



## From the Director

Please welcome Tyler Chen who has taken a temporary position as the Instructional Web Designer. He will work with the eLearning staff to design/develop Instructional Unit, Division, and Department web pages.

Tyler comes from the Office of Instruction where he was Secretary Senior for Curriculum Committee, Instructional Planning Team, Professional Placement and Advancement Committee, among many other duties. Best of all he is a drummer in the rock band, Silversafe ([www.silversafe.net](http://www.silversafe.net)).

Drop by the eLearning department and say hello to Tyler if you are in the area.

## Incorporating Difficult Subject Matter Into the Online Classroom Environment

### Part One: Why should I do it?

**DEBRA JENKINS, ECE** - Whether it is family systems within the context of mental health or topics of race, sex, culture, or economics, finding ways to deal with subjects that can possibly cause disequilibria for students are challenging to incorporate within a face-to-face classroom— not to mention facilitating these same types of discussions in an online setting.

My journey towards dealing with difficult subjects began in my undergraduate work at Pacific Oaks College, a teacher's college that values social justice. I had the opportunity of being on the receiving end of such facilitation practices as a student. Having my coursework implemented this way shook the very foundations on which I have established myself. I left many a class in tears after viewing the realities of the world with my own eyes. The subject matter came to life and lived with me until the class met again. Many of those enlightening and stirring moments still live with me today.

The next transition on my journey towards dealing with difficult subjects was as a faculty member at that same institution. Although the social justice environment of the institution validated the facilitation strategy of deconstructing and reconstructing areas of development within a social and political context, I had to learn that it is critical that students learn to reflect from their spirit without having to "bleed from the soul." (Personal communication, Dr. Paige Parker, 2000)

Today, as a lifelong learner myself, I am consistently working to improve at providing the core principles of critical pedagogy through effective, challenging, and motivating online conversations while remaining ethical in practice. Incorporating dialectical theory into the core curriculum can have the potential of shifting students from seeing themselves as the author of the world's interpretation to a place of seeing the world as read through the lenses of many outside of themselves. Antonia Darder (2003) in her book, *Critical Pedagogy Reader* states,

*In opposition to traditional theories of education that serve to reinforce certainty, conformity, and technical control of knowledge and power, critical pedagogy embraces a dialectical view of knowledge that functions to unmask the connections between objective*

*perspective, all analysis begins first and foremost with human existence and the contradictions and disjunctions that both shape and make its meaning problematic...An important emphasis here is that students are encouraged to engage the world within its complexity and fullness, in order to reveal the possibilities of new ways of constructing thought and action beyond how it currently exists. Rooted in dialectical view of knowledge, critical pedagogy seeks to support the dynamic interactive elements, rather than participate in the formation of dichotomies and polarizations in thought and practice. By so doing, it supports a view of humans and nature that is relational, an objectivity and subjectivity that is interconnected, and understanding of theory and practice as coexistent. Most importantly, this perspective resurfaces the power of human activity and human knowledge as both a product and a force in shaping the world, whether it be in the interest of domination or liberation. (pg. 12)*

I now view the critical pedagogy principles as potential objectives and course goals in every class I teach. I have experienced the growth in myself to challenge my teaching to the level where the content lives in the lives of my students far beyond the online classroom. I am often receiving emails from students who may not have "gotten it" during the ten weeks of class but, through a Piagetian "aha" experience, later realized that the class content suddenly had real life meaning for them. Difficult subjects are hard-yes, but well worth the effort in establishing a foundation for students towards lifelong learning. ♦

Part two will be in the May issue of ePlus News: "Strategies for implementing difficult subjects online"

*A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is insofar democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes.*

**John Dewey**  
**Education and Democracy,**

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## Converting to eLearning



**PAULA BUTTERFIELD, ART** - Anyone who has ever taught a child to read, or even to tie his or her shoes, knows that, in the end, learners really teach themselves. All one can do is guide them. At first, converting my Art Appreciation course to an eLearning format seemed like a no-brainer: type in my lectures and upload my slides. Wrong! The first thing I needed to do was get over the idea that I was the source of all knowledge for my students.

