Volume 8, no. 2 - 2001

JOURNAL OF Funeral Service Education

Contents

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The **Journal** publishes refereed papers submitted by authors with interests in any facet of funeral service education: scientific, psychological, ethical, legal, or managerial.

This publication exists to serve the needs of educators by facilitating the dissemination of original works of research as well as by serving as a forum for commentary, summation, debate, or other forms of academic exchange.

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Over the last ten to fifteen years, the student population of American colleges and universities has changed dramatically. Funeral service education has not been immune to the transformation.

Gone are the days when our classrooms were filled with white, male, 20-something, funeral home scions; today's enrollees are increasingly female or minority, older, educated adults coming to funeral service with a range of experiences largely outside of their newly chosen profession.

These are eminently practical students. Their choice of school is frequently a matter of cost effectiveness. They have a variety of extra-curricular responsibilities, little time to waste, and expect successful employment in exchange for their investment.

If we position this collegiate population in an environment that offers convenience, speed, and timeliness, we can define a student body eager to explore education on- line.

Today more than half of colleges and universities currently offer some form of distance education and spend millions of dollars of their institutional budgets to gain or sustain a competitive presence in the markets afforded by computer technology.

What we are not sure of is effectiveness. How do presently available computerized formats compare to the more standard lecture/laboratory approach? Are some formats better for some learners? Which formats are better for which disciplines?

While few can decry the ease with which factual materials may be collected and disseminated via computer, some may question this technology's effectiveness when applied to the psychomotor and affective aspects of curricula.

Hence this issue of the Journal.

A number of our colleagues have been quick to explore computer technologies as an option for their course delivery. Some of them have been gracious enough to share their experiences with us in hope of stimulating further discussion within the profession (and, hopefully, within this publication).

As you digest the contents pause to consider:

What are the best methods for assessing student learning and should this methodology differ between disciplines?

Is present technology sufficient to ensure mastery of subject matter required for licensure?

For which subject areas would virtual reality be useful and would you be comfortable certifying competency using such a methodology?

Finally, what is the role of the teacher/mentor in the development and socialization of a funeral service practitioner?

Read, enjoy, discuss, and send your comments to me (snailmail or email ac5964@wayne.edu) for inclusion in our next issue which will focus on ethics in funeral service education.

DISTANCE EDUCATION: FRIEND OR FOE?

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The concept of distance education is clear-- the delivery of educational programs to those who for some reason cannot attend a traditional college in a residential setting for an extended period of time. For years there have been correspondence programs that have sought to fill the need. Such programs have been envisioned by some as the friend of both colleges and students. In contemporary society electronic communication has made the delivery of programs feasible and viable; however, the cost and effectiveness have yet to be determined both in general and in mortuary science education. This brief article gives an overview of current thinking in general education and points out the failed experience of one mortuary program in distance learning.

In the brochure "*Assuring Quality in Distance Learning*," the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (Washington, D.C.: 1998) reviews the purpose, structure, approaches, themes, and strategies for distance learning. In the ensuing discussion the Council points out the critical requirements for qualified faculty and for the assurance of quality in a distance learning program. To that end, any college that is considering distance learning must confront the problems of adequate training for faculty members, time-on-task measures, student support services, differing missions, control of the faculty over curriculum, and a heavy emphasis on goals and outcomes. At Regis University, for example, faculty who want to teach distance courses "are required to review and provide feedback of a student paper, write a brief essay on value-centered education, interview with a current faculty member, participate in a leaderless group activity, and facilitate a brief 20-minute instructional segment." Once involved in the program, faculty find much greater time demands than in a traditional teaching format. From this alone it is clear that distance education requires much more of the faculty than residential teaching.

With regard to student support services, various universities are finding that students must have significant counseling prior to admission and more advising and support than traditional students. "At the University of Phoenix, the University employs a technical staff 20 hours a day, six days a week," just for the technical aspects of computer operation, software comprehension, and successful use of the system. It is

clear that the small colleges would hard-pressed to have the computer resources needed for distance learning.

Beyond teaching and advising, universities are establishing components in the assessment of student achievement. Typically those components break down into:

- Professional and educational values
- Comprehensive outcomes
- Communication skills inventory, and
- Critical thinking.

Each of these areas requires significant planning, extensive testing, and the application of multiple instruments of measurement.

Once a program of distance learning is established, accrediting bodies develop separate and extensive guidelines for the accreditation of those programs. In September of 2000, for example, eight regional accrediting commissions issued a "*Draft Statement of the Regional Accrediting Commissions on the Evaluation of Electronically Offered Degree Programs.*" It is a five-page, single-spaced document followed by a fourteen-page, singled spaced draft of the "Guidelines for the Evaluation of Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs." The draft statement lays heavy emphasis on the value of traditional classroom instruction as the best means of instruction. Having said that, however, the statement recognizes the potential value of distance learning and the necessity for colleges and accreditors to deal successfully with the issue.

In the "Guidelines" the regional commissions address five main components of distance education: "institutional context and commitment; curriculum and instruction; faculty support; student support; and evaluation and assessment." Suffice it to say that each area poses many questions that will require vast documentation for any college that enters distance education with the hope of accreditation.

Following upon the heels of writings such as those mentioned above, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 16, 2001) published an article by Sarah Carr, "Is Anyone Making Money on Distance Education?" Ms. Carr points out the fact that many college administrators now question the expansion of distance education and on-line learning as they monitor the financial costs and time requirements. She mentions six

new studies commissioned by the Sloan Foundation that examine distance learning at various universities:

> "Most of the reports--based on studies conducted at the Rochester Institute of Technology, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Maryland's University College, and Drexel, Pace, and Pennsylvania State Universities--reveal that the universities are hovering close to the break-even point with their distance-learning programs."

