

Running head: Asynchronous Solutions to Multi-Tasking

Applying Asynchronous Solutions to the Multi-Tasking Realities
of a Teacher Education Faculty Unit: Case Study

Paper Presentation

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Abstract

The case study describes the early stages of building and using a learning management system (LMS) to aid in the productivity of an education faculty unit. Little to no research exists regarding teacher education units using LMSs to create an online web group for work purposes. The literature review preceding the case study illuminated some of the variables impacting such an endeavor in analogous ways. Study results reveal the pros and cons of using LMS's by stakeholders for unit work. The lead investigator provided unit faculty with a two question, open ended survey regarding the initial use of the LMS web group and those results are shared. Recommendations for additional implementations and further study are then provided.

Applying Asynchronous Solutions to the Multi-Tasking Realities of a Teacher Education Faculty Unit: Case Study

How can an education unit utilize existing technology on its campus to enhance its efforts in accreditation work? Also, can existing technology better connect the various stakeholders of the education unit? Can technology enhance professional development? Will technology enable stakeholders who are otherwise unable to participate in real time meetings to participate in new ways? Will technology link instructors across several campus locations in more meaningful ways? These are but a few of the many questions the education unit is asking itself as it embarks on its journey to incorporate technology in its everyday operations.

Although little to no research regarding the use of distance learning platforms intended to foster meaningful online interaction by education faculty units exists, the available literature regarding such use in online courses can be applied in analogous ways to inform attempts of applying an online learning platform to the enhancement of education unit effectiveness, efficiency, and efficacy.

Several factors affect the early success of using LMS software in this particular way. First, there must be someone in the education unit who is able to communicate with the college or university technical director of online learning in such a manner that the creation of a course shell needed to construct the online faculty web group comes to light and approval for same must be apparent.

Next, someone in the unit must be able to construct the web group for the faculty in the unit and enroll them in it, once the shell has been launched by the campus technology people. Beyond participant placement in the LMS web group someone in the unit must promote use, manage the web group, facilitate discussions and encourage active engagement by participants.

Beyond mere creation and construction of the LMS web group, many factors affect its intent and success. Variables include the relationship between higher order thinking and adherence to communication principles and equal emphases of cognitive and affective aspects of learning in online discussions. Variables also include resource-based learning (RBL) contexts, empathic interfaces, communication protocols, ethnography of speaking, supportive communication, adherence to practical communication principles and degrees of mixing real time meetings with asynchronous virtual ones.

Literature Review

Although little to no research exists regarding teacher education units using LMSs to create an online web group for accreditation work and other purposes, research regarding distance learning platforms intended to foster meaningful online interaction, and affective as well as cognitive asynchronous dialogue, exists. The available literature can be applied in analogous ways to inform attempts of applying available online course software to the enhancement of education unit effectiveness, efficiency, and efficacy.

In a study several years ago it was noted that asynchronous discussion boards provide participants the opportunity to post replies in discussions day or night during prescribed time windows (Moffett, 2001). Data regarding the construction of an online web group for use by practicum students to connect them across the semester experience provided a glimpse of the merit of using online discussion boards for connecting people who may otherwise not be connected as much as they would like to be.

In fall semester, academic year 2000-2001, practicum students had reported they missed the conversations they were able to have during the real time seminar component of the experience at the beginning of the semester. With this feedback, for the spring semester of

academic year 2000-2001, the Investigator added an Internet message board to the experience and required students to post weekly reflections therein. Participants posted their reflections and then read the reflections of other participants and thoughtfully replied to an assigned number of them during prescribed time windows.

In the spirit of aligning the research in 2001 with NCATE 2000 Standards, the Investigator focused on discovering and understanding the variables and forces that either facilitated or impeded the learning process, using the electronic medium (Dottin, 2001).

Students across the several majors in the practicum experience interacted with one another asynchronously in the online message board during the second year of the study.

Below are some examples of the student and instructor generated titles for discussion in academic year 2001-2002:

[Talking with students about 9/11](#)
["B" Average Needed To Teach](#)
[Junk Food in the Schools](#)
[CLASSROOM CONTROL](#)
[Respect towards authority](#)
[Chris's Social Studies Links](#)
[Kati's Special Ed Links](#)
[Connie's IEC Links](#)
[Aaron's PE Links](#)
[Maisha's Special Education Links](#)
[Kyle's Social Studies Links](#)
[Grouping Students By Ability](#)
[Will You Teach?](#)
[Become a Teacher in just FOUR WEEKS!](#)
[Mindy's Middle Childhood Links](#)
[School: place or concept?](#)
[My Practicum Expectations](#)

The Investigator concluded that online teaching required much more clarity than real time teaching. Effective online dialogue required prescribed time windows for the discussions. A

previous study by the Investigator measuring the impact of the arts on students' critical thinking skills, as measured through their writing, revealed that in order for an innovation to be successful intensive training and requirements of use are essential (Moffett, 1998).

