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EDITORIAL

In this month's issue of DEOSNEWS, Matthew Moen describes an innovative interdisciplinary distance education program that combined courses in English, history, and political science for delivery to 31 sites across the state of Maine. The faculty members involved realized several benefits from team teaching the inter-related courses: the ability to work with faculty in other disciplines, enhanced professional development opportunities, and gaining access to a wider range of instructional tools and resources. Students reported few mechanical or logistical problems and gave both the course and the instructor positive ratings.

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TEAM TEACHING OVER AN INTERACTIVE NETWORK

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars are facing distinctive and far-reaching challenges to traditional forms of pedagogy. The exponential growth of database packages, online services, and multimedia capabilities are a challenge to the usual lecture and Socratic methods of teaching; the rise of distance education questions the traditional model of students matriculating on campus. This paper offers reflections on team teaching an interdisciplinary distance education course, based on my participation in an experimental offering within the University of Maine system in fall 1994 (1).

I. THE ART OF DETECTION

The rubric for the experimental offering was entitled "The Art of Detection." It consisted of three interrelated courses in three disciplines: The Literature of Detection and Suspense (English), The Historian as Detective (History), and The Politics of Concealment (Political Science). The "detection" framework provided thematic linkages between subjects as diverse as the murder mystery, the historical method, and congressional investigations. Each of those entails the need to marshal and evaluate evidence, to dismiss alternative explanations for events, to arrive at the correct conclusion based on the evidence, and to

affix blame on those guilty of wrongdoing. In the case of Sherlock Holmes, for example, he follows that process to solve a fictional murder; in the case of the Iran-Contra Committees, they follow that process to affix blame on administration officials for a foreign policy quagmire. While the setting is very different, the process for achieving the objective is similar.

My course focused on the use of concealment as a political strategy, with special attention to the authority and proclivity of presidents to withhold information from Congress. We examined the arguments for executive privilege and prompt action outlined by Alexander Hamilton in the "Federalist Papers," the countervailing right of Congress to acquire information in order to make informed policy decisions, and the constitutional setting for that inter-branch rivalry. We explored the issue of concealment by the executive branch in conventional settings, such as promulgating regulations to carry out the will of Congress, and in more prominent settings, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, Watergate, the Pike and Church Committee investigations of the intelligence community, and the Iran-Contra affair. With each of those subjects, I tried to elaborate upon the twin themes of concealment and detection.

In addition to thematic links among the courses, programmatic ties were also incorporated. The Art of Detection was offered over the course of fourteen Wednesday evenings and two Saturdays, with the first and last Wednesdays and the two Saturday afternoons set up as interdisciplinary sessions of all three faculty and all of the students. The remaining classes, taught by individual faculty on Wednesday evenings on a rotating basis, and the two Saturday mornings, were individual course sessions. That unique arrangement served a variety of purposes: it provided for several interdisciplinary settings; it fulfilled the requisite number of class contact hours (although those enrolled in several courses doubled up with the interdisciplinary sessions); it gave distance education students the opportunity to enroll in multiple courses without scheduling conflicts; it allowed faculty to teach jointly and individually; it permitted the Education Network of Maine (ENM) to reserve only a Wednesday evening time slot in its programming schedule.

A principal difficulty with this innovative arrangement was actually conveying it to the students. Both elaborate syllabi and considerable attention to scheduling issues at the outset helped ameliorate this problem, but at cost to substantive class time. A related problem was the time lag between the individual Wednesday evening courses, which averaged about three weeks due to the rotation system. Two students in my course who signed written course evaluations suggested that the time between sessions was too long: "The time of 2-3 weeks was too much." "Great course but too much time between classes." The Continuing Education Division (CED) on campus, which was the administrative office responsible for overseeing the Art of Detection, sent a questionnaire to all students enrolled in the courses seeking their feedback on a panoply of issues (2). With respect to scheduling, CED found that 49% of the students were satisfied, 25% somewhat satisfied, and 26% dissatisfied with things. Those figures are difficult to interpret since they may be tapping sentiment related to the lag between classes, the compulsory Saturday sessions on campus (discussed shortly), or

the mix of interdisciplinary versus individual course sessions. Clearly, students were more satisfied than dissatisfied with the unique scheduling arrangement, but the existence of some negative student comments and 26% dissatisfaction with scheduling suggests the need for further assessment of unique scheduling arrangements with regard to distance education courses. Given their nature, it may be best to teach distance education classes in a traditional scheduling format, both to minimize confusion among students and to maximize the faculty member's opportunity to provide a coherent intellectual experience.

The Wednesday sessions originated at the University of Maine, where faculty taught about a dozen students in a studio classroom, with the course being simultaneously broadcast over television to thirty-three sites statewide enrolling about forty students (per course). The distance education students could see and hear the faculty member and students at the broadcast site, while we could only hear their comments when they called in with questions. Two disadvantages were built into that arrangement for the instructor. First, it was impossible to get visual cues from the questioners at the sites, which is a routine part of teaching a course. Was the student calling with a question genuinely confused, or merely seeking recognition for a point well understood? It was difficult discerning that difference barring a clear inflection of voice. Second, it was sometimes difficult to foster a respectful attitude among the students on campus toward the less capable students at the sites; while more talented students often dismiss the remarks of less able students, the tendency was especially pronounced when the questioner was simply a voice whose comments on the telephone were amplified.

On the other hand, the students in the studio classroom were the beneficiaries of many incisive comments by people at the sites able to participate because it was a distance education course. A number of the students at the sites demonstrated better verbal and writing skills than those in the studio classroom, partly because they tended to be highly motivated adult learners with some years of work experience. The lack of respect for some students calling in with questions from the sites, in other words, was often offset by the quality participation of others. All things considered, the level of student participation was less than with a traditional classroom (with the interactive distance format inhibiting some of the students), but the quality of participation was similar.

The two Saturday sessions were taught at the University of Maine campus without being broadcast, so students enrolled in the courses were obliged to attend class on campus for two full-day sessions. That arrangement mitigated the impersonal nature of a televised course for the students taking it at the sites, making it into a modified distance education course. It also provided me the opportunity to get to know the students taking classes at the sites; in fact, I became better acquainted with some distance education students during the all-day Saturday meetings than with students enrolled in traditional courses throughout the regular semester (especially those in large introductory sections often taught at state universities). The CED questionnaire assessing student satisfaction revealed that 38% were satisfied with the Saturday scheduling, 38% were somewhat satisfied, and 24% were not satisfied. While those figures suggest much dissatisfaction with Saturday scheduling, closer scrutiny of individual student

comments on open-ended questions shows that most complaints were related to the pedestrian issues of the distance to drive or the fact that Saturday sessions conflicted with a job. Those gripes were unrelated to the substance of the Saturday meetings, which seemed to help create a sense of community that is difficult to achieve in a distance education course.

II. FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

The most rewarding component of participating in The Art of Detection was working with faculty members in other disciplines. The benefits were numerous. For one, I was required to perform the substