

Teaching History with E-Learning Components

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As academia increasingly becomes more globalized, the need for student and instructor interaction via technology increases. Why? At a rapid rate, universities and colleges are offering new ways to boost student enrollment, retention, and access to resources and course participation. Students are requesting off-site access to college courses due to a variety of reasons, including geographical, familial, and financial challenges to the more traditional, on-site student experience. E-Learning (also known as Web-based instruction) often provides a way to bridge the gap between the changing generations of students and the increased need for higher education in the global market.

Some graduate students and faculty members are at first hesitant to experiment with E-Learning, in large part because they are rightfully wary of the additional time commitment required *initially* to change their teaching methods. Many instructors have found that slowly integrating technology works best for them. Also, many universities and colleges have E-Learning support centers or at least a staff person dedicated to E-Learning, so be sure to take advantage of this resource to help you integrate technology. There are various levels of E-Learning options available.

The three main categories for teaching college courses using Web-based tools are:

- Traditional lecture with a Web site containing additional instructional materials
 - This could include: exam reviews, syllabi copies, lecture outlines, primary source links, copies of articles, use of textbook Web sites, online exams/portions of exams, online submissions of research papers to anti-plagiarist-checking Web sites, links to helpful on-campus resources, and links to professional organizations
- Blended instruction, which is approximately half traditional lecture and half online interaction
 - This could include: (those listed above), required discussion forums, online reading response posts, and research directives via source/library links
- Total online interaction
 - This could include: (those listed above), printed lectures instead of verbal in class, digitally taped and broadcasted lectures—either audio or video, interactive “what if” history games, and interactive statistical research sites

Each type of instruction has its own benefits and setbacks, and depending on how each one is designed, those can vary instructor to instructor.

The benefits of using some type of E-Learning component in the classroom are endless because instructors are only limited by their imaginations and access to technical support/ability. Some benefits include increased interaction by the students with the material outside of class (active

learning), increased access to materials provided to the students (including primary sources), increased discussion among students and between students and instructor, increased efficiency for the instructor in time management (once the site is established), increased creative outlet for the instructor, and increased freedom for instructor (if allowed by department) to travel or reside away from the home institution.

Some suggestions when using any type of online learning environment:

- Academic copyright laws still apply. “Fair use” loopholes only work in an online environment if the class has access via password (for example using a design like WebCT).
- Instructors should give themselves time to upload and check the site before students need to have access—a day or two is usually enough.
- Experiment as much as you can and check the results.
- Textbook Web sites are often a great place to start. Your students will usually purchase a passcode with their books. These sites offer additional materials to students, including quizzes to test reading comprehension, maps, photographs, copies of textbook chapters, timelines, outlines, etc.—It is strongly suggested, though, that the instructor thoroughly examine the site and its testing options before assigning it or using it with students. Often, components are not exactly what are advertised. Regardless, the instructor will be asked by students to answer any questions regarding the Web site during the semester. Familiarity with the site will save loads of time and trouble in the end.
- Often colleges and universities have technical departments that exist merely for the support of online instruction; rely on these whenever possible. Call on the staff several weeks before you have a class up and running. They can usually show you how to use virtual classrooms, post digital discussion boards, and even record your own lectures.
- Find colleagues who already use Web components in their classes and discuss what benefits and problems they encountered. As with so many aspects of the profession, this is an excellent opportunity for a mentoring relationship.

Some resources for additional information regarding online instruction include:

- [The United States Distance Learning Association](http://www.usdla.org/) (<http://www.usdla.org/>)
- [World Wide Learn](http://www.worldwidelearn.com/) (<http://www.worldwidelearn.com/>)
- Many universities are now offering graduate degrees in education with an emphasis in online learning, and/or graduate certificates in online learning.

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