

DISTANCE education

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Report

Texas Initiative Enables Every College in State to Establish Online Courses

By Rebecca Kopf

It started as an ambitious goal to meet an immediate need: develop a training program to allow all colleges in Texas the ability to teach and manage online courses.

Five years later the “Internet Teachers at Every College” program has put more than 1,800 teachers into online classrooms and enabled every Texas college to have their own faculty to originate online courses.

“It has had amazing growth,” said Dr. Mickey Slimp, Dean of Learning Resources at Tyler Junior College, and project director for the statewide program. “More than 1,100 course sections are occurring in Texas because of this program.”

Internet Teachers at Every College was built on the premise that online courses can — and should — be more like classroom instruction, says Slimp. This notion helped captured the enthusiasm of the colleges and instructors who were previously intimidated by the prospect of putting courses online.

Three online courses form the path

The program consists of the following three progressive online courses, designed to prepare instructors at every level to develop their own Internet

savvy and further establish their Internet teaching skills:

- **Preparing to Teach Online**

Preparing to Teach Online, the preparatory course, is for the teacher that has “no to little Internet knowledge,” says Slimp. The class provides an introduction to Internet resources, file management and website design; the basics needed to develop the confidence and skills to conduct courses

The program has allowed teachers to experience the student’s online learning perspective

online.

While individuals keep to a shared schedule during the course, each student is expected to log in twice a week on his or her own time to interact with other course participants via chat lines, and to follow through on assignments.

“We also pair people with individuals from their own college, a ‘buddy

system’ of sorts,” said Slimp. This helps individualize the program more and provide the person-to-person connection which is often missing in online classes.

- **Putting your course on the internet**

The next step in the three-phased approach is for faculty who already possess basic Internet and web page design skills, and are ready for instruction at a higher level. As a pre-requisite to the course, participants must have completed the first course or be able to send completed web pages used in instruction to the course instructor.

In this course, individuals gain experience with course management techniques, including instructional design, assessment development, and online module outline and syllabus creation.

- **Advanced internet teaching methods**

The third course is designed for instructors that have already been teaching online for a year or have a significant level of web development and computer science teaching experience. The advanced program develops higher-level skills, including streaming media, online presentations, and integrating such elements into course instruction.

Each course is the equivalent of 32 hours of online instruction and originates from a variety of Texas community colleges. In all three courses, individuals are expected to participate in all classroom discussions and be willing to share their material with others, said Slimp.

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DISTANCE education

Report

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Vice President: Jody Glynn Patrick

Publisher: William Haight
(billh@magnapubs.com)

Managing Editor: Christopher Hill
(chill@magnapubs.com)

Associate Publisher - Marketing:
David Burns
(dburns@magnapubs.com)

Graphics/Production: Debra Lovelien

Customer Service: Mark Beyer

Editorial Advisory Board: Stephen Donahue, M.S., G-Learner Corp.; Stephen Ehmann, Vice President, TLT Group; Donald P. Ely, Associate Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology; Jeffrey Feldberg, Chairman, CEO, Emбанet Corporation; Gordon Freedman, Director, Strategies & Alliances, Prometheus; Christine Geith, Director, Program and Business Development, MSU Global, Michigan State University; Chere Gibson, Ph.D., Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Darcy W. Hardy, Ph.D., Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs/Director, UT Telecampus, The University of Texas System; Joseph Holland, Chair, Department of Hospitality & Tourism, University of Wisconsin-Stout; Marge Jeffers, WTCN Distance Education Network, Fox Valley Technical College; Marina Stock McIssac, Educational Media and Computers, Arizona State University; Karen L. Murphy, Ed.D., Associate Professor, Texas A&M University; Don Olcott, Jr., Ed.D., Executive Director, Division of Extended Programs, Western Oregon University; Christine Olgren, Ph.D., Chair, Distance Teaching and Learning Conference, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Rick Shearer, MA, MBA, Instructional Designer, World Campus, Pennsylvania State University; Karen Vignare, Director of Business Strategy & Development, Rochester Institute of Technology; Linda L. Wolcott, Ph.D., Department of Instructional Technology, Utah State University.

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Stanford University Releases Free Online Course Management System

Stanford University recently announced the open source release of its course management system, CourseWork. CourseWork is a simple, scalable system for faculty to develop and present on-line course materials. With the open source release, the code is available to any school to install and customize for instructional web sites.

Developed by Stanford's Academic Computing Group, CourseWork has been officially used by the campus since January, 2002.

