Visual Communications Journal

2000

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Acknowledgements
Jurors: Ervin A. Dennis, Z. A. Prust, John Hansen
Cover Design:
Cover Separations:
Page Design: Jennifer Ruisaard and Crystal Lews, students at the University of Houston
Typography, Image Retouching, and Page Makeup: Jerry Waite
Printing, bindery, and distribution: students at Ferris State University.

How We Produced the Journal
Articles were submitted in both hard-copy and electronic formats. All the photographs were submitted digitally and were edited and converted to grayscale using Adobe Photoshop. Graphs and tables were converted from Microsoft Word and Excel to the portable document file (pdf) format. Then, the pdfs were opened in Adobe Illustrator and converted to the encapsulated Post Script (eps) format. Page layout and text editing, using variations of Adobe Caslon type, were accomplished using QuarkXPress.

About the Journal
The Visual Communications Journal serves as the official journal of the International Graphic Arts Education Association, Inc., and provides a professional communicative link for educators and industry personnel associated with design, presentation, management, and reproduction of graphic forms of communication. Manuscripts submitted for publication are subject to peer review by the Association, and the views and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy or views of the IGAEA.

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This is my fourth year as editor of the Visual Communications Journal. During the years I have been editor, it has never ceased to amaze me how the professors and researchers interested in graphic communications think about similar things at the same time. For example, in this year’s Journal, both Bob Chung and Penny Osmond write about distance learning through the use of the Internet. In addition, both veteran Journal author Chris Lantz and first-time contributor Wendy Maboudian write about how to determine and influence the message delivered through visual images. I don’t know—maybe something gets in the water supply that turns graphics educators minds in the same direction!

After reading both Bob’s and Penny’s articles, I took some time to reflect on why I am so ambivalent about distance education. After all, both Penny and Bob convincingly write that distance learning is a given. In fact, Penny writes: “Those educational institutes unwilling or unable to use this technology as an alternative delivery method may not survive the next wave of change brought about by the digital age.” Wow, I’d better start running now before the fire-breathing dragon catches up to me. Seriously, I do think that both Penny and Bob are right: education at a distance through the internet is probably here to stay. But, that does not mean I have to like it.

I suppose that there are several reasons why distance education does not appeal to me. First, let me recount a recent meeting that took place in our College of Technology. A supposed “guru” of distance learning—one who sells well-regarded customized on-line learning programs to several well-known Houston-based oil companies, was invited to give our faculty a presentation of his wares. As he displayed page after page of poorly designed, boring—even goofy—text and graphics, I could not help but be reminded of the old “programmed instruction” workbooks that we were forced to make in graduate school. At the very best, those programmed books succeeded in conveying only the very lowest of Bloom’s taxonomy of instructional objectives: knowledge. Not only was the instruction low-level, but it was also boring—no, make that BORING. The guru’s on-line examples were no better—the pages presented a little bit of information followed by lots of drill-and-practice that tested for the exact same verbiage, word-for-word, as the previously-presented lesson. Where’s the synthesis? Where’s the evaluation?

Even our beloved Graphic Arts Technical Foundation’s Prepress Training Program CD is no better. It’s all the same: a tidbit of information followed by drill-and-practice that, for all practical purposes, requires students to do no more than regurgitate what they just read.

After the rather tragic meeting I described above, our resident in-house guru explained that things can be done better. Our faculty, she pointed out, do things much better and use the technology more effectively. Well, as I perused course evaluations for our distance-education courses, I read “boring..., chat rooms didn’t work..., software is unreliable..., best part of the course was the day I came to campus...I could see passion in my professor’s eyes for the first time.” Bob, in his article, confesses just about the same when he states: “students felt that they would have preferred more help and guidance in completing their lab assignments.”

Several of the faculty in our department are not jumping on the distance education bandwagon. We prefer to be able to look into our students’ eyes, to crack jokes with them, to hug them when they tell us they’re getting married, and to chew
them out when they’re not working up to our expectations. One of those reactionary professors forwarded an e-mail to me from no less than the Journal of Higher Education. It seems a bunch of professors are having less-than-acceptable results with distance education. For example: “Under-graduates enrolled in introductory psychology perform better in distance-education courses, but are generally less happy with them, according to a study by Ruth S. and William S. Maki, two psychology professors at Texas Tech University.”

