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Web-based Teaching and Training Panels

Issues in Web-Based Teaching

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Internet, a network of computers, is creating a turbulent but exciting environment for universities and academicians. Concept of any place any time teaching is becoming a reality. What started as distance learning is becoming an internet based learning. Many universities like the University of Phoenix, NOVA, Ziff-Davis have already started full scale course and in some cases degree offering on the web. In many cases, these universities are virtual and do not even maintain a physical presence in the area of their course offerings. This is providing intense competition to traditional schools. Universities are revising curriculums to include internet related courses and offering some of these courses on the web.

For universities, the next obvious question is: Can the internet be used **effectively** for educational purposes? Is it possible to bring education to people rather than bringing people to the educational environment? Can internet conquer "time" and "distance" and provide class related information on demand? Distance learning, of course is one such environment. Can we combine distance learning with web-based teaching?

Many issues arise when we discuss web-based learning. Control, quality and motivation are the three biggest challenges. We can provide an abundance of information through the web, but how do we control it before it becomes "information overload". How can we motivate students to "seek" useful information on the web? Is it possible to have a "complete" web-based course? If so, how can we control for quality? Homework, exams, papers and group assignments need to be submitted and graded. How can we ensure the ethics of this process? Anonymity may be a blessing and a curse: it could help students who don't do well in face-to-face environment, are not comfortable with the language or do not feel comfortable in a group setting. However, it could also hurt student development and training for a real life environment. Face-to-face learning, working in a group environment, class presentation are ways of dealing with real world situations. This could be entirely lost in web-based teaching environment.

The biggest challenge is how do we differentiate between web-based course offerings and correspondence courses. What is nature of instructor involvement? Are question/answer allowed? How do students contact instructor? Can there be real time group interaction?

Researchers are still struggling with these issues. There are very few studies in this regard and studies appear to be conflicting. This panel will address some of the issues raised above and describe their own experiences with web-based teaching.