CourseWork enables faculty to create course home pages, send e-mail announcements, develop syllabi and

plans to start a new technology-based theological school in the Fort Worth-Dallas area, scheduled to open in fall 2004.

Plans were discussed by Baptist leaders in June at a meeting in Arlington, Texas. The school would be named for B.H. Carroll, founder of Southwestern seminary.

The goal, they said, is to create a new model of seminary education where traditional Baptist theology would be taught that would be affordable to ministry students and church members.

The announcement comes in a context of contention between conservatives and moderates in the denomination. Recent controversy has centered around the conservative purge of

Some see the new online seminary as an attempt to create a moderate alternative within the denomination.

schedules, distribute and evaluate assignments, organize course materials, and manage grades.

CourseWork allows institutions to integrate their course web sites with their campus registrar's database, student information system, library systems, and other campus-specific infrastructure systems. The CourseWork interface can also be modified to match the look of an institution's existing web sites, unrestricted by the constraints of proprietary systems.

CourseWork materials and information may be accessed at <http://coursework.stanford.edu/>.

Southern Baptists Plan Online Seminary

A group of prominent Southern Baptist leaders, including former leaders of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, have announced

Southwestern seminary — including the firing of seminary president Russell Dilday. With conservatives now in control of all Southern Baptist seminaries, some see the new online seminary as an attempt to create a moderate alternative within the denomination.

A headquarters for professors and administrators would be established between Fort Worth and Dallas, but otherwise buildings will be kept at a minimum.

Training would include lectures, group discussions and face-to-face contact with qualified mentors in a network of "teaching churches."

Meetings are scheduled with accreditation agencies.

Dilday said of the new online seminary, that "it would help theology students who can't pick up and move hundreds of miles." ●

Enrollments in Internet Courses at Illinois Colleges and Universities, fall 1999 to spring 2003

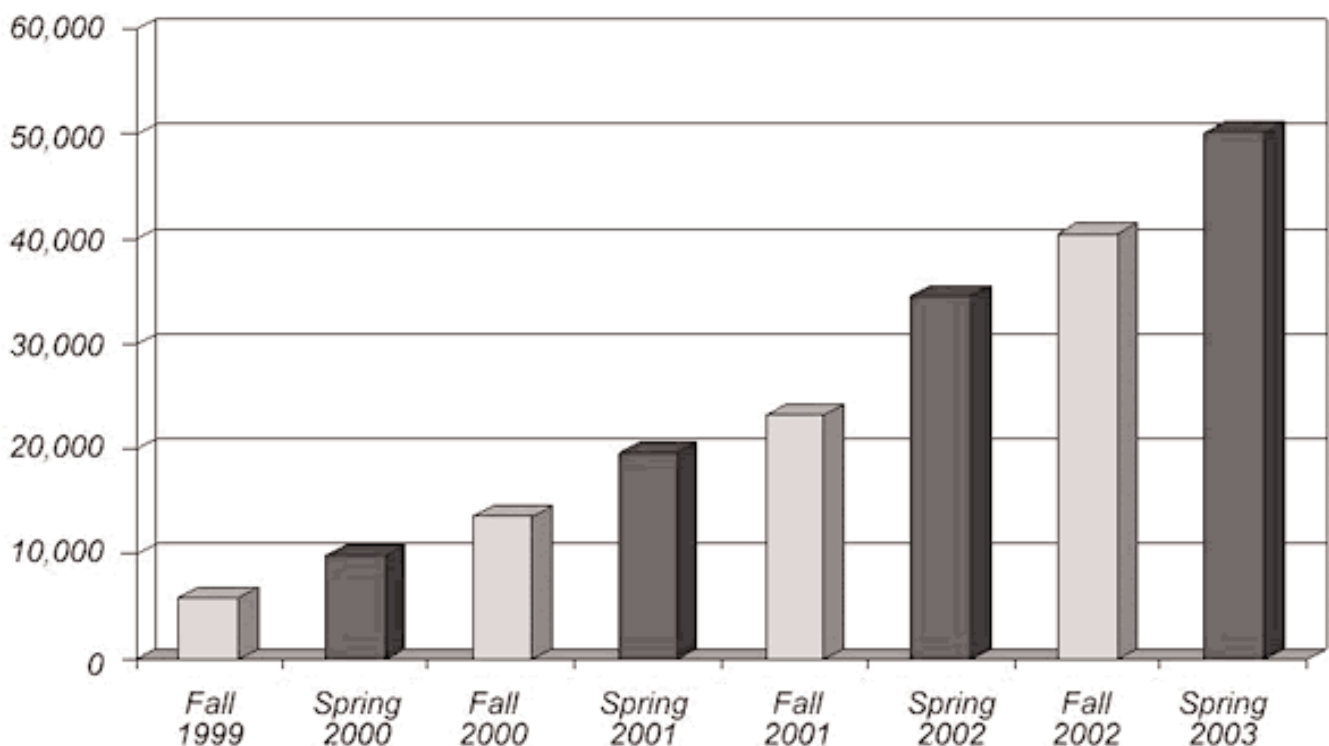
The graph shows the online course enrollments reported by Illinois colleges and universities for the fall and spring/winter terms since fall 1999. Online enrollments at Illinois colleges and universities increased rapidly each semester since fall, 1999, when the Illinois Virtual Campus