In the remainder of the article, Ms. Carr lays out various cost accounting models and shows the difficulty of comparing universities or even gathering adequate data for a thorough analysis. The conclusion is that much more study needs to be completed before adequate assessment is possible.

In mortuary science education, as well as general education, there has been experimentation with distance learning. Many colleges appear to believe that distance education will bring more students into the system. The American Board of Funeral Service Education (Portland, Maine) recently published a "*Fact Sheet, 1975-2000,*" in which the ABFSE enumerates colleges that now offer distance education in funeral service. Twenty-three of fifty-two mortuary programs (44%) offer courses through distance learning, and it is interesting to note that eighteen of them are public institutions. This fact might indicate that public colleges have more assets in terms of equipment, software, faculty, and support services than private colleges. It is also of interest that in spite of distance learning actual enrollment in mortuary science programs has *declined* significantly since 1996. In 1996, there were 3213 students reported in national enrollment for mortuary colleges. In 2000, there were 2368. Clearly, distance learning is not the panacea that was expected. While there may be many causes of enrollment decline (salary, working conditions, strong economy), those would be beyond the scope of this article.

It is the experience of this writer that distance education is extremely difficult and expensive to manage. Several years ago, this private college attempted a distance learning program with funeral service students in one of the provinces of Canada. The program was designed to deliver funeral service education to 60 students through

computers and telephone lines to remote terminals at Canadian funeral homes where students were employed. Books were to be sold and delivered through the mail system, daily assignments, quizzes, and counseling were to be done via e-mail, practical embalming experience was arranged in local funeral homes, and college faculty were scheduled to make periodic visits for group-centered lectures on-site in Canada. The system failed in spite of everyone's best efforts and turned out to be a less-than-break-even program financially. The College had seriously underestimated the amount of technical problems that would arise in computers, hardware, software, and overall operation and maintenance of technical system. The College also was not prepared for the inability of students to keep a regular pace in study, to send materials in a timely way, and simply to study in remote locations away from all other persons involved. One faculty summarized it by saying that instead of teaching a class of sixty students once, the faculty were teaching one student sixty times. The burden for faculty and the individual problems of students quickly overwhelmed everyone involved, because students needed so much support in every aspect of the program and its delivery that it became untenable. Therefore, distance education will *not* be the recruiting tool that many expected. This conclusion may be overly general and it may be the opinion of only one college's faculty, but the experience gained in this instance supported a statement made above by the regional accrediting commissions that traditional classroom instruction is the best means of instruction. Outside of the traditional classroom, distance learning can be an excellent opportunity for a *very few, highly-motivated, well-disciplined* people. Beyond that, without extensive and expensive planning, counseling/support services, and financial commitment, the system loses its participants owing to a lack of efficiency, control, social interaction, and self-discipline. Whether distance education is friend or foe remains to be seen. Most certainly it will depend on the resources committed to it, and, unless there are major changes, few colleges will be able to carry it out successfully over the long term.

Review of a Funeral Service Course Online

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Not every institution has jumped on the distance education bandwagon; some have declined or been unable to join others in offering extensive online programs to their students. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (2/21/01), Boston College, for example, supports the online efforts of a few professors but has not established a full-scale distance education program.

The strategic plan developed at the University of Central Oklahoma suggests that by the year 2007 approximately 3,000 students will take advantage of courses offered exclusively via distance technology. The beginnings for such a plan materialized in the fall of 1997 when the university's newly appointed chief technology officer approached the Department of Funeral Service Education to explore the initiation of a web-based course which could be delivered through the Southern Regional Education Board (Educational Technology Cooperative of 15 member states) and its new distance learning arrangement known as the Electronic Common Market. The goal was to design a course students could take electronically and make available learning opportunities that are much less tied to a specific place and time.

Psychology of Grief was selected for this pilot project. After a series of planning sessions with information technology specialists and faculty, a format was developed in which students who enrolled in the distance learning section of the course were subscribed to a grief-

listserv and asked to provide their e-mail addresses. Utilizing these communication methods, students were expected to interact and exchange ideas with each other and the professor. Thus the course was established as a pure internet class with the students never setting foot on the campus. Students from several states and two foreign countries have engaged in this asynchronous approach to instruction. In fact, since its inception, the class has doubled its size each semester it has been offered! The course has had a maximum enrollment of 150 students. In addition, a graduate level section was developed and remains a popular choice in various master's programs.

Online instruction has its pros and cons. Students are able to 'attend' a web course when it's convenient without having to physically appear on campus. This arrangement greatly assists students who have had a significant life-change occur during the semester, i.e., illness, accidents, or of domicile. Importantly, self-motivation can be a key factor for ensuring success in completing assignments and responses by the due date.

Web courses tend to work more successfully for visual and kinesthetic learners. Students who rely on auditory feedback are at an obvious disadvantage. Students do enjoy interaction with each other on the listserv; however, it is necessary that students have basic computer skills or other technological abilities appropriate for the course.

Teaching a web course is not simply a matter of transferring lecture notes to electronic notes. The challenge is keeping students involved on a regular basis. Other important factors include clear and uncomplicated directions, continual communication, small manageable classes and good technological support from the appropriate campus offices.

For each new web-based course, issues will always include training and compensation of the faculty, ownership of materials, copyright and other related policies. There is little doubt

that technology will continue to break down many traditional boundaries that have confined higher education to campuses and other location-bound delivery systems.