In the third year of the longitudinal study measuring the merit of using online message boards in practicum experiences, the Investigator shared three years of data regarding students' perceptions of the merit of online message boards and the students' comfort levels with them (Moffett, 2003). First year results provided data that suggested extending conversations online among participants was beneficial. In year two of the study the Investigator discovered an increase in the mean across a semester regarding students' self-perceptions of their expertise in using online message boards but a slight decline in the mean regarding students' perceptions of the merit of online message boards.

In year three (2002-2003) of the study the Investigator incorporated an additional online requirement, based on data collected in year two, and pretest/posttest means for both the students' perceptions of the merit of using online message boards and their perceptions of their expertise in using them increased.

Concurrent with the three year study measuring the merit of discussion boards in practicum experiences, the Investigator designed and launched an MSN private web group for an education department's initial NCATE accreditation work (see appendix item A). The unit's logo, mission statement, vision, and conceptual framework emerged through faculty online discussions. Various committees and task forces were created in the web group to connect unit stakeholders including full time faculty, clinical faculty, P-12 school administrators, P-12 teachers, and department alumni.

Quality of the online experience is an important variable in its success. Participants should be surveyed periodically to determine how effective and meaningful their learning experiences are in online message boards. Statistically significant differences can occur across online courses when participants' perceptions of quality of courses are surveyed. Even in the same degree program there seems to always be a range of quality across online courses. Just as there can be "good" or "bad" real time courses, there can also be "good" or "bad" online courses.

The Investigator studied a graduate educational leadership program's online program by applying the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) method to the participants' perceptions of the online courses (Moffett, 2005). The null hypothesis, "There will be no significant difference across the means of course quality rankings, when it comes to the perception of them by program graduates," was rejected as a result of the statistically significant difference across courses.

It is apparent that people enjoy utilizing online message boards to various degrees. A range of comfort with the medium exists across participants and this is due in part to comfort levels in real time setting discussions, real time discussion pecking order, field dependence, field independence, and prior use of technology. It is also apparent that a good deal of knowledge of the theory and practice about how to effectively facilitate online message board discussions is an essential ingredient to their success.

Online participants experience the greatest success by being engaged in goal driven activities that promote discovery, collaboration, reflective analysis, relationship building, and a personal relationship in their learning (Shea, 2006).

Depending on the focus and intent of the online discussions, participants may engage in flexible and informal interactions or be a part of collaboration leading to constructions of new knowledge (Stein, 2002).

McCracken (2006) encouraged the creation of separate discussion forums in message boards to promote a variety of discussions ranging from informal to carefully organized. She reminded us that participants enter virtual discussions with varying levels of expertise and comfort levels and this impacts their online experience and those of their counterparts.

Web groups have the potential to be transformational in participants' critical thought development (McCracken, 2005). Online discussion boards also have the potential for providing continuous engagement and learning.

Methodology

With the support of the college administration and technology people on campus, the Investigator requested the construction of a Blackboard course shell named B-PC Education Division. This course shell became the unit's web group. A welcome message was placed on the front page of the site and toolbars were organized and reflective of the college's colors.

Co-Investigators, other education faculty, core content faculty, education adjuncts, and college administrators were enrolled into the web group. The first discussion forum that was placed in the web group's discussion board was a welcome message. Participants were asked to provide a reply to the initial post in that discussion forum to let everyone know they had successfully navigated to that site. Across the life of the study, and beyond, the welcome discussion forum sits at the top of all forums so new participants can easily locate it and check in.

In many cases the adjunct names were incorrect. Adjuncts had departed from the programs and new adjuncts had arrived but changes and updates in the system had not been done. Recent adjunct hires had to be gotten into the system and placed in Blackboard while adjuncts who were no longer with the college had to be taken out of the web group and the

system. Also several adjuncts had no college e-mail addresses so there would be no way to communicate via the web group's e-mail feature without securing e-mail addresses for them.

Once faculty, adjuncts, and administrators were properly and completely enrolled in the web group, work began on eliciting meaningful dialogue regarding accreditation, assessment, professional development, best practices in teaching, and other topics in July of 2007.

An e-mail was sent to web group members asking what the content of discussion forums should be in our web group. One of the full time faculty members was at a remote campus one and one half hours from the Mount Vernon campus. The web group immediately caused this faculty member to be a part of the accreditation and assessment discussions without having to drive the three hours round trip for real time meetings. Several replies were received and as a result the unit began with these:

Potpourri

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to post a reply to the initial discussion post regarding any education division topic, beyond topics overtly listed in forums, that you would like to discuss.

