CREATING DYNAMIC INTERACTION IN A VIRTUAL WORLD: ADD VALUE TO ONLINE CLASSROOMS THROUGH LIVE ELEARNING AND COLLABORATION: A DEMONSTRATION

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ABSTRACT

Creating a dynamic online environment within a virtual classroom presents a challenge for academic instructors. Integrating a synchronous dynamic to distance learning serves as an instructional delivery solution that will add value to the online environment. A demonstration of eLearning using Elluminate Live! will be conducted to highlight the benefits and limitations of eLearning and collaboration within a virtual classroom. This Web conferencing tool is built specifically for live, multimedia collaboration between students and instructors. As an experienced instructor of online courses utilizing eLearning, I will provide recommendations, observations and limitations associated with this new technology. The purpose of this demonstration is to: 1) present a model for integrating live eLearning and collaboration within online classrooms, 2) present guidelines for moderating interactive online sessions, via E-Live! 3) describe the facilitator tools available in E-Live!, 4) share student feedback on the use of eLearning in an online MBA program and 5) view student team presentations conducted in E-Live!

As part of this demonstration, the group will be able to participate in an E-Live! session and view recorded E-Live! sessions conducted as part of an online MBA program. A summary of the content for each section is noted below.

INTRODUCTION

Those of us who have been teaching online understand the work that goes into carefully designing, developing and implementing online courses. We have spent hours, days and months trying to anticipate every aspect of the learner as they sit out there, somewhere. Now we must face the obvious question…If you build it, will they come? Much has been happening in the world of online learning and yet the challenge of developing dynamic, captivating online environments still exists. Will they come? Will they learn? Will they interact? These are the questions that, as virtual educators, we must respond to on a daily basis. If we can successfully create a virtual environment that is stimulating and dynamic and that allows for creative participation and team interaction, chances are that they will come, they will learn, they will participate and they will have fun! This is our challenge, and it is no small feat! To understand the challenges that surround the online environment we must first define online teaching and the integration of eLearning as it exists in today's world of virtual education.

ONLINE VS eLEARNING

In simple terms, online teaching is learning via computer. The material presented in the course can be as traditional or conventional, as complex or as simple as a resident course but the delivery methodology of an online course is designed to meet the multiple needs of an online setting. To date, online courses include such things as text of lesson materials, graphics, audio, visuals, message boards and testing tools. For the most part, the delivery methods used have been asynchronous, in that there is no timing requirement for transmission of information. An asynchronous environment is not "live" and does not allow for instant communication between student and instructor. On the other hand, a synchronous environment, as it applies to online teaching, exists when the communication between participants takes place instantly. This technology allows for "live" or interactive sessions via the computer. To this point, chat rooms have existed as one of the most common forms of synchronous environments for online teaching. However for the most part, online teaching has existed in an asynchronous environment. This is about to change!

eLearning allows instructors to use the internet as a powerful communications tool that promotes interactive learning and communication. eLearning environments offer an engaging user experience combined with a low learning curve. In this setting, participants are able to dynamically interact via two-way "voice over internet," share applications and whiteboards, instant message and respond to real-time polling and testing. Additionally, with the eLearning technology, participants are able to virtually "raise their hands" to ask or answer questions and are able to express their agreement or confusion with a discussion point, using emotion indicators that mimic online body language. By incorporating "live" discussion as a delivery method in online classrooms, instructors are able to appeal to diverse learning styles in "real time".

E-Live!: A DEMONSTRATION OF eLEARNING

As an experienced instructor of online graduate courses, I currently integrate eLearning into my online MBA classrooms via a web-based tool known as Elluminate Live! (E-Live!). This demonstration session will highlight an actual online MBA course currently using E-Live! and will allow participants to take part in an E-Live! session. The conference demonstration will be presented in five main discussion points, they are listed below. The demonstration will:

1. Present a model for integrating live eLearning and collaboration within online classrooms
    - How is E-Live! integrated in the course?
    - How many E-Live! sessions exist within the course?
    - What time of day are E-Live! sessions conducted?
    - How is E-Live! used for team projects and assignments?
    - Is E-Live! audio and visual?
    - How do you solicit student feedback on the use of eLearning within the course?
    - How long is an E-Live! session?
    - Do all of the students attend the E-Live! session?
    - How are team presentations conducted via E-Live!
    - Is participation in E-Live! part of the course grade?
    - What barriers exist in an eLearning environment present?

2. Present guidelines on how to moderate an E-Live! session
    - What formats can be used to conduct E-Live! sessions?
    - What preparation should be done before an E-Live! session?
    - In what ways does the student interact during the session?
    - In what ways does the facilitator interact during the session?
    - What barriers exist to conducting successful interactive sessions?
    - What tools are most effective when moderating an eLearning session?
    - How are message boards used in an E-Live! session?
    - From a moderator's perspective, what are some of the challenging aspects of eLearning?
    - What can you do if students are not participating in the session?

3. Describe the facilitator tools available in an eLearning environment (E-Live!)
    - Two-way voice over IP
    - Application Sharing
    - Shared Interactive Whiteboard
    - Team Breakout Rooms
    - Instant Messaging
    - Interactive Quiz and Survey Manager
    - Instant Polling
    - Emotion and Activity Indicators
    - Recorder Options

4. Share student feedback on the use of eLearning in an online MBA program
    - Review of survey format and content
    - Responses from student surveys will be presented
    - Conclusions on the effectiveness of eLearning based on student surveys

5. View student team presentations conducted in E-Live!

A sample of 2 student team presentations will be displayed during the demonstration. Each team presentation was created and conducted in an eLearning setting using the E-Live! tool with the students acting as moderators of the session. The team presentations will be shown in "recorded view" for the purpose of this session. Student teams referred to during this demonstration are participants in an online MBA program and were given the assignment to create and conduct their final project in presentation format via E-Live! Audience members for the original team presentations were the instructor and participants within the course.

IN CONCLUSION

The understanding and implementation of eLearning is critical for both academia and corporations in order for quality education to exist in a virtual world. As educators in both forums, we must continually be aware of the needs that are present in education and respond proactively to maintain the focus on delivering high quality, interactive education. The desired goal of eLearning is to add value to education in a virtual setting. We must build our programs in a way that they will come.