Comments may be sent to: kcurl@ucok.edu

Editorial Queries:

1) What was the cost to develop your course?

The Psychology of Grief course was developed without a specific budget provided as thus was a 'pilot project' funded by the University. Requests for computers, printers, attendance at training seminars, and other needs, were met to assist in making the project successful. Therefore, it would be recommended that any faculty developing such classes included a budget in advance of course development approval.

2) How much of your time was spent in development?

The greatest factor, from our experience, is the TIME involvement both for development plus student interaction via the web. Faculty, in our opinion, must be given release time or load compensation as would be expected with any professional activity from which both the university and students benefit.

3) Who is presently the instructor for this course and could you comment on the time factor: how much time per week does your instructor spend or how does the time involvement compare to that associated with a lecture/discussion format?

Currently, Mr. D. Archie Young serves as instructor for this course at UCO. Because of his desire to personalize e-mail interaction with students, he spends upwards of 10-12 hours per week on the computer. Although online courses do not provide all the student feedback teachers often desire, student evaluation/assessment of the web format has indicated a very positive experience by students in helping them reach their educational goals.

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Obstacles to Producing Online Courses

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Many colleges and universities have begun to embrace the idea of learning at a distance. It isn't surprising that interest has peaked since some universities, colleges, and technical training programs are offering degrees that can be obtained completely online. The fear of losing students to these convenient online programs has stimulated great concern by educators and administrators alike.

In reaction to this boom in online course offerings many educators have decided or are trying to decide if they want to jump on the online learning bandwagon. In this article we will present a "reality check" for those who are thinking of adding online Web-based course design and development to their teaching repertoire. There are many obstacles that may arise on ones journey if one should choose this path.

We will present issues such as cost of production, time investment, and some of the limitations of the Web as a teaching modality especially for those requiring high graphic content to illustrate learning principles. For example, funeral service education as well as many of the allied health professions, nursing and medicine face specific obstacles relating to the difficulties of delivering psychomotor (hands-on) training.

So much of the learning that needs to occur during the education of funeral service students requires hands-on training and laboratory experiences. The process of embalming, for example would be very difficult to represent in the 2-dimensional environment of the Web. Yes, it would be possible using amazing graphics and animations to recreate the process of embalming. Interactivity could also be designed into the course such as having the student

control a trochar and aspirate a cavity through the use of a joystick type of a device. Unfortunately the graphic art and animation costs would probably be quite expensive (that is, if you want it to look realistic). In reality, the necessary psychomotor objectives would really need to be met in the laboratory with real cadavers for the learners to actually become proficient.

Another obstacle to producing an online course is cost. As mentioned earlier, the financial cost of producing a high quality course can be quite high. A course that takes one hour to complete can take many hours to produce and usually involves a team of designers, graphic artists and web developers. On a personal note, a one-hour course involving one of the authors and a five-member team took approximately 325 hours to complete. The course had minimal graphic content and a very small amount of animation. If the labor costs were $32 per hour this would have been a significant investment ($10,400). Who is going to pay? Most budgets don't allow for this type of teaching resource. The cost doesn't stop there. The course then must be placed on a server. A server is a computer where online course files are stored and retrieved by the students. Server space costs money and requires staff for maintenance. In addition, students may need help using the course. This would require some type of help desk service.

What about the cost to faculty? Many hours are required on the part of educators to produce online courses. The most valuable entity to many educators is their time. Currently, most educators use overheads, lecture notes, a blackboard and chalk. The course content is regenerated year after year and is relatively inexpensive in term of materials. Updating course content usually consists of having to create new overheads and lecture about new findings. With this in mind it may be difficult to imagine the amount of time it would take to convert a traditional course over to an online course. The first obstacle educators face is learning the software programs required to put the course on the Web. Even the "computer guru types" will

find some of the Web development software quite challenging. There are some template style programs available but they force users to layout content according to the vendors' idea of how a course should be presented.

Compensation and support are other issues that concern educators. Most budgets only allow for traditional teaching preparation time. The prep time for an online course can be greatly increased over traditional methods but many times educators are not compensated sufficiently for the extra time and effort they expend. It is not surprising to find educators who feel that it is unfair to have to learn the skills required to put their courses online and they simply refuse to do so.

What are some of the strategies that one can use if interested in jumping on the online bandwagon? First, it is wise to consult with administration or program directors to assess if there is support for online learning initiatives. Next, start looking around the campus community. There may be groups already involved in online course development. If so, try to form weekly or monthly brown bag sessions where educators can share their failures and successes with each other. Another resource that may already exist is a teaching and learning center. These centers usually offer courses or workshops where skills required for developing online courses can be obtained.

In conclusion, although producing an online course can take a great deal of time and money the final product can be very rewarding. The convenience to students is only one of the advantages. Once the course is up and running you can use it semester after semester and because it is online you can update as often as desired.

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Educational Technology And Vocational Education

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Abstract

Vocational education focuses on a hands-on approach to curriculum. Educational technology applied to vocational education has the potential of influencing the learner with visual and kinesthetic support within each lesson. While technical resources allow instructors to incorporate various multimedia devices into the presentation of a prescripted curriculum, they also challenge the instructor to develop a stimulating environment for each student.

Based on a review of the vocational education literature, it is recommend that additional research be conducted in the area of technology-based learning as correlated with student success in the mortuary science field.