Assessment Task Force List of Recommendations (7/9/07)

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to read the list of 10 recommendation items. Task force members will dialogue through replies to the initial post.

Accreditation Task Force Meeting Minutes 7/9/07

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to read the minutes from the July 9th meeting. For those of you who attended, please feel free to provide a reply regarding any corrections that should be made. Other web group members who were not in attendance are encouraged to read the minutes as well.

Current Assessment Items

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to review our assessment items as of 7/12/07

The potpourri discussion forum was designed to provide a place where anyone could talk about anything regarding the unit and education. It seemed to make sense that there should be such an open ended forum. To date three different discussion topics have been placed in that forum.

Concurrent with the creation of the web group, the education faculty had received compensation for meeting weekly over the summer to refine its assessment system. Therefore, the minutes of the assessment task force were placed in the discussion board prior to the next meeting so participants could read the minutes and provide replies with needed changes or revisions.

The task force created a list of ten recommendations for its work in the remainder of July and August and this list of ten became a discussion forum in the web group. Placing the list of ten in the web group discussion board enabled participants to continue the conversation beyond the real meeting to work out details and brainstorm ideas.

The list of ten tasks to be completed became the second generation of web group discussion forums, as did notes from ongoing real time meetings:

[Teacher Education Assessment and Oversight Committee Proposal](#)

Modify

Remove

Click on this forum to view the proposal

[Assessment Task Force Meeting Minutes, 7/16/07](#)

Modify

Remove

Click on this forum to review the minutes from this meeting and post a reply with any possible revisions.

[Questions/Discussion Items for John Rhodes](#)

Modify

Remove

David Moffett will be meeting John Rhodes on July 18th. As a reply to the initial post in this forum, please provide any questions you have for our PSC Consultant, John Rhodes so these items can be carried to this meeting.

Adjunct Orientation

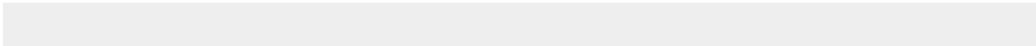
[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to view information regarding the adjunct orientation and activities on August 18th. Please post ideas regarding our division's portion of the activities for this day.

Artifacts for Courses

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this discussion forum to share your course artifacts and then click on the original post entitled "Course Artifacts" for clarity regarding what to share and how.



26 ▾

Dr. Melton's Answers re Items for Handbook 7/24/07

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this discussion forum to review Dr. Melton's answers to items for our handbook discussed in our 7/23/07 task force meeting.

Assessment Task Force Meeting Minutes, 7/23/07

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this discussion forum to review minutes from the 7/23/07 task force meeting.

This second generation of discussion forum items laid the foundation for what was to come in the unit in several ways. The unit's scheme of incorporating stakeholders beyond the college community was in need of an overhaul. A proposal was drafted to reform the unit's council. The council would reflect the education division's partnerships in new and meaningful ways. Assessment task force meeting minutes again became a discussion forum where participants could read and review them ahead of the next real time meeting and post replies with needed revisions or changes.

The provost of the college advised the Investigator to visit the unit's state professional standards consultant in Atlanta. In advance of this visit a discussion forum was built to invite participants to post questions that should be asked of the consultant when the real time visit

occurred. Many questions were posted as replies and these questions were carried by the Investigator to the meeting with the state consultant.

An adjunct orientation was scheduled for August and a discussion forum was created to discuss what agenda items were needed for the orientation. The orientation provided the opportunity to hand out hard copy instructions regarding the web group and encourage participation. New adjuncts had to wait about a month to access the web group due to needing to be placed in the system and enrolled in the web group.

A master list of all artifacts occurring across education courses was developed in the discussion forum for same. This master list is known as assessment eight in the unit and it is still a work in progress. It varies by program and informs the unit regarding what and how assessment is taking place across the courses and in programs as a whole. Although there were initial concerns regarding how technologically literate board of examiners would be in future visits, resulting in identifying many artifacts as hard copy items, recent discussion at the national level revealed future examiners will be technologically savvy. Further discussion discerned which items should be placed in student's hard copy files and which should be electronic. This led to discussions regarding current attempts at student electronic portfolios and possible changes with those.

Several of the revisions resulting from the weekly real time meetings and the online message board discussions resulted in the need to ask the provost questions regarding policies and practices in the college handbook. The provost's answers were placed in the web group as a discussion forum. Participants provided replies to the provost's answers and this discussion led to policy changes. Additional meeting minutes from a real time task force meeting became the next discussion forum so participants could review them prior to the meeting.

