LEARNING BY FIRE: REFLECTIONS OF A FIRST TIME ONLINE INSTRUCTOR

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ABSTRACT

This workshop will present the experiences of a first time online instructor and the lessons learned from that experience. The presenter was faced with the task of teaching his first online course with no orientation or training on the software used. That experience offered many challenges and rewards which the presenter will discuss. The workshop will also provide the opportunity for participants to exchange information about their experiences and the lessons they learned from them. The presenter continues to teach online courses and has discovered ways to balance the additional workload and maintain quality standards in addition to increasing course content for students. This workshop will be an opportunity for new and experienced online instructors to share and learn from one another.

In the spring of 2005 I was asked to teach two courses online using WebCT[R]. I was generally familiar with the kind of instructional technology that WebCT presented and I had used online supplements to traditional classes. I was also familiar with some of the challenges of online teaching from the limited workshops and conference presentations I had attended. Since my past employer did not offer online courses I, frankly, had not given the subject much attention. All I knew was that online courses required more instructor time to respond to emails and online discussions.

This workshop will focus on what I learned from this experience that I have subsequently used to improve my online courses and better manage the time requirements. The workshop will also provide for interactive exchange by participants to share their experiences and suggestions.

Some of the topics to be address are:

- Adjusting how grades are determined
- Finding ways to involve students who also do not have much experience with the online format
- Ensuring participation by all class members
- Student honesty in testing and assignments
- Managing the increased time requirements
- Making the class more than an "independent study" course with students reading material and taking tests on that material
- Incorporating critical thinking
- Class attendance
- Communication—explaining course requirements, test formats, etc.
- Enhancing course content

SCHEDULE

After a 5-10 minute introduction there will be open discussion of each of the above topics for @5 minutes each, or as much as is needed.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Through interactive exchange of participants everyone attending should come away from the workshop with useful ideas, techniques, and approaches for improving online teaching and learning. The workshop will focus on what has worked and what has not with the intent to reduce the likelihood of "reinventing the wheel" and helping online instructors be more efficient and productive with their time.