Dean’s Comments

On March 3, Florida Tech University Online celebrated its fourth anniversary of our launch. It’s been a most interesting ride—challenging and rewarding, for sure. We are continuing to launch new programs. New programs in supply chain management and international business are being launched. Several others are in the preparation stage.

We could not have had this success without the faculty. Several faculty (38 to be precise) have been with us since the launch of the program. According to our records, 218 have taught 8 or more terms. 97 have taught 4 to 7 terms. This demonstrates the loyalty that our faculty have to Florida Tech and to our students.

I encourage you to continue to let us know what we can do to help improve the program for you and your students. Continue to provide feedback to us through the faculty surveys conducted each term. Continue to provide suggestions on improvements to the ELP (elearning platform, our new name for the LMS) to Gil Conradis, our ELP coordinator and trainer. Continue to communicate with your administrators and staff in your academic unit.

Thanks again for all you do to provide a quality learning experience to our students.
The Faculty In-Box

“Education should consist of a series of enchantments, each raising the individual to a higher level of awareness, understanding and kinship with all living things.”—Author Unknown

Rhetorical Analyses of Websites
Andy K. Stanfield, Director, Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE)

Introduction
Sometimes returning students possess weak writing skills that are combined with a lack of critical thinking abilities. Both of these skills take time to develop. However, one way to combat both problems is to have your students choose and analyze a website related to a topic they are studying. It doesn’t matter if the website is good or bad: the only purpose is to help students learn to critically analyze web content and to help them improve their writing skills. The students then write about the website’s perceived strengths and weaknesses, its navigational layout, its purpose, and its quality of content among other goals. This model is good because it combines both skills in one assignment.

Assignment
First, either give your students a topic or let them choose their own. Next, each student uses the Internet to find a website of their choice on the topic. At this point, the students are required to analyze the website for credibility, content, usefulness, navigation and purpose. You may want to add more criteria for them to use as guidelines in their analysis.

Benefits
There are many benefits to having your students conduct web analyses. First, this type of assignment makes students more selective consumers of information from the web. Second, this assignment also gives students more control because they get to pick the website. Finally, student writing can be positively affected with this type of assignment through the use of rhetorical concepts and time on task spent writing.

Disadvantages
There is one major disadvantage to this type of assignment: few students or instructors have experience with this type of writing. Thus, instructors might want to analyze and write a few rhetorical analyses of their own before attempting this type of assignment. Finally, some type of examples or modeling will be helpful to online students the first time they perform the assignment.

Conclusion
Having students rhetorically analyze websites fulfills many instructional goals: learning the content, thinking critically, understanding navigation and layouts, understanding rhetorical goals of web content (sell, persuade, gain votes, etc.) and helping their writing skills. In conclusion, this is a great assignment for students who need to improve both writing and critical thinking.

TOPIC | DESCRIPTION | TIMES | LOCATION
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Plagiarism & Turnitin | Learn about ways to prevent plagiarism, including multiple drafts or iterations of a paper and the use of Turnitin. | June 7, 2012 | Adobe Connect session
Engaging Students Online | This session will focus on tips and strategies for engaging students in online learning environments. | June 14, 2012 | Adobe Connect session
The Art of the Discussion Forum | This session will focus on creating engaging and dynamic discussion forums for online environments. | June 21, 2012 | Adobe Connect session
Learning Styles or Preferences | This session will focus on the various learning styles based on Gardner’s work with multiple intelligences. | June 28, 2012 | Adobe Connect session
Educational Ethics | Ethics for educators, including accessibility, professionalism, diversity, conflicts of interest and more. | July 5, 2012 | Adobe Connect session
Instructional Strategies | Strategies for providing instruction, ranging from mnemonics to chunking and frames. | July 12, 2012 | Adobe Connect session
Generational Learning Styles | Learn about the characteristics and needs of different generations. | July 19, 2012 | Adobe Connect session

For more information on these workshops, call ext. 8531 or email Andy Stanfield at astanfield@fit.edu.
Hospitality in the Online Classroom
Brooke Estabrook-Fishinghawk, Adjunct Faculty

When I first began teaching online (1993), I would always strive to have equivalent learning experiences in the classroom regardless of my delivery method. At a conference nearly a decade ago, I was introduced to the concept of hospitality in the online classroom. I approach each course with the goal of being a facilitator for student success. Every term is a clean slate. I make no assumptions about what my students will be like and continually have an elusive goal of having 100% of my students successfully complete the course. FIT students have predominantly the same desires as I read through each of their bios; they want to be successful to provide better opportunities for their families.

