

COMMENTARY

MARCH/APRIL 2002



the technology source

Using a Web-Based Course Management Tool to Support Face-to-Face Instruction

by **Nada Dabbagh**

Web-based course management tools (Dabbagh, *in press*) such as **WebCT**, **Blackboard**, **Virtual-U**, and **Learning Space** can be used to create online learning delivery contexts ranging from Web-supported or Web-enhanced instruction, known as the *adjunct mode*, to distance learning courses, known as the *online mode* (Harasim, 1999). In the adjunct mode, Web-based instruction (WBI) complements traditional, face-to-face (F2F) classroom instruction.

Web-supported instruction offers the following advantages:

- Allows instructors to capture class activities and archive both process and product, enabling access to course content beyond the timeframe of the course;
- Expands opportunities for students to contribute to the course through the use of asynchronous communication tools;
- Encourages students to contribute to the course because it is readily accessible and amenable to all schedules;
- Encourages active learning through the use of just-in-time learning resources and online, threaded discussions;
- Facilitates more efficient **modeling** and **scaffolding** activities using student samples and expert intervention;
- Facilitates peer review and collaboration on group projects;
- Promotes learning through multiple forms of interaction distributed across space, time, and various media.

While clearly advantageous, the above instructional strategies and activities are often realized at considerable cost in terms of faculty time and effort as well as institutional resources, a situation exacerbated by the absence of guidelines for integrating WBI and F2F instruction. This article discusses the challenges facing faculty and students when interfacing between the two delivery contexts and provides general guidelines for using a Web-based course management tool to support F2F instruction.

The Challenges of Dual Delivery

Faculty members engaged in the design and development of WBI face challenges in a variety of areas: technology, logistics, organization, and delivery (Dabbagh, 2001).



INTERACT!
with this article!

These difficulties are particularly acute in the adjunct mode. According to Palloff and Pratt (1999), preparation time for F2F instruction requires 6.5-7.5 hours per week, while preparation time for online instruction requires 18-19 hours per week. Given this statistic, one can imagine the time required to prepare for both delivery contexts, which is in essence what a faculty member is doing when supporting F2F instruction with WBI.

In addition to increased preparation time, the use of two delivery contexts introduces the problem of redundancy. In many instances, instructors have distributed print syllabi and assignments in class and uploaded these same documents to the Web for students' convenience. Similarly, faculty have added online discussions to in-class discussions without considering the time and effort required of themselves and their students to make both discussion forums successful. Although duplicating certain instructional tasks may benefit students, duplicating courses serves no one's interests. To avoid redundancy, faculty need to create instructional activities that integrate both delivery contexts rather than creating separate but similar activities within each delivery context. Web-based course management tools can facilitate integration, and this article will consider ways in which one such tool, WebCT, supports F2F instruction.

WebCT facilitates the organization of course material on the Web and provides a variety of tools and features that can enhance the delivery of course content and activities. Examples include a conferencing system, online chat, student progress tracking, group project organization, student self-evaluation, grade maintenance and distribution, access control, navigation tools, auto-marked quizzes, electronic mail, automatic index generation, course calendar, student homepages, student work areas for posting content, and course content searches. Use of these features can promote collaborative learning; enhance critical thinking skills through content generation, representation, and synthesis; and give all students equal opportunity to express their views and test the viability of their ideas (Dabbagh, Bannan-Ritland, & Silc, 2001). Since the majority of Web-based course management tools have features similar to those mentioned above, the reader can apply the points of this discussion to almost any Web-based course management tool used to support F2F instruction.

Instructional Activities Integrating F2F and WBI

One instructional activity that effectively integrates both delivery contexts is requiring students to (a) engage in a classroom discussion on the course readings, (b) synthesize the key points of the discussion offline (individually or in groups), and (c) post the synthesis to the student work area in WebCT for others to download and for the instructor to evaluate. Alternatively, an online discussion can be facilitated using WebCT's conferencing system, and the synthesis can be presented in class. These integrated activities have the following instructional advantages:

- Provide the opportunity for all students to contribute through asynchronous communication tools;
- Allow students to articulate their thoughts on course content and issues at any time;
- Provide the opportunity for students to engage the course content by following discussion threads;
- Promote learning through multiple forms of interaction distributed across space, time, and various media.

Another instructional activity integrating both delivery contexts is requiring students to post drafts of papers to the student work area and then engage in peer review. The instructor can arrange students' papers in pairs on the Web and provide an evaluation rubric that students can download and use to guide the feedback they give. Students can then trade evaluations in class. By taking advantage of both delivery contexts, instructors can make the process of drafting papers and receiving feedback more effective and efficient. This integrated activity supports the following instructional advantages:

- Facilitates peer feedback and collaboration;
- Promotes learning through multiple forms of interaction distributed across space, time, and various media;
- Provides instructors with the ability to capture class activities and archive process and product.

A third activity involves Web-based, group discussion forums when group work and group presentations are part of the course requirements. These forums save time: students do not have to arrange meetings outside class, and the instructor keeps F2F class time for lectures. Groups can discuss their work in these forums, share documents and resources, and prepare for their class presentations or group project. At the same time, groups can receive feedback from the instructor through these forums, and, more importantly, the instructor can monitor the group process and group dynamics. This integrated activity supports the following instructional advantages:

- Facilitates more efficient modeling and scaffolding activities;
- Facilitates peer feedback and collaboration on group projects;
- Provides instructors with the ability to capture class activities and archive process and product.

