Epistemology, Pedagogy, and Latent Functions:
The Peculiar Nature of Web-based Public Access Courses

John Hamlin
University of Minnesota Duluth

Dialogue is "at the heart of the e-learning experience" (Littleton & Whitelock 2004, p.173). It is the means to building mutual understanding, encouraging the construction of personal meaning and ensuring engagement. Inquiry requires dialogue. If we value processes of inquiry, then it is at our peril that we ignore the complex issues and aspects of designing and facilitating in online environments for inquiry processes. How do we design online learning experiences that encourage dialogue and a process of inquiry? A phenomenological inquiry using student postings, student interviews and survey data from an online undergraduate course is undertaken to explore the dynamic interrelation between design, facilitation, tools and learning. As part of the analysis, a heuristic device was developed – the *Map of aspects of dialogical inquiry*. In this article, this device and the dynamic interrelation between design, facilitation, tools and learning are discussed, and implications for practitioners teaching in online environments are explored.

Sometime, somehow, over the past dozen years, since 1996 at least, changes in computer technology wormed their way into the craft of teaching, almost virus like so it seems. Once, it will be recalled, instructors learned how to make filmstrips and overheads to help bring life into the classroom. Now the technology available for teaching has become increasingly complex and sophisticated. Programs like Authorware, Director, Flash, and new mediums like podcasting or Wiki can make a sociologist's head spin. Not withstanding these new mediums, the heart of teaching with computer technology is still the basic html page. Simple coding that allows straightforward presentation of text and graphics on the web. As programmers make the World Wide Web user-friendlier, it is becoming more commonplace to see and hear about distributed education. The idea that universities can reach out to an otherwise untapped revenue resource, those non-traditional students who are not in a position to travel any distance to attend university, has enticed administrators to expand the traditional academic universe. The normative structure of the classroom is being deconstructed and the university will instead travel the distance to meet the student. Where this might have been accomplished through INI courses (individualized instruction) with material being sent via the post, now computers allow instant access via the web.

According to the CIA World Fact Book (2007), there are 77 countries that have over one million Internet users. Of those countries, 52 or 67.5% have under ten million users; 11 or another 14.2% of countries are between ten and twenty million users. Ten countries have between twenty and fifty million users. Two countries sit between 50 and 100 million users, India with 60 (as of 2005) and Japan with 87.54 million users (as of 2006). Only two countries are in the world top 100 million users: China with 137 million Internet users and the United States with over 208 million Internet users (as of 2006). Consequently, the plethora of Internet users makes non-space specific learning more appealing and probable if at the same time not equally distributed across nations. It is the case, however, that specially designed distributed education courses are not usually public access. That is, "online" courses are specifically designed for students who are paying to gain access to knowledge. Universities and professors who deliver such courses would be undermining their own revenue stream by letting course material remain open to the public. And this does not even begin to address the issue of intellectual property, which continues to be a huge concern. Thus, those courses designed for distant education are most usually protected within some sort of shell, such as WebCT, that allows for password protection, a gated community, if you will, of scholars. These intellectuals live in a silicon, rather than ivory, tower. But the anarchy of the web still has its place.

A search of the web will quickly reveal that a number of sociologists have at least some, if not all, of their course material open to the public. Anyone and everyone are free to access their material and see what is occurring in their classes. This paper addresses the issues surrounding such a set of course pages. It will explore some basic latent functions of public access material as well as epistemological issues involving open web pages. This paper contains then, two slightly divergent but interwoven pieces. First is the general description of unsolicited emails received directly as a consequence of the author's collection of webpages. The description of these emails must remain at a very general level given that this information, although unsolicited, was not procured using any disclosure or guarantees of privacy. Second, the more important portion of the paper, discusses how technological changes are more than mere pedagogical tools. They

have, in fact, laid the groundwork for a new epistemology.