As I attempted to type my lectures (which existed not in tidy Word files, but in scribbled outlines, covered with margin notes, Post-its, and newsclippings), I realized that if doing so was unutterably tedious for me, what was the likelihood that my students would dutifully plow their way through screen after screen of text? It was painful to ruthlessly edit my pearls of wisdom, but I ended up writing a brief introduction to each week's material, supplementing information in the textbook. I chose a highly readable typeface (I like Garamond), in a large point size, with key words in color.

It was also quickly apparent that uploading hundreds of slides was going to take untold hours, and moreover, that it was completely unnecessary. Every major art museum now has online collections of images; and other sites, such as Artstor, offer collections as well. Each week, my students must complete exercises responding to images they access through links I've established for them. You are probably already aware of websites that would be appropriate for your classes.

Art Appreciation students learn basic art history and how to "read" art, but they create some artwork also. After receiving feedback from students that they would like to see other students' work, I started a Photobucket account ([photobucket.com](http://photobucket.com)), where students can submit files with their work. There's one "album" for drawings, another for photographs, and so on. When students log on, they have a page of--for instance--self-portraits to peruse.

In order to replicate a classroom environment, I ask students to comment on specific aspects of one another's work, through Blackboard's Discussion Board feature. In fact, the DB has become a valuable part of my course. Each week, I post a forum on the DB that relates to that week's unit. **Continued on page 3**

"My students have really benefited by a tip I learned from Kathy Chatfield. A student asked me how she could open documents so that they would print just the document and not the other parts of the Blackboard web page. Kathy told me that you can "right click" on the link to a document and then select "open in new window."  
- Lisa Borho

## Moving From a Telecourse to Online

**JEANNE HOFF, HEALTH** - Kathy Chatfield asked that I share my "innovations" for moving from my Nutrition telecourse to online. My initial response was that I did nothing creative that warrants being classified as an "innovation," but what I can share is how I survived the transition and how things have turned around this quarter (second time offering the course in eLearning) to be so much better.

When I was told I would have to change from offering Nutrition as a telecourse to an online course, I knew I would need to learn all about Blackboard as this was a new medium for me for reaching students. I took several of the workshops offered by the eLearning Department but found this did not really prepare me for all that was to

come. I am not saying I was not properly trained, rather so many other quirks can show their ugly faces when you really offer the course. So I offer to you my tips for surviving the quarter teaching online.

### *Basic Survival Skill:*

Have Kathy Chatfield's email address and phone number on your desk at all times!!!! And don't hesitate to use them! Scott Coffie, also, held my hand and calmed my nerves many times. The eLearning staff are definitely there to help as needed.

### *Tip #1: Fast and easy is not always fast and easy!*

I thought it would be easier to create this online course using a packaged course shell from the book publisher. I am not so sure that was the best thing to do. There were so many

things that were limited in the packaged course shell that could not be overridden, deleted, or changed. There were other areas in my packaged course shell that did not seem to interface well with Blackboard even though they were supposed to. In hindsight... I would have been better off starting from scratch.

### *Tip #2: Keep it simple to start.*

I am so grateful I decided to not add too many bells and whistles the first quarter. For instance, I decided to only give exams and use the discussion board the first quarter. By doing this, I only had to troubleshoot two areas, and the students felt less frustrated because I was able to handle these two areas in a time efficient manner. **Continued on page 5**



## Moderating Forums

**ANN VIRTU SNYDER, WOMEN'S STUDIES** - The Discussion Board in Blackboard is a powerful tool that can be used to engage students, create a collaborative learning environment, and assess student learning. I've been managing face-to-face discussions in the classroom for many years, but the idea of recreating the energy and accountability of my traditional classroom discussions online was somewhat daunting to me as a new distance education teacher.

One problem that nagged me was how I could assess each individual student's understanding of the reading material, while at the same time allow for a flow of ideas among them. There are times when I don't want the students to see each others' answers to a focus question until all the responses are in. I stumbled upon the **Force moderation of posts** feature of the discussion forum as a way to allow students to compose their own responses without the influence of their peers.