An underlying theme is to make students feel welcome in my courses. I begin each course with a welcome email; this is followed by a reply sent to each student regarding the posted bio with at least one individualized statement. I provide a screencast informing students how I would approach the course if I were them. I also have a screencast to show them how to navigate MYITLab. I am in the course daily and even twice a day during the first week. I keep a tally chart to make sure each student is being responded to in the course. I try to use their name in each correspondence and then end each response reminding them to ask questions if they have them.

Understanding students’ frustrations in the first week of the course seems to go a long way. It does not mean I have changed the standards, but the students are more willing to express frustration when I am calm, friendly and understanding. Sometimes I am the only person in these students’ lives who believes they can succeed in the classroom. I also aim to tie each of the discussion threads and skills covered to the workplace. Adult learners need to know how this will apply to their future skill set, which helps to motivate students. Additionally, in the discussion, I try to promote higher-level thinking, which will help the students master the material. Enhanced discussion prompts provide students the mechanism to promote critical thinking for success in their future courses and the workplace.

According to Al-Fadhli and Khalfan (2009), online instruction is a better environment to develop critical thinking than F2F courses. Their findings show that online students demonstrate greater improvement in critical thinking skills over students in traditional instruction. Technology continues to improve, but it is not a panacea for learning. Instead, other factors must include student commitment, instructor feedback and solid content. The environment furthers the learning and suggests an increase in course content mastery.

Articles of Interest
Grades and Motivation
Are students in a direct “paper chase” or is the importance of education the utilization of tools, concepts, creative thinking, enthusiasm for the discovered connections? After all, isn’t the educational value based on results. That is, what the student does after spending the time and effort, that encourages higher achievement. On this site is a series of examinations of student motivations and the interaction with grades.

Florida Tech is pursuing challenging programs of study. If higher motivation equals higher achievement, and less emphasis on grades, but, what kinds of motivators succeed? Grades are certainly motivators, but are they essential ones?
What do you think?
http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/ motivation/gradesgpa

Evolution of the New Student Experience

Julie B. Shankle, Associate Director, Online Program Administration

Here we are at the fourth anniversary of our undergraduate online programs. As we launched the programs in 2008, we had many of the required processes in place. With experience and perspective (and feedback), we noticed the process for new students could use some tweaking. After over a year of planning, review and development, we have rolled out various pieces of an improved “on-boarding” process for our new students. Summer 1 will complete the transition.

As prospective students sign up for their programs, they now receive a Florida Tech planner, customized with registration due dates and helpful information. All students are asked to complete an online orientation called Panther Pass (see right column). This orientation prepares the students to start off on the right track in their first term at Florida Tech. These two processes are in place for all new students—graduate and undergraduate.

We have had a one-credit introductory course for new undergraduates since the programs launched. This course, ASC1006 Mastering eLearning, is equivalent to the University Experience course main campus students complete. Required for graduation, Mastering eLearning covers Florida Tech resources including the library and student handbook, life and study skills such as time management, and learning to navigate the eLearning platform.

We have added some assignments in Mastering eLearning for Summer 1 and have enhanced others. We have added interactions for the students to utilize on proofreading, and the SQ5R study method. Our plagiarism lesson will be enhanced with a new interaction as well.

As we continue to enhance our online programs, Florida Tech is committed to the best use of online resources to remain “High Tech with a Human Touch.”

Panther Pass

All Florida Tech students use Panther Pass, the online orientation system, as they enter the university. Main campus, Extended Studies and Florida Tech University Online each have customized modules developed specifically for their student populations.

Our student services staff work with the new online students to encourage and support them through the various modules of orientation. The staff are updated daily on student progress. The modules, listed below, are intended to help the students track and complete necessary tasks before starting class, and make them aware of terms and skills they will use as they begin the online program.

- Welcome
- Update Personal Info/PAWS
- Your email account
- Academic Honesty
- Application Document Tracker
- Financial Aid
- Computer Terms
- Computer Skills
- Computer Requirements
- Browser check
- Navigating the LMS
- Panther ID Card
- Importance of Books
- Study Space
- Study Schedule
- Do’s and Don’ts in Online Learning
Faculty News

Marilyn Carter
Professor Marilyn Carter spoke on “East Meets West in Culture” with the students at Chiang Mai University in Northern Thailand on Nov. 9. Her international creative calligraphy group, “Art of Ink in America” was invited through calligrapher, Dr. Ronald Nakasone, to present a group exhibition in Chiang Mai. Dr. Nakasone made the arrangements through the chair of their art department, Dean Potjaman Punjinda. Ms. Carter was then asked to redo her talk when this international exhibit moved from Thailand to a gallery in the Shelter Rock Art Gallery, Manhasset, N.Y., opening Feb. 26. Professor Carter spoke on the similarities found between being taught how to write Chinese characters in the East with the Palmer Method of learning good penmanship in the West. Creatively, in the West was accomplished by artistic monks and nuns in the Medieval period illuminating handwritten manuscripts, whereas in the East the creative change came in our current era by the re-arrangement of Chinese character brush strokes making an aesthetic balanced form.