Maybe the students rote-memorized content, but they lost the essence of what human interaction in a course should be. Another example: “David F. Noble says distance education is fool’s gold, and he’s eager to point out who the fools are. In speeches, essays, and countless sound bites, the professor argues that the primary motive behind the craze for online education is profit rather than pedagogy, and that the glimmer of dot-com riches is tempting some administrators to put the core values of their institutions at risk.” (Italics are mine.)

Bob admits the exact same phenomenon in his paper about distance education at RIT.

Another reason I’m skeptical is related to my own experience using distance education technologies. Yes, I, the reactionary, have used closed-circuit interactive TV technology to teach online. I’ve taught an online course twice: it’s called Graphic Communications Materials and Processes and I teach it for our own University of Houston students as well as students enrolled at Kingwood College, a community college located about 50 miles north of Houston. I do it because the curriculum at Kingwood College requires that their desktop publishing students must learn a little bit about printing (what a concept!) and they don’t have anybody who is qualified to teach what ink-on-paper is all about. So, to be of service to those students, I gave in. Now, you must understand that both the University of Houston and Kingwood College have state-of-the-art closed-circuit television classrooms manufactured and installed by V-Tel. It’s sophisticated technology that works well. The students in both locations can see me and I can see them as well. Problem is, the Kingwood students appear to be all of about five pixels on the TV monitor that is built into my teaching console. A nother problem: when I look at my “live” students, I’m actually looking away from the Kingwood students. What’s worse, when I look at my distance students on the monitor, I have to look down—away from the camera—so that I can see them. What do the distance students see? The top of my head. What about that staple of all good graphic arts teachers—samples? My live students can see, touch, and even smell the real thing. But, my distance students can only see a TV-resolution image of the real thing.

When I receive the student evaluations from both campuses, the differences are like night and day. “Distance students say remarks such as “boring, too long, hard to stay awake, couldn’t see the examples well.” The live students say “dynamic professor, great personality, likable guy,” and so on.

Noble says the most compelling reason that I do not want to jump on the distance education express is a card I received the other day from one of my students. She had been doing OK, then she bombed the midterm. During lab, I pulled her aside and asked her if she was getting frustrated or disheartened—was I asking too much from her? She said no, that she liked the class and was just a little overburdened by her work schedule. However, later that night, I pulled it out of my PowerBook bag and opened it. I started to cry. She told me that I was the only professor who ever showed her that I cared about whether she did well or not. She said I am her favorite professor. I’ll tell you, I did not cry out of pride. I cried in agony for her because others never showed her they cared. She takes most of her courses on-line.

So, all of you who wish to teach on-line, I wish you luck. I know that students, businesses, and college and university administrations are clamoring for you to do it. Penny doesn’t think that people who refuse will survive. Maybe she’s right. But, I’ll take my chances.
Educators have been looking for better ways of delivering knowledge to students for years. According to Leonard (1999), knowledge does not need to first pass through the instructor as the primary gatekeeper for learning to occur. He refers to this as an Industrial Age education model which should not be revisited in the digital era. More appropriate to the digital age is the learner-centric model in which content is manipulated by the learner rather than the instructor. The instructor acts as a coach and a program manager directing projects. This model engages students in their own learning. Educators know that learning can occur outside the classroom environment. Even for traditional classes, students do “homework” by going to the library, reading books at home, and, in the digital age, using the internet to acquire information.

Distance Education

An alternative mode of delivery that has been around for a long time is learning through distance education. Distance education can be defined as a separation of teacher and learner in space and/or time (Perraton, 1988). Distance education can be characterized in three distinct generations that have emerged with the changing technology (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Schneider (1999), describes correspondence study as the first generation of distance learning, dating back as far as 1883. Students received course materials at home and sent responses back to the instructor by mail. There was generally a time lag for communication between teacher and student. The second generation came about in the 1950s and 1960s with the use of broadcast media such as radio and television. Print materials were still used, but communication between teacher and student was improved. Interaction among students, however, was still scarce. The third generation of distance education has emerged during the last few years with the use of computers and the digital communication era. This recent change in technology has altered the way distance education serves distance learners (Schneider). Multi-directional interaction can now occur between both students and teachers as well as students and students (Schneider).