When "force moderation of posts" is turned on in Forum Settings, all posts (except the moderator's) are placed in a queue until they are reviewed and released to the discussion board. I use this feature when I don't want students to see what others are writing until all the posts are in. I then assess their level of reading comprehension and writing ability and assign them to groups to continue the discussion. I match strong readers and writers with tentative ones and spot monitor their discussions to make sure the more advanced students are in "helping" mode, and not overpowering or ignoring the beginners.

This method, coupled with timely individual feedback, has helped me create an environment for collaborative teaching and learning. An interesting possibility that I haven't been brave enough to attempt yet is that students can be assigned as moderators. That will have to wait until next term!

Here are the logistics I've used to set up a moderation queue:

1. Set up the discussion forum and select "force moderation of posts." I also turn on "do not allow additional threads," and I select the "grade forum" option.
2. Write the first focus question and guidelines for students to follow. I generally set up a thread with my focus question and ask the students to reply to that thread. I let them know that they won't be able to see their or their colleagues' posts until after the due date. Be sure to make the forum available!
3. When the first posts are in and you're ready to moderate the forum, turn off the students' availability to the forum. I find this helpful because I don't want students inadvertently posting when I'm assigning them to groups.
4. When "force moderation of posts" is turned on, you'll see a button at the top of the forum screen called "Moderate Forum." Click on this to review each post. I assign a preliminary 3-tiered grade (Advanced, Average, Beginning—this is a note to myself that I don't share with the student until I grade the completed discussion), and release the post from the queue.
5. Match up Advanced students with Beginning students in small groups (with a balance of Average), pose additional questions for them to discuss and create threads for each of the groups.
6. Turn off "force moderation" and make the discussion available again.
7. When the discussion closes, grade the forum. For each student, you'll see the original post and all subsequent contributions.

I've run into a few glitches along the way. For example, there is no way I know of to release all the posts in the moderation queue without clicking on each one of them. This isn't a big problem for me because I want to read each one before I assign students to groups. Another thing to be aware of is that if you turn off "force moderation of posts" before you've cleared the moderation queue, you can't get to the posts in the queue. They haven't disappeared, but the handy "Moderate Forum" button has!

Let me know of your adventures! Are you assigning students as moderators? How is that working out? I'm new at this and I learn something new every time I log on! ♦

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## Converting to eLearning—cont. from page 2

This week, after reading about post-WWII artists and visiting a website about Jackson Pollock, students will post a response to a current article in *Scientific American* which contends that recently discovered paintings thought to be Pollock's can be authenticated by analysis of their fractal patterns. I update Discussion Board forums almost quarterly to keep the freshest information available for students. In addition to posting his or her response to a forum, each student is required to comment on at least one other student's post, which simulates class discussion. Can such discussions really be simulated, even without my incisive, provocative comments? It turns out that discussions are actually improved, as even those back-of-the-room students are contributing, often a heck of lot more than you would have ever imagined. Inhibitions disappear online as students ponder how Prozac might have changed Van Gogh's style, or whether the curators at the Getty Museum, who bring priceless antiquities to Malibu from their countries of origin, are preserving those objects or stealing them.

I now see my job as an eLearning instructor as a guide, leading my students to resources and discussions topics, then getting out of the way as they teach themselves how to appreciate art. ♦

### Tech Tips from Scott

The online learning environment can be enhanced by the use of multimedia elements, which can improve the learning process for multimodal learners. Faculty can utilize pre-produced content from online digital media repositories, such as found here: [http://www.irc.gmu.edu/resources/findingaid/twt\\_guides/repos.htm](http://www.irc.gmu.edu/resources/findingaid/twt_guides/repos.htm). Alternatively, you may schedule some time to work with me and our multimedia production workstation to create your own custom content for online delivery. Email me at [scoffie@clark.edu](mailto:scoffie@clark.edu) if you have an online multimedia project in mind!



