

Fall 2000

Cleaning Up the Junkyard: An Exploration in Developing an Online Course

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**CLEANING UP THE JUNKYARD:
AN EXPLORATION IN DEVELOPING AN ONLINE COURSE**

Wendi Milam



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MS-102

**Cleaning Up the Junkyard:
An Exploration in Developing an On-line Class**
by
Wendi Milam

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements of the CSU Honors Program

for Honors in the degree of
Bachelor of Science
in
Secondary Education, English,
College of Education,
Columbus State University

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An Exploration in Developing an Online Course**

**Wendi Milam
Honors Thesis
Fall Semester 2000**

Gift 2-20-01

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I. Introduction

As America enters the 21st century, our systems of education must adapt to the changes in culture and technology. Our visions of the modern classroom are no longer limited to a room on a campus with a professor and a blackboard. Many classes are going fully online; some are meeting only once a semester if at all. This type of learning and teaching opens the door for many complex questions. What is the most effective style of web site to use? How should the instructor form the requirements of the class? What should the instructor use for academic evaluation of the students taking the course? This study attempts to answer these questions with the formation of an online Eighteenth-Century British culture course.

The Eighteenth Century was rich in historical and cultural importance. It saw the beginning of the novel with Samuel Richardson and an outpouring of prose writing across the disciplines. With figures such as Samuel Johnson, Christopher Wren, and Alexander Pope, British culture saw vital advances in areas of criticism, architecture, and literature. An online course will provide a strong foundation of research, exposure, and analysis, conducive to student's achieving an effective grasp of the neoclassical and romantic eras.

II. The Problem

A. Rationale

The chief goal of this study was to formulate, through research and analysis, a working, efficient online course. There are potential values that could stem from the development of this course. For example, the web site could function as a prototype for other courses or as a supplement for already existing ones. With the volume of online sites popping up daily, one must sort through what already exists and develop a complete model. Many of the present sites lack academic validity, therefore making them poor sources for scholarly use. Through my site, students have access to primary source documents, authentic visual aids, scholarly research, and fact-based commentary of the period

There are two main reasons for my focusing on the Eighteenth Century. More than any other century, a study of the 1700s must combine the aesthetics of the era with the practical and fine arts popular at the time. The literature is laden with images of Eighteenth-Century gardens, English cities, and architecture. In order to comprehend fully this visual complexity, students must be able to experience the aesthetic elements of the Eighteenth Century directly. Scanned pictures of sites visited in my trips to England give the class the advantage of seeing the elements of the literature, architecture, and culture instead of simply reading descriptions of them. The addition of links to the site also allows students to view relevant resources and draw information from them. Included in the links are guided tours of the cities and historical landmarks. With these study aids, students can have immediate access to research for their assignments.

The second reason for emphasizing the Eighteenth Century in this web site is the relative inaccessibility of the artifacts and documents pertinent to the changing of the culture. American students often view British culture as unexciting and something they will never experience themselves. By using the Internet, the students can make informed opinions about the culture and grasp the depth of British history.

B. Theoretical Framework

The framework of the investigation into online courses will be pragmatic in nature. The ultimate goal is a practical, working model of an online class. I reach this goal not only by researching the information but also by the development of the actual web site accessible to all students. The research consisted of two major phases. First, I examined off-line and online literature courses for reading material, class schedules, and syllabi. I also analyzed different links, obtained visuals for the site, and explored the optimum use of chat rooms. In addition to scholarly accuracy, user-friendliness and simple navigation has been a primary concern.

C. Statement of the Problem

The number of Eighteenth-Century resources available to American students first-hand is extremely limited. However, the student in an online class can access a wide range of information. For example, when reading Tobias Smollet's *Humphry Clinker*, students in a traditional classroom often miss the irony of the differing views of Bath, England, because of the instructor's limits. In an online class, the students see actual photographs and take virtual guided tours of Bath, resulting in a deeper analysis of Smollet's writing.

There are, however, flaws in the current Internet system that must be addressed. Though a vast resource, the Internet can be a junkyard of inaccurate facts and unresearched opinions. Many students flock to the Internet as a cafeteria of knowledge, taking sorted facts and placing them on their academic tray. Educators must filter out inaccuracies before the information causes students undue confusion. The problem does not lie in the use of the Internet but rather in the unrestricted views and opinions to which it is susceptible. This project establishes a credible resource and guide to the Eighteenth Century. Realizing the difficulty of Eighteenth-Century thought and diction, a guided Internet class grants the student a world of peripheral resources and the security of learning the facts.