began collecting distance education enrollment data.

Illinois colleges and universities reported offering 3,941 online class sections that generated 50,125 student course enrollments during the spring/winter 2003 term. This is an increase of 9,575 course enrollments

(24 percent) from the 40,550 online enrollments reported for the previous term (fall 2002) and an increase of 15,576 course enrollments (45 percent) from the previous year's 34,549 course enrollments (spring/winter 2002).

(See story on page 6.) ●



Texas Initiative...from page 1

Results prove program's worth

In addition to the strong response to date from the community colleges, several universities, private colleges, and public agencies have also utilized Internet Teachers at Every College, says Slimp.

He adds that the impact on the institutions has been phenomenal: more than 20,000 students are being served each semester via online courses developed through instructors and colleges which have participated in the program.

While the number of colleges and students impacted is substantial, there are additional benefits from the program, according to Slimp. The program has allowed online teachers to experience the student's online learning perspective, and given them the unique pedagogical experience of online instruction. Both of these aspects make online instructors more effective.

Slimp recommended that other states or organizations seeking to develop a program similar to Internet Teachers at Every College should first identify a funding source. (The Texas-based program has received funding

through the Carl Perkins Act as well as through local foundation donations.) Then, get the word out through partnerships, presentations at conferences and seminars and networking through state teachers' events.

While Slimp's program currently serves only two-year colleges, there are some aspirations to brand it outside of Texas. However, the program's main focus is growing the current course and instructor opportunities in the state.

For further information, contact Mickey Slimp at msli@tjc.edu. ●

Miami-Dade Produces “Home-grown” Learning Objects for Massive ESL Program

By Steven Donahue

Miami-Dade College (M-DC) administers the largest English as a Second Language (ESL) program in the United States, serving over 12,000 non-native English learners each year. In an ambitious e-learning undertaking, M-DC is in the process of putting 540 hours of ESL writing curriculum into self-contained language learning objects (LOs). The entire project is being funded through a three-year, \$500,000 grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE).

Learning object factory

Because writing is a critical skill in today's job market, the initial phase of M-DC's grant involves creating an “e-Writing” program. The overall goal is to create a six-level, content-rich, interactive, online writing lab that consists of a repository of over 500 hours of web-deliverable ESL learning objects.

Judith Garcia, chair of ESL and foreign languages at the Kendall Campus, defines the LOs as a one-hour, self-contained, re-useable item of on-line instruction that teaches one discreet learning objective. An LO does not link out to other LOs, nor does it depend on other LOs for instructional purposes. It pre-tests student knowledge of the target concept, and at the end of the lesson measures learning through a post-test. Between those two tests, it presents the students with up to three chunks of instruction, each reinforced with self-tests and activities. The material is designed to appeal to all learning styles.

The complete eWriting project will include over 250 hours of ESL writing instruction and an additional 250 hours of instruction on WebCT, basic computer skills, word processing, Internet skills, web links to reinforce the learning objectives in each LO, and study

skills.

Michaela Tomova, e-Writing grant manager, explains that, “With the help of curriculum design experts at the college, the writing teams outline the table of contents, and define the functional objectives and writing skills for each LO. These teams then develop the lessons and evaluate them against a

M-DC is in the process of putting 540 hours of ESL writing curriculum into self-contained language learning objects.

checklist to make sure that all components are included. The LO is then piloted with students who complete a survey that measures level of difficulty, interest, and length. When the writers get the feedback, they edit and revise the LOs.

“That's stage one of the materials development process - the content. The LOs are then submitted for on-line design and piloting.”

