

Five Roles I Play in Online Courses

by Scot Headley

In my view, the key to successful teaching and learning is relationships. As Bernard et al. (2004) suggest, "Instructionally relevant contact with instructors and peers is not only desirable, it is probably necessary for creating learning environments that lead to desirable achievement gains and general satisfaction with DE [distance education]" (412). In online courses, developing meaningful relationships requires different strategies. Although this philosophy is familiar, especially to experienced online instructors, the five roles I describe below provide a useful rubric for thinking about how an instructor can promote community.

I deliver courses to graduate students enrolled in programs offered by the School of Education at George Fox University (GFU) (<http://www.georgefox.edu/>). Our students are teachers and administrators in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools. GFU, a Friends institution based in Newberg, Oregon, has an enrollment of about 3,000 students. I have delivered Internet-based distance education courses here for over seven years. Currently, we use WebCT (<http://www.webct.com/>) as the primary vehicle for the delivery of our online courses.

Scholars concerned with relationships in the online environment have presented several views in describing good online pedagogical practice. Salmon (2000) proposed a specific developmental process for describing and managing the online learning environment; each step in this process presents unique challenges and opportunities for instructors who want to build strong relationships with their students (Exhibit 1). Others (e.g., Palloff, Pratt, and Pratt 1999; Preece 2000) propose specific elements and procedures for building community in online courses, such as clarity of purpose and expectations, consideration of leadership, functionality and transparency of the technical system, and well-defined roles and policies (Exhibit 2). The particular strategy I employ is to adopt a number of roles that allow me to provide for student success and for community building. These roles include space planner, pacesetter, host, connector, and mirror. Several of these roles emphasize my organizational responsibilities while others reflect my commitment to the social aspects of my courses. The roles I describe do not designate linear stages of development but instead refer more to the ongoing responsibilities and commitments online instructors need to accept in order to ensure success for their students.

Space Planner

The first responsibility of online instructors is to plan their course space by using the functionality and activities of the online course to create abundant opportunities for interaction within an easily navigable interface. This responsibility is at the heart of my first role: the space planner. In Salmon's (2000) model, the first two steps, "access and motivation" and "online socialization," require that the instructor provide clear instructions on system use and course expectations; in addition, through these stages, instructors need to provide opportunities for students to associate with one another and to establish their respective identities as participants in a particular online community of learners (Exhibit 1). I address these needs by creating opportunities for students to get to know me, the course content and expectations, and one another.

Within the online course environment, I create interactive spaces, such as a virtual student lounge, wherein I encourage students and participate in casual, off-subject conversation. I will "seed" the lounge with talk of my family, travels, personal concerns, and favorite sports teams. Further, I also require as the first activity in all courses the posting of a biographical statement by each student, which is always followed by a great deal of personal interaction in a threaded discussion. All the course participants have the opportunity to share as much professional and personal information about themselves as they wish. I summarize the biographies in a one page information sheet that can be used by students as ready reference. In addition, I create a course photo bank or scrapbook. I accept digital pictures or photographs and manipulate them as necessary to make them usable; I especially encourage pictures of the participants with their students, colleagues, or families to help all of us get a sense of the others' personal lives. In cases where students decline to submit personal photos, I suggest that they select a picture of a favorite animal or flower to serve as their iconic representation.

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I create physical spaces for interaction and relationship building as well. Although some of my students are not within commuting distance, many are, so I offer optional face-to-face meetings that center on fellowship, problem solving, and addressing technical and process concerns. We schedule two or three of these sessions on Saturday mornings throughout the semester. I often organize these mornings so that students from any of my courses can gather for an opening session that deals with broader concerns about online learning and that provides for social interaction amongst classmates. We also include photos of these face-to-face sessions in the course scrapbooks. Course-specific sessions follow, focusing on the particular expectations of each course.