D. Elements of the Study

I investigated many questions in this project. The following list is not comprehensive but expresses many of the concerns a web site such as this would lend itself.

- Does the class ever need to meet physically?
- How will the homework and reading deadlines be enforced?
- How will technical problems be handled?
- How would a chatroom be used most effectively?
- What is the best way to use links?
- What will be the primary method of teacher-student communication?
- What will the actual layout and design of the page look like?

E. Resources

This thesis allows for the exploration of many areas of research. First, I explore the evaluation of current University Internet classes and sites. By drawing from the strengths and weaknesses of these resources, I create an effective web site. Already existing in these resources is information such as the actual structure of a college class, evaluation procedures of online classes, and general assignments conducive to online learning. I gathered the reading material from anthologies and textbooks as well as syllabi from other professors' previous classes. In addition, various research sources such as Galelio provide the literary criticism and other general information. Using established methods of web site critique ensures the validity of links. An example of this type of resource is the Auburn University Library evaluation site located at <http://www.lib.auburn.edu/bi/bookmark.htm>. Finally, the technological details of the web site require many resources. Handbooks and other guidelines for online development will be invaluable tools to the set-up and running of the class.

F. Summary

Ideally, this study combines the most monumental and important Eighteenth-Century cultural issues with the growing popularity and vast resources of the Internet. The development of this course emphasizes interdisciplinary studies by incorporating architecture, culture, and history into the literature of the time-period. The course includes homework, exams, and a reading schedule but also has links, a chatroom, and email. This completed study will result in a comprehensive class that provides a pragmatic online setting.

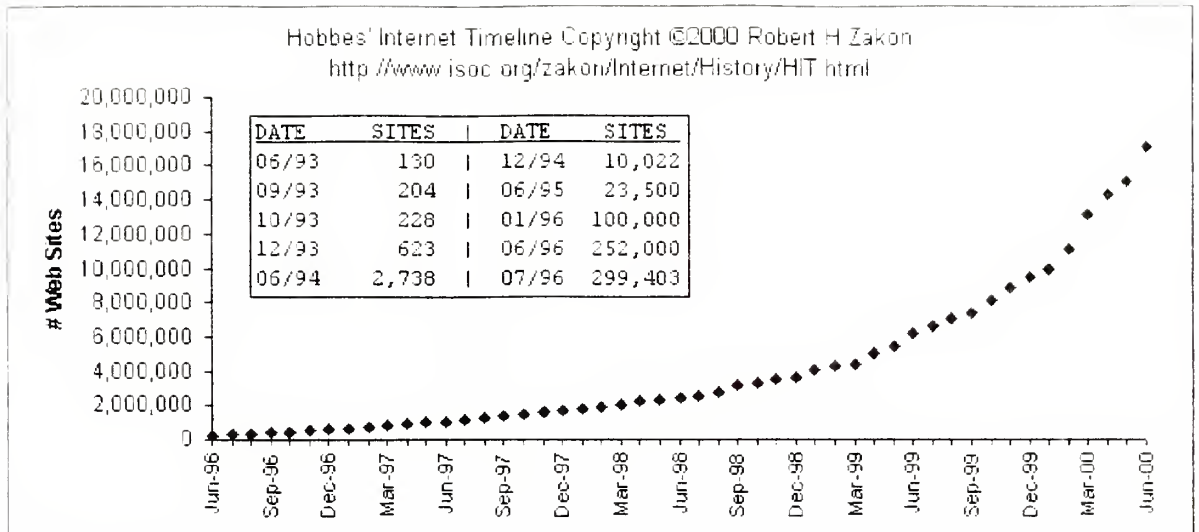
III. Review of the Literature

The past decade saw the birth of a new way to communicate. Our lives display this new form of communication in the form of email, web sites, and list serves. As with any new convenience for living, researchers decided to study the effects that the Internet would have on those who use it. One can find articles about the Internet and its many effects in any scholarly periodical on any subject. Even when I narrowed the topic down to education and the Internet, the number of articles was overwhelming in volume. Only when I narrowed the search even further to “online classes” did the amount of information become workable, and then it was clear that numerous scholars were busying themselves with the same concerns for their sites as I was struggling with for mine.