The Web Material

Once professors were paid to pontificate on subjects near and dear to their academic souls. Then it was deemed important to more directly involve the audience in the learning process. Greater emphasis was placed on the "craft" of teaching and learning. To state it more practically, over twenty-seven years of teaching has presented this author, and clearly others as well, with many opportunities to reinvent the way we practice pedagogy. Prior to 1980, the normative order dictated professors lectured and waited for the eager student to ask questions and challenge the material being presented. By the mid-1980s, learner directed pedagogy emerged and many gave their hearts and souls to active learning. From 1985 to 1995, student involvement was believed the best alternative pedagogical practice for helping students embrace sociology. For me, a simple act in 1994 changed my way of thinking about teaching. Not that I abandoned active learning or lecturing, I have too much of an ego to let that go. But, a straightforward request from a hearing impaired student suggested that technology might help her and others with class material. The student simply requested permission to copy the overheads before class started. Early on, the practice of using overheads with outlines of lectures was a direct response to the notes I saw students taking in class. They were often filled with examples and references to my poor humor but quite frequently missed the major points being made. Putting up an outline of the main points would allow them to pay more attention and fill in necessary detail. Trying to follow the overheads and the interpreter in front of the class was a difficult task for this particular student. I had been creating web pages using html in a text editor and realized by placing course material on the web, I could free students from the drudgery of note taking and potentially enhance their listening and participation. (On the flip side of this issue, one might argue that removing note-taking responsibility from students is aiding in the alienation of students from the process of work, learning, and their product!)

Method: Email as Data

The data serving as the impetus for this paper is a collection of emails received as a result of the public posting of course web pages. The data is serendipitous in as much as it was not collected systematically with any conscious design or project in mind. The emails were just kept as a matter of course. The final set of email data did not originate at the institution of my employment and only contacts from individuals not personally known to me were included. This project spans a ten-year period from 1996 through 2006, starting two years after the web pages were posted. As noted above, the existence of these data is the result of serendipity rather than deliberate data collection. As emails were received, they were kept in folders on the computer. Some of those folders remained on a central server while others were downloaded to the computer in use at the time. Over this ten-year period eight computers were used regularly, in serial succession mostly, but with overlap between portables and desktop computers. The primary reason for the large number of computers used was a result of a series of computer failures, such as hard drive crashes, motherboards gone wild, etc. Consequently, not all of the email has been retrievable. Nonetheless a large enough number of emails exist to garnish useful information. To carry this project out, it was decided not to count each email message since a large number of the email messages were follow-ups to an original contact. The emails were placed in an excel file for simple coding and manipulation. The result, after elimination of those follow-up emails, was a total of 332 separate and distinct contacts. Given the loss of data, there are years in the study with low numbers, making it relatively impossible to discern whether the low numbers are due to deletions or just lack of contact. My suspicion is a bit of both since there is likely a natural attrition as the popularity of the web expanded. Indeed, the number of web pages related to sociology is much larger in 2006 than existed in 1996. A simple coding structure was used to catalogue the data. Location was noted as given by the sender, primarily state of origin or country. Student status was coded along the following strata: high school, community college, four year university, graduate student, and post-graduate student. Other statuses included college professor, high-school teacher, professional, and citizen. Salutations were coded as formal, casual, sender identified, or none. The intent of the email was identified as seeking information, recognition of the pages, asking permission to use the web material, personal-life issues, or suggesting corrections.

From the existing 332 separate inquiries the vast majority, 251 (75%), were from students. One hundred ninety-nine (30%) were written by college students attending a four year institution, another 29 (9%) from graduate students, seven (2%) from community college students, two from post-grad students, two that were not clear concerning their level in school, and 14 (4%) from high school students. Among the other contacts were seven (2%) from citizens seeking information, 23 (7%) from professionals working in various agencies, 28 (8%) from college professors, and five (1.5%) from high school teachers. Three of the college students

Table 1
Email Contact by Year Regarding Online Sociology Course

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Contact	18	37	57	62	58	3	29	24	23	6	15

clearly stated their professional occupations as well (all three were police officers), but they were classified primarily as college students due to the nature of their requests being more consistent with college assignments for programs in which they were enrolled.

The contacts were not evenly distributed by year (see Table 1), most likely due in large part to the number of computer failures over this period of time, but the trends are clear and in keeping with expectations. As the material on the Internet expanded over the years, the number of sociology and criminology resources expanded. Thus an inverse relationship was likely to occur. That is, the greater number of potential resources would lead to some decrease in accessing this particular set of web pages. The fact that no meta-tags are used on this set of web pages decreases even more the likelihood of web searches finding these web pages immediately. As can be seen, the trend is for greater number of requests in the years just before the turn of the century. There is an obvious decline in the number of emails in the first part of the twenty-first century even if one discounts 2001 and 2005, years in which emails were lost.

Requests came from a wide variety of locations as well. Of the total number of contacts, 95 did not provide any indication of where they originated. The remaining 237 either stated explicitly where they came from or their email address indicated location, or in a couple of instances, the IP address showed on the email allowing for a quick search indicating the location. Thirty-seven different states were represented in the emails originating from all four-census bureau regions. The states most likely to host requests were California with 15, Texas with 11, and North Carolina and Minnesota tied with nine each. There was also a wide variety of countries represented, 39 countries across six continents for a total of 100 international emails. The list of countries originating emails include Argentina, Australia, Austria, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, Caribbean, Columbia, Costa Rica, England, France, Germany, Greece, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kosovo, Mexico, Nepal, New Zeeland, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Wales, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The largest numbers of emails originated in England (16) followed by Canada (15) and Australia (14).

Many email requests start with the sender providing an introduction regarding who they are (86).

This is often as simple as a "hello my name is." Also common is the sender providing various indicators of status. Invading even one's virtual personal space seems to inspire, if not who they are, at least who they are *not*. It is not unusual for one to say, "I am not in your class but… would help me with this?" It appears as if they desire to ask one for something, some bit of knowledge in this case, presumes some need to legitimize the request, and the more identity indicators provided the more the legitimation function is served. In an educational setting, even if virtual, control over knowledge is power; professors can grant access or deny it.

Many emailers find difficulty in starting the conversation with a stranger. How does one begin such an encounter in a virtual place? You do so within the normative structure of first time introductions stemming from face-to-face encounters. This is the only normative model with which most of us are familiar and comfortable. The single largest number of emails, 162 or 49% started without any salutations. Examples of such emails include:

- I just want to say thank you…
- Do you know where I can find Ceasare Lombroso works in the web for downloading...
- I was browsing your web page…

Eight-six salutations began by primarily stating their status number (26%). For example,

- I am a student at Austin Community College,
- My name is … and I have a few questions…
- I am the creator of a page for sexual abuse victims…
- I live in Argentina and study law…

They may even start with a negative status, such as "I'm not in your class…" Eighty-four emails (25%) started with a greeting either formal (10.5%) or informal (15%). An example of the formal salutation is, "Excuse me sir," "Dear sir," "Professor Hamlin," or "Dear Colleague." Casual greetings were just that: "Hi" or "Hello" or "Hey."

Contacts came from a variety of student statuses. There is something about the status of student that legitimates seeking information or assistance when it comes to educational matters. Although it was possible for a student to ask an

unknown professor for information prior to the advent of the web, it is more probable that libraries were a more likely source. The web turns the stranger into an automated reference source. None-the-less, the status of student is offered as a way of introduction and legitimation. When someone needs an authoritative source, even a stranger on the web will do. Having said that, the formality of emails ends up all over the map. We see this right away with salutations. As stated, many salutations are quite formal with dear Mr., Dr., Professor, etc. There seems to be an underlying nod to authority or at the very least recognition of status differentials. Others are the complete opposite with either just my first name, or a simple "hey" or no salutation at all. The web allows for informality that personal contact may shape differently and, to a certain degree, a leveling of statuses between virtual actors. This holds true at the close as well with formal etiquette such as a "thank you" or "sincerely" or complete informality with no formal ending at all.