Pacesetter

Online instructors must carefully design not only their virtual classroom spaces but also the timing and pacing of the course. As pacesetters, online instructors provide time for interaction and reflection and thus allow for depth as well as breadth of learning. Satisfactory experiences for the instructor and student in an Internet-based course require the recognition that the preparation, activities, and commitments are a bit different than those of face-to-face courses. I value discussion as an important instructional device, and as research done by Swan (2001) indicates, active discussion is viewed by online students as a positive contributor to their learning. In my role as a pacesetter, I recognize that rich online discussions require more time and that I must allow for more reflection time than face-to-face discussions require. Therefore, it is important to avoid content overload, both in scope and sequence. In my online courses, I reduce the scope of the content and streamline course objectives.

I also attempt to elongate the timing of the instructional cycle so that there is sufficient "time-space" available for participants to read, reflect upon, and converse about the content. Specifically, I have adopted two and three week sessions as opposed to the weekly sessions I use in my face-to-face courses. In this modified schedule, students' discussion postings often become the text for additional analysis. For example, in a three week session, students read a selection from our assigned text in the first week and post a summary and reaction by the end of the first week. During the second week, I ask the students to reflect on what their colleagues have written, responding to several posts specifically; by the end of the second week, they present statements that react to or summarize key points from the discussion. The third week's assignment then requires students to apply several of the key concepts from the text and discussion to a situation within their own professional role and context (Exhibit 3).

I use a pattern of measured responses in the student lounge and other discussion areas. I work hard at not dominating the conversation, but at the same time I make myself a regular participant. I try to be present several times a week in each conversation. However, I measure my participation by how vibrant the conversation is: the more active the conversation, the less active I become. My hope is that students will not expect me to be the mediator or gatekeeper, but that students will seek out other students as sources of knowledge and will accept the responsibility to share information, affirmation, and empathy.

Host

Rather than viewing their role in class discussions as that of moderators, online instructors should act in more subtly supportive ways—as hosts. In the host role, online instructors draw students into the experience of online learning and respond to student needs and concerns with a patient, welcoming, attentive attitude. This role is especially important in Salmon's (2000) preliminary "access and motivation" and "online socialization" stages (Exhibit 1). I perform a number of functions in this role. I send individual messages of greetings, concern, and help, both through e-mail and course mail. Occasionally, I will phone students, particularly those who seem to be absent or in great need. I also send group messages for instructions, welcome, and encouragement.

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In conjunction with students and colleagues, I have created several "Help" documents for my online course. These include "General Words to the Wise" (Exhibit 4), comments from former online students (Exhibit 5), and frequently asked questions about distance learning at GFU (Exhibit 6), as well as other documents relating to WebCT use and academic success in online courses. The published biographical statements, information sheet, and student photos also serve to foster encouragement and familiarity.

I take very seriously my responsibility to be available to my students. I publish my personal commitments with my "turn around" times. My personal commitments include: a.) a reply to phone messages, course mail messages, and e-mail messages within 24 hours; b.) reading and replying where appropriate on discussion messages within 5 days; and c.) an acknowledgement of my receipt of every e-mail and course mail message immediately upon reading it. If I am unable to respond to the request or concern at the time of initial reply, I state that and also give an estimated time for my next reply. If I am going to be away from the course space for more than a day or two, I send a message out to the participants stating the length of my absence.

Connector

Establishing and abiding by these personal commitments go a long way toward the foundation of the instructor's next role as connector. As connectors, online instructors ensure that lines of access to information and communication among participants are open and clearly established. My connector role requires me to help participants make connections with each other, with the course content, and between their work in the course and their work outside the course space. This role is especially important in Salmon's "information exchange" stage (Exhibit 1). At this particular stage, the participants may be overwhelmed by the vast amount of information available to them. As a connector, I have to be careful to help guide directions and make connections in response to these feelings, while also staying out of the way once the connections are made. I do not want to be a mediator for all conversation that occurs in the course; rather, I build bridges and highways and then enjoy the journeys that occur as a result of that infrastructure.

A number of specific activities and functions make up the connector role. I attend to connections between the course's content and the participants' professional roles and aspirations by "listening" to the concerns, problems, opportunities, and hopes that the participants express and looking for ways of connecting the content and course activities to their personal needs and desires (Exhibit 7). As previously mentioned, I utilize a published participant list that includes each student's name, professional role, geographic location, and e-mail address. This easy-to-use resource allows each participant to be acquainted with and have access to the others. At times, this leads to collaboration on course projects as participants discover common roles, concerns, or geography.