Skype Brings Interviews with Individuals into the Brevard Classroom
As technology advances, so do opportunities available to teachers to liven up their classroom discussions. Tapping into the free video conference software, teacher Dylan Emerick-Brown, a Career Pathways Counselor in Rockledge, has arranged interviews with individuals his students might not otherwise be exposed to. Thanks to the online literary magazine he edits, Splash of Red, Emerick-Brown contacts and interviews writers — and then asks if they would be willing to spend time with his students.

Florida Tech Online Fraternity Participates in Books for Soldiers
The first-ever fraternity for online students, Florida Institute of Technology’s Theta Omega Gamma (TOG) service fraternity, has adopted Books for Soldiers (www.booksforsoldiers.com) as a service project. The co-ed organization recently shipped its initial package to soldier Rocky Botner, stationed in Afghanistan. Members of TOG are required to contribute at least two hours of community service per month as part of their membership.

“We felt it was a very worthwhile project. The consensus among members was that we would do this on either a group or individual basis until ‘they all come home,’ especially our troops in Afghanistan,” said faculty adviser Vicky Knerly. TOG member and webmaster Stephanie Kagley, a criminal justice major located in Birmingham, Ala., is coordinating the outreach effort. TOG members are currently in six states and overseas.

Members responded to Botner’s request for comedy, science fiction, action and romantic movies by sending a package of 12 DVDs, cards and letters from members, blank note cards and stamps. Additionally, the package included a drawing from TOG President Tamika Ahfeld’s seven-year-old son Joey. Theta Omega Gamma was founded in January 2010 specifically for online students. Its intent is not just to be a networking and social club, but an organization in which members regularly join in service projects. “Because online students are all over the world, the organization’s projects have the potential for a global reach,” said Knerly.

For more information about TOG, email thetaomegagams@gmail.com.

If you have news about your research and presentations, please submit them to Gil Conradis at conradis@fit.edu.
Council of College and Military Educators 2012 Annual Symposium

Andrea Renee Morley, Military and Veterans Affairs Coordinator, Certifying Official—Office of Online Learning

On Feb. 15, Brian Ehrlich, director of online program administration, and I presented at the CCME (Council of College and Military Educators) 2012 annual symposium. Our presentation covered Electronic Records Possibilities. Below is a description of our presentation:

Technology frequently paves the way to new tools. Using these tools effectively determines if the new ideas make life better for the people involved. When Florida Tech examined the manual processes that are involved in trying to keep paper files, it’s hard not to think there has to be a better way. Florida Tech is now using the tools within our secure shared database and Xtender document system to create electronic files for each military and veteran student. This system has eliminated paper waste, misplaced documents, and has produced perfect audits. It also allows staff to access forms at the same time from different locations. It has moved from being an idea to being a proven solution.

Also during CCME, Brian Ehrlich and I packed care packages to send to deployed service members. It was all part of the 2012 CCME Cares project. All in all, 1,000 bags were packed and a monetary donation of approximately $14,000 was given to Operation Gratitude, www.operationgratitude.com. You never know you might have a student in your class who will receive one of these packages.

eLearning Platform Adjustments

Gil Conradis, eLearning Platform Coordinator and Trainer

On Monday, March 5, four changes were made to the eLearning Platform (ELP) 3.2.9 release functionality.

1. The first thing is that the LMS will now be referred to as the “eLearning Platform” (ELP).

2. When you log in to the eLearning Platform (ELP) courses you are teaching, regardless of program, will be displayed, you will no longer have to switch between programs as you may have had to do in the past.

3. Students will now be marked as withdrawn rather than simply disappearing from your roster. Those shown as withdrawn on the roster are seen by professors only. The student who has withdrawn will be marked in red as “Withdrawn.” While logged in as a student, users will not see withdrawn students.

4. Posts in the Discussion Board can now be marked back to unread as a method of managing posts that you may wish to quickly identify and refer back to. The email will be reported as read, but a small flag will identify it as changed to unread. Click on “Mark as Unread” button to mark a Discussion Board post as unread.

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