Other supporting indicators of status take the form of the sender declaring I am from institution X, from this particular town, city, state, or country. Some will indicate their position in an agency, their academic major, or profession. Early in the email, they will indicate they are a student and more precisely the type of student they are (e.g. high school, college, graduate, etc). The same is true for the non-student as well, those working in professions like police, publishing companies, etc. More detail may follow such as the name of the school they attend or work at, the city or town they live in, and the state or country in which they reside. All of this of course helps to legitimize and justify what appears to be an intrusion on one's time. Those without status indicators approach requests as a right and suggest it is your obligation to reply. The tenor of the message runs the gamut of very formal to down home familiarity. The actual writing may be the worst form of text messaging lingo to quite proper writing styles. There may or may not be formal salutations.

With regard to the purpose for the email, the vast majority of the senders of these emails were asking for information (225 or 68%). The nature of the emails differs however. As stated earlier, the emails range from high school students to post doctoral students, and high school teachers to college professors as well as a sprinkling of citizens and members writing as professionals. As such, one would expect a diversity of email encounters. The emails fall into two broad categories: compliments and requests, with a few offering both. Compliments are straightforward and frequently are quite short: "Well done!" or "Thanks" or "Nice pages." An example of a shorter thank you email would be the following:

Thank you for your insightful tags! I think that I might just get a handle on my external studies down (Sociology through University of New England in Armidale Australia) under. I love the net and your pages are worth more money!! Thanks and hugs,

Even in the longer emails the gist of the message is the same:

I just wanted to thank you for maintaining the information on your home page. I am an English teacher in Israel teaching an advanced reading comprehension course through Bar Iian University's Extension in Safed. We are learning an article which mentions the Durkheimian notion of the inevitability of crime which I knew nothing about. Thanks to your lecture outline, I was able to gain some insight as to what is referred to, plus I took down the names of two books used in your courses which we'll order for our library here in Safed. I'm going to tell our criminology lecturers to refer to your homepage as well to see how well organized a lecturer you are. Your efforts are appreciated world-wide!

The requests for information have a far greater diversity and complexity. From the student side, it may be as simple as asking for an answer to what sounds like a take home exam or a paper assignment. For example, "Hi, I was wondering if u could tell me by today if the british crime survey is useful in official statistics. Cheers." Some will come right out and declare they need to write a paper. Many are looking for help and are seeking assistance in getting them off in the right direction but not looking for an answer. An example of this type of request is "I was browsing your web page and found it quite interesting; would you mind if I asked you questions about sociology and criminology. Now and then." This latter group appears to be in the pursuit of knowledge while the former group only wants answers to get their work completed. Other requests from non-academic or professional sources often are looking for advice or are seeking understanding of some major event in the world or in their life. For example, one person was trying to understand her son's suicide and another his son's ADAH diagnosis. He was tying to put it into the context of labeling theory. Many requests merely want to cite the web pages in work they are doing or in some cases use the material directly (4%). This may be as minor as using pictures from the web site to parts of the material (one or two pages), and in some cases, making the entire site available to their audience. It is in these instances that it is clear that the web pages serve a number of unintended consequences.

Simmel (Wolff, 1950) once observed that the stranger, although this seems counter intuitive, may become a confidant. Strangers are not normally perceived as an integral part of a group. Their social distance in relation to the group may make them the object of distrust. But in part, because of their objectified relations, they may become the one person to whom secrets may be revealed. Electronic communication goes one step further by creating a "virtual stranger." Not only are they not a normal part of your social group, they are physically "unreal" as well. Strangers exist as Max Headroom zipping into your computer screen out of nowhere and as quickly disappear.

Pedagogy vs Epistemology

Brooks points out that over the years there has been a major paradigm shift from teaching (traditional normative structure) to learning. Practically as a consequence of this shift, it becomes clear that "teaching and learning are scholarly acts, fully equal to research and service" (1997, p. 1). Brooks defines virtual education as incorporating electronic technologies. "Virtual education, therefore, includes traditional modes of learning supplemented by the use of sophisticated technologies" (1997, p. 7). Once freed of the normative and physical structure of the traditional teaching-learning setting, new forms of social interaction are free to emerge. This type of parasocial interaction incorporates a real person with an intangible "not quite real entity or environment" (1997, p. 8), but in a very different way than our parasocial interaction with movie stars, for example. The person on the other end of the email knows a good deal more about you from your web pages and, of course, you know nothing about them. Emails illuminate this type of interaction when in the course of seeking specific information they comment, "Where do you teach?" To the audience, you are a cyber professor; your presentation of self lacks some of the normal tools of impression management. The nature of email chat is a form of "pseudo-Gemeinshaft" – that is, the creation of a fake sense of community to sell you a bill of goods (Merton, 1968, p. 163). This is not to say email identities are purposely deceptive, but rather, virtual education necessitates redefining community and one's place in it. One other aspect of the new pseudo-Gemeinshaft community is the need to create it quickly and for only fleeting moments.