Personal reflections on course concepts are generally required assignments in my courses (Exhibit 8). This type of exercise provides the opportunity for participants to make connections between their personal experience and knowledge and the introduced content. In similar manner, I allow for flexibility in major application assignments. Individualized projects bring diverse responses to a given assignment and help participants see the potential for broad applications of course ideas, thereby expanding the assignment's learning potential and providing not only connections between the content and the students' professional lives but also connections among the professional lives of classmates.

Mirror

As the work of the course progresses, instructors must participate in assessment activities. In this role of the mirror, the online instructor provides clear and appropriate feedback to facilitate student learning. My personal goals within this role are to help individuals have an external guide to their

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mastery of the course content, to inform individuals of their level of success in fulfilling community commitments, and to encourage and challenge the group as a whole. In order to provide guides for student mastery of the material, I supply assessment rubrics for written assignments, self-tests on key concepts, and student examples of previously completed assignments. I also encourage students to provide feedback to me regarding the clarity and pace of the course so that appropriate changes can be made when needed.

I use several specific forms of feedback: informal and formal personal feedback, formal group feedback, and final feedback for both individuals and for the class as a whole. Informal personal feedback is used depending on the need of the participant. For instance, I often send an encouraging e-mail or course mail (e.g., "Where have you been?" or "I hope things are going better now" or "That was a great response to . . .") to students in need. For formal personal feedback, I send out a session-ending course mail message that gives specific feedback regarding the participant's fulfillment of assignments and participation in the session, as well as point totals for the session, for assignments, and, at key points in the course, running point totals. I occasionally send out formal group feedback in a discussion area or through a course mail message that highlights key learning, provides encouragement or a challenge in specific areas, and provides updates regarding changes, problems, or new areas of exploration (Exhibit 9).

At the conclusion of the course, I provide an end-of-course summary that gives feedback on final assignments, a final point total, and course grade. I use course mail and e-mail for this report. I strongly encourage students to provide formal and informal feedback to me and to the university as well. We use an Internet-based course evaluation system for anonymous formal feedback; I usually receive numerous informal feedback messages as well.

Conclusion

I believe that the social aspect of the course makes it a meaningful experience for those involved. This belief is shared by others. Bernard et al. (2004), in a meta-analysis comparing distance education and classroom instruction, stated: "We speculate that the keys to pedagogical effectiveness in DE center on the appropriate and strategic use of interactivity among learners, with the material leading to learner engagement, deep processing, and understanding" (413). My roles as an online instructor lead me to guiding principles and practices for course design—the elements I select and the flow of the course are shaped by my understanding of these roles.

My brief descriptions and examples regarding the five roles of an online instructor serve to illustrate an approach to appropriate and strategic use of interactivity. These particular examples may not be appropriate with other groups of students and different content; however, instructors examining their practice or assisting a colleague new to online teaching will find that reflection on their responsibilities as space planner, pacesetter, host, connector, and mirror will only enhance their efforts.

Assuming these types of roles helps the instructor to assume primary responsibility for community building and demonstrates a commitment to strong relationships as a key expectation of the course. These roles may not be congruent with typical expectations of an instructor. For instance, consider the following implications for online instructors when they commit to adopting these roles:

- Instructors would invest more time working with smaller sections of students.
- Instructors would take an active role in pursuing lurkers or non-participants.
- Course planning and syllabi would allow time for relationship building and reflection as primary activities of the course.

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- Depth of learning would be a desired outcome, as much as or more than breadth.
- Interaction amongst the participants would be rewarded in the formal assessment of the course.
- Instructors would model commitment to relationships through prompt and respectful replies to inquiries and discussion.
- Personal and technical needs and concerns of students would be attended to and addressed appropriately.
- The instructor would invite interactions outside of the formal course space.
- Feedback would be prompt and readily available.

Assuming the roles of space planner, pacesetter, host, connector, and mirror requires instructors to recognize their unique position in enabling student learning in an online course. Moreover, reflecting on the implications of those roles helps in designing the curriculum and implementing instruction in ways that place strong relationships at the center of that plan.

