A group here is examining how SEO (search engine optimization) can be used to enhance Florida Tech University Online’s rankings on the results display pages on the web. A couple of key drivers in improving rankings are the variety and amount of content available at a website and the reliability of the source from which the content is being pulled. Edu websites, as sources, have great credibility to search engines such as Google and Yahoo.

We control the amount and type of content available on our websites. The group that met here on campus talked with full-time faculty to brainstorm about what content would be appropriate for our website and of interest to prospective and current students. Some of these topics are career information, hot topics in the industry and available certifications in the field.

Florida Tech is interested in having faculty serve as reviewers for this content. If you are interested in being a reviewer, please notify your academic department and Ms. Stevie Pursell, administrative and marketing assistant (spursell@fit.edu). Please include the subject areas that you would be interested in reviewing. The deadline for indication of your interest is Friday, Dec. 2.

Managing the Holiday Schedule

As much as we look forward to them, holidays tend to disrupt the usual flow of the online course schedule. Students and faculty alike question how to handle a holiday that would close most classrooms.

Florida Tech online courses recognize the following national holidays: Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year’s Day. As the Faculty Guidelines state, courses are not conducted on these days. However, faculty and students are expected to meet the deadlines of the courses regardless of their own travel schedules and family gatherings. Take note of when holidays occur each term, and remind your students to plan ahead so they can meet their course obligations.

As for administrative concerns, ensure that you submit your final Fall 2 course grades in PAWS by noon, Dec. 20. Please take note that Florida Tech administrative offices are closed during the semester break (Dec. 23 to Jan. 3, 2012).

Florida Tech wins ‘Best Education Website’ award

Florida Tech has earned the title “2011 Best Education Website,” from the Web Marketing Association, a national review group. The site was created by the marketing and communications office to spark student recruitment. One judge commented, “I thought this was an innovative site. Also effective in providing useful information (Financial aid, campus, etc.) and the ability to apply online. Innovation on this site is superior.” The judges also noted their appreciation of the skateboard tour. Honored marketing and communications staffers are Josh Culver, Anna Drazich, Jennifer Neuhard, Nancy Grossbart, Andy McIlwraith and Erin Fox. The team’s effort earned high marks for design, innovation, content, technology, interactivity, copywriting and ease of use. The site can be seen at www.fit.edu/decision-dashboard.
Using Case Studies in your Online Courses

Andy K. Stanfield, Director, Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE)

In the last issue, we discussed how to design case studies for use in your classes. In this column, we are going to discuss how to use case studies once they have been developed. We need to keep in mind that the case study method works best with more advanced students: students in most introductory classes do not have the background knowledge to properly analyze and interpret a case.

There are five main events that need to occur when using case studies with your online courses. First, the students need to read and think about the case. If this is going to be a synchronous session, then give them enough time to read the materials before the session starts. The second step is to give instructions to the students and provide guidance. Ask the students exploratory and contextual questions to let them see there is not one correct answer. Additionally, you might want to provide students with questions to guide their thinking. This depends upon the students’ levels because advanced or graduate students may not need questions or as much guidance. There are other questions you might want to ask. Do they have all the information that they will need or will they need supplemental materials? If supplemental materials are required, can they use any sources or specific ones you share or approve?

The third step is to have the students analyze the case. Determine if the students will be analyzing the case study individually or in groups. Group analysis can be best. Guided questions can be helpful. The fourth step is the presentation of findings. Will there be a regular discussion board, or will they use the debate format or try the case as a trial? Will their findings be submitted in a formal report or in PowerPoint or some other type of media? The final step is discussion and debriefing. This is where much learning occurs. During debriefing, don’t just focus on the content and results but also on the thought processes behind the decisions. Use open-ended questions to guide the students’ reflections. Afterward, you might want to look for ways to create new cases or expand the case based upon the students’ insights or participation.

Remember that case studies are a great way to engage students and bridge theory and practice. The more you use this format, the more you will find what works for your particular course, based upon your discipline, your philosophy and what works for you.

Graduation

Brian Ehrlich—Director of Online Program Administration

Commencement is one of the days that educators relish. We get to share in the accomplishments and achievement of a life-lasting goal with our students. Twice a year, Florida Tech celebrates this day with our students, once in December and again in May. We invite students from our different areas to join together in celebration, including graduates from our online, military base and campus programs.

As the online programs continue to grow, we see an increasing number of online students coming on campus to share this day. For the upcoming ceremony on Dec. 17, 2011, we have well over 200 online students from both undergraduate and graduate programs who have requested to attend the ceremony. The Office of Online Learning will host a joint breakfast reception with the Academic Departments before the students attend commencement. This allows every student, no matter where they are from, to meet each other, share their stories, and maybe even talk about their favorite professor.

As we look into the future, there are changes on the horizon. We are continuing to grow, and it has become clear that we need to invite more people to the party. To that end, the spring commencement to be held on May 6, 2012, will have two ceremonies. The undergraduate students will have their commencement ceremony in the morning, and the graduate students will have theirs in the afternoon. This change will allow even more friends and family to attend.