Introduction

Technology is a vital part of the world we live in. Educational technology is even more important. For purposes of this paper educational technology is defined as *any electronic device that enables the instructor to diversify the lesson so that learning is achieved.* Typically instructors in vocational education fields use a method of direct teaching for their lessons. Students write copious notes on some type of preprinted outline only later to be tested by way of a single modality test. Most vocational programs have a standardized test that is administered for licensure. These vocational examinations are usually in the same format as the tests the students learned while in their vocational educational program. But this need not be the sole approach to content delivery; technology can widen the horizon of instruction.

By itself, technology is only a mode of transmitting the information necessary to be learned. This paper examines reports of others who have looked at technology as a vehicle to assist in providing information to students. The focus is on funeral service education, the field in which I teach.

Funeral service is a specialty of vocational education in which few technological changes have been made. Incorporation has been slow perhaps because businesses have been reluctant to embrace technologically advanced methods for such business operations as record keeping and inventory control. Research on the use of technology based instruction in funeral service education is limited. There have been numerous funeral service educators who have not updated their instructional methodology to include technology. I have reviewed instructional materials that were taught to students from the mid 1980's. These materials have not been updated nor has the presentational format been revised.

On the other hand, students enrolled in funeral service have changed. Presently 25% of attendees are 20-22 years old and 24% are second career students over 30 years of age. (American Board of Funeral Service Education, 2001) Large numbers of adult learners return to vocational education to update existing skills or to acquire new basic work skills for new career paths. These enrollment figures are mirrored, in my experience, in the Mortuary Science Department at Cypress College. Similarly Vandenbergh indicated in his letter (2000):

> Out of the 58 graduates that day, 24 were women, representing more than 41 percent of this class. I thought back to my Wayne State Mortuary School graduating class of 1968, where out of 34 graduates, none were women. The second trend I witnessed that day was the increase in people selecting funeral service as a second career. Again, my class consisted of many gentlemen who were second-or third-generation funeral directors. Funeral service was in their blood, so to speak. There were a number of people in this class of 2000 who were beginning careers in funeral service after achieving successful careers in other fields. (p. 27).

Overview of the literature

Many different viewpoints can be found in a review of literature dealing with the use of technology in vocational education. Some researchers reviewed student achievement through the use of technology- based curricula. Other reports dealt with academic attributes of the learners or their professional outlooks. . I chose to narrow my attention to the literature highlighting the more negative aspects of technology.

In recent years much attention has been brought to the use of technology as a method of instructional enhancement in vocational education but not all of the attention has been positive.

> Christopher Columbus Middle School in Union City, New Jersey, is a school praised by President Clinton as having dramatically raised its test scores through technology use. Scrutiny, however, revealed that the test scores actually rose before the school installed computers. (Chaika, p. 3)

Frequently academic advancement of instructional technologies was shadowed by voices of discontent. "In the classroom, however, teachers never really embraced the new tools, and no significant academic achievement occurred." (Oppenhiemer, 1997, p. 2). The divide between those who accepted technology- based education and those who preferred the method of direct instruction seemed, at times, miles apart. "If education were to include a systematic study of these issues, we would see far more intelligent discussion of technology and, hopefully, fewer decisions based on the myth that equates technological innovation with progress." (Bowers, 1998, p. 119).

While there may be a number of reasons why any given instructor askews the use of technology in the classroom, a new instructor may find that decision particularly difficult. New instructors are scrutinized from their first day of teaching. This constant observation by administration puts significant pressure on new instructors and often causes a great deal of stress and frustration. Newer vocational instructors must contend with the issues of evaluation and subject area confirmation while developing more technically advanced or challenging teaching strategies. This additional pressure directly affects the vocational education instructor as well as the method of instruction. Chaika (1999) noted a computer instructor's concern about the level of frustration regarding the use of technology in his school:

> Lowell Monke, an advanced computer technology teacher in Des Moines, Iowa, found that when it comes to the internet, 'the connections are often unreliable, the interfaces

> unintuitive, the documentation unintelligible, the information unfindable. And when we do get the systems working, the technology changes so fast that we never feel fully confident about what we are doing.' (p. 3).

In addition, students often reflect the teachers' anxiety and concerns, especially when technology or technically advanced equipment challenged the instructor.

> 'In social studies we do not use the social studies books, because they're from the 1980s and they are falling apart,' Justin a 14-year old student, told Education-World. 'Our school chose to spend money that they could have used to upgrade our social studies books to buy computers. Almost everyone in the school has used them only once, but we would use our books every day.' (Chaika, p. 4).

These added expectations become even more of an issue with the trend to distance education. Distance learning is another rapidly developing area of education that has challenged even the more technologically advanced instructors. "Vocational teachers who are often compelled to ask others for job-related assistance experience stress." (Adams, 1999, p. 9).

However, in spite of their personal stresses, many teachers are impressed by the extent of their student's motivation when using technology in learning. "I am consistently struck by the eagerness and the rapidity of their questions, their openness to new ideas, their wanting to know about everything and to answer any and all questions I put to them." (Bartlett, 1999, p. 47). "Creating an open atmosphere also requires freeing students to challenge the professor. Students often seem conditioned not to question." (Bartlett, p.54) Not only do students who are comfortable with technology excel but there also seems to be a revived sense of academic preparation stemming from the class structure. "They share the technological optimism that has dominated post-war culture, an optimism captured in the advertising slogans of my youth:

'Better living through chemistry,' 'Progress is our most important product.'" (Turkle, 1995, p. 231)

Technology based education has also influenced some other attitudes of vocational instructors. "Decisions to incorporate computers into public schools and universities, whether for administrative use or classroom instruction, follow from the unquestioned assumption that computers are the latest expression of social 'progress.'" (Bowers, 1998, p. 111).

