

Chapter 14

Beyond the Horizon: Teaching an Online Humanities Course

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of this chapter is to explain the extensive step-by-step process involved in creating and teaching an online university humanities course based upon the primary educational philosophy called “constructivism.” Instead of using a distance learning or correspondence model, the University of Maryland University College’s learning approach focuses on “construction and engagement” or intensive interaction among students and professors. This social engagement (professor to student and student to student) requires more time, energy, and thought on the part of students and faculty members than face-to-face teaching. As a case study in teaching the History of the American West online within an intensive eight-week course length, this chapter provides concrete information about the course’s required concepts, skills, goals and objectives, project assignments, conference participation requirements for threaded discussions, assessment methods, and grading rubrics. The case study also addresses the current challenges facing the implementation of the course and offers recommendations. Although some of the details specifically relate to teaching a history course, they are applicable to any humanities course.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The University of Maryland University College (UMUC), founded in 1947, is one of eleven accredited, degree-granting institutions of the University System of Maryland. A global institution headquartered in Adelphi, Maryland, UMUC conducts online, face-to-face, and hybrid classes throughout the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, the United States, Europe and Asia. UMUC began online instruction in the early 1990s. The university offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate degree and certificate programs. It serves over 90,000 students who represent a diverse range of racial, ethnic and social-economic backgrounds with differing educational and work-place experiences.

The student population comprises adults who work full or part-time. The university gives face to face and online academic, financial, and internship guidance to all students. For over sixty-six years, UMUC has dedicated itself to teaching military service members and veterans. It is one of the largest providers of education for the military. Military and veterans' advisors help students maximize their education benefits, fund their education, and matriculate through the university. A military tuition rate applies to active-duty service members and their spouses, those in the Selected Reserves, members of National Guard units, and some dependent children of active-duty service members. Others included in the military rate comprise commissioned Corps members of the uniformed services, their spouses, and some dependent children. In addition, qualified veterans who attended secondary school in Maryland are eligible for the Maryland resident tuition rate. Members of the United States Armed Forces, American employees of the federal government and their family members who reside overseas in a UMUC-contracted area may enroll in courses through the Europe or Asia divisions. (UMUC, 2013, *About UMUC*; UMUC, 2013, *UMUC and the Military*)

In order for students to graduate with a major in History, they must successfully complete 120 credits of coursework, including 33 credits for the major. At least 17 credits in the major must be earned in upper-level courses, numbered 300 or above (UMUC, 2013, *History*). The course described in this case study, the History of the American West, is a 300 level course. Faculty members report directly to a course chair and the head of the program who in turn reports to the division head and various deans. The History Program falls under the administration of the Undergraduate School's Liberal Arts and Communication division, one of seven academic divisions. Faculty members possess notable academic credentials; a sizeable number maintain full or part-time positions, for example, as high-ranking lawyers, scientists, civil servants, public history professionals, and business executives. The worldwide faculty meets online daily within and across disciplines to discuss substantive issues relating to teaching and scholarship. (UMUC, 2013, *About UMUC*)

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