## Photo Sharing, Class Collaborating and Experiential Learning

**JAK TANENBAUM, ART - Basic Camera (Art 130)** is a class about learning to see with a camera. Students explore the creative possibilities of light and learn to see photographic subjects in terms of line, shape, texture, and color. Students practice arranging balanced, coherent compositions in the camera viewfinder frame exploring the relationship between form, content and technique.

In the old days (last Fall) students dusted off their film cameras and completed their class projects using 35mm color slide film and the E-6 film processing provided through the Clark College Bookstore. All class assignments were produced and critiqued using projected 35mm color transparency film, and many students felt a real satisfaction of accomplishment when viewing and discussing their projected color slides.

I was welcomed into the digital “eLearning” age when a decision was made to make the Basic Camera (Art 130) class a “digital only” photography class. Although I have been shooting digital in my studio for the past several years, my teaching has been primarily film-based. When I discovered that the Mac Lab server is only accessible to me from campus computers, I decided to explore using Clark College’s Blackboard as a way to have students submit their digital photography assignments so that the work could be accessible on the Internet and retrieved from any computer.

I scheduled an appointment with Kathy Chatfield for a tutorial on how Blackboard works and some help figuring out if Blackboard could do what I needed it to do. I learned that Clark pays for server space from Blackboard and that creates some limitations when dealing with the large image file sizes that most contemporary digital cameras produce. Kathy suggested that I explore the use of photo sharing Internet sites as a way to share imagery by linking the URL of the posted image in the Blackboard discussion groups. Sharing student comments, exploring vocabulary, and expressing in words how images communicate was an interesting idea with the potential to create a challenging, yet enjoyable, learning environment.

I went to work reorganizing the course material and restructuring the class using Blackboard as the heart and soul of the class. Even though my class is a face-to-face class, all of my course materials are distributed electronically through Blackboard. This has definitely ended the “I lost my Syllabus, can I have another one” syndrome. I like the fact that Blackboard is HTML friendly. This allows me to use my web development experience to change the design and look to meet my specific needs for the display of photographs, links to photographs, and other content hosted on the Internet.

Students have four specific shooting assignments and a final project which must be posted to a photo sharing web site of their choice by a specific date. Once they have posted their photographs to their photo sharing web site, they are required to go the Blackboard discussion group that I created for each assignment and post the URL (hyperlink) to the photographs so that their classmates and I can view their assignment submissions. I give the students a choice of about ten different photo sharing web sites that I have explored and that work well for the class. Some are free and have some limitations, including making the user view a lot of advertising. Others cost \$10 to \$25 per year with a lot of storage capacity and other organizational features that are helpful. I’ve created a page that describes each photo sharing choice with a link so that students can click, visit the site, and decide what works best for them.



Most students selected Flickr which is owned by Yahoo. Flickr is a photo sharing site that builds community around images. Flickr allows users to upload images, describe them, and then allow others to discuss them. Some students selected Photobucket which is another good free photo sharing site but has a lot of ads which can be annoying.

Students are required to look at their classmate’s photography assignment submissions on the discussion boards and continue the thread by posting an appropriate comment or observation about the image. I give them handouts with vocabulary and definitions and require that they use appropriate photography and design vocabulary in their posted discussion. I encourage them to write their observations but not to judge. I ask them to analyze and explore direction and quality of light, line, color, shape, value, form, texture and repetition. At first some students were posting comments like “I really like that picture because it looks cool.” As the quarter has progressed Blackboard discussions have become more mature and students are becoming more comfortable making written observations about what they see in a photograph and using more descriptive words and appropriate vocabulary.

I require students to post their assignment to the discussion board 48 hours before it is due so I can download their photos to build the presentation for the class critique. Students are also required to post their observations on the assignment discussion board so I can access them prior to class. I have been taking the downloaded assignment submissions and discussion board comments and creating a Powerpoint presentation for the class critique. This critiquing method of requiring students to review and comment on the work prior to classroom viewing has opened up a whole new world of learning opportunities. It has been easier to engage quieter students who are less likely to voluntarily speak up, because they have had an opportunity to preview, think about, and write about what they see.

