

# Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace



**SPSE 6900**

Dr. Dorothy Valcarcel Craig  
MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

## Defining Computer-Mediated Instruction



### We begin by examining Distance Education

- Refers to the provision of learning resources to remote learners
- May involve distance teaching as well as distance learning

### Defining Elements

- Separation of teacher and learner during instruction
- Use of educational media to unite teacher, learner, and content material
- Provision of multiple communication modes
- Concept of "Learner in Charge"
- Interaction Within the Community
- A "Network" of Learners

### KEY Element – Active Learning and Interaction

- Interaction between teacher and student
- Interaction between students themselves
- Interactions within the larger group
- Interactions among members of small groups

### Who Learns Best in the Online Environment? – A Brief Look at the Learner

#### Students who are:

- Lifelong Learners—inquisitive and seeking knowledge
  - Motivated—those with high expectations for themselves
  - Organized
  - Goal Oriented
  - Task Oriented
  - “Interactors” – Those who like to interact and discuss on a higher level
- What type of teacher is most effective in the online environment?**

**The teacher who is:**

- Goal oriented
- Strong in curriculum design
- Highly organized
- Has high expectations for students
- Creative
- A lifelong learner
- Flexible, flexible, flexible

**New Approaches...Things to Consider**

**•Access to Technology**

- Students must have available hardware and software
- Students must find the “comfort zone”

**•Guidelines and Procedures**

- Teachers must make sure all guidelines and procedures for successfully completing the course are clear and well-defined
- Use of *technical writing* (plain and simple) helps

**•Participation & Collaboration**

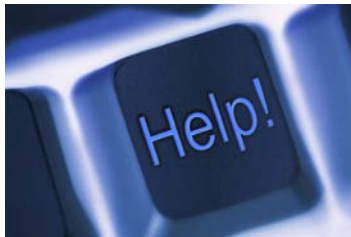
- Active participation is a MUST; Collaboration is critical

**•Transformative Learning**

- Students must be given opportunities to *learn about learning* in the online environment

**•Evaluation**

- Multiple assessment tools are key



### **The Community Emerges when...**

- Students interact and carry on internal dialog in order to formulate responses
- Students feel that the environment is a secure place where their thoughts are acknowledged and welcome
- Student ability to create a mental picture of their peers and teacher is nurtured
- Students create a sense of presence through communication

### **The Community Grows and Develops when...**

- There is a clearly defined purpose
- The online environment becomes a gathering place for exchanging ideas
- It is facilitated by a defined leader (teacher)
- A clear code of conduct is outlined
- The course content is presented in a relevant and interesting manner for all learners



### **The Importance of Community**

*Due to the absence of face-to-face contact, the online learning environment must become a place where students have a sense of autonomy, initiative, and creativity while being able to question, think critically and engage in dialog and discourse.*

### **Signs that the Community has Formed**

- Active interaction involving course content and personal communication
- Evidence of collaborative learning
- Socially constructive meaning evidences through questioning and inquiry
- Sharing
- Expressions of support and encouragement among all members

### **Forms of Electronic Communication**

- Email
- Public Electronic Forums
- Bulletin Board Systems
- Electronic Network Chats
- Pay-For-Use Services
- Face-to-Face Communication that occurs during learning

## Issues in Building Learning Communities



- Virtual v. Human Contact, Connectedness, and coalescence
- Shared responsibilities, rules, roles, norms, and participation
- Psychological and spiritual issues
- Vulnerability, privacy, and ethics.

### Asynchronous v. Synchronous

- Asynchronous – students logging on to course site any time, anywhere with no set time for all to be online together.
- Synchronous – everyone online at the same time—similar to meeting for an on-campus class.

### Time Comparisons of an Online v. Face-to-Face Class

Instructor Activity	Face to Face Class	Online Class
Preparation	2 hours per week Review assigned readings and lecture Prepare in-class activities	2 hours per week to review assigned readings and lecture Prepare discussion questions and activities
Class Time	2 ½ hours per week of assigned class	2 hours DAILY to read student posts, grade assignments, etc.
Follow-Up	2-3 hours per week for individual contact	2 – 3 hours per week for individual contact with students via email
Total Hours Per Week	6 ½ to 7 ½	18 – 19 hours

### **Establish a Program for Managing Communication**

- Set up specific time each day to read and respond to student messages
- Wait to respond to a message that upsets you and be careful in responding
- Never say anything that you could not tolerate seeing in print on the front page of the paper
- Establish clear priorities for dealing with messages and categorize messages by importance.

### **Managing the Technology**

- Learning online involves interacting with peers and teacher
  - Learning online also involves interacting with hardware, software, and connectivity
- REMEMBER: Technology is a facilitative tool, it should remain functional, simple, visually-pleasing, and user friendly.