> In education computers commodify thought and communication. This requires that institutions make huge economic outlays to put libraries online and for professors to carry on research and to teach online. Students, in turn, must be consumers of technology that will require an endless series of upgrades to feed the industry's need to increase its share of the market. (Bowers, p.113)

"We are in the 'business' (as people like to call it) of education. We teach and train people for the careers and lives they aspire to and want to live." (Hall, 2000, p. 12)

Other considerations

Influence on students: Gender plays a role in the motivation of students. As indicated by researchers, male learners have had more access to technology based curricula than female learners. Turkle (1995) illustrated this finding regarding gender based motivation in the use of educational technology:

> When examining the motivational aspects of technology on students, generally speaking, males have more exposure and encouragement than females. "For example, when Lisa minimized the importance the computer had for her by insisting that it was 'just a tool,' it was more than a way of withdrawing because her programming course had forced her

into an uncomfortable approach. It was also a way of insisting that what was most important about being a person (and a woman) was incompatible with close relationships to the technology as it had been presented to her." (p. 62).

The age and background of vocational students have influenced class structure and the curriculum. As students have become more technically aware of learning methodology, many instructors have tried to bring the use of technology into their courses. However, authors such as Bowers and Turkle continue to warn of unintended consequences.

> The failure of universities to provide the historical, cultural, and ecological background for understanding that computers are not a culturally neutral tool also has consequences for younger students. These students are being indoctrinated into believing that computer mediated thought and communication represents a superior and more empowering form of learning. (Bowers, p. 116).

> In our current situation, technological optimism tends to represent urban decay, social alienation, and economic polarization as out-of-date formulations of a problem that could be solved if appropriate technology were applied in sufficient doses, for example, technology that would link everyone to the 'information superhighway.' (p. 231).

Assessment issues: A necessary step toward online class quality assurance is determining how classes are to be evaluated by participants. Regardless of the delivery method, issues of quality are the same. Recognizing that online classes should be evaluated in the same way as lecture classes is a necessary step to establish standards for quality. (Ryan, p. 83).

"In adult technical education the trend toward competency-based programming has been applauded and urged by a number of interested stakeholders including potential employers, some trade unions, licensing bodies, and some educational institutions." (Bell & Mitchell, 1999, p. 2).

Funeral service utilizes the National Board Examination. Mortuary science students who pass the exam are eligible to be licensed in the majority of states. However, it is not known whether technology- based curricula have elevated test scores or positively influenced student decisions to continue their involvement with the funeral industry.

Conclusions

As I reviewed the literature on technology and vocational education, I became aware that many instructors are intimidated by technology as a tool for instruction. Rather than experiencing some relief from their workloads, many instructors felt increased stress dealing with the demands of educational technology and felt that administrative expectations were not matched by sufficient administrative support. Vocational educators have work experience but tend to blame school administrations for failures of technology in the classroom.

Second, it appears that, although some students are quite comfortable with technology, all students are not. Witness preliminary studies regarding gender.

In addition there are serious questions to be addressed regarding the efficacy of technologies. Unfortunately, specific comments about funeral service education are not possible. Current literature in this vocational field is insufficient to draw conclusions about success rates for technology assisted students.

Further studies are recommended that analyze the uses of various technologies in funeral service education.

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DISTANCE LEARNING ASSESSMENT

by

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Assessment of distance learners is currently a topic of debate among educators. For the purpose of this article *assessment* will encompass manner of test administration, types of assessment, and how to determine if the assessment was successful.

How Tests Should be Administered/Controlled Environment

Although technology is available to take exams online, this tool need not be used exclusively when examining distance learners. Many instructors prefer that exams be given under controlled conditions, eg. in the presence of a proctor. Most colleges and universities have a testing center that allows students from other schools to take exams at their facilities. Instructors should develop written agreements with these facilities outlining duties of the proctor. Each exam sent to a testing center/proctor should be accompanied by a cover letter stipulating general instructions such as time limits, whether books, notes, or a calculator may be used, and how the exam should be returned to the instructor. The benefits of this type of assessment are: 1) the student will have to show

picture identification verifying their identity and 2) the risk of cheating will be lower on an exam where instructions can be given prohibiting use of books, notes, or other outside sources.

A potential problem with this type of assessment is that regardless of the instructions given, the integrity of the exam can still be comprised. For example, in one situation a student wanted to 'overnight' the exam to meet time constraints: the proctor handed the exam to the student and told him to do the mailing himself. In another situation, the proctor was providing a photocopy of the exam to each student upon completion; this action was taken to ensure that the student would have a second copy in case the exam was lost in the mail.

Another potential problem is the extent of feedback a student receives following an exam. If 30 students take an exam and each student fails one or more questions, the instructor must then contact individual students, by telephone or email, and review each question missed. This is a very tedious process.

On-Line Method

On-line assessment options have increased in the past few years. One current provider of distance learning software and service is Blackboard. With their assessment software the instructor is provided with many options for on-line assessment of students. Each exam can be password protected so that only those students with the specified password can take the exam. A set time for each exam can be given. The students are shown a running clock and warned when the time limit is approaching. This is an important feature

because if the student does not know the answer they will not have time to leave their computer and seek the answer in their textbook. Also, if a student takes more than two minutes to answer a question the computer will automatically assume that the student has left and will exit the system forcing the student to turn in an incomplete exam. The exam can only be re-entered if the instructor clears the student's attempt. The software can also provide the student with a detailed review of each question missed and the correct answer for that question. This methodology provides feedback in a way that is important not only to the learning process but also to the student who, hopefully, will not continue to miss the same question on subsequent exams. The exam can also be made available during certain days and times, thus the student is required to take the exam during the week it is scheduled. Perhaps the most valuable feature of the assessment manager software is that a pool of questions can be created by the instructor and each student can receive a different exam. The computer can be told to choose at random 50 out of 100 questions for each student taking the assessment. The worst case scenario is that a student may take the exam, print it, and give a copy to another student. But since each student takes a different exam, the copy can be looked at as nothing more than a review sheet.