I am starting to see a lot of learning happening that I have not previously been able to explore. I am enjoying the immediacy of the Blackboard teaching experience. If a student posts an assignment which is not satisfactory, I am able to give immediate feedback which gives the student an opportunity to re-post their assignment and potentially improve their grade. I have been impressed with how comfortable my students are with the new format of the Basic Camera class. Most of the students have been able to post their assignment images with very little help from me. I tell my students from the beginning that this is not a computer class (even though they are sitting in front of one), and it’s not a Photoshop class (although we are using that tool to resize and edit images), it is a class about learning to see and communicate ideas with the camera.

I’m discovering that the combination of Internet-based media sharing services and Blackboard discussion groups can empower students and produce exciting new learning opportunities. Using Blackboard in the Basic Camera class has allowed me to explore new teaching and learning opportunities for sharing, discussing, and building a classroom community around photographic imagery. And from the feedback I’m getting from students they are having fun with the Internet-based class format. I have found that when I mix a little fun with a little learning the result is often quite satisfying. ♦

## Moving From a Telecourse to Online—cont. from page 2

*Tip #3 Use the discussion board regularly throughout the quarter.*

In my telecourse, I used videos, exams, and assignments. The piece I always missed in the telecourse was the interaction with my students like I get in the traditional classroom setting. There is always so much more than what is in the textbook that I want to share with them, so I was encouraged by the fact that Blackboard had a discussion board to use that could act, to a certain extent, like a classroom discussion. My first experience with the discussion board was like the experience in the classroom where students are either staring blankly at you or respond in rote rather than critically thinking about the issue. I struggled with this for about four weeks the first quarter and then started to find the right words to post a good discussion question. This quarter I made sure to get to know the students first, via the discussion board (i.e., who they were, their interest in nutrition or lack thereof, their dietary practices, their hectic lifestyles, etc.) This enabled me to carefully choose the words for the discussion questions. I also now require two posts each week. This allows me to ask a more generic question and get their feedback, and then I can focus the question so students can see why general dietary guidelines don't work for everyone and don't always tell the whole story. By week two, the students were making good posts, and I even had a few moments where I would just smile with my students like we get a chance to do in the classroom.

*Tip #4: Be prepared for things to go wrong!*

For those of you who know me, I like things to be under control as I enter the classroom. For instance, if it is a day to take an exam, I have the exam in my hands and students have the whole time uninterrupted to take the exam. Issues with online exams that I was not expecting include:

- Blackboard may not be available and students might not be able to complete their assignments, exams, or postings to the discussion board on time. This required resetting things a number of times and making time in my day to answer several emails from panicking students. This, of course, altered what I envisioned for my day.
- Students can get locked out of an exam.
- Your gradebook can get messed up pretty easily when using a packaged course shell.

My advice to you is to post announcements every single time anything strange comes up. Get the message out there globally, and then you do not have to do so much individual troubleshooting later. I also found that students remained very calm (much calmer than I did) once they knew the situation. Many had taken other online courses before, and they accepted that this was just status quo for using the Internet.

*Tip #5: Keep a core course shell that you can make changes to throughout the quarter.*

The first quarter I taught online, I started to make the changes I knew I wanted for the next quarter while in the current quarter. Big mistake! It caused things to get messed up in the gradebook (i.e., Blackboard thought I was offering a new exam), and it caused students to get confused even though the only changes I made were to material they were supposed to be finished with.

*Tip #6: Be careful what you make available to your students ahead of time.*

Many students will work way ahead of schedule. If you want to change something you originally thought you were going to do, but now want it different based on your interaction from the students, you will not be able to do it since some students will have already completed that component.

*Tip #7: Have the eLearning Department create a fictitious student (you) for each class.*

This will allow you to test everything on the student side after you make the course available but before the students start using it. It also allows you a chance to see what the students are complaining about that you may not be able to see from the instructor side.