Distance Education via the World Wide Web

As popularity of the World Wide Web increases, its use as a means of delivering instruction also increases (Shih, Ingebritsen, Pleasants, Flickenger, and Brown, 1998). With more schools, businesses, and individuals obtaining computers and accessing the World Wide Web, there has been an increased demand for higher education to offer courses over the internet. Distance education has now become more popular than ever in the form of web-based instruction. “The potential of technology, combined with the availability of computer systems, has resulted in an increased use of computers for teaching and learning in education” (Henke, 1998). Colleges all over the world are competing for the distance education student separated by space and time yet easily connected through a computer and the internet. Those educational institutes unwilling or unable to use this technology as an alternative delivery method may not survive the next wave of change brought about by the digital age (Leonard, 1999). Those willing to adopt this technology have created a feeding frenzy for web-based instruction. Faculty in institutions know if they do not do it, someone else will. With this explosion of offerings there is some question as to the effectiveness and quality of the instruction being offered. There are currently no policies in place to determine the quality of web-
based instruction, yet faculty are moving ahead with this mode of delivery not knowing all of the issues involved (Meyen, et al, 1998).

Can Distance-Delivered Instruction be Effective?

Most educators are in agreement that distance education may not be the preferred method of delivery when compared to a traditional classroom setting. Human interaction is certainly easier in the face-to-face traditional classroom. It must be asked, though, can distance delivered courses be as effective? Most research done in this area has indicated that it can. Alternative methods of delivering courses provide access to students who otherwise may not be able to take the course. This is the strength of distance education.

The profile of the distance education student is rapidly changing. According to Henke (1998) advanced technologies are providing unique opportunities for educators to develop effective instruction to meet the needs of today's distance education student. Easier access to continued learning is more important than ever. Companies are encouraging employees to get more training while maintaining full-time employment. Web-based instruction is ideally suited for this type of market because of the increasing accessibility of the internet.

Willis (1999) describes the technological innovation process for distance education in three stages: birth, death, and resurrection. In the birth stage new technologies evolve with unrealistic expectations. The new tool is over-hyped. In the death stage there is a realization of what the technologies cannot do and the interest and enthusiasm for the tool quickly fades. In the resurrection stage, the technology is tested in various instructional settings and a niche is found for its particular setting.

Critics of web-based instruction thoughtfully ask several questions: Will web-based instruction progress through the same stages as other technologies in distance education? Why does web-based instruction have such a strong following? What is the big hype all about? Is it the cure-all technology for distance education or will it ultimately proceed to its death? Web technology is much different than any other technology used thus far in distance education and it has not yet reached its full potential.

Differences Between Web-Based and Other Types of Distance Learning

One component that differs with the web as a tool for delivering distance education is the interactive abilities previously not available in other distance education models. Students can complete assignments and take quizzes online. Those quizzes and assignments can be submitted and graded immediately. Students can receive almost instant feedback, something difficult for most instructors in a traditional classroom to provide.

Communication is also improved in a web-based environment. Communication with the instructor and other students is an important aspect of an educational environment. Perhaps this has been the biggest limitation of distance education. With web-based instruction, communication is still a limitation, but it is much improved as compared to previous distance education models. Through the use of electronic bulletin boards, chat rooms, and e-mail, instructors and students can communicate with one another at any time. Communication can be both synchronous as in a live chat room and asynchronous using bulletin boards and e-mail. Administrators and professors from colleges and universities are adopting web course technology packages with these built-in communication tools, so the online environment is becoming standardized.

What about the human factor of communication? Body language is a form of communication not yet available on the web. Yet, our society has already begun to introduce a human-like component into electronic environments. Frequent “chatters” have developed their own electronic expression of human emotion, such as typing “LOL” (Laugh Out Loud) when humor is felt. There is the capacity on chat lines to send animated icons to the receiver such as a hand-wave for good-bye or other gestures expressing human emotion. These electronic human-like components will become more and more a part of communication in the digital age. Some instructors will use these forms of electronic expression to bring the human component into the online teaching environment.
Evaluating Web-Based Education

According to Leonard (1999) the movement from campus-based learning to web-based distance education will be an inevitable result within and outside of academe. But will web-based instruction be as effective? What are important learning factors in web-based courses? According to Shih, et al. (1998), research is needed to understand student learning strategies and patterns of learning with different learning styles via the World Wide Web. Why are some students more motivated than others? Why are some students more successful with online instruction than others? This type of research could lead to predictors of success for students enrolling in web-based courses.