The Learning Clock

The writing objectives are the same as in the traditional classroom and reflect ESL techniques tried and refined at the college over the last thirty years. LOs are designed to deliver the same writing competencies typically taught in the classroom during a 45-hour semester, such as grammar, sentence skills, and paragraph development.

The unique design of the LOs, however, resembles a clock face.

- At “1:00,” students get a pre-test

(recorded in WebCT, the entry point).

- At “2:00,” the first step of a three-pronged lesson begins.
- Each lesson portion or step ends with a comprehension quiz, followed by an instruction break before the next step.
- By “11:00,” students finish all three learning steps for the level, and take a review.
- A final post-test parallels the content probed by the pretest. Students then exit and can take an assessment test before proceeding on to the next LO.

Commitment key

Garcia stresses that institutional commitment is key to the project. “To produce a product of this scope could not be done without strong administrative support from the college,” she asserts. “Through the support of College Training and Development (CT&D) staff, all the latest technologies available to the college become immediately accessible for the project staff and writers.”

Tools

To create the particularly robust content that this type of instruction demands – and to accommodate the broadest possible range of learning styles — the college has adopted an unusually wide variety of tools to create its “homegrown” LOs. Tools employed range from the simple sound recorder available on every desktop, to Impatica, which reduces the size of a PowerPoint up to 90 percent for easy web delivery, to sophisticated authoring tools, such as BlueGLAS. (See chart on facing page.)



Software tools used for the Miami-Dade ESL project, and the learning styles they address

Tool	Description	Related learning styles
Wimba http://www.wimba.com	Oral threaded discussions, voice e-mail and more	auditory/verbal
Impatica http://www.impatica.com	Compresses PowerPoint for streaming over web	visual/non-verbal, auditory/verbal tactile/kinesthetic
Impatica on Cue http://www.impatica.com	PowerPoint with instructor video dialog	all learning styles
Camtasia http://www.camtasia.com	Produces videos from anything displayed on desktop	auditory/verbal, visual/non verbal, visual/verbal
Hot Potatoes http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/halfbaked/	Multiple choice questions	tactile/kinesthetic
Quandry	Branching logic instructional	visual/non verbal tactile/kinesthetic
BlueGLAS http://www.blueglas.com	Development tool for creating online content for language instruction	all learning styles
ToolBook	Software construction program to create object-oriented programs	all learning styles
FrontPage	Webpage and website development tool	all learning styles
Dreamweaver	Web page and website development tool	all learning styles
WebCT	Learning management software for web delivered courses	all learning styles
iGLAS	Learning management software for web delivered language content	all learning styles
Snagit	A screen capture utility that copies anything on screen	visual/non-verbal
Animation Factory	Graphics and animation: royalty-free (with subscription and credits)	visual/non-verbal
Partners in Rhyme	Royalty free (with subscription) music loops and sound effects	auditory/verbal

New Study Highlights Virtual University Success Factors

Almost every state is now participating in the creation of distance learning initiatives. A symposium of 13 state consortiums (see website below) generated a paper about how they are constructed and how successful they are. The study summarized below analyzes the reasons for their success (or not) and suggests a model for statewide initiatives in the future.

One symposium goal was to understand the similarities and differences among the organizations, referred to as Virtual University Consortiums (VUCs). Almost without exception, each VUC had adopted a collaborative model. None of the consortia are degree granting, and none offer their own courses; rather, they list courses of the participating campuses and act primarily as referral services.

Why the collaborative model? Theoretically, the idea was to leverage existing educational resources to serve each state's needs. The University of Phoenix and others challenged this model with stand-alone programs, inspiring study of whether there is a better way to deal with state education needs. However, most concluded that stand-alone virtual universities (vs. collaborations) would be too expensive financially and politically. Existing institutions jealously guard their ability to grant degrees and did not relish the idea of establishing a rival, independent, degree-granting, resource-devouring institution. Thus, the collaborative model was born.

All too frequently, the paper continues, VUCs began by asking how existing institutions could collaborate, as if collaboration is an end in itself, rather than beginning with a programming goal and determining if collaboration is the best way to achieve it. It turns out that only a few models of collaborative programming actually materialized, and these were incredibly time-consuming to develop.

Many VUCs amount to no more

than a statewide listing of available courses in a database, a portal to individual institutions' distance learning offerings. Others more aggressively attempted to set up online universities, centralizing course management and student services functions. These have not been particularly successful. Collaborative program development is especially difficult because individual courses are still so strongly identified with individual faculty, departments, and institutions. Suspicions always arise as to whether another institution's standards are up to snuff.