A. Historical Overview

The Internet began in an U.S. Department of Defense program called ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), established in 1969. Researchers and academics in other fields began to make use of the network, and the National Science Foundation took over to establish a network of networks capable of handling far greater traffic (“Internet”). The growth of web sites has skyrocketed since 1996 and with this growth comes the changing of attitude towards the Internet (see chart below). It is no longer seen as a form of entertainment or a place merely to check stocks. The running of whole businesses and entire schools from the Internet is the trend now with some gaining better success than their more traditional counterparts.

Internet Growth (Zakon)



B. Literature Specific to the Topic

The amount of literature specific to the topic of online classes corresponds with the growth of more general web sites on the Web. In 1997, Kaplan reports Web-based courses to be one of the more explosive growth areas on the World Wide Web. The latter part of 1996 and the beginning of 1997 saw a dramatic increase in the level of interest and activity in the Web Based Instruction. Instructors and professors are putting up content at an increasing rate (Schoech 475). Because of the experimental nature of the courses, many documented their results in the form of journal articles.

There is an abundance of literature related to the topic of online courses. Most of the research deals with the advantages of building courses online. The advantages to providing courses on the Internet are overwhelming. One of the most important advantages found in the research is that the students in the class are not responding to physical features, gender, charisma, or whatever – they are responding to ideas, and,

“that can be freeing” (Thornton 40). Without the non-verbal cues present in normal interactions, students get to know one another by their writing. There are no preconceived notions about personalities, and this may lead to more objective debates about the course content.

The findings also suggest that the Internet provides ample tools to deliver a course, especially when chat is used. The studies show that online chat rooms create an atmosphere for rich descriptive presentations of situations and solutions. Larry Mikulecky found in his study that online chats offered, “Detailed, thoughtful responses and counter responses to fellow students for further professional development” (17). Online, there are no time limits to discussion and no chance for interruption or disconnection of thought. There is a high level of self-disclosure and openness in sharing and reflecting due to the safety of drafting one’s comments away from an immediate audience (Hazari 95).

Online education is growing quickly in college and universities because it offers flexibility, accessibility, and convenience. The cost and time savings are significant – there are no travel costs and the actual time utilized by students averages about 50 percent of that of instructor-led education or training (Halasz 94). One study even projected that by the year 2002, the number of students taking courses over the Internet will triple to about 2.2 million. This figure does not even include students enrolled in online courses offered by computer training companies. Nor does it count people taking online hobbyist classes (Thornton 40).

I found only one article with a sole focus of the disadvantages of online classes. This article dealt with the lack of consistency in online college courses. The article

focuses on the congressionally mandated commission that debated the merits and the pitfalls of online learning. The commission delved into whether distance education needs to be monitored, either through legislation or by some other method, to prevent those who offer online coursework from becoming high-tech diploma mills. No recommendation to Congress resulted from the commission's discussion. An alternative to regulation suggested by one professor is a uniform system of accreditation similar to that which colleges and universities already use (Hereford 8). The final recommendation was a warning to consumers simply to be cautious and do some checking into the reputation of the online course provider.

Hereford is not the only researcher who mentions disadvantages in his writings. Other disadvantages mentioned in the literature are more personal in nature. For example, students who thrive on the social aspect of the classroom find online learning a challenge (Jana 120). Students do not get the gossip of the weekend fraternity party or the latest news about the new student organization on campus. Students also indicated in studies of online classes that professors needed to be more involved in class discussion. Professors are accustomed to traditional classroom settings where they pose a question and the class responds. The professor merely acts as an observer as the students continues the discussion on their own. According to Miller, professors need to participate actively in the discussions by posting comments more frequently or sending individual students email. Professors and students also must know the technology used in order for the class to be successful. This knowledge is the final disadvantage to online learning is the technology itself (Miller 49). Online learning requires support for the students and professors. Each will learn and spend some time with the tools and the web

site in order to be successful. Although the disadvantages are few, they must be tackled before an instructor forms a class.

The literature contained one other common thread. The debate between synchronous and asynchronous courses recurred in many articles. Synchronous classes usually require students to attend online chats and turn in homework at specific times. Asynchronous classes let the students work at their own pace. Students should realize that synchronous classes provide a framework with specific deadlines and some pressure to attend that is not present in asynchronous classes (Chizmar 249). Both classes have advantages, and the results of studies leave the decision up to the student and his or her individual personality. If a student likes to move at his or her own pace without interaction from anyone else, the asynchronous class is the one to choose. For the student who likes structure and deadlines, synchronous classes are the way to go.

C. Other Related Research

The other research related to the topic of online classrooms focuses on in the area of web-site reliability. There are many articles dealing with this topic, but they all go back to the same formula for evaluating a web site. Instructors must review the web site before placing a link on the page. The author of the web site needs to be located in the page, and the author should provide credentials that demonstrate his or her expertise. In addition, if it is a reliable site, a copyright statement should be located somewhere on the page (Weible). A telephone number and address of the institution or organization that supports the web site should be found on the site along with a clearly stated mission and established reputation. Finally, the information on how to prepare a citation for that particular site will be on a reliable Web page.

The next area of reliability is accuracy. There should also be no typographical errors on the site. Research has found that reliable sites will have verifiable facts and these facts are correctly cited (Engle). Along with the accuracy, the page will have objectivity. The question to ask in this area is what is the motivation for the host in providing the information on the Web? Advertising for profit or for a certain agenda could be a sign of non-impartiality. The main way to look for this type of problem is to look at the domain code of the site. For example, university sites will have a domain code of .edu. A government site will end with .gov. Lastly, looking at the site's currency and coverage is important in the evaluation of a web site. Is there a stated commitment to regular updating and maintenance of the information? Coverage looks at the page itself (Jacobson). The page should be complete and not still under construction. The information on the page should not have anything missing. If any of these things are missing or incomplete, the page could lack academic validity. Evaluating sites can be tricky, but the majority of the research uses this formula to evaluate web sites in order to ensure the links used on a page will be reliable and effective.

D. Critique of the Literature

Most of the literature focusing on online courses compares the advantages and disadvantages. Few writers focus on what actually works in an online course. If they do touch on this subject, the findings are very narrow in information. These studies did not offer general advice for anyone else building a course online. Some did offer pertinent advice for any online course. For example, one study offered advice on keeping the web site simple and not changing the design from year to year. It stated, "Students have grown accustomed to the first format and then had to waste valuable time learning a new

course format the next semester. They suggested that the university maintain consistency between semesters” (Miller 49). Overall, the literature was abundant but difficult to wade through to find out what information deems important and what is not. If the popularity in online courses continues to rise, the literature will more than likely become denser and the information more ambiguous than it is today.

E. Summary of Known Information

The immediate advantages and disadvantages of online courses are clear. Online courses create more student involvement, cost less money, and allow students to know each other through writing, not through physical characteristics. On the downside, these courses tend to lack consistency and can lend to cheating. For students who do not care for face-to-face interaction with other students or even their professors, online courses are ideal. Students should choose their online courses carefully. One author warned her readers to do some research first, “Ask how many hours the instructor is available. When? Is there an online chat facility so students can help each other?” (Jana 120). Online courses are not for every student, but they are the trend for the future. They will never totally replace the traditional college classrooms, but they will continue to grow as an option.

F. The Study’s Contribution

This study will be a how-to guide on building an online course. The course developed in the study will be a practical, working one. Any college professor wanting to put a course online can look at this study and find real answers for his or her questions. The lack of such answers mars most studies to date. Very few offer the real-life “nuts

and bolts` of choosing the right host for your web site or choosing the possible links.

The study will give practical advice on how to build a college level online course.

One major advantage this project has is my experience. I have taken a regular course load of classes, but I have also taken an online course. I know the frustrations of the student first-hand. I can attack the potential problems that I encountered during class as well as the problem my peers have encountered. The study will also be valuable in that it will have the web site attached so that anyone can read the study and look at the web site simultaneously. No other study that I came across during my research had this feature attached to it. Readers will not simply be reading about a study done at a University somewhere; they can look at it, for example, while reading about the rationale behind the content.

IV. Procedures

This section serves to inform the reader about the daily working of the course. The ideas behind an Eighteenth-Century culture course are broad, but this abstract narrows down the topic so that the professor can be successfully cover the material in one semester. The rationale of the content explains the class syllabus and schedule for the course. In these areas, I start the foundation for a strong online class and I build on this foundation in the following Findings section.

A. Course Outline

This course covers a wide range of cultural ideas and writings of the Eighteenth Century. The class begins with an introduction to the Eighteenth Century as a whole. During this week, the students post messages about their expectations of the class and their ideas about how the online class will be successful. These postings will serve two purposes. They will give an opportunity for the instructor to read the student's writing and they will allow the students to read each other's writings. Again, writing is the only way the students will get to know each other. The postings are a way to give first impressions to the rest of the class. During this week, the students are also encouraged to surf through the site and become familiar with the syllabus and schedule. If there are any questions, email messages sent between the professor and the student provide the answers. Email opens the line of communication so that everyone feels comfortable with the format of the class. Through email and the chat room or discussion board, there is as much, if not more, communication than in a regular class. These options are useful tools to clear up any problems or discrepancies with the class as a whole as well as pose discussion questions.

After the first introductory week, the class is devoted to studying a piece of literature each week and then researching and discussing an aspect of the Eighteenth-Century culture the next week. Discussion questions act as guides for the chat rooms. At the end of the first week, the professor assigns the first reading and posts the first discussion question. The students have until the next Tuesday to post a reply. The professor then posts some more “thoughts to ponder” for the class to reply to by Friday. The responses need to be in paragraph form and long enough to flesh out the topic thoroughly. These chat assignments, or “Instigators,” are worth 30% of the student’s grade for the semester. Discussion wraps up on Friday with the next reading assigned and the next set of questions posted.

The class will cover important elements of Eighteenth-Century culture such as art, music, architecture, gardens, and women’s roles. The cultural discussions will stem from the literature and will serve as a basis for assignments during the semester. The students write two papers on topics related to the class materials and the class discussions. On each paper, the students will have an opportunity to revise and email back to the professor for a grade. Students hand in the papers via email to the professor. The professor sends the paper back within a week and the student has a week to make revisions. The first paper is worth 5% of the student’s grade and the revision worth 10%. The second paper holds more weight with 10% for the first submission and 15% for the revision.

The final project for the class is a web presentation in which students take an element of the Eighteenth Century and, in groups, create a web-site devoted to that element. Each member of the group is responsible for a page and the professor assigns

the groups after the first week of class. The professor also assigns the topic for each group when he or she assigns the groups. The groups have the entire semester to work on the project and the presentations must be up and ready for viewing by the first day of finals for that semester. This presentation counts for 30% of the student's grade. Although it is a group project, the students receive a grade on their individual page as well as the overall quality of the project. It is up to the groups to get their pages loaded on the web and to send the email address to the professor. Students are encouraged to communicate with their groups via email.

B. Rationale of Content

The syllabus consists of nine pieces of work by Eighteenth-Century authors. This interdisciplinary course endeavors to present prominent works of the Eighteenth Century within a cultural context. Although a Literature course, the focus is on architecture, landscapes, art and music and the impact of these elements on the literature. This course is fully online with face-to-face meetings only on an "as needed basis." The objectives are to examine several important literary texts from an interdisciplinary perspective and to foster critical writing and thinking skills through the close examination of relationships that exist among texts and their contexts. All the texts for the class are online, but the students can choose to buy them if they like. The texts consist of novels, poetry, and plays.

The literature I chose is an eclectic mixture of styles, genres and authors of the Eighteenth Century. The works represent many cultural ideas for the period as well as representing male and female authors. The poetry discussion stems from the authors Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, and Ann Finch. When the class reads Pope, the

cultural discussion highlights his writings on gardens in the Eighteenth Century. Samuel Johnson's writing leads to a discussion on architecture and Finch leads to a discussion on art. I space these poets out throughout the semester so the students get a variety of genres each week. The class reads three novels chosen for their unique Eighteenth Century qualities. The first is Tobias Smollet's *Humphry Clinker*, which looks at his use of bawdy humor along with establishment of relationships among the people. The cultural discussion following the reading is entitled "The Bawdy and The Beautiful" and is a humorous look at the Eighteenth-Century. The second novel is *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole. This novel shows the deep gothic nature of the period and is a precursor to a discussion on gothic writing and culture. *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen wraps up the semester and leads to a discussion on the role women play in the Eighteenth Century.

The class also discusses one play: John Gay's *The Beggars Opera*. Music is the cultural topic that follows the reading of the play. There are valid sites on the Internet that contains music clips of this type. During the study of this play, the students listen to these clips from various sites such as www.comtemplator.com and www.engl.virginia.edu. By listening to the music from the play, the class grasps Gay's ideas better and receives a greater understanding of the culture during the time he wrote.

The content comprises a full semester and seems at first overwhelming but there are few assignments. This level of reading and assignments allows the students to focus on the literature and the discussions that follow. The content, questions for discussion, and projects give the class a fully interdisciplinary view of the century while creating many opportunities for expansion of thought.