Yet another aspect of public web course pages centers on the role the Internet in general plays in terms of public forums. Public access course pages have a unique ability to function as both second and third places. Oldenburg defines the second place as the realm of work and production. The third place is much more of a social arena both encouraging and enhancing a sense of community, open to celebration and enjoyment (Oldenburg, 1989, p. 14). Without question, these public academic web sites are examples of second place arenas. The producer uploads web pages as part of teaching-learning scholarship. Given the nature of the vast majority of email contacts, consumers are also accessing pages as part of their work. Some emails indicate that they came across the pages while surfing the net. They were just interested and wanted to make comments or ask questions. In this context, the web pages are representing a third place. The shame is that third places are disappearing (or at least changing dramatically) as humans rush head long into what C.W. Mills (1956) called mass society. Habermas provides much the same accounting to the flipside of the more purely social realm as he discussed the disappearance of the "public sphere" (Seidman, 1989, pp. 231-236). The public sphere is an open arena that allows for public expression on political discourse. This tended historically to be face-to-face.

As many of the emails suggest, the public access web pages comprise an expansion of second place. Most inquires are directly connected to work, either as student, professor, or professional. But there are those inquiries that clearly cross over to that third place and occasionally the public sphere. The web, although under constant attack, is the last free openly public forum and by posting material one enters, perhaps unintentionally, the public sphere. Content from my web pages, for instance, generates or is used in political discourse around issues such as sexual assault or crime.

As Brooks points out, the shift to using computer technology in teaching is a shift in pedagogical paradigms (1997, p. 12). This apparently happens whether we consciously design a course for distant education or not. To make matters even more complicated, O'Mera and Rice (2005), Lucal et al. (2003), Brooks (1997), Boyer (1990) and many more have addressed the central issue of the blurred lines between scholarship and teaching in this new model and conclude the reward system must be modified to reflect the time, effort, and scholarship of this type of teaching.

Edwards et al. maintain that "electronic technologies may inadvertently provide the improvement of traditional courses" (2000, p. 386). Given the history, one might actually make the case that the reverse is true, that introducing electronic technologies into traditional courses helped make distant education courses possible, as an unintended consequence. Pedagogically, Edwards et al. are correct when they say that "template drawn, cookie-cutter course construction" (2000, p. 386) will not by itself produce a quality educational experience. However, from an epistemological point of view, it may make all

the difference in the world as to how knowledge is constructed and vetted.

In their conclusion, Edwards et al. state "instructors who are forced to use this technology are not likely to be convinced, and uninspired, cynical teachers in the traditional classroom are not likely to become good teachers simply by using distance-education technology" (2000, p. 391). But then pedagogy and epistemology has never been the same thing. Teachers who use this technology, if used properly, will indeed be committing to a new form of scholarship (epistemology) if not becoming better teachers (pedagogy).

Concentrating on pedagogy obscures a deeper issue related to online material. Pedagogically, if one is designing courses for the web or distant learning, all matters related to learning and teaching are taken into account. In other words, issues of method and structure become paramount as one contemplates delivery modes. The question of how we know what we know (and ultimately how we know what we know is "true") suddenly takes on immediate importance or at least far greater concern. One can see that the anarchy of the web redefines truth. For example, a list of rape myths and facts is on one of the course web pages. This data set was compiled by looking at myths scattered all over the web. In that list is a "fact" that states the unfounding rate of rape is at about the same as other crimes, 2%. This is, as a matter of fact, wrong; unfounding rates for rape typically vacillate between 8% and 10%. People cite the information from that web page as evidence supporting the idea that women do not lie about rape. Others see fit to let me know that it is wrong (or in a blog a general reference is made to my stupidity). I would be remiss not to state here that unfounding rates have little, if nothing whatsoever, to do with lying. A person might lie, that is always possible, but unfounding occurs for many reasons. Now back to the issue at hand.