At this point in the study the Investigator determined that the date of the creation of each discussion forum should be placed within the title of the forum. In hindsight the Investigator realized the discussion board was becoming an electronic diary of the unit's work. Placing a date with each discussion forum would provide a chronology of unit activities and the dates of particular forums could be cited in background e-mail alerts encouraging participants to visit new or existing discussion forums.

The next generation of discussion forums seemed more substantive than the earlier ones. Co-Investigators devoted substantial time working on revised assessment instruments:

[Assessment Instrument 6 \(7/25/07\)](#)

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to participate in discussions regarding assessment instrument 6.

[Assessment Instrument 4 \(7/25/07\)](#)

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to participate in discussions regarding assessment instrument 4.

[Assessment Instrument 3 \(7/25/07\)](#)

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to participate in discussions regarding assessment instrument 3.

Major revisions of the knowledge, performance, and proficiency assessment instruments occurred from both real time meetings and online discussions. Participants were able to view the revisions online and provide feedback replies regarding those changes and additional possibilities.

Each year the unit produces a handbook for students entering the college. The discussions online regarding the handbook occurred in these discussion forums:

[Handbook: Frequently Asked Questions section \(7/31/07\)](#)

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to participate in discussions regarding the "Frequently Asked Questions" section of the handbook.

[Handbook editing and proofing activity \(8/6/07\)](#)

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to participate in editing and proofing the handbook.

In the background a rejoinder was due to the professional standards commission by September 1, in response to their visit in November of 2006:

[Rejoinder Work \(8/8/07\)](#)

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to participate in our rejoinder work.

As the new academic year was upon us, a new letter was needed for P-12 school administrators who might host the unit's students in field experiences. Discussions regarding the letter occurred online:

[Draft of Letter to School Admins requesting field exp \(8/9/07\)](#)

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to review the draft of this letter.

On August 8 the unit's new council met for the first time. Meeting minutes were placed for review shortly after the meeting:

[TEAOC 8/8 meeting minutes \(8/10/07\)](#)

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to review the draft of minutes from the 8/8/07 TEAOC meeting.

Additional task force meeting minutes were placed in the discussion board prior to the next meeting for review:

[Assessment Task Force Minutes from Aug 6 \(8/11/08\)](#)

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to view the minutes from the Aug 6, '07 Assessment Task Force Meeting

The work of revising assessment instruments was pulled together in one discussion forum:

[Revised Assessments \(8/13/07\)](#)

[Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Click on this forum to view revised assessments.

A survey was given at the end of the adjunct orientation and the results of the survey were placed in the discussion board for review and discussion:

[Ed Division Adjunct Orientation Day, Aug 19 \(9/5/07\)](#)

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Click on this forum to see the survey results from our 8/19/07 adjunct orientation.

The Investigator and Co-Investigators found themselves at the end of the real time intensive summer task force meetings and the beginning of the academic year. Foci had to shift to advising, teaching, supervising field experiences, supervising student teachers, and supervising interns. The last task force meeting occurred as did the division's first academic year meeting and minutes from these meetings were placed in the discussion board:

[Assessment Task Force Minutes 8/20/07 \(9/6/07\)](#)

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Click on this forum to review the minutes from this meeting.

[Education Division 8/23 Meeting \(9/13/07\)](#)

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Remove

Click on this forum to review the meeting minutes.

Advising became a principle topic of discussion early in the academic year:

[Advising Question and Answer Forum \(9/13/07\)](#)

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Remove

Click on this discussion forum to participate in questions and answers regarding advising students in the Education Division.

A report was due to the state by October 1 and work began online:

[PAAR college wide faculty demographics \(9/17/07\)](#)

Modify

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Click on this forum to participate.

The Investigator shared a lesson from a course regarding building a community of learners along with tough questions for him in a reflection contemplating whether or not courses were modeling best practices:

[Creating a Community of Learners Lesson Plan \(9/18/07\)](#)

Modify

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Click on this forum to participate.

A new faculty member found that creating checklists for herself helped her better understand the programs and candidate progress in them. These checklists were shared as a discussion forum in the web group and meaningful discussions resulted:

[Advisee checklists across programs \(9/19/07\)](#)

Modify

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Click on this forum to participate.

On September 25 the questions for this study were placed as a discussion forum in the web group's discussion board:

[Questions for GATE, etc study and presentation \(9/25/07\)](#)

Modify

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Click on this forum to participate.

The study questions were:

Q1. Although we have only used our Blackboard web group for a couple of months, consider how it has affected the unit's accreditation task completion process. Has the process changed? Yes? No? If yes, describe in detail how the use of the web group has changed the task completion process. If no, describe in detail why our web group has not changed the task completion process.

Q2. Describe content that should be placed in our web group. Thinking big picture, long term about what particular discussions need to take place in our web group that will have the potential to take the unit to the next level and help it become all it can be?