References

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Note: This article was originally published in *Innovate* (<http://www.innovateonline.info/>) as: Headley, S. 2005. Five roles I play in online courses. *Innovate* 2 (1). <http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=78> (accessed September 26, 2006). The article is reprinted here with permission of the publisher, The Fischler School of Education and Human Services at Nova Southeastern University.

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EXHIBIT 1:

Salmon's model

Gilly Salmon (2000) presents a well-developed model for understanding the stages of needs and response in computer-mediated conferencing. This model serves as a basis for reflecting on the particular roles that instructors should play and the particular activities that they carry out in building community in their online courses. This five-stage model intimates that there is a developmental process in order for participants to be fully engaged and successful members of the community. Salmon's model suggests the type of technical support that is needed by students at each stage and also points to specific moderating activities that are performed by the instructor. Figure 1 (below) presents information about participant needs and instructor responses at each of these stages.

Stage	Participant Needs	Instructor Response
5. Development (reflecting on learning and achieving personal goals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have and accept responsibility for self-learning ▪ Challenge assumptions regarding process and content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Openness to challenges ▪ Support for self-directed learning ▪ Trouble-shooting technical or process issues
4. Knowledge Construction (establishing common understandings and collaboration)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assert individual views ▪ Make meaning and share new learning ▪ Develop collaborative efforts at knowledge building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group building ▪ Facilitating discussion and connecting conversation and content
3. Information Exchange (sharing course content and process information)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Select and use information ▪ Exchange ideas with others ▪ Appropriately constrain efforts at interaction and information retrieval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Directing effort ▪ Presenting guidelines for interaction, research, and other course-related activity ▪ Personalizing course activities
2. Online Socialization (establishing online identities and interactivity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a sense of belonging and identity ▪ Learn to use the system for communicating ▪ Understand guidelines for behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Modeling appropriate interactivity ▪ Making connections between individuals, each other, and the learning environment ▪ Promoting mutual respect
1. Access and Motivation (gaining access to and successful use of the system)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Get connected to the course ▪ Access support materials ▪ Understand purpose and become motivated to participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Directing clearly regarding access and support ▪ Inviting and welcoming

Figure 1. Needs and responses implied by Salmon's five stage model of computer-mediated conferencing

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The first stage, access and motivation, is characterized by participants gaining access to the course system and becoming motivated to participate in the course. In the second stage, online socialization, participants are establishing their identities and patterns of interactivity. Information exchange, the third stage, is characterized by the sharing of information related to the course content, participants, and process. In the fourth stage, knowledge construction, participants are collaborating in the establishment of common understandings. Development, the fifth stage, is the point at which participants are reflecting on their learning.

Reference

Salmon, G. 2000. *E-Moderating: The key to teaching and learning online*. London: Kogan Page.

EXHIBIT 2:

Views of community

Palloff and Pratt (1999) briefly describe the changing nature of community in the advent of new computer technologies. In addition to the key concepts of differentiation and membership—the shared interests and distinguishing aspects of the community that make it different from other groups—place is a historically important element of community. The advent of electronic communications and information networks, however, has changed these notions somewhat. Educators have the advantage of working with gatherings of people who share common purpose because in online education, students are choosing the courses based on their needs. Nevertheless, educators should be direct in their efforts at building community in online courses. Basic steps include:

- Clearly define the purpose of the group.
- Create a distinct gathering place for the group.
- Promote effective leadership from within the group.
- Define norms and a clear code of conduct.
- Allow for a range of member roles.
- Allow for and facilitate subgroup.
- Allow members to resolve their own disputes (24).

Preece (2000) presented the idea that although the concept of an online community may seem easy to define, in actuality a working definition must include specific descriptions of the elements involved in the definition. Preece's definition of online community includes the following elements:

- People who interact socially as they strive to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles such as leading or moderating;
- A shared purpose (such as an interest, a need, a form of information exchange, or a service) that provides a reason for the community;
- Policies (in the form of tacit assumptions, rituals, protocols, rules, and laws) that guide people's interactions; and
- Computer systems to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness. (10)

References

Palloff, R. M. Pratt, and K. Pratt. 1999. *Building communities in cyberspace: Effective strategies for the online classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Preece, J. 2000. *Online communities: Designing usability, supporting sociability*. Chichester, England: John Wiley and Sons.