The problem is, that the rape myth web page was designed as a way to generate discussion concerning what makes "facts" indeed facts; how do we know? It also is a way to talk about the authoritative power of knowledge; the mere stating of something as fact makes it undeniable and carries a sense of authority that transcends the individual. However, since this page was created for use within a traditional classroom setting, should it be changed? The creation of knowledge is an outcome of the presentation of information on the web. Knowledge is created as a process, not a static "a-ha" moment. A statement is made, it is picked up, and passed on in perhaps modified form and in the telling becomes defined as truth. Truth to a great extent, although not totally, is socially constructed and validated. One must be careful not to turn Karl Marx into Adam Smith, which

can easily be done with the web (sort of Orwellian truth). The immediacy that accompanies web-based material has the potential to transform course material created for pedagogical reasons to transfer knowledge, into its opposite, knowledge creation that may transform pedagogy.

Web Scholarship

As new forms of scholarship emerge, such as teaching and learning and scholarship of integration, it will be increasingly difficult to judge contributions made to the discipline. If knowledge is gauged only on inception, it misses the dialectical or at the very least developing character of knowledge. Is knowledge to be judged by peer review or by how wide spread it is accepted, regardless of its "truth" factor? If traditional scholarship becomes outdated in part due to advances in knowledge, the teaching-learning-scholarship nexus will make knowledge obsolete at an ever-increasing rate. By its very nature, knowledge will change as rapidly as information technology advances. Blogs and wikis, even web pages, represent knowledge as an emergent process rather than one of discovery. In discovery, a domain assumption suggests that knowledge is there to find. In new forms of scholarship, knowledge is more clearly socially constructed. In the traditional measure of contributions, senior scholars would appraise written works as elder statesmen and masters of their discipline. In the new virtual and hybrid virtual world, many elder statesmen are just as likely to be left on the periphery, not knowing how to judge current advancements. It is a brave new world. In 1994, when the initial web pages that make up the basis for this paper were created, there were a limited number of sociological resources on the web. Now, web pages abound and formats like podcasting have emerged, which will place the web page as we know it next to the library book as an existing but outdated depository of knowledge. Traditional forms of producing new knowledge and conveying that knowledge are not likely to disappear anytime soon. The point is the landscape is changing and we must be prepared to embrace new definitions of scholarship, knowledge, and the expression of the ways of seeing. Although the virtual world is not the antithesis of traditional forms of expression, it is clearly transforming the academic world. Public access web pages are a part of the transformation. Users are growing up with the web as part of their landscape, not as a new venture. Just as the printing press took oral knowledge and transformed it into a static set of truths, the web is transforming knowledge all over again, allowing it to morph as we observe it. New users' expectations of that knowledge and the creators of that knowledge will be vastly different than the old standard of books, articles, and authoritative authors.

Discussion and Commentary

The creation of web pages in the early 1990s had the express pedagogical intent of providing access to information in a way that did not disadvantage any student. That is, traditional modes of teaching, the normative structure, were premised on the assumption that students could sit, listen, write, and ask questions, etc. all fundamentally in the same way. That normative structure appropriately provided tools necessary for that learning environment: chairs, lighting, pencils, paper, and so on. The web leveled the playing field just a bit by displaying information accessible anytime, not just during class periods, for students who were in a position of needing to "multi-task." It only gets better as tools make the pages even more accessible to a wider more diverse set of students. One unintended consequence of putting course material into a public access format was to generate an audience outside of the intended audience, a parasitic audience if you will. I say this not to to disparage those who seek information. By parasitic audience I mean those who attach themselves to a host seeking nurturance (knowledge) and then detach and move on, a twenty-first century stranger. In many instances, these strangers, part of the parasitic audience, appear as true seekers of knowledge, in some instances only wanting enough to get by (give me this answer). But in either case, it is almost always a unidirectional relationship (parasocial). Emails generated from web pages tend to be unlike blogs and chat rooms in this sense. The host becomes the granter of knowledge (life blood), the expert, and the authority, in the end the keeper of the truth. Where formally one might have made a quick trip to the library and grab Durkheim or Marx off the shelf, now they come to web pages in search of the host's rendition of the ideas, a pseudo-knowledge of the thing, not the thing itself. As such, the web page becomes less pedagogical for the parasitic audience and more epistemological. It appears the opposite for the intended audience where web pages are a pedagogical vehicle for obtaining knowledge.

