Experiential Exercises In The Online Environment

Michael J. "Mick" Fekula
University of South Carolina Aiken
mickf@usca.edu

Janet M. Duck
Penn State Great Valley
jmd226@psu.edu

ABSTRACT

The evolution and rapid progression of the online learning environment has afforded many new technologies for course structure and design. Although an advantage of online learning is that every student in the class has an equal opportunity to participate, the disadvantage is that students are unable to interact with each other as they would in a traditional classroom setting. This poses a challenge to the use of traditional experiential learning methodologies designed for the classroom.

While computer-based simulations are greatly enhanced through web-based technology, experiential exercises that rely upon rich communication means are likely to be degraded in an online class. The purpose of this presentation is to explore the nature and effectiveness of experiential exercises in the context of online environments. The presentation also examines the extent of existing technologies that can be used to enhance experiential exercises conducted online.

After defining what we meant by an experiential learning exercise, as opposed to a computer-based simulation game, this presentation will classify experiential exercises according to the degree to which a particular exercise relies upon face-to-face, real-time interaction with other students in order to be effective. At the other extreme, we identify exercises that would be effective in an asynchronous environment. In the interval, we distinguish exercises that require varying degrees of synchronous participation or face-to-face interaction. Similarly, we then identify those technologies that align with particular exercises.

The goal of the presentation is to offer a taxonomy from which teachers can identify those exercises most suitable to the online environment. In like manner, professors can use the scheme to classify the exercises which they create.

This approach has the potential to generate a perspective that reveals the need for a whole new breed of experiential exercises; those being designed solely for use in the ever-growing online learning environment. The presentation also identifies new technologies that will be needed to allow for the use of particular types of experiential exercises. We also expect that this presentation will open up a whole new dimension of perspectives, research ideas, and papers for ABSEL, as well as the larger experiential community.