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EXHIBIT 3:

Outline of Session Two

Session Two

[Author note: The following example is from a summer-semester compressed course with two-week sessions; the activities described correspond to the first two weeks of a three-week session during the fall or spring semester.]

Session Two continues the introduction of our content, as well as the ongoing conversation amongst participants. Session Two is two weeks long and runs from June 20 to July 3. The following is a list of activities for the session.

1.) Continue interacting with your colleagues in the Leadoff Discussion. If you have not already done so, complete the assignments for Session One as soon as possible.

2.) Read the following chapters in our texts: Knowles 3–5 and Wlodkowski 3. Address one of the following three topics with a three paragraph (minimum) discussion entry in the Foundations of Adult Learning Discussion Area. Please post your statement by June 26. As people begin posting, please be active in reading and responding to the statements. I expect each participant to respond with depth to two postings and to converse with those who respond to you. Complete your responses by July 3.

1. Develop a brief essay on the topic: "Keys to Adult Learning." The essay may be developed from a historical, theoretical, or experiential point of view; or
2. Present a brief overview of the assumptions that form the basis for the andragogical model with brief commentary; or
3. Review the key elements of Wlodkowski's "The Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching" and apply them to a proposed situation in which you would instruct adults.

3.) Your Self-reflection is due on July 3. See the Reflections page in this Session Two folder for details on that assignment. Please post the assignment in the Reflections Discussion Area. You may attach a document to your posting if you like, but please include a pasted in copy as well.

4.) Continue to post your concerns, questions, and suggestions regarding the Application Plan and the Personal Emphasis assignment. You should be exploring the supplemental resources available to you, linked from the course home page, and other sources of interest to you. By the end of Session Two, all participants should have a topic identified for the Personal Emphasis assignment. Ask for suggestions and throw ideas out on your Personal Emphasis assignment in the Personal Emphasis/Alternative Activity Assignment Ideas Discussion Area.

5.) Make yourself at home in the Student Lounge. View the course as an opportunity to exchange ideas with others about the meanings, methods, challenges and opportunities associated with our own personal, spiritual, and professional development.

6.) Please note that I will be using course mail as a primary means of providing updates and assignments, and in giving feedback. Feedback on Session One will be in course mail by the middle of the week of June 20. You can check your course mail by clicking on the mailbox icon on the homepage or by clicking on course mail in the menu. If you are new to WebCT, please be advised that when you have new mail and discussion messages that you have not read, the system will inform you by highlighting the icons (on my machine it looks like a "green glow").

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DEFINITION:

Course mail

Course mail is an electronic mail system that operates primarily within the confines of a course management system (CMS), such as WebCT. Although many participants choose to link their course mail with their preferred e-mail systems, the designation "course mail" helps to distinguish the internal e-mail system provided in the CMS from other systems that participants may be using.

EXHIBIT 4:

Help document: General Words to the Wise

General Words to the Wise

Orientation to Class:

- Check in as soon as class information or announcements are posted.
- Familiarize yourself with the course navigation; click and explore.
- Practice using the WebCT communication tools.
- Print the syllabus, calendar, and any additional information to start a class notebook.
- Read the syllabus; mark significant dates/deadlines on the calendar; order textbook or additional supplies.
- Explore the course resources or references.
- Print bios of classmates and pictures if available.
- Post your bio ASAP. Include the same kind of information that you would in a face-to-face class get acquainted activity. Be cautious not to give overly personal information. Some folks are extra cautious, others far too open. Once it's posted, it's out there! You do not have a delete command to remove a post.
- Ask your professor for help when needed.

Developing Community:

- Participate in the discussion.
- Respond genuinely to what others have to offer.
- Be open, flexible, and honest in your communication.
- Be willing to work collaboratively with others.
- "Lone Rangers" are not good in the online community.
- Show respect; address others by name; sign your post.
- Allow space for vulnerability; share your challenges, frustrations, and achievements.
- Establish a presence online—become known for who you are and what you share.

