.								
7. Instruction is personalized for each student ⇔ not personalized for each student.	8	7	8	8	7	7	6	8
8. Course participants are motivated by intrinsic/self-defined interests ⇔ extrinsic/institutional rewards.	5	7	4	7	2	7	6	7
9. Emails and discussion forums are initiated most often by the instructor ⇔ by the student.	2	7	4	2	2	2	7	3
10. Course activities and assignments are completed through individual effort ⇔ collaboration.	3	1	2	3	4	1	2	1
11. Rules and procedures are few ⇔ numerous.	4	4	4	8	4	3	4	6
Sum	55	56	62	66	48	44	49	46
Average	5.10	5.10	5.64	6	4.36	4	4.45	4.18

CHART OF GROUP QUESTIONS AND ALL PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES
APPENDIX E

Survey Question 1= low group; 8 = high group	U.S. History Instructor	U.S. History Student	MCS Instructor	MCS Student	Bib Interp Instructor	Bib Interp Student	CSI Instructor	CSI Student
12. Within the online class, course participants mostly work alone ⇔ work collaboratively.	1	1	2	2	3	3	2	2
13. Course participants consider socialization and work within the course as separate and dichotomous activities ⇔ incorporated and united activities.	4	2	3	6	3	5	6	3
14. Extrinsic rewards (such as grades) primarily benefit the individual ⇔ everyone in the course.	1	1	4	2	1	3	1	1
15. Learning and discussions are planned/organized around only the teacher's goals/interests ⇔group assignments and activities.	2	5	3	8	3	3	5	7
16. Course participants are evaluated primarily on their individual assignments and activities ⇔ group assignments and activities.	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1
17. Course participants work in isolation of goals and objectives ⇔	5	2	2	1	6	2	4	2

CHART OF GROUP QUESTIONS AND ALL PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES
APPENDIX E

Survey Question 1= low group; 8 = high group	U.S. History Instructor	U.S. History Student	MCS Instructor	MCS Student	Bib Interp Instructor	Bib Interp Student	CSI Instructor	CSI Student
collaboratively toward goals and objectives.								
18. Course discussions are individual exchanges between instructors and one student at a time ⇔ group exchanges that include all course participants.	5	7	8	7	7	6	7	8
19. Communication flows primarily through individual informal networks ⇔ corporate, formal networks.	6	7	4	1	4	7	3	7
20. Within the course, instructional resources are controlled and developed by the instructor ⇔ all course participants.	1	1	1	6	1	3	2	3
21. Course participants seem to have no engagement with the other online course participants ⇔ a great deal of engagement with the other online course participants.	4	2	8	5	7	6	7	7
22. Responsibilities of instructors and students are ambiguous/fragmented with no	6	5	7	6	7	7	6	3

CHART OF GROUP QUESTIONS AND ALL PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES
APPENDIX E

Survey Question 1= low group; 8 = high group	U.S. History Instructor	U.S. History Student	MCS Instructor	MCS Student	Bib Interp Instructor	Bib Interp Student	CSI Instructor	CSI Student
accountability ⇔ clear/communal with much accountability.								
23. Most decisions are made by the instructor ⇔ by all course participants.	1	1	4	2	3	2	2	2
Sum	37	35	47	47	47	49	46	46
Average	3.08	2.92	3.92	3.92	3.92	4.08	3.83	3.83

APPENDIX F

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Thursday, October 22, 2009
IRB Application No	ED09133
Proposal Title:	Culture and Community in Online Courses: A Grid and Group Explanation
Reviewed and Processed as:	Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 10/21/2010

Principal Investigator(s):

Stephoni Case
9840 Stonebridge Drive
Yukon, OK 73099

Susan Stansberry
207 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Sheila Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Stephoni Lynn Case

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctorate of Education

Dissertation: CULTURE AND COMMUNITY IN ONLINE COURSES: A GRID AND GROUP EXPLANATION

Major Field: Applied Educational Studies

Biographical:

Education:
May 2010 Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma
Doctorate in Education – Applied Educational Studies/Interdisciplinary

August 1992 Southern Nazarene University
Master of Arts in English Education

May 1983 Bethany Nazarene College
Bachelor of Arts in English

Experience:
Program Manager of Oklahoma School Business Management
April 2010 – present Oklahoma State University
Adjunct Instructor
August 2009 – present Oklahoma City University
August 2009 – December 2009 Oklahoma State University/Oklahoma City
Assistant Professor/Classroom Instructor
August 1991 – present Southern Nazarene University
Public School Classroom Teacher
August 2001 – May 2002 Bethany, Oklahoma
August 1986 – January 1990 Bakersfield, California
August 1983 – May 1986 Mustang, Oklahoma

Professional Memberships:
National Council of Teachers of English, Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, Association of School Business Officials

Name: Stephoni Lynn Case Date of Degree: May, 2010

Institution: Oklahoma State University Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: CULTURE AND COMMUNITY IN ONLINE COURSES: A GRID AND GROUP EXPLANATION

Pages in Study: 230 Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major Field: Applied Educational Studies

Scope and Method of Study: Using Mary Douglas' (1982) Grid and Group Typology, the purpose of this case study was to explain the distinctive patterns of student engagement, communication and community in the culture of four online courses. The participants were four online instructors and four of their students who completed online courses at Liberal Arts University in the summer of 2009. Interviews, observations and document analysis were used in both physical and virtual environments.

Findings and Conclusions: The course participants of each course reflected a Bureaucratic/Authoritarian (high grid/low group) culture. Characteristic of the Bureaucratic/Authoritarian quadrant on the grid and group matrix, the individual, was limited in personal decisions and activities; personal autonomy was minimal as was group survival and/or influence. The students in each class finished strong with an attrition rate of less than ten percent, but there were varying degrees of collaboration in the discussion forums; quality of postings was directly related to the word count requirement from the instructors. The instructor's methodology in using the discussion forum impacted students' perceptions the value of the forums. Students also accommodated their instructors by converging to the method of communication demonstrated by the instructors. The findings also indicate that transferring an identical definition of culture from an onland environment to an online environment might be problematic, and that as online course culture theory develops, some elements in each culture may be different. Future studies of different types of courses offered in a traditional semester or at a different institution would be a positive addition to research. Also, further development of theory of culture in online courses is needed.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Susan Stansberry