Student Response to Dual Delivery

Student response to courses using WBI to support F2F instruction underscore both the challenges and the advantages noted above. One topic that students address repeatedly is time. As one student put it:

Compared to a traditional F2F classroom environment where one attends a three-hour class, goes home and has a week to prepare for the next class, WebCT forces you to log on daily to check on things and participate in ongoing online discussions. You end up putting much more time in between classes.

Though this comment is not necessarily negative, it does suggest that students need time to get accustomed to a Web-based component. Guidelines can give students a sense of how to distribute their time between in-class and online activities. Without clear guidelines, students can become frustrated over having to attend class, prepare class assignments, and participate in online activities without any assistance in attending to the demands of interfacing between both delivery contexts.

Another student's perspective, however, indicates that interfacing between F2F instruction and WBI may save time in the long run:

Using WebCT does save time in the long run in the classroom in that everyone has a chance to put forth his/her point of view. In the traditional classroom we always seem to run out of time for discussing topics. I also think it saves time in that it gives students more time to process, question, and get feedback as opposed to just being in a classroom setting.

The above statement testifies to the instructional advantages of supplementing F2F instruction with online activities, especially asynchronous communication tools. Yet, these same tools pose technological challenges to students unfamiliar with posting to threaded discussion forums or uploading files to individual or group work areas. Here is what one student had to say about these issues:

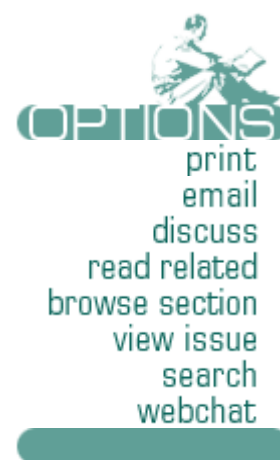
The process of threading took some teaching time, how to respond to particular messages without creating new strands in the discussion. Navigating through a threaded discussion is also very difficult. Additionally, we are required to post files in another section, and there is some difficulty in accomplishing that.

In order to address technological challenges, faculty must seek instructional support on the use of the tool and take time to model procedures for students. In the case of threaded discussions, faculty can provide practice forums to facilitate student learning of how to follow threaded discussions, reply to threads, and compose new threads.

General Guidelines

The following general guidelines for using a Web-based course management tool to support F2F instruction are based on the above discussion:

1. *Integrate rather than duplicate*: When planning instructional activities, careful consideration must be given to ensure that these activities integrate both delivery contexts rather than duplicate activities in each.
2. *Do not underestimate the learning curve*: The Web-based course management tool could be new to both faculty and students. Plan and provide adequate instruction on using the Web-based tool for yourself and your students.
3. *Find the right balance*: Interfacing between F2F and online instruction requires knowledge and time. Provide explicit guidelines on how to make this process effective and efficient. For example, give students an estimate or range of how much online time is required on a daily basis to participate in associated activities.
4. *Avoid conducting a second course*: Supporting F2F instruction with a Web-based component can double the workload for faculty and significantly increase the time required of students. Keep in mind that the Web-based component is intended to support the course by facilitating content delivery and enhancing existing activities.



References

Dabbagh, N. (2001). The challenges of interfacing between face-to-face and online

instruction. *TechTrends*, 44(6), 37-42.

Dabbagh, N. (in press). Web-based course management tools. In *Educational technology, an encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO. Retrieved March 1, 2002, from <http://mason.gmu.edu/~ndabbagh/wblg/WBCMT-encyclopedia%20entry.htm>

Dabbagh, N., Bannan-Ritland, B., & Silc, K. (2001). Pedagogy and Web-based course authoring tools: Issues and implications. In B. H. Khan (Ed.), *Web-based training* (pp. 343-354). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.

Harasim, L. (1999). A framework for online learning: The virtual-u. *Computer*, 32(3), 44-49.

Palloff, R. M. & Pratt, K. (1999). *Building learning communities in cyberspace: Effective strategies for the online classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

COPYRIGHT AND CITATION INFORMATION FOR THIS ARTICLE

This article may be reproduced and distributed for educational purposes if the following attribution is made under the title and author's name:

Note: This article was originally published in *The Technology Source* (<http://ts.mivu.org/>) as: Nada Dabbagh "Using a Web-Based Course Management Tool to Support Face-to-Face Instruction." *The Technology Source*, March/April 2002. Available online at <http://ts.mivu.org/default.asp?show=article&id=938>. The article is reprinted here with permission of the publisher.

VISION	ASSESSMENT	FACULTY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT	TOOLS
CORPORATE U	COMMENTARY	CASE STUDIES	VIRTUAL U
LETTERS	VIRTUAL HIGH SCHOOL	SPOTLIGHT SITE	
ABOUT	BOARD	CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS	FORUMS
		SEARCH	ARCHIVES



A PUBLICATION OF
THE MICHIGAN VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

Unless otherwise noted, all material within the *Technology Source* may be distributed freely for educational purposes. If you do redistribute any of this material, it must retain this copyright notice and you must use appropriate citation including the URL. Also, we would appreciate your sending [James L. Morrison](#) a note as to how you are using it. HTML and design by [Noel Fiser](#), ©2002 [Michigan Virtual University](#). *This article has been viewed 3437 times since July 9, 2001. Information last modified February 25, 2002 8:24 PM.*