Types of Assessment

Assessment is certainly more than taking an exam. Each student should be given various ways to show they have learned the material. This may include: homework assignments, weekly quizzes, research papers, and even on-line discussion. Don't make the exams

worth more points than any assignments and that way if a student cheats on the exams they still have to write a good paper to pass the course. In one instance a student was accused of cheating on a paper that received a high score but their exam scores were low enough that the course was not passed despite the high grade on the paper. Don't put your eggs in one basket, and don't put all your points on a few exams.

Successful Assessment

In funeral service education the most commonly used method of assessment is the National Board Exam which is administered by the Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards. But does passing the National Board Exam guarantee that a student is ready for entry-level work in funeral service? On the surface the answer to that question is "yes", but most instructors have taught at least one student that could do the book-work but could not make the transition into working in a funeral home. The method of learning the students receives and whether a student takes an exam in a controlled environment or on-line cannot determine if a student is going to be successful in funeral service. Only time and experience will make that assessment.

Book Review

Higher Education in an Era of Digital Competition by D.E.Hanna and Associates Madision: Atwood Publishers,2000.

If you are looking for a good overview of the challenges and issues facing higher education in the future, this is the book for you. Hanna et al. address real issues precipitated by changing student populations, tightening education budgets, and proliferating technologies in an ever-competitive marketplace.

Selected topics and quotes to whet your appetite:

Chpt.2 Emerging Approaches to Learning in Collegiate Classrooms

"Knowledge that people need to live and work in today's society is increasingly interdisciplinary, problem focused, and process based rather than linear, routine, and well defined. Proficiencies required include the ability to work inteams, excellent presentation skills, critical thinking processes, and the capacity to use a variety of technologies and software. (Gardiner, 19940. More than ever people will need to develop an internal process for learning that will enable them to be continuous learners." p.46

"The teacher is not the primary source of all information relevant to the content of the course, nor even the primary interpreter or integrator of such knowledge and information. That role becomes the learner's. The teacher's role becomes one of modeling effective learning behaviors, coaching and guiding, and mediating among possible classroom activities and pursuits within the framework of overall course content." p.47

How does this view relate to accreditation and licensing related exams?

Chpt.3 Advanced Technologies and Distributed Learning in Higher Education

"Central to the effective utilization of advanced learning technologies via distributed learning is developing a reflective understanding of how each interactive medium shapes the cognitive, affective, and social interactions of participants, The creation, sharing, and ,astery of knowledge is not simply an intellectual exercise; the emotional and psychosocial dimensions of learning are very important as well.

Much study is needed to develop the new kinds of rhetoric necessary to make these emerging media effective for learning and to design distributed learning environments appropriate to specific groups of learners for particular types of content and a given set of educational goals. While a great deal is known about instructional design in classroom settings to facilitate affective and social interactions, many emerging media are so new that little is known about the emotional and collaborative affordances they provide - and lack. Understanding social, psychological, and emotional environments compared with virtual environments, in which many direct sensory experiences can only be simulated or imagined, is

critical for developing effective learning environments using advanced technologies." p.82

Chpt.4 Emerging Organizational Models: The Extended Traditional University

"While penalties are eventually imposed on extreme laggards, few financial rewards are offered for growth within the mainstream academic budgeting process. Departments with growing enrollments end up subsidizing those with stagnant or decreasing enrollments for substantial periods of time. With this situation as an operational framework, it is of little wonder that departments, left to themselves to operate within the traditional financial backdrop (and without additional financial inducement), see little value in adapting technologies that will simply add to the individual workloads of faculty in at least three ways. First the faculty member has the added burden of learning new instructional technologies. Second, adapting to new modes of instruction places a greater burden on the faculty member to provide one-on-one and "one-to-few" interactions rather than the "one-to-many" interactions so prevalent in lecture- style classrooms. Third, increased nu,mbers of students with varying locations, schedules, and maturity demand flexibility. Adaptation presents new logistical as well as pedagogical challenges. All of these factors serve as powerful disincentives not only to faculty members, but also to academic departments, whose budgets control the academic structure of the university." p.108

Chpt.7 Leadership in the Age of Knowledge

"Skilled leadership is not a new proposition for higher education, but the academy has not been adept, human, or fundamentally humane in its leadership practices as the future requires. It is time for university leadership to take the high road-and quickly. The greatest challenges facing universities may not be how to raise more money or shape undergraduate education in isolation from institutional reform, but rather how to become flexible, resilient, speedy, creative, just, and concerned." p.165

In closing, check Goodwin's ten lessons for leaders pp.175&ff.; it's only a test.

Resources

Books

Dollars, Distance and Online Education by M.J. Finkelstein, C. Frances, F.I. Jewett, and B.W. Scholz (eds.). Series on Higher Education. Westport: American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 2000.

Digital Dilemma: Issues of Access, Cost, and Quality in Media-Enhanced and Distance Education by G.C. VanDusen. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Series 27:5. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass,2000.

The Survey of Distance Education Programs in Higher Education. New York: Primary Research Group,2001.

