2c. Computer Learning/Web-Sites

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The overall purpose of this presentation is to spark ideas for incorporating new digital technologies such as course web sites, email, mailing lists, web-based threaded discussions, and interactive quizzes into any faculty development program. In ninety minutes I can not teach others how to create World Wide Web documents or JavaScript interactive learning exercises. But there is time in ninety minutes to discuss how the concept of community can help you plan, design, and use course web sites, provide you with print and digital examples of virtual learning communities, and overview the skills you need to develop course web sites.

Thomas DeWitt, in his opening remarks, encouraged the audience to consult with professionals outside of their immediate discipline. He jokingly stated that it was useful to consult with these "aliens." I believe that there are three 'alien' groups that can help us conceptualize how we would use World Wide Web documents and computer-mediated communication (e.g., email and mailing lists) to enhance learning.

Communication specialists, such as Harasim (1998), Walls (1993), Jorn, Duin, and Wahlstrom (1996) are the first group to help guide how we plan, design, and use course web sites. They all encourage us to use digital technologies to build virtual learning communities. In fact, Linda Harasim notes, "The Internet is more like a community. Anyway, it's not a road going somewhere. That's why people are having trouble understanding it. It's a place. The first thing everyone types when they get connected is, 'I'm here.'" Walls goes on to note that when planning, designing, and using global networks, we need to remember that in physical communities we design tasks based on established common goals, establish relationships built from planned interactions, and find shared spaces in which to interact. When planning, designing, and using course web sites, Jorn, Duin, and Wahlstrom expand on Walls notions and encourage us to develop course web sites that are designed to create virtual learning communities:

… Determine learning goals and specific tasks learners will complete

… Consider who will interact with whom and in what manner (learner to learner; learner to instructor; learner to content; learner to technology)

… Determine what spaces (Internet tools) to use

Architects are the second group contributing to the building of virtual learning communities. Mitchell William (1995, 31) states, "To inhabit CMC [computer-mediated communication] places [email, IRC, MOOs, mailing lists] we will be "mighty morphing cyborgs" that are constantly reconstructing ourselves, increasingly relying on electronic extensions of ourselves." He reminds us that new digital spaces, such as email, mailing lists, and chat rooms, all have unique characteristics of their own and will shape the way learners interact and communicate.

Psychologists are the third group that can help us conceptualize how we create virtual learning communities. For example, Sherry Turkle (1995) writes about the intense relationships people have with their computers. She discusses how people use computer-mediated communication to explore new identities and shape their current identities. She also discusses how we have learned to navigate quickly between many virtual learning spaces, e.g. word processor, email, chat room, and web pages, and carry on tasks to complete specific goals in each one of these spaces.

In summary, I believe that we can create virtual learning communities in which learners complete specific tasks and accomplish learning goals, interact with many people and the technology, and

use many different Internet tools to accomplish these goals and interactions. As designers of course web sites, we need to think of ourselves as architects of virtual learning spaces and builders of not just technical spaces, but also social spaces.

Using this schema of virtual learning communities, I continue my presentation by discussing nine course web sites (I provide URLs) that do create virtual learning communities. Some of these examples are from the health care field and some are not. The purpose of these examples is to spark ideas on how different Internet and computer-mediated communication tools might best help you develop new faculty development programs.

Following these nine examples, I list new skills faculty need to develop course web sites: <more information about these skills can be found at http://www.umn.edu/dmc/create/ta-cert/ >

- … Plan technology enhanced learning experiences
- … Comply with intellectual property issues
- … Design web documents (web site map and page layout)
- … Produce media
- … Author media assets
- … Design for interaction
- … Evaluate virtual learning communities

Finally, in my presentation I briefly review some of the current research questions, methodologies, and results that help us learn how we can effectively plan, design, and use course web sites to create virtual learning communities.