The Co-Investigators provided answers as replies in the forum between October 2 and October 4. It should also be noted an adjunct at a remote location provided answers to these questions and had been active for weeks across the discussion forums. The level of activity by the adjunct was exemplary and it offered models of possibilities regarding future use of the web group to connect adjunct and others who are geographically distant.

Results

Four Co-Investigators provided answers to the two study questions posed.

Q1. Although we have only used our Blackboard web group for a couple of months, consider how it has affected the unit's accreditation task completion process. Has the process changed? Yes? No? If yes, describe in detail how the use of the web group has changed the task completion process. If no, describe in detail why our web group has not changed the task completion process.

Answers:

C.I.#1 I am certain that we are just beginning to realize the use and value of our dialogs in Blackboard. I see the potential for this to develop as a means of dialog, a think tank for ideas, and a depository for documentation and for finalized documents. I also realize that some of my negative responses may be due to our or more particular my inexperience of working in this format. Please remember that my negative comments are not directed at anyone in particular and reflect only my reactions. Which actually is a negative that I feel I must put in a disclaimer for my remarks! (:>)

On the plus side we are creating the following:

- **A flowing record of our dialog on various topics**
- **An online depository for documents**
- **Documented log of discussion topics - think tank**
- **Documented log of activities**

- **Opportunity for input from various stakeholders who are not in our location. Unfortunately they are not presently participating.**

I believe the discussion groups would be more effective if we had input from various stakeholders. This would provide an opportunity for dialog on pertinent topics that is needed in a short time frame. Also many of our stakeholders are not able to attend meetings due to their school positions and time schedules.

I hope this will be a valuable tool as we continue to work on our needs improvements for PSC and NCATE. But I do not see this replacing our real time meetings for brainstorming, planning, or discussion of pertinent topics.

There have been some negatives with learning to use this process and maybe these are growing pains and something that will resolve itself.

On the down side:

- **It takes time and usually the only time that I can find to check BB is late at night when is not a good time to think and respond.**
I feel like I am spending more time watching my sentence structure, running spell check and watching the tone in which I am writing, rather than the essence of my remarks.
- **With a small group, much of what I am writing on Blackboard we have already discussed in informal “hall” meetings. But including on Blackboard does provide a written record of our “hall” meetings.**
- **I miss the face to face discussion. In the discussion groups we are unable to read member facial expressions and body language. Through the years we have developed a process of feeding off each other’s remarks and ideas. We have always worked pretty well as a team.**
- **When I open a thread I am expecting to see concrete suggestions – not chit chat that is best served in an email.**

**And what I consider chit chat might be what someone else considers important
Let’s hope these negatives are temporary hiccups as we learn how to use the process.**

But I do not see this replacing the need or value of face to face planning and working sessions.

C.I.#2 1. Our current use of Blackboard has generated a more efficient manner for recording and archiving information. This recording and archiving of information has helped with the quality of our decision making we are making better informed decisions from printed comments vs. "I thought he/she said."

2. Also, we are moving away from the Barney partnership (warm and fuzzy) to a more insightful partnership.

3. Created the central place for housing final copy of documents that are used across the unit.

(We haven't done this yet, but I think it would be very useful for placing completed assessments, etc. Downloading from the BPC website can get cumbersome.)

4. Allows for ongoing dialogue and reflection.

Concerns:

- 1. Printed dialogue may produce restraints to commenting as well as remove the unspoken language ... facial gestures, body posturing, etc. I suspect many are hesitant to put in print what they are "really" thinking and I suspect what gets printed has an impact on what/how others may respond.**
- 2. Sometimes, silence is golden. The interpretations of this silence may cause challenges.**
- 3. Assistance with better use of time tables for responding.**
- 4. Time is a valuable commodity. Clarification of usage of Blackboard....what is dialogue in Blackboard and what is email?**
- 5. Alternative "style" to enhance dialogue/discussions. Use of technology isn't my only style of learning.**

C.I.#3 The education faculty made use of “reply to all” comments in emails and, due to our small size and all being housed on the same hall, many informal “hall” meetings. Blackboard had been available to our campus for some time but our immediate division faculty never made extensive use of it or investigated its use as a communication and documentation tool.

Reports dealing with our accreditation indicated the need for involving our professional community and providing feedback to candidates, faculty, and stakeholders. Blackboard provided a means of including all of these groups in open discussion. It allowed for dialog from groups such as our off-campus adjuncts, candidates, and hopefully will soon include local school personnel.

