

Chapter 4.6

Internet Citizenship: Course Design and Delivery Using ICT

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INTRODUCTION

This article presents the design of an undergraduate course that focused on how the Internet¹ may be used as a medium for discovering information about citizenship, in general, and for advocating and practicing citizenly conduct, in particular. The goal is to share with the reader a set of guidelines to specify course objectives and requirements, to select relevant materials, to engage students in self-directed learning, and to appreciate the process of working with the students over a semester. Applications of information and communication technology (ICT) were integrated into the course management and delivery, and they also formed the basis of the topic for the course content.

The title of the course was “The Voice of an Engaged Citizen: Vote, Advocate, Volunteer, Respond, Act...How?” This course was one of 14 first-year seminars² (FYS) intended to be taken by high-achieving freshman at the University of Maryland–Baltimore County (UMBC).³ These seminars, which are limited to 20 students, are intended to create an active learning environment. The students’ development of effective oral and written communication skills and the mastery of techniques to seek and evaluate information are the cornerstones of these seminars. This particular course was intended to explore the ways that ICT could foster the practice of citizenship. The course also had the objective of teaching students to use the Internet to search for reputable evidence in support of the Internet’s use in such an application area.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

First, the students taking part in this course should use the Internet to learn what citizenship is. From there, they can look for ways that the Internet can be used to practice citizenship. Practicing citizenship via the Internet may include, but is not limited to, finding and evaluating Web sites that provide information about important issues and that provide the opportunity to communicate with our representatives. Likewise, students are also encouraged (1) to look for research that has been done to see if and how citizens are using the Internet to participate in democracy, (2) to seek information about political activist groups on the Internet, and (3) to determine how effective those groups are in attracting members and influencing decision making. Students should then attempt to find out if the Internet has information about character development and the learning of moral values.

The overall objectives for the coursework are formulated as the class progresses. This way, the class will allow itself the flexibility to pursue an avenue it finds interesting. The format of the work should include group discussions and seeking out information on the Internet. During some of the classes, students present their findings for discussion, ensuring that the students learn how to prepare and deliver PowerPoint presentations and how to write evaluative essays of journal articles and other material.

COURSE MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY

A Blackboard site was available in support of this course where material, such as readings and Web site links, were posted for the class to review. It should be noted that the “syllabus” of this course evolved in the form of an “Assignments Log” posted on the Blackboard site that specified the requirements for each particular class. This log

evolved because there was flexibility in the pacing and type of assignments required from the students; typically, the due dates for written essays and presentations were posted two weeks in advance.

However, the most important use of Blackboard was its function as a forum for students to provide immediate written comments on class events, whether led by the instructor or by the students themselves. Furthermore, Blackboard was also used for students to post their PowerPoint presentations, their review essays of journal articles, and their evaluations of Web sites so they could be reviewed by the instructor as well as other members of the class.

COURSE CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

This particular seminar course met twice each week for 75 minutes over a 14-week semester. Class time was devoted to the following types of activities.

First, the instructor (HHE) posted on Blackboard a collection of journal articles (Evans & Yen, 2005; Froomkin, 2002; Thomas & Streib, 2005), related reports (Best & Wade, 2005; Clift, 2002; Emurian, 2004; Noveck, 2004; Vance, 2000), and surveys (Horriggan, 2004). This material was used for reading and discussion in class. The preferred style for engaging this material was found to be a type of “round robin” where each student would lead and read several paragraphs, later passing that role to another student. The student leader and reader was free to make comments and ask questions as he or she engaged the material, and other class members were encouraged to present their own questions and comments. At the conclusion of a reading and discussion, each student posted his or her own thoughts on the reading on a designated Blackboard discussion forum. Students were encouraged to give an evaluation of the material read and discussed in relationship to the overall objectives of the course. These class

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