The proposed project will explore the current and potential use of Virtual Learning Environments in the social sciences. The focus will be on creating learning environments, through the design and implementation of integrated syllabi, that utilize a combination of electronic media both in the live classroom and through on-line forums such as Desire2Learn. The project will be informed by phenomenology and critical theory. The efficacy of multi-media course delivery, including on-line media in the enhancement of teaching and learning will be a particular focus.
Introduction

_Lifelong learning requires a deeper understanding of... fundamental human activities and their relationships with new media. It requires an integration of new theories, innovative systems, practices, and assessment. New intellectual spaces, physical spaces, organizational forms, and reward structures need to be created to make lifelong learning an important part of human life._

G. Fisher 2001

Having recently attended the Course reDesign Institute at the University of Guelph I was struck by the creative innovations in teaching delivery methods that are available on this campus. In addition I was introduced to some of the vast corpus of literature on the effective usage of new technologies in the classroom. With class sizes ranging from 270 to 400 students at the first and second year levels it seems imperative that I find a strategic subject-based way to adopt some of these technologies to enhance student learning and engagement with course material and mentor teaching assistants to prepare them for an academic career. In particular I am interested in researching the efficacy of participatory on-line media designed for students in the social sciences. One example of this type of media is an online simulated fieldwork program designed for first and second year anthropology students (Ethnoscape® offered by Pearson Press). The proposed research will explore strategic ways to make use of these opportunities and innovations in a subject-appropriate manner and to analyse the pedagogic implications of such adoptions. The project will include the testing of material, a literature review, and the design of new syllabi for two introductory level courses in anthropology. The project will aim to develop a strategy for multi-media course delivery that is inclusive, accessible, and promotes life-long learning. The proposed plan of study, goals and outcomes are detailed below. I have also provided a summary of my eligibility and a preliminary reading list for your convenience.

Statement of Goals

The goals of the research project are to develop multi-media delivery strategies for the two introductory anthropology classes for which I currently hold First Right of Refusals (ANTH1150 and ANTH2160) and to explore similar material for higher year courses in International Development and Anthropology (eg for Community Development and the Seminar in the Anthropology of Tourism). To do this effectively means researching accessibility issues, exploring the efficacy of these tools in enhancing students’ learning experiences and ability to learn how to learn, and learning to incorporate audio-visual material from my own field research in a more streamlined fashion. The specific media that I wish to explore and possibly incorporate are those that provide participatory learning in virtual environments: the online fieldwork program mentioned above, simulated virtual reality games that explore various development scenarios, and virtual tourism. In addition I will write a paper on pedagogical best practices for
integrated Virtual Learning Environments for live classes that will summarize the findings based on a review of the literature and a review of these products based on my own at-home trials of the various packages available.

Plan of Scholarly Activity and Outcomes

1. Review literature on the emergence of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) in higher education.
2. Review literature on the efficacy of VLEs in higher education.
3. Experience Virtual reality through participation in Virtual Tourism and Virtual Ethnography (such as Pearson’s online simulated fieldwork program).
4. Redesign course syllabi to include the provision of interactive learning materials and packages designed to enhance the learning experience and engagement of students.
5. Write a paper or papers summarizing the findings for publication in a pedagogical journal.
6. Prepare a written report for the University of Guelph community.
7. Prepare a paper for presentation at the Society for Phenomenology and Media (San Diego, spring 2012)

Preliminary Reading List:


http://www.aace.org/pubs/etr/issue1/fetherston.cfm


*Proceedings of the Media Ecology Association. Vol. 11*

*Journal of Human Studies* 28(4) 453-467.

http://www.icbl.hw.ac.uk/ltdi/evalstudies/esevalimp.htm

loyalty and travel product purchases. *Tourism Management* 25:3 (343-355)


Lind, RA (2003). *Race/Gender/Media: Considering Diversity Across Audience, Content, 
and Producers*. Allyn & Bacon.