Key to our accreditation process is the need to provide written documentation and artifacts. Most of our documentation was electronic but maintained by several individuals in separate accounts. Blackboard allowed an efficient method for housing information without pulling from separate accounts and files. Using Blackboard for accreditation has allowed:

- A larger discussion group**
- Electronic documentation**
- A wider range of discussion topics**
- Viewing ideas of others while being able to work from home**

There are weaknesses noted which may result from the fact that we are new at using this method, this is not the learning and discussion style for some faculty, or we are older, set in our ways and resistant to change. Concerns are:

- It is hard to absorb and respond to all the topics in a timely manner unless you are continuously monitoring the discussions.**
- I find myself not responding because I feel that I have lost the train of thought somewhere and don't have the whole picture.**
- We view our small size as a bonus and have developed an especially close relationship with other faculty members. Group meetings spark more ideas. We seem to lose a little of this in Blackboard.**
- Blackboard discussions save group time not overall time. Time is spent individually at home instead of during the day.**

Our process has changed. We have fewer group meetings and more Blackboard discussions. All conversations and dialogue are documented and a wider discussion group is included.

C.I.#4 Response: Blackboard's effect on the accreditation task completion process has changed in a positive and productive manner mainly because we now have more documented evidence of task assignments and completion. We are communicating more effectively with on-campus faculty as well as our adjuncts at the off-campus sites. The discussion board is helping us to think more creatively and critically before we make decisions. Although I believe that there must still be "real time" discussions (and we have those), I like the idea of discussion through Blackboard before bringing issues to the table to be approved or rejected. Blackboard doesn't or shouldn't restrict our discussion in "real time" meetings. It seems to help us make better-informed decisions.

Blackboard also serves as

- a holding tank for documents needed for the accreditation task (big move forward as we've revised assessment instruments, transition tables, teacher education handbook, field experience handbook, developed PAAR report forum, etc.)**
- sample lesson plans shared among faculty**
- clarification of academic advisement**
- communication with and feedback from adjunct instructors**
- help in developing a community of learners (i.e. college faculty, school faculty, candidates, other community professionals)**

- **interactive discussions with our students 24/7 (CONCERN: my own time management skills in responding to student responses and discussions...40-50 students)**

Still a work in progress, Blackboard is playing an effective role in program improvement

Q2. Describe content that should be placed in our web group. Thinking big picture, long term about what particular discussions need to take place in our web group that will have the potential to take the unit to the next level and help it become all it can be?

C.I.#1 I would like to see the following:

- **Discussion on the various areas that we need to address in terms of the NCATE/PSC accreditation with time frame limits for discussion. We need to received input, discussion points, ideas, suggestions - whatever and then bring these to a real time work session. Final draft can be put back on BB with a time limit to respond.**
- **Discussion should not be limited to just topics relating to NCATE/PSC.**
- **Perhaps a question and answer section.**
- **Divide up topics/issues and create BB committees**
- **Time frame for replying to topics**
- **Input from stakeholders. I would like to see the participation to be broader - include content area, advisory committee members.**

C.I.#2 1. Itemized areas for PSC/NCATE with timetables.

2. Use of Blackboard to include sections for different stakeholder groups: once again time is precious. Specific sections for those using assessments (school faculty members), questions/comments for/from superintendents/administrators, candidates, etc. All are free to read from any discussion, but are asked to respond to specific areas.

3. Strategic Plan for next 5 years. Where are we, where are we going and how do we plan to get there?

C.I.#2 Eventually all division discussions could take place, at least in part, through Blackboard. All discussions for program improvement and change should have the input of our stakeholders and Blackboard provides the means for this.

It has the potential for feedback on a wide variety of topics where input has been limited.

At the present we are beginning the use of Blackboard with our individual courses. The Discussion Board allows for communication between students on campus and those enrolled in the same courses at the off-campus sites. This communication in turn provides

needed feedback from students on a wide variety of topics that can lead to program improvement.

Our only limitation to content and discussions will be our ability to include responses from a wide group of stakeholders. The people included in this group will help determine the potential for future use.

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Our only limitation to content and discussions will be our ability to include responses from a wide group of stakeholders. The people included in this group will help determine the potential for future use.

C.I.#4 - information about long-range planning for the Division

Analysis of Results

Analyses of answers to question one illuminate the pros and cons of initial use of an electronic message board by an education unit in many ways. Co-Investigator One (C.I.#1) offered a disclaimer prior to listing pros of the online web group and commented on how she felt that having to provide such a disclaimer was a negative in itself. However, C.I.#1 is the technology in education lead faculty in the division so she possesses an advanced knowledge regarding how posts online can be misinterpreted by others. This advanced knowledge of the nuances in online posts and replies may have elicited the disclaimer.

On the plus side of the web group C.I.#1 listed attributes including a flowing record of unit dialogue on various topics, referring to the enterprise as a think tank. She also mentioned

the possibility of gaining input from a variety of stakeholders via the web group discussion boards. The web group is in the third month of its life. Already participants are seeing the possibilities of connecting external faculty, adjunct faculty, P-12 school administrators, teachers, current program students, and unit alumni in the web group discussion board.