V. Findings

The sections below are the results of the research done in choosing a host site for an online course. Also involved is how the web site actually works and how I chose the links for this particular course. The findings build a practical, working web site that is useful and successful. Through the findings, an instructor can find practical information on how to run an online class.

A. Rationale of Host Site

The instructor must research different host options for downloading the course on the Internet and choose which avenue is most appropriate for the class. The choice made by the instructor will affect how much time he or she spends on the site. This choice also determines how user-friendly the site is for the students. There are two main choices to consider when putting an online course on the Internet. The first option is to build a web site starting from scratch. Of the two options, this one is the most difficult. This option requires a computer with Netscape Composer or Microsoft FrontPage. Each of these web builders has their advantages and disadvantages. For example, FrontPage is easier to use but it is not readily available. While many office packages contain FrontPage, it is relatively expensive to buy off the shelf. Composer is free to download, but it is much harder to navigate. It does not have the user-friendly design that FrontPage has. If an instructor makes the decision to create a web site from scratch, he or she must realize that after the site initial formation, he or she is responsible for updates and changes to the site accordingly. Making changes on one of these programs is not always easy and can lead to frustration.

The second option is to put a class on a pre-existing site on the Internet. There are many of these types of web sites for instructors to use. While forming this particular online course, I researched two different sites. One site is NiceNet.com and its Internet Classroom Assistant (ICA). NiceNet and ICA are tools that bring conferencing, personal messaging, document sharing, scheduling and link/resource sharing to a variety of learning environments. It is for post-secondary use and distance-learning use. The site has many advantages and disadvantages, which I saw first hand when I used this site during an online course at Columbus State.

One advantage of the ICA is the minimal use of graphics. This feature decreases the load time of each page, making it easier to use. The site is also instructor friendly because it takes only a few minutes to set up the class and allow others to join. The best feature it has to offer is the Document Sharing area. Students and professors have the ability to publish their documents on the site using simple web-based forms. Neither the instructor nor the students need to have knowledge of HTML. The Document Sharing page is automatically integrated with the scheduling page so students are one click away from turning in their assignments online or getting feedback from their peers. There is also a feature that allows students to add links for sharing by the class. For professors who are uncomfortable with allowing the students to add any link, there is a system for turning the feature off.

The disadvantage of using NiceNet for an online class is the cumbersome nature of the page. There are so many hyperlinks and options to use that it can be overwhelming to a student first using the site. The documents are also difficult to edit and maneuver. The other disadvantage is fact that users sometimes have trouble logging on to the site.

There were many problems with this during the semester I used NiceNet. There were many times that fellow class members posted an assignment late because the site would suddenly shut down. While NiceNet as a whole is a great supplement to a regular classroom, I do not feel the site is useful for an entirely online course.

The second site I researched for web hosting is Blackboard.com. Blackboard has become the leading provider of Internet foundations to the higher education market. Students and faculty at Cornell University formed this site and it has grown to a user base of more than 3.5 million people. Much like NiceNet, Blackboard is advertising free, so neither the instructor nor the students have to look at slogans while doing their homework, and while it does have its disadvantages, they are minimal for what is needed in an online course.

Blackboard is unique in that it offers more than just a host site for the course. It offers resources for instructors to customize their site along with thousands of full-text journal articles and handpicked Web sites. There is also an area for instructors to participate in discussions about their classes and about trends in online courses along with an area for students to communicate with each other. Once a student logs on, he or she has the option to check out announcements, look at course information, staff information and course documents. He or she also can surf through assignments, post messages to the message board, and send emails. There is also a button for External Links that send the student to any links that a professor wants them to look at for that week.

The biggest advantage to Blackboard is its user-friendly nature. Instructors have their own Control Panel so that they can edit the site at any time. The Control Panel has

complete guides for using the site and separate buttons for each function. The site also allows for some creativity by the instructor. There are many different styles of buttons and backgrounds to choose from on the site. The professor customizes the course to his or her personality and this feature makes the class more interesting. These advantages make Blackboard the most practical choice for a host site. Although disadvantages will crop up through regular use, the advantages outweigh the small inconveniences that occur.

B. Description of Web Site

After logging on to the site, students will read the message for the week. There is also a feature for the students to see any past messages. The messages will serve as a reminder for the students for any upcoming due dates and to inform students of any changes in the schedule. After the students read the message, they can navigate through the web site for links to the readings or go directly to the message board to read and post messages. Throughout the duration of the course, the course information remains posted, so the students can go back to the syllabus and project descriptions at any time. Students use the communications tool to post answers to discussion questions and to send email. Blackboard has navigation buttons to guide students through whatever information they need to find. I feel that the site serves as an excellent meeting place and discussion forum for the course and creates a productive atmosphere for learning.