More successful VUCs are designing courses centrally to be taught by multiple instructors, dramatically reducing the costs of development.

Four success factors identified

Some VUCs have been comprised only of state schools, but some have included private colleges. Regardless, the most successful progress for meeting statewide goals results from the following:

1. Keep the focus on increasing access for new students, rather than on supporting institutions. The VUC mission statement should include language about serving underserved communities, offering nontraditional career professionals workplace development, and offering degrees not offered by existing institutions. Often VUCs do not know who their students are, unable to tease out how many new students are enrolled or how many are currently enrolled tra-

ditional students who happen to be taking a piece of their study online.

- 2. Find out what students and states need, and create a mechanism to respond** (rather than merely aggregating what institutions have to offer). The more demand driven a VUC is, the more likely it is to be self-supporting, this paper says. Any campus can offer a course, but it should provide evidence of demand and a business plan to recover costs. Instead, most VUCs simply reflect the specific interests of individual faculty or perhaps departments. They are supply driven. They may even be designed to use underused faculty without having any connection to degree programs or certifications. Many VUCs initiate a distance learning program by simply adapting an existing traditional program.
- 3. Leave the resolution of higher education policy issues to state policy makers** (rather than trying to solve them in the VUC). Residency requirements, articulation agreements, tuition, grading inconsistencies, intellectual property, and faculty load – these questions cannot be resolved by throwing them into the VUC. Example: statewide grading inconsistencies cannot be successfully handed to a VUC to align single-handedly. Few such policy issues have been or should be resolved by VUCs. Without pressure from a governing or coordinating board to resolve such issues, the process of working through cross-institutional committees will bog down under the weight of resistance to change.
- 4. Create a business plan for self-supporting sustainability** (rather than relying on state allocations). Seed

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New Study...from page 6

money and venture capital are required in the form of start-up grants and operating subsidies, but the amount of such funding has no relation to the funding needed to continue. Generosity or stinginess in seed money does not necessarily have an impact on meeting ongoing student interests. However, initiating and operating a VUC with a sound business model, using for-profit management techniques, will.

What turns out to be the most important success factor is a combination of a clear focus on serving new students (those previously unable to attend existing campuses), an incentive system to gain campus participation, and a business plan to support ongoing operations. New programs should begin only when there is evidence that revenue to support the program will immediately begin to flow.

The highest cost is faculty, but with few exceptions the faculty role is conceived as repetitive and labor-intensive. Each course requires re-inventing the wheel, and assumes that the faculty member is responsible for all interactions with students. In fact, the emerging paradigm is becoming the small campus seminar, not the more cost-effective scalable large course. Campus leaders are rightly concerned that such IT applications are increasing instructional costs, rather than controlling or reducing them. More successful VUCs are designing courses centrally to be taught by multiple instructors, dramatically reducing the costs of development. Such an approach ensures consistency and ongoing availability of courses.

New orientation: State needs

The new issue is not to encourage institutions to develop distance learning programs, but to design them to answer state needs. The key is to provide a competitive funding mechanism driven

by consumer needs, stressing collaboration only when needed. It is no longer necessary to be centralized. VUCs that deliver programs that students need have the best chance of meeting statewide goals – even if a new VUC model may only attempt to answer a small piece of the statewide educational need. It may require charging double or even triple in-state tuition rates.

New model: Statewide Educational Ventures (SEVs)

A new model is based on institutional autonomy rather than collaboration, and emphasizes programs rather than courses, especially those terminating with a degree or certification, designed and evaluated by the faculty of the offering institution (or a consortium) with clear accountability. An SEV would:

- 1. Identify unmet demand for postsecondary learning.** In-state institutions would have the right of first refusal to submit an RFP to meet that need. If none responds, the SEV is free to look outside the state.
- 2. Contract with providers to meet that demand.** The RFP process would include a significant component that trains existing institutions as to what is possible and required. An RFP would have to include planning statements about admissions and transfers, assessment, cost-effectiveness, enrollment flexibility (with a goal of meeting the need for just-in-time training), marketing, student services (especially via the web), and technology.
- 3. Assess program effectiveness through the institution and its faculty.**
- 4. Provide the seed money critical to success.** This marks a major difference between the SEV and those

programs that only identify educational needs. The goal is to identify a need and find a provider to meet the need. The SEV would not fund the entire development and delivery of new educational initiatives. Instead, the venture capital would be used to defray the initial costs of creating a business plan, structuring the offering, and identifying private sector support.

5. Structure less labor-intensive, more cost-effective learning venues. A key component of this is to redesign entire courses, not just individual classes.

6. Identify partners that might benefit from and share in supporting programs, including the business community whose workers may be retrained at less expense, localities seeking to retain a trained labor force, and granting agencies.

Each venture can be quite different in size and scope, but keeping the size of the SEV administration to a minimum is critical to its success. A staff as small as a president and a couple of administrators can act as a portal and basic call center to refer students to designated contacts at colleges and universities offering online programs. The program-offering institution would carry out the student services of application, acceptance, registration, etc.

“Expanding Access to Learning: The Role of Virtual Universities” by Carol A. Twigg, 2003 Center for Academic Transformation. The entire symposium report can be found at www.center.rpi.edu/PewSym/Mono6.pdf. ●

Online Music Collaboration Overcomes Small School Limits

by Kathleen Rinear

If you are on the faculty of a small music department in a small, private college, you may have somewhat limited resources. How do you prepare your music majors for the highly competitive world of graduate school admissions?

In a word, “collaboration,” says Patricia Gray, technical programs consultant to the Orpheus Alliance, a music collaborative of the Associated Colleges of the South (ACS — sixteen small, private liberal arts colleges) that “uses technologies to build programs that small colleges have trouble building themselves.”

Established in 1991, ACS serves as a “regional technology center” in association with the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education (NITLE). NITLE consists of approximately 40 small liberal arts schools sheltered under one umbrella. Gray says that NITLE puts great emphasis on the use of technology in the teaching and promotion of the arts.

Music education plus technology

Four or five years ago, ACS began looking at music applications using emerging technologies. The first effort was a workshop on music notation software with Flash animation. The second workshop featured how to create streaming videos of musical performances.

Then, based on this initial work, ACS received a grant from the Andrew Mellon Foundation through NITLE. The grant money allowed ACS to establish the “Orpheus Alliance.”

The mission of the Orpheus Alliance is “to create successful music collaborations for our faculty and staff,” according to the Alliance’s website. This mission is accomplished through a combination of distance education technology (such as data exchange, web casting, streaming video and audio, and online discussion forums) and traditional face-to-face methods (such as concerts, competitions and workshops).

The focus is multifaceted, Gray says, encompassing not only classroom applications of new technologies, but also providing a performance vehicle for student and faculty composers, who often get “the short end of the stick” in small schools that have limited resources to support them.

Typical liberal arts colleges that make up ACS have music departments with only five or six faculty members

“Music departments are uniquely suited for collaborative projects.”

and twenty to thirty majors. Nonetheless, these schools harbor a number of serious composers. For these composers, “networking is everything” Gray says. One means of networking is provided through streaming video and audio of student performances, which allows students and faculty of various colleges to see and hear each other’s work.

Varieties of networking

One of the most important means of networking is the Alliance’s annual new music festival, which includes both concerts and workshops. To prepare for this year’s festival, students and faculty were encouraged to visit the Alliance’s website, where there were several learning objects that participants could review before attending the festival. The objects use Flash animation to provide audio and visual reproduction of the work to be studied.

Modern classical music is challenging to understand and to perform — “Students need to live with this music a long time,” Gray notes. To that end, the website provides background information on the piece of music, including

interviews with the performers, the history of the piece, and technical issues such as instrumentation.

Online training at a music festival

The Alliance’s approach provides students with another benefit. Gray says that many music majors will end up teaching. The exposure they are receiving to multi-media presentation of their musical and scholarly work will be valuable to them when they enter the classroom. For example students who come to the festival’s workshops with papers already written can receive help in converting the paper to a multi-media format.

At the festival, students and faculty can also attend workshops on using technology. This year’s festival offered sessions in sound editing, creating learning objects, and marketing yourself using the Internet, to name a few.

A supplement to face-to-face cooperation

While the Alliance continues to offer these concepts for classroom application, Gray says that the current focus of the Alliance is on collaboration between students, between students and faculty, and between faculty members.

To that end, the Orpheus Alliance plans to expand its offerings beyond the summer festival and new composition contest to include ensemble performances during the school year. The ensembles will consist of performers from the various member schools and will utilize both face-to-face work, as well as streaming video and audio.

“Music departments are uniquely suited for collaborative projects,” Gray asserts.

Team-building, Gray says, is essential. At ACS, this is still achieved through face-to-face collaboration. But ACS promotes collaboration made possible through technology. “It enriches the lives of faculty and students,” she says. ●