Posting Online:

- Select an accurate title for your post.
- Offer substantive thoughts that help the discussion.

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- Reflect on what you are writing before you post it.
- Be intentional—give examples.
- Welcome others ideas/experiences.
- Spell check before sending.

Patterns of Communication:

- Telling—getting the information out via printed text, or links.
- Asking—use of discussion board or chat.
- Responding—use of discussion board or chat.
- Discussing—collaborative work in small groups, or discussion board.

Student Roles:

- Knowledge generator—usually first to post.
- Collaborator —relational skills.
- Process manager—clarifier.
- Analyst—draws conclusions; offers summation.

Asynchronous Communication:

- Similar to telephone voice mail; post a message and wait for a response.
- Students participate at times that are convenient to them.
- Opportunity to download e-mail or discussion post, reflect, and compose thoughtful response. No need to react or "think on your feet."
- Discussion can cover a significant period of time with various "threads" or topics.
- Can integrate your working situation into the discussion.
- Cost-effective technology allows wide participation.

Synchronous Communication:

- Similar to telephone conference call; everyone connected at agreed upon time.
- Motivation and energy flow in group dynamic.
- Instantaneous interaction including emotion and sense of involvement.
- Quick feedback on ideas for group consensus and decision making.
- Keeps the pace moving, but may exclude some who need the flexibility of time.

Note-taking:

- If you are working online, take notes in your word processor.
- Use the copy and paste features to copy text from the Web into a document.
- Use favorites/bookmarks to keep track of Web sites and links as you read; keep these organized in folders in your browser.

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Feedback:

- Login to Web site and check discussion 3 to 4 times each week (minimum is 2).
- Respond to questions or statements as you can.
- Expect instructor feedback within 2-3 days.
- Be realistic about instructor presence—they cannot be there 24/7.
- The last folks to post frequently get very few responses to their comments; make your presence known earlier in the discussion.

E-mail:

- Use e-mail to interact with instructor or colleagues when you want to direct specific comments or questions to fewer than the entire class.
- Make sure you are sending it to the correct person and that you have a correct e-mail address;
- Identify the topic clearly in the subject heading.
- Keep it short and to the point.
- Keep your comments to one screen; more than that should be a word processing document that is sent as an attachment; or, if attachments are a problem, paste the information into the body of the e-mail after your note.
- Sign your e-mail.
- Review your message and spell check before you send it.
- If you expect a reply, make it very clear in the message, especially if you have a specific deadline.

EXHIBIT 5:

Help document: Comments from former online students and faculty

Comments from former online students and faculty - GFU and other schools

Ask for help:

- Ask for clarification from your professor if you don't understand something.
- Don't be afraid to e-mail, phone, or course mail your professor.
- Communicate with other students, who may be struggling also.
- Look for help from your professor, the computer help desk, the school librarian, etc. Know their phone numbers and e-mail addresses and use them.

"Attend" class:

- Check the syllabus and e-mails regularly. You'll find that there are often changes as the semester progresses.
- Check in every day or two, even if you don't post to the discussion board. Keep aware of what is happening.
- Get to know the other people in the class. Some professors really emphasize the idea of community and use lots of ideas to make it happen. It really pays off.
- Don't quit, even if you get discouraged. Problems can be solved and the more you learn about the "online" experience, the more you'll like it.
- Online learning isn't the same as face-to-face learning, but the more you're there, the easier it is.
- I enjoyed distance education and feel that I learned more by contributing regularly to the class through discussion than I ever did in a face to face class.

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- I, being a quiet person, speak more to others online. People with pushy characters get equal time.
- I couldn't have done the class otherwise, due to full time work schedule.
- As I progressed through the class, with the help of others, I survived!
- I enjoyed communicating with other classmates online; everyone seemed to be very open with their reflections.