C.I.#1 asserted the discussion groups would be more effective with input from various stakeholders in a narrative beyond the pluses list. C.I.#1 went on to write that she did not see the web group replacing real time meetings for brainstorming, planning, or discussion of pertinent topics. This caused the Investigator to recollect comments from students in educational technology courses at the turn of the century. When online courses were discussed at that time many students thought that if online courses came into vogue people would never leave their huts. It seems to be human nature that when something new is introduced we all take the idea to an extreme in our preliminary evaluation of its merit. Then, as the innovation becomes commonplace we adopt it and accept it in varying stages. People still certainly leave their homes even if they are in online courses and units must meet in real time as well as in online to be effective.

C.I.#1 then listed the down sides of the web group. These included the time it takes to check Blackboard since that is usually late at night and feeling as though more attention is given to proper sentence structure, etc than the message itself. C.I.#1 reports that she misses the real time meetings and feeding off each others' remarks and ideas. C.I.#1 reports they have always worked together as a team. C.I.#1 expects to see concrete suggestions rather than idle chit chat that is best served in e-mail. C.I. #1 is hopeful that these hiccups are temporary.

C.I. #2 believes we are making better decisions as a result of utilizing the electronic message boards. The recording and archiving of information has helped with our decision making. C.I.#2 believes the web group is causing the unit to move away from a warm and fuzzy partnership to a more insightful one. It also serves as a central holding place for documents.

C.I.#2 believes it would be good to house final documents in the web group. It should be noted that in the documents section of the web group some course syllabi have been pasted and attached. Other documents would be suitable for placement in this section of the web group.

Last among pros of using the web group was the allowance for ongoing dialogue and reflection.

C.I.#2's concerns included the discussion board removing unspoken language, facial gestures, body posturings, etc in real time meetings. C.I.#2 suspects that web group participants are reluctant to put in print what they are really thinking. Silence can be golden and interpretations of this silence may cause challenges. C.I.#2 also requested greater clarity regarding the difference between content in message board posts and e-mails. Time tables for responding would be helpful as well as providing mediums for dialogue beyond the web group to complement multiple learning styles.

C.I.#2's answer caused the Investigator to reflect on real time behaviors versus online behaviors of students across his online courses in the past decade. Often students would be in both his real time and online courses so he came to know them in both venues. Students who were quiet in real time class meetings were often the most expressive online and vice versa. The web does not embolden participants while real time meetings may. There are pros and cons to the dynamics of both online meetings and real time ones based on where and who a participant is

in the organization and dialogue. Additionally an hypothesis of the Investigator is field dependent learners prefer real time settings while field independent learners find online settings attractive. More research is needed in these areas.

C.I.#3 shared how the unit previously used reply all e-mails to communicate electronically in the opening to her answer to question one. This implied that many of the conversations in the past were lost, or at least not archived. She went on to share that Blackboard had been available for some time at the college but the division faculty never made extensive use of it.

C.I.#3 cited accreditation reports sharing the need for involving the unit's professional community and providing feedback to candidates, faculty, and stakeholders. She sees the web group as a place where all of these groups can be brought together. C.I.#3 sees our web group as a consolidator. Previously several people kept unit work in separate electronic locations but they can all be brought together in Blackboard.

C.I.#3 also shared concerns about the unit's web group. She prefaced concerns with a statement saying the discussion board may not be the learning or discussion style for some participants and it may be that we are set in our ways and resistant to change. C.I.#3 shared that it is hard to absorb and respond to all discussion topics in a timely manner unless you are continuously monitoring the discussions. Sometimes she did not post replies because the train of thought was lost somewhere and she didn't have the whole picture. She cited the closeness of the faculty in the unit and asserted that group meetings spark more ideas. Some of this is lost in Blackboard discussions. Per C.I.#3 Blackboard discussions save group time not overall time. Time is spent individually at home instead of during the day. The process has changed. Fewer

group meetings occur and there are more Blackboard discussions. All conversations and dialogue are documented and a wider discussion group is included.

C.I.#3's comments caused the Investigator to think about the differences in how the baby boomers were trained to do one thing at a time while generations Y and Z do five things at once and eat pizza. It is natural that many in the generation who were raised to be linear task completers would favor doing one thing at a time like attending meetings and focusing on a single task. On the other hand with the complexities of the unit faculty positions and all they must do it seems as though multi tasking is a requirement in our work world whether we favor that or not. C.I.#3's comments about resistance to change, learning styles, and discussion styles shed light on some of the challenges faced by units who undertake innovation. Also, the comment about a wider discussion taking place in Blackboard when compared with real time meetings suggests that some participants' voices may be heard better in one venue than the other.