The Strategic Use of Learning Technologies by Elizabeth Buuge, ed. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education #88. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass,2000.

Web-Based Training: Using Technology to Design Adult Learning Experiences by M. Driscoll. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass,1998.

Managing Technological Change: Strategies for College and University Leaders by A.W. Bates. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999.

The Impact of Technology on Faculty Development, Life, and Work by K.H. Gillespie (ed.). New Directions for Teaching and Learning, #76. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass,1998.

Information Technology in Higher Education: Assessing Its Import and Planning for the Future by R.N. Katz and J.A. Rudy (eds.). New Directions for Institutional Research, #102. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Adult Learning and the Internet by B. Cahoon (ed.). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education,#78. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.

Moderating: The Key to Teaching and Learning Online by G.E. Salmon. London: Kogon Page, 2000.

Lessons from the Cyberspace Classroom by R.M. Palloff and K. Pratt. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001

Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace by R.M. Palloff and K. Pratt. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Multimedia-Based Instructional Design by W.W. Lee and D.L. Owens. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Bookmarks

Publications

http://www.magnapubs.com
Publishers of Distance Education Report and Online Cl@ssroom

http://www.askeric.org
Education information and ERIC database

http://www.ntlf.com
National Teaching and Learning Forum

http://www.syllabus.com
Syllabus magazine

http://www.educause.edu
EDUCAUSE publications

http://www.aahe.org and http://www.tltgroup.org
American Association of Higher Education

http://www.chea.org
Council for Higher Education Accreditation

Student Learning Aids

http://www.mun.ca/library/ref/li/caul/research.html/
Doing research from a distance

http://www.lib.unb.ca/library/instruction/InfoSearch.html
Info Search: A Step-by-step Guide to Finding Information for a Research Assignment

Examples of the Web used for learning

http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/tl/about.html

Top Tips for Increasing Online Interactivity

http://www.learnscope.anta.gov.au/display_stories/1-90000/1501-1800/display_stories_1660.html

other resources

Innovations in Education and Training International
http://www.umuc.edu/distance/odell/cvu/
University of Maryland University College

http://www2.ncsu.edu
Homepage for Richard Felder and his teaching effectiveness workshops

http://www.gwu.edu/~tip/gagne.html
Teaching and Learning Definitions

Regularly scheduled conferences

Center for Case Studies at Pace University

2001 topic: Enlivening Teaching: Using Discipline- based Cases and Classroom Research to Improve Learning and Teaching

Learning Resource Network

2001 topic: Learning Online:
Best Practices and Emerging Trends
Lessons from the Cyberspace Classroom
What Do We Know Today About Online Instruction That We Didn't Know Yesterday

Syllabus, Fall 2001

Education and Technology Conference and Exhibition

Association of American Colleges and Universities

November 1-3, 2001 topic: Technology, Learning, and Intellectual Development

Death Education:
What the Students Think

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Death Education: What the Students Think

Being well educated is one of the most important qualities that one can acquire throughout a lifetime. Our learning begins immediately at birth when every waking moment of every day is spent exploring the world around us. After some years of exploratory learning, we move on to the organized learning of elementary school where we learn the basics of language and mathematics. High school follows where one takes basic skills and 'fine tunes' them into useful knowledge. Some students enter the work force right out of high school but others may go on to institutions of higher education and choose an area of study that will be their life's work. Some students study medicine, anatomy, and surgery (along with many other subjects) to become doctors while other students study technology and computer science to enter the 'cutting edge' of our technological world. All of these wonderful places of learning are, in theory, preparing the students for their lives out of school where they will hopefully become contributing members of our society. In most instances this pattern of instruction works. But no matter what choices any of these students make, they all have one things in common: they will experience loss. Perhaps someone close to them will die, or they may be torn by divorce, or they may lose their job. Whatever the event, that time will come when death or extreme loss will affect them and all the education or work experience will be of little value in helping them survive.

Many individuals have not even finished high school when death/loss enters their life for the first time. In fact, many students recall that their first involvement with death

occurred when they were still in middle school. If this truly is the time when most people experience their first involvement with death, then why not have a teacher and a class that is dedicated to learning about death and loss and how to cope with both

Why?

I would like to believe that given the innumerable books, papers, and articles written on the subjects of death, dying, and bereavement, that most people working in our field know that anyone is capable of grieving. From newborns to the elderly, all are able to grieve. Most of us grieve losses all of the time. Losses that range from the loss of money to the loss of our spouse or our parents affect our everyday lives. It is not only adults who grieve; children and adolescents are affected by loss just as much, if not more so, than adults. In a study reported by J. Conrad Glass (1990), students compiled a lengthy list of losses over which they were grieving. In a similar study within a rural high school, students gave some of the same answers seen in the Glass study (Minnich, 2000) Some of the most prevalent losses identified were divorce, moving, failing, breaking-up, loosing friends, and, of course, death.

Death is something we cannot avoid. The time will come when everyone will encounter the death of someone close whether it be the death of a parent or grandparent, the death of a friend, or the death of a pet. Since death cannot be avoided, we should not shun those rituals that can be so helpful for us all but especially for children and adolescents. There are so many reports of children who are not allowed to attend the funeral of a loved one. Is our society still trying to 'shelter' its children from death?

Are there still adults who think that grief or loss does not affect their children? When students were asked, "Do you feel that grief (for any reason, death or otherwise)

affects your life now?" Sixty-four percent of the students agreed that grief did have a present affect on their lives. (Minnich, 2000) With this number of students admitting that grief was exerting an effect on their lives, there should be some way of educating and helping these students learn about grief and loss.