Assignments:

- Complete your work in a word processor first and then copy and past into the Web page.
- If the class doesn't have specific due dates, then make them for yourself.
- Pace yourself. Don't get behind.
- Like any class, discipline yourself to do a little bit every day or every other day to keep up, because there are no reminders like in a traditional class.
- Make sure that you don't save it all until the end, and then try to cram. It will not work.
- Procrastination will kill you.
- Try to read the posts, but don't feel that you have to respond to everyone. It gets to be too much.
- Sometimes the formatting is lost depending on what word processor you are using when you are posting.

Technology:

- A large portion of the trouble I had with this course had to do with the fact that I've not had practice or interest to master the technology required to communicate via computers. What should have taken minutes took hours.
- A lot of times, computers just don't work the way they're supposed to. Don't be surprised when it happens to you.
- Get a cable modem. You can spend hours online just waiting for pages to load.
- Be sure you have a dependable ISP (Internet service provider).
- Understand the Web tools and resources. Experiment with how the system works.
- Brush up on your computer skills, like how to cut, copy, and paste.
- Work on your keyboarding skills; use a typing tutor software program.

Other words of experience from those who've been there:

- Don't think the course will be easier or take less time, just because it's online.
- It can be frustrating at times, but overall, I think it's a good experience.
- You should still act like a student, even though you don't go to an actual classroom.
- Print copies of everything to start and keep organized.
- Learning to learn online takes time and effort. It is very different from the traditional classroom and I can't just fall back on what I know how to do. But the payoff has been great.
- Take yourself seriously as a student.

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EXHIBIT 6:

Help document: GFU distance learning FAQs - GFU Distance Learning FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

1.) What is an online class?

- Class offered via the Web
- Connect to WebCT/GFU Web site with login ID and password
- Interact with professor and fellow students through discussion group
- Asynchronous—not real time
- May include occasional "chat" in real time
- Class site includes syllabus, lectures, suggested links, discussion board, class e-mail, calendar

2.) What are the most important characteristics of successful online students?

- Independent, enthusiastic, willing learners
- Willing to explore a new avenue of learning
- See "Is Online Learning for me?" for more specific details

3.) What technology do I need to take a class?

- The guidelines for computer skills and equipment are in the technology section of this guide.

4.) How is the class taught?

- Varies by professor and curriculum
- Readings, lectures, discussions, projects, papers
- Interact by posting comments and questions in the discussion area
- Some classes have group projects

5.) How do I get a textbook, syllabus, and library access?

- Textbooks from GFU bookstore or an Internet vendor; or follow professor instructions for ordering.
- Syllabus is posted on the class website — print it out;
- Library access — use ID # to access all resources as on campus students

6.) How much time should I expect to spend in an online class?

- More time than face to face (estimated at 100-150%), depending on your organization and time management skills. You may find yourself easily sidetracked, investigating related topics. Make an effort to stay intentionally focused.

7.) How is my work evaluated?

- Papers, projects, tests, quality and consistency of discussion postings
- Specifics assessments will be noted by your professor in the syllabus

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8.) What computer skills do I need?

- See "Technology checklist"
- Remember, there are tutorials and software to help you brush up on your skills

9.) Is there technical support available?

- The IT Service Desk will answer your questions by phone or e-mail
- The time schedule is in the Technical Requirements and Skills section

10.) What library resources can I use at a distance? How does that work?

- You have access to all MLRC resources including all library holdings, interlibrary loans, and online databases and resources
- See the MLRC section for more detail

11.) Are the classes equal to on-campus classes? Do they have the same curriculum and credit?

- Yes, although the format differs, objectives and expectations are the same.

12.) What resources are there for online students to be successful?

- This GFU Guidebook
- WebCT Help Section
- Recommended readings (many of these books are available used through Amazon.com, Powells.com, Half.com and others):

Learning Online: A Guide to Success in the Virtual Classroom

Maggie McVay-Lynch

ISBN 0415700000

Excellent overall book and very current

How to be a Successful Distance Learning Student

Marguerita McVay-Lynch

ISBN 0-536-60288-3

Excellent overall with good assessment tools

Distance Learner's Guide

WICHE

ISBN 0-13-939513-X

Good information; well organized

Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace

Paloff and Pratt

ISBN 0-7879-4460-2

Emphasizes community building in teaching and learning

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Distance Learning Online for Dummies

Nancy Stevenson

ISBN 0-7645-0763-X

Good general book, especially in the technical aspects

The Ultimate WebCT Handbook, a Practical and Pedagogical Guide

Reberg, Ferguson, McQuillan, et al.