More research is also needed to determine effective ways of evaluating web-based courses. Technology is moving so rapidly in web-based education that it is like trying to hit a moving target. According to Sherry (1996), evaluation should be a continual revision process based on feedback from instructors, students, and content specialists. The technology exists to provide immediate response and analysis from students using point-and-click feedback, something other distance education models cannot provide. This technology allows teachers the opportunity to adjust their teaching styles to accommodate individual differences while the class is being conducted (Champagne, 1998). As more research is done, educators will be able to utilize this information to help plan, organize, and deliver quality web-based instruction in such a way that will improve student learning.

Conclusion

Web-based instruction is here to stay. It has not yet reached its “death” as other distance education technologies have. It has not even reached its full potential. Bandwidths are increasing as cable companies become involved in providing internet access to home users through cable lines. Access and speed will continue to increase and the quality of online courseware will continue to improve. Just as the digital age has just begun, the “birth” of web-based instruction has also just begun.

References

Penny Osmond is an Assistant Professor in the Graphic Communication department at California Polytechnic State University. She teaches courses in prepress and consumer packaging. She has taught at the post-secondary level for the past ten years in both Nevada and Idaho. Penny is currently pursuing a Ph.D. from the University of Idaho. She completed her Master’s degree at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and her undergraduate degree at Ferris State University in Michigan.
Eligibility for Publication

- Only members in good standing of the International Graphic Arts Education Association, Inc., or students of IGAEA members, may publish in the Visual Communications Journal.

Audience

- Write articles for educators, students, graduates, industrial representatives, and others interested in graphic arts, graphic communications, graphic design, commercial art, communications technology, visual communications, printing, photography, journalism, desktop publishing, drafting, telecommunications, or multi-media.

- Present implications for this audience in the article.

Types of Articles

The Visual Communications Journal accepts four levels of articles for publication:

- Edited articles are accepted or rejected by the editor. The editor makes changes to the article as necessary to improve readability and/or grammar. These articles are not submitted to a panel of jurors. The decision of the editor is final.

- Juried articles are submitted to the editor and are distributed to jurors for acceptance/rejection. Juried articles are typically reviews of the literature, state-of-the-art technical articles, and other non-empirical papers. Jurors make comments to the author, and the author makes required changes. The decision of the jurors is final.

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- Student articles are submitted by IGAEA members. These articles are accepted/rejected by the editor. These articles are not submitted to a panel of jurors. The editor's decision is final.

Manuscript Form and Style

- Prepare manuscripts according to the APA style.

- Prose must be written cleanly and correctly. Editors will make only MINOR corrections.

- Submit a maximum of ten word-processed, 8.5" × 11" pages (excluding figures, tables, illustrations, and photos).

- All articles MUST be submitted in electronic form.

- The text of the article is to be submitted electronically. The preferred method of submission is as an attachment to an e-mail sent to jwaite@uh.edu. Alternatively, articles can be submitted on a 3 1/2" disk, or on a CD-ROM. Zip or 3 1/2" disks can be either PC- or Macintosh-formatted, but CD-ROMs must be formatted for the Macintosh or be in the ISO 9660 format.

- The text must be submitted in ASCII text OR in the Microsoft Word format. Please do NOT submit text saved in any WordPerfect format. DO NOT submit documents created in page-layout programs.

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• Manuscripts for juried or refereed publication in a given year must be received by the editor no later than December 15th of the previous year. Articles for edited publication or student articles must be submitted by January 15th of the publication year.
• The manuscript packet must include digital and hard copies of all text and figures. Prepare text and artwork according to the instructions given in these guidelines.
• Be sure to include your name, mailing address, e-mail address (if applicable), and daytime phone number with your materials.

Acceptance and Publication

• If your article is accepted for publication, you will be notified by e-mail or mail.
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- After typesetting and page layout has been completed, you will receive a pdf proof. Carefully examine the proof and notify the editor immediately if any errors are found.
- The Visual Communications Journal is generally published and distributed in the fall of each year.

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