C.I.#4 focused on the accreditation process in their answer to question one. She contended that the use of Blackboard has changed things in a positive and productive manner because we now have more documented evidence of task assignments and completion. She also stated the unit is communicating better with on-campus faculty as well as adjuncts who are remote. She felt as though the discussion board is helping participants think more creatively and critically before making decisions. C.I.#4 liked the model of discussing topics in the discussion board prior to discussing them in real time meetings. Blackboard doesn't restrict discussion in real time meetings and instead helps the unit make better informed decisions.

Blackboard, per C.I.#4, also served as a holding tank for documents, sample lesson plans shared by faculty, clarification of student advisement, communication and feedback with adjuncts, and serves as a catalyst for building a community of learners within the unit.

Perhaps there is a correlation between being a reading specialist and enjoying the discussion forums in Blackboard, since C.I.#4 is the lead faculty in Reading. Perhaps too C.I.#4 could be considered one of those participants who is quieter in real time meetings and enjoys the online discussion format.

Q2. Describe content that should be placed in our web group. Thinking big picture, long term about what particular discussions need to take place in our web group that will have the potential to take the unit to the next level and help it become all it can be?

C.I.#1 shared that she would like to see discussion on various areas we need to address for NCATE/PSC accreditation with time frame limits for discussions. C.I.#1 perceives Blackboard's merit as being the place where we can post input, discussion points, ideas, suggestions, etc to then be taken to real time meeting work sessions leading to drafts that can be put back in Blackboard. C.I.#1 would like to see groups formed to do particular tasks in Blackboard and input from stakeholders.

C.I.#2 would like to see itemized areas for PSC/NCATE with timetables. Different groups established within Blackboard to encourage different stakeholder groups to participate. C.I.#2 believes it is important for all participants to feel as though they can read posts in any forum but they should be limited to particular areas for posting replies. C.I.#2 would like to see a discussion forum regarding the college wide strategic plan for the next five years. She believes

that eventually all division discussions could take place in part in Blackboard. Blackboard provides the means for all stakeholders to participate in these important discussions. C.I.#2 contends that our only limitation to content and discussions will be our ability to include responses from a wide group of stakeholders.

C.I.#3 believes that all discussions can take place in part in Blackboard. All discussions for program improvement and change should have the input of our stakeholders and Blackboard provides the means for this. The web group provides the venue that has been lacking in the past when it comes to stakeholder input. Blackboard is also being used in some courses and it is connecting students across the three campus locations as well.

C.I.#4 believes that our focus should be on using our message board for long-range planning for the Education Division.

It is clear to the Investigator that there are pros and cons to the use of electronic discussion forums by education unit faculty. Some respondents feel a greater level of comfort with the medium than other respondents and explanations for same are apparent through their answers. All people are indeed resistant to change to some degree and new ways of doing things do cause people to think in extremes and also often make the previous way of doing things seem like the good old days. In some cases however the good old days are not really all that great but there is still lament for them because they did not require mastering a new way of doing something. This is a universal problem with change and innovation. People adapt to new things at various stages and the adaptability levels of the respondents are evident through their answers to the questions (Narayanan, 2001).

Summary and Recommendations

Although electronic discussion boards have only been utilized for a short time by the unit, common themes emerged in the respondents' answers that will take the web group to new places.

The Investigator must obtain approval from the college to allow stakeholders who are not directly affiliated with it to gain access to the Blackboard web group. The Investigator must begin to place time windows in discussions so they are open and closed in prescribed ways.

The Investigator must continue to send e-mail alerts each time a discussion forum is created and posted in Blackboard, as well as sending e-mail alerts to participants when they should return to a particular forum for discussion. The Investigator must create discussion forums for particular task forces and committees and prescribe who replies in those forums.

The Investigator must continue to encourage division faculty, adjuncts, core content faculty, college administrators, P-12 school administrators, teachers, unit candidates, and college alumni to participate in the web group. The Investigator must strike a balance between online discussions and real time meetings, taking into account the multi tasking realities of the unit faculty balanced with their learning and communication style needs.

The Co-Investigators must reflect on their possible resistance to change and continue to seek to multi task in order to meet the extraordinary demands of their positions. They must also continue to work as a team and exhibit the self initiative they have displayed to date in order to affect change in the unit. The Co-Investigators can also play a substantial role in encouraging

stakeholders to be actively involved in the web group through their natural networks on campus, in P-12 settings, and beyond.

Obviously more research is needed in the area of measuring the merit of utilizing electronic message boards in an education unit. Therefore, the research will continue and further study results can be anticipated in the future.

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