ISBN 0933079125

Excellent resource for using WebCT

Online Learning: Concepts, Application & Strategies

Dabbah, Bannan-Ritland

ISBN 0130325465

EXHIBIT 7:

Connection interchange

John stated:

I would like to work with identifying a process to prepare each of these coaches with my philosophy, mission, and ensure they are qualified to teach kids at the level they are interested in. I'm not quite sure how this will play out in my final project but it is the only opportunity to teach adults and it is very important to me.

I replied:

Regarding the personal emphasis activity, think about something like one of the following:

1. Develop a resource library for volunteer coaches (movies, print, manuals, clinics, etc).
2. Develop a policy manual of needed information that adult volunteers need to be aware of and in compliance with in order to work with the athletes.
3. You could also look at typical coaching clinics and materials and critique them from an adult learning point of view. For example, attend or participate in a clinic over the next few weeks or reflect on several that you have recently participated in and write reviews to compare the content, purpose, and methods to the ideals that our authors present.
4. Develop a recruiting campaign for volunteers that would adhere to the principles of motivation that Wlodkowski presents.

John stated at the conclusion of the course:

Professor Headley:

I just wanted to thank you for your great idea about the coaching policies. I have a great policy form for the athletes but nothing for the coaches. This will really help in getting coaches on board with my program. I enjoyed the class and especially the readings. I'm sorry I did not participate more in the

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Dabbah, Bannan-Ritlande discussion. This kind of class was new to me and I struggled with writing reactions to what people had to say. My personality type is more of a talker rather than a writer. I really tried to do a good job this last week in responding to my classmates. Thank you for your constructive comments and all your help. You, the other students, and the readings have been very inspiring to me and have helped with new teaching ideas for my kids. Have a great rest of the summer!

Sincerely,
John

EXHIBIT 8:

Assignments

Self assessment, with personal reflections and reporting (25 points)

- Complete a 800-1500 word self reflection by responding to the following questions (also located in the assignment area of session one). While you will be sharing this with others, please do not write this for me or for anyone else, but for yourself. Learning about ourselves—who we are, how we learn, and what is important to us—is an excellent place to begin our study of adult development and education. Due July 3rd.
- The following prompts will serve as the foundation of your response (although you are welcome to include other material, as well):
 - Briefly describe who you are as a learner, how do you learn best, what excites you about learning, and what hinders your learning.
 - Describe one memorable learning experience (in a formal or informal setting). Provide enough detail so that the reader can understand what you learned, the context of learning, and why it was so memorable for you.
 - How do you define wisdom and maturity?
- Respond to the following scenario. The phone is ringing, you answer it and your personal physician is on the line. "The lab tests are back. The results have been checked and re-checked. It's as we feared, you have 6 months to live." How are you going to spend the next 6 months?
- Respond to the following scenario. The phone is ringing, you answer it and a lottery official is on the line. "We have just confirmed your winning number in the Powerball lottery. You have won 29 million dollars." What are you going to do?
- You go to bed tonight and when you wake up, it's five years later. Where are you, and what are you now doing with your life?

EXHIBIT 9:

Feedback

Dear [Student X]:

During session four you and your colleagues read and reported on additional readings from the texts and supplemental readings. I asked you to post your review of the readings by July 23 and to respond to your colleagues throughout the session. Session four also provided time for you to continue work on the remaining major assignments. The session was worth five points, with full credit given for a discussion assignment completed on time, and with the minimum expected interaction with colleagues.

Supplemental Reading and discussion: [Student X], good choice of reading.

You did a good job of relating the content of the article to the concepts of the course. Did you think about how some of the motivational strategies



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presented by Wlodkowski were supported by the findings of the project cited in the article? Thanks for being responsive to those who interacted with you.

Session four total: 5/5

Let me know if you have any questions about session four or five. Please refer to the session five introductory material to review the remaining assignments for the course.