C. Strengths, Weaknesses, and Limitations of the Study

The strength of this project stems from the fact that I have had experience in online classes. I have taken two online courses and I understand the way students learn. The other strength of the study is the depth of the literature. With so much literature on

this topic, it was important to narrow it down, but the literature contains strong arguments that are included the study. The final strength of the study is my background in education. Although I have not taught on the college level, I have taught college-prep Advanced Placement students during my student teaching. These students reviewed the web site and discussed the advantages and disadvantages from their points-of-view. Having the students' input on the topic strengthens the development for the online course.

The one main weakness for this study is lack of information about the web sites that are already online. There are hundreds of online courses, but many of them are supplements to regular classroom study. The study needs to have more influence from other fully online courses that are successful and those that are not. Blackboard.com has a discussion room for professors that would be helpful, but not many professors have the time to sit around and pose questions about their classes. Many other studies do have the web sites to accompany them as examples but do not have explanations of class successes or abandoned ideas.

This weakness also has a connection to the limitation of the study. Most online courses that are already on the Internet have passwords. These passwords ensure that only the students enrolled in the class participate in the discussion and the activities, but this also blocks out researchers who want to study the site. Numerous times, I attempted to look at an online course only to find that I needed a password. This block on the sites is the primary limitation of the study. There are sites that do not require a password, but most of these were only syllabi of the class, not the entire course. The study would have been stronger if I could have observed an actual class chat room or message board

discussion. The block on classes is a needed security feature but limits others in their attempt to create other courses.

VI. Conclusions and Implications

The overall conclusion that I formed during this study is that academia must become comfortable with the idea of online classes. The literature highlighted in the previous sections conclusively shows that the trend in education is toward the Internet. While the possibility that all college degrees will be attainable online in the future, it does seem that the Internet will act as a major supplement to the regular classroom setting. When embarking on this study, I had the vision of building an "ideal" online course. I soon realized through research and analysis that there is no such thing as an ideal online course. The idea of a perfect web site is relative to what the professor's goals and the students' needs are. The findings in this study show a workable course for most college classes.

A. Conclusions to be Drawn

I learned numerous lessons from this study. Building an online class always seemed daunting to me. After researching the literature and researching the avenues available to college professors, I now understand that anyone can build a web site. Web sites are not limited to only those techies who know HTML language, but with this ease comes problems. The web sites professors build can be of strong academic validity, yet when a class uses links and other people's web sites as a supplement for the site, problems arise. A professor must research a site and make sure that the site is valid before placing as a link on his or her site. If an instructor does not does not research the link, students could receive inaccurate information.

The maintenance of web sites has become almost elementary because of sites such as Blackboard and NiceNet. These types of sites do the upkeep for the instructor. There is no worry about changing the site back to the editing page or figuring out what HTML language changes the site. Blackboard.com allows a user to sign on and edit his or her page without these problems.

I also learned that the trend in online courses will gain momentum in the near future. Online educations will eventually become a staple in academia. With this surge of online education, some sites are not as legitimate as others are, but as the trend grows, so will the restrictions. Those instructors who rely on traditional paper and pen ideas of education must realize this trend. They probably will not have to give up on their pedagogical theories all together, but they will have to change and adapt to fit this constantly changing technology.

B. Implications for Further Research

This study has many areas for further research. A primary avenue of study could be to study the course itself. Most of the literature found in the previous sections encompasses this idea but, as stated before, the web site accompanying the study would be an asset. A study based on student participation and student success with direct references to the actual site could help other online courses thrive in the future.

C. Recommendations

My recommendation is for universities to grow in the area of online education. This form of learning has much room for expansion and improvement, but it will not do these things by itself. It takes motivated, intelligent instructors to put their courses online and to amend the stigma that online courses have no validity. I recommend colleges to

conduct more studies and to encourage their students to add input to their already existing courses. Unlike regular classrooms, online learning takes everyone working together to maintain a high level of satisfaction and high level of instruction. Courses on the Internet can add growth to universities and bring students together although they are literally miles apart.