It also appears the public access web pages contribute unintentionally to maintaining the public sphere. Debate, discussion, arguments, even vituperative fights, seem to spontaneously combust on the web. Blogs and position papers have used information from the web pages that form the foundation of this study, for supporting their arguments. Since it has taken on an air of public domain knowledge, all control is absent. As a consequence, information is quickly interpreted and reinterpreted, misrepresented in some cases void of its original intent.

Finally, it appears that these web pages did contribute unintentionally to a broader phenomenon, the coalescing of third place and the public sphere.

Twenty-first century strangers connecting to a host as spokes from a hub, grabbing bits of knowledge and then seeking others for debate and discussion outside of the comfortable surroundings of family or work, more at ease arguing about social issues or politics with those from whom you are emotionally detached. The manifest functions of the web course material at the root of this paper did not envision assisting anyone outside the traditional classroom let alone those in states and continents far away.

References

Benson, D. E., Haney, W., Ore, T. E., Persell, C. H., Schulte, A., Steele, J., & Winfield, I. (2002). Digital technologies and the scholarship of teaching and learning in sociology. *Teaching Sociology*, *30*(2), 140-157.

Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Brooks, J. M. (1997). Beyond teaching and learning paradigms: Trekking into the virtual university. *Teaching Sociology*, *25*(1), 1-14.

CIA. (2007). *World fact book*. Retrieved from https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2153.html

Edwards, M. E., Cordray, S., & Dorbolo, J. (2000). Unintended benefits of distance-education technology for traditional classroom teaching. *Teaching Sociology*, *28*(4), 386-391.

Jaffee, D. (2003). Virtual transformation: Web-based technology and pedagogical change. *Teaching Sociology, 31,* 227-236.

Kling, R. (1997). The Internet for sociologists. *Contemporary Sociology*, *26*(4), 434-444.

Lucal, B., Albers, C., Ballantine, J., Burmeister-May, J., Chin, J., Dettmer, S., & Larson, S. (2003). Faculty assessment and the scholarship of teaching and learning: Knowledge available/knowledge needed. *Teaching Sociology*, *31*(2), 146-161.

Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Mills, C. W. (1956). *The power elite*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Oldenburg, R. (1989). *The great good place: Cafes, coffee shops, community centers, beauty parlors, general stores, bars, hangouts, and how they get you through the day*. New York, NY: Paragon House.

O'Meara, K., & Rice, R. E. (2005). *Faculty priorities reconsidered: Rewarding multiple forms of scholarship*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

O'Neill, E. T., Lavoie, B. F., & Bennett, R. (2003). Trends in the evolution of the public web. *D-Lib Magazine*, *9*(4), 1-10.

Seidman, S. (1989). *Jurgen Habermas on society and politics: A reader*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Webster, J., & Hackley, P. (1997). Teaching effectiveness in technology-mediated distance learning. *Academy of Management Journal, 40*(6), 1282-1309.

Wolff, K. H. (1950). *The sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York, NY: Free Press.

_____

JOHN HAMLIN, Ph.D. is a Professor of Sociology at University of Minnesota Duluth where he has been since 1981. He has published in the area of active learning working one year with the Instructional Development Service at UMD conducting sessions on active/cooperative learning. His research interests include the study of sexual assault, sociological theory, and the sociology of cemeteries.