If they don't get it at home where are they getting it?

Where should death education take place? Some may disagree with my suggestion but why not in the school? The average child spends many hours at school; what a perfect opportunity to teach these children about death and loss. I am not talking about such matters as the 'afterlife' or what happens to our spirit or soul when we die. That is a matter of an individual's personal belief and/or religion and should be taught at home and at their place of worship. I propose a death education course that would enlighten the students in the areas of 'normal' grief responses, coping strategies, resources, and include discussions of issues surrounding death and funerals and other important rituals. (Zalesnik, 1992) Classroom (peer) discussions could encourage expression and help those students who may be uncomfortable or feel alone in their grief.

Where are students presently getting information about death and loss? It could be assumed that most parents are giving their children the information that they need in times of great loss. However, when students were asked where they would go to find information on grief and loss only 27% said that they would turn to their parents. What about the remaining 73%; where are they getting their help and information on death and loss? Of the students questioned, 24% said that they get their information from a friend,

18% said they sought the advice of a minister or clergy member, 16% sought the counsel of a physician or a counselor, and 15% said they got their information from books or the Internet. (Minnich, 2000)

Death Education: School, Home, and Church

What does all of this mean? It is not in any way wrong or bad that some students get their information from sources such as books or the Internet. However, if those students are not also talking with others (parents, teachers, friends, or clergy) about death how will they learn the emotional and social ramifications of loss? Students felt that death education should take place at school, home, and their place of worship. Thirty-six percent said death education should take place at school with reinforcement at home and church (or place of worship) another 35% said the same but placed more emphasis on the home and the church. (Minnich, 2000)

In the ideal death education course there would be classroom discussion and learning, homework that would require parent-child input, and a broad perspective section designed to give students a better understanding of and respect for the beliefs of others.

Parents?

Parents would have to be in favor of such a course being taught to their children. Having the parents in agreement with the death education would also add to the breadth of the class. I am hopeful that most parents would want to be actively involved with the death education process. Parents, for the most part, are afraid of doing or saying the 'wrong thing' and believe that the school can help them. (Stevenson, 1996)

When students were asked if it would be easier to start discussions about death

with their parents if homework would require their parents' help, 42% of the students were in strong agreement. Of the students who were not in agreement, 32% were undecided and 26% disagreed. For discussions between parents and children to be successful, the parents would also have to be in agreement with teaching death education in the school. (Minnich,2000)

Current Information on Death and Loss

Some people may oppose the introduction of a death education course in American high schools. They may argue that a child's education and information on the subject should come from home and/or place of worship. However, are these places doing their job? Are today's youth receiving the correct information on death and loss? To those of us in the field of thanatology, it would seem that some theories of grief and loss are basic enough as to be universally known. In the study I recently completed at a local rural high school, I found some surprising results as to what students know to be "correct" information about death. I found that the answers given by the students, while acceptable twenty or more years ago, were incorrect given today's theories.

Grief does not have a fixed timeline. In many ways, we can grieve a loss throughout different times in our lives. Major changes in our lives may bring back some feelings of sadness or despair that have connections to a previous loss. When the students were asked "How long should someone grieve under 'normal' circumstances?", they responded in a number of ways. Forty-two per cent answered that grief may last a lifetime. However, the second most popular response (34%) was that grief might last two to six weeks. Other responses included two to six months (17%) and one year (7%) as

the expected period of mourning. This clearly shows that a large group of students has some incorrect information about grief. The most important finding relative to this question is the fact that 58% of the students believe that grief does have a timeline and should be finished within one year! (Minnich, 2000)

It used to be thought that children do not grieve until they reach a certain age or time in their development. However, that is a view nor widely held today. Many studies with children have demonstrated that even the youngest newborn can show signs of grief responses in reaction to a loss. (Grollman, 1995) The students in my study were asked "At what age can a child first grieve?". Only 5% of the students answered that a newborn has the capacity to grieve. Twenty-two per cent answered that a person is able to grieve at the age of two, while the largest group of students (47%) felt that a child needed to be at least seven years of age to be able to grieve. Nine per cent of the students answered that one cannot grieve until the age of fourteen and one person felt that an individual must be 'older' than fourteen to grieve. (Minnich, 2000)

Conclusion

Is education the key to bringing our children closer to a helpful, more comforting level of awareness of death and dying? The information gathered in my study clearly shows that these students have some incorrect information about the grief process. In addition, many students included positive remarks concerning the development of a death education course. One question asked "Would it be helpful to you if there were a teacher who taught a Death Education course and who was available to give information about death and dying and to sit and discuss these subjects with you?" Of the students who participated, 57% said that a death education course would be helpful to them.; twenty-

one percent indicated that such a course would not be helpful and 22% were undecided. This question also included an open comment section in which many students gave their ideas and thought for such a course.

Overall the students agreed that a course on death and dying would be helpful to them. (Minnich, 2000) This, however, is only the first step in instituting a death education course. The next, and very important step, will be to gain support of parents, teachers, administrators, and the Board of School Directors. (Stevenson, 1996) I believe that the information gathered by my survey provides a strong and positive impetus for further research on and eventual implementation of a death education course in our schools. I look forward to sharing more results with you in the future.

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JOURNAL OF FUNERAL SERVICE EDUCATION

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The Journal of Funeral Service Education is published under the auspices of UMSEA (University Mortuary Science Education Association).

Subscriptions:
rate: $25.00 per yearly volume
prepaid by check or money order to UMSEA/Journal
c/o Subscription Office/JFSE
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