My final recommendation would be for professors to share their sites with those wanting to learn more about online courses. Instructors need to talk about what works and what doesn't. There is not a lot of this communication circulating right now. Most professors feel possessive of their web sites, which is understandable because of the amount of work that goes into building a successful site, but if this area is going to grow, success must be shared.

D. Summary

The Internet has undoubtedly become a way of life for many people. Email addresses are as common as telephone numbers and personal web sites are booming by the minute. Changes in education, no matter on what level, must parallel the growth of technology or it will leave the students behind. By building and maintaining online courses, educators can keep up with the world. This study has proved that online education does not have to be hard. Any professor can add his or her course to the Internet with minimal effort over and above what he or she would do to prepare a regular classroom. Through a little creativity and a lot of research, educators can clean up the junkyard that is currently growing with invalid and inaccurate information and can transform it into a thriving, successful avenue for learning.

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Appendix

Course Syllabus

18th Century British Culture
Engl 2130 – Fall Semester 2000

URL – www.blackboard.com/course/Engl2130

Instructor's Email

Overall Course Description

This fully online course covers a wide range of cultural ideas and writings of the Eighteenth Century such as art, music, architecture, gardens, and women's role. This interdisciplinary course endeavors to present prominent works of the Eighteenth Century within a cultural context. The cultural discussions will stem from the literature and will serve as a basis for assignments during the semester.

Objectives

- ✓ To examine several important Eighteenth Century literary texts from a fully interdisciplinary perspective.
- ✓ To examine the architecture, landscape design, painting, sculpture, and music as it expresses an aesthetic consonant with that of the literature of the period.
- ✓ To examine important historical, intellectual, and social developments that affected the arts of the Eighteenth Century.
- ✓ To visit sites that illustrate, reinforce, and fully "contextualize" the above objectives.
- ✓ To foster critical writing, speaking, and thinking skills through the close examination of relationships that exist among texts and their contexts.

Grading Policies

The following factors and percentages will determine your final grade:

Paper #1	-	5%
Revision	-	10%
Paper #2	-	10%
Revision	-	15%
Group Web Pres	-	30%
Instigators	-	30%
*Very active, quality contributions - A		
*Active, quality contributions - B		
*Occasionally contributes to discussion - C		
*Rarely contributes to discussion - D		
*No contribution to discussion - F		

The grading scales is as follows:

A -- 100-90
B -- 80-89
C -- 70-79
D -- 60-69
F -- 59 or below

Materials

All texts for the course are online. I have placed them in the Course Documents section of the web site. You are welcome to buy any of the text, but it is not necessary. Most of these items can be found in the library or borrowed from other students.

Below is a list of the texts that we will cover this semester. As you will see, the list of an eclectic mixture of different genres and different styles.

"Rape of the Lock" -- Alexander Pope
***Humphry Clinker* -- Tobias Smollet**
***The Castle of Otranto* -- Horace Walpole**
***Northanger Abbey* -- Jane Austen**
"The Beggar's Opera" -- John Gay
"Rasselas" and "The Vanity of Human Wishes" -- Samuel Johnson
"Nocturnal Reverie" -- Ann Finch

Papers

You are assigned two papers this semester. On each paper, you will turn in a first draft for a grade. I will grade and return back to you for revisions. Then, the revised paper will be sent back to me. Each paper turned in counts towards your final grade. (See Grading Policies) The topics for the papers will be announced next week. Please hand in the papers via the Student Drop Box in the Student Tools Section. If you have any questions, please email me.

Instigators

The class will study a piece of literature each week and then researching and discussing an aspect of Eighteenth-Century culture the following week. Discussion questions act as guides for the discussion board which is located in the student tools folder. An "Instigator" will be posed on as a thread on Friday and you will have until Tuesday to respond. I will then continue to the discussion by adding to the discussion and you must respond by Friday.

Your replies to the discussion must be in paragraph form and of high quality. Show support from the text and make sound arguments based on the literature and research. The more you participate and the better your responses, the higher your grade.

Web Project

The final project for the class is a web presentation. You have already been put into groups and those groups can be found in the student tools sections under group work. You and your partner have an assigned cultural element to research and analyze. You will then create a web site devoted entirely to that element. You have the entire semester to work on this web site but it must be ready for viewing on the first day of final exams. The presentation counts for 30% of your grade and although it is a group grade, you will receive a grade on your individual contribution to the page. It is up to the group to decide how they want to upload their pages on the web. You are encouraged to communicate via email! I will use these presentations in the future as teaching tools so be creative! Make them good!