*Tip #8: Give a few bonus points throughout the quarter and ask students to email how the course is going for them and what they would change to make it work better for them.*

You ask was it worth all this to change? My answer this quarter is yes. If for nothing else, the ability to have such great discussions with my students. ♦



### Who am I Online?



**VERONICA BROCK, HEALTH**—I have experience being me in a F2F classroom. But when I started to teach online, I was less sure of how to interact with students. I was going to be reduced to two-dimensional printed responses, and that concerned me. I knew that if making a connection with students that would help them with retention and learning, but was it possible to connect without regular face-to-face contact?

I had heard that I shouldn't jump in too much on the discussion board because that could silence students. So, I held back during my first quarter and let the discussions take their course. I think the result worked in terms of achieving course "outcomes," but personally, it felt un-natural and unsatisfying. My sense was validated when students commented in their course evaluations that they wanted more interaction with me in the discussion forums. So this term, I decided to be as genuine as possible. I interact and contribute when it feels like I should – I listen to students and trust my intuitive teaching sense. For me, this term is more enjoyable, and I feel better connected to this group of students.

So, my two-cents as a newbie to teaching an online course is: **Be yourself; do what comes naturally.** ♦

'Come to the edge', he said.  
They said, 'We are afraid'  
'Come to the edge', he said  
They came  
He pushed them...  
and they flew.

-Guillaume Apollinaire, Poet  
1870 - 1918



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Please feel free to drop by the eLearning office, email, or call us if you have questions related to eLearning. Remember, eLearning involves more than just online learning.

**ePlus News**

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## Upcoming Conferences

- **Pacific Northwest Higher Education Teaching and Learning**  
May 2-4, 2007, Vancouver, WA
- **NEW – Tracking your Future Teachers: How the Right Database Can Help Your Program Succeed:** [www.CareersinEd.org](http://www.CareersinEd.org)  
May 17-18, 2007, Green River Community College, Auburn, WA
- **Bb World 07:** [www.blackboard.com/company/events/Bbworld07/Home](http://www.blackboard.com/company/events/Bbworld07/Home)  
July 7-12, 2007, Boston, MA
- **Educause 2007:** [www.educause.edu/e07](http://www.educause.edu/e07)  
October 23-26, 2007, Seattle, WA

## ITC Professional Development AudioConferences: [www.itcnetwork.org](http://www.itcnetwork.org)

If you are interested in participating in one of these following audioconferences, please contact Maggie Peeples ([mpeeples@clark.edu](mailto:mpeeples@clark.edu)) for more information or to RSVP. The audioconferences last for 1 hour from 11am-Noon.

The sessions are also “reserveable.” This means that we can access the recording by telephone and a computer at a later date and time for up to 60 days. So, if Tuesday at 11 a.m. is a time when you are unavailable, don’t let that stop you. Just let Maggie know that you are interested in participating in a particular session, and we will coordinate your access to it.

- March 13, 2007: Classroom Assessment Techniques in the Online and Blended Classroom
- March 20, 2007: Establishing Boundaries and Maximizing Potential for Virtual Educators
- March 27, 2007: Student Success Skills Integration
- April 3, 2007: Working With Hidden Disabilities
- April 17, 2007: Game-based Technologies in Higher Education
- April 24, 2007: An Example of Game-based Technologies in Higher Education—Pulse
- May 8, 2007: Choosing the Right Learning Management System
- May 15, 2007: Tips and Tricks for Teaching Math Online

## Innovate-Live Webcasts: [www.innovateonline.info](http://www.innovateonline.info)

Innovate-Live webcasts are offered on a variety of topics regarding the “...creative use of information technology (IT) to enhance the educational processes...” Times and dates are listed on the website along with access to archives of previous webcasts. There is no cost, simply register at their site.

## In the next issue...

### The Journey of eLearning Course Development, May 2007

What has the journey been like for you? What are the rewards? What would you do differently? Why did you make the leap?

We welcome your contributions regarding this or any of our upcoming topics. Please send all submissions to [MPeeples@clark.edu](mailto:MPeeples@clark.edu) or [KChatfield@clark.edu](mailto:KChatfield@clark.edu) with “Newsletter” and the topic stated in the subject line. Submissions due April 10, 2007.