The Florida Tech family of alumni is over 50,000 strong and growing all the time. It’s great that all of us get to be part of helping our students reach their potential and achieve their goals.
Faculty News

Eliza Dopira
Florida Tech’s own Eliza Dopira starred with the Space Coast Symphony’s production of The Music Man.

The style of the concert was like a live radio show (think “A Prairie Home Companion”), starring Stephen Mumbert as Professor Harold Hill and Eliza Dopira as Marian Paroo.

“...what we think we know that keeps us from learning.”
—Claude Bernard

If you have news about your research and presentations, please submit them to Gil Conradis at conradis@fit.edu.

Articles of Interest

“A Lack Of Rigor Leaves Students ‘Adrift’ In College”
The gist of this story is that with the increased educational availability, there has generally been a corresponding decrease in the demands on students to challenge themselves to higher levels of understanding and application. I got from this article that the more demanding the curriculum, the more value added to the student and society. This seems fairly obvious at first thought, however maybe there is a question of degree being presented here. After all, one measure of our success academically are the accomplishments of our students.


“Toward a Rational Response to Plagiarism”
This article questions if academics are policing rather educating students in writing skills even to the point where use of originality and plagiarism detection is sending the wrong message—assuming guilt (Plagiarism) rather than assuming a desire to learn. This author also points out the time and energy required to check, might be better applied, for instance, improving submissions.

http://chronicle.com/article/Toward-a-Rational-Response-to/128611/

These are certainly points for discussion among faculty and staff. I will post these as topics of discussion in the Faculty Lounge for further comment and conversation. I expect there to be many spirited observations.

Faculty Presence

During a recent webinar entitled “Learning from failure,” the presenter stressed the importance of early faculty engagement/presence in classes as ways to help students to be successful. We here at Florida Tech University Online believe in the importance of faculty presence. That is one of the reasons we have the performance standard for faculty to login in at least once every 36 hours. Twenty-four hours or less is really the ideal but we understand that this is not always possible.

We want to congratulate the faculty who achieved the performance standard during the summer 2 2011 session. We had over 70% of the faculty achieve this standard, up from the 60% who attained the performance standard in summer 1 2011. We want to see this figure reach 100%. The break down by academic unit is as follows: College of Business 67%; College of Psychology and Liberal Arts 75%; College of Engineering 72%; and College of Science 75%. If you are interested to know if you met the performance standard, please contact me at Bonhomme@fit.edu.

We also want to publish the names of those who met the performance standard. If you are willing to allow us to publish your name in the faculty newsletter, let us know.

Chris Frongillo
Dr. J. Christopher Frongillo, Assistant Professor, Humanities and Communication and Academic Program Chair, Liberal Arts, College of Psychology and Liberal Arts online, authored the article “Giving the Tragic Boot to the Comic Sock: The Recoding of Christopher Marlowe’s Tamburlaine from Low to High Culture,” published in Popular Entertainment Studies, September 2011.

Eliza Healy Dopira, Adjunct Professor of Music Director Choral and String Studies

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The Faculty In-Box

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."
—John F. Kennedy

VA Corner

I wanted to introduce myself to you for those who I have not had the pleasure to meet. My name is Andrea Morley, and I am the military and veterans affairs coordinator for Florida Tech University Online. I proudly certify all military and veterans using their VA benefits. Currently I have certified a little over 300 recipients for the FALL 2 (201186) term. The numbers keep growing as you might have already noticed, with the increase of service members and veterans in your virtual classrooms. These students are very important to us and we should all try to accommodate them to the best of our ability here at Florida Tech University Online.

I wanted to give a link to the Vet Center, an important site in case questions arise that you as the faculty could assist them with. With the increase of soldiers coming home, we need to open the lines of communication. The Vet Center is an excellent resource to push them toward if any indicators are brought to your attention. Or if you wish you could add this link to your introduction in class just to put it out there. Below is information on what this site provides:
http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/

Vet Center History

The Vet Center Program was established by Congress in 1979 out of the recognition that a significant number of Vietnam era vets were still experiencing readjustment problems. Vet Centers are community based and part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In April 1991, in response to the Persian Gulf War, Congress extended the eligibility to veterans who served during other periods of armed hostilities after the Vietnam era. Those other periods are identified as Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, the Persian Gulf, Somalia and Kosovo/Bosnia. In October 1996, Congress extended the eligibility to include WWII and Korean combat veterans. The goal of the Vet Center program is to provide a broad range of counseling, outreach and referral services to eligible veterans in order to help them make a satisfying post-war readjustment to civilian life. On April 1, 2003, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs extended eligibility for Vet Center services to veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and, on June 25, 2003, Vet Center eligibility was extended to veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and subsequent operations within the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). The family members of all veterans listed above are eligible for Vet Center services as well. On August 5, 2003, VA Secretary Anthony J. Principi authorized Vet Centers to furnish bereavement counseling services to surviving parents, spouses, children and siblings of service members who die of any cause while on active duty, to include federally activated Reserve and National Guard personnel.

We understand, and most of all, we care.

Thank you again for all your hard work. I know that the 8 week terms go by fast, but you can always make a big difference in a short time.

Here is my contact information. Please feel free to reach out to me for assistance.

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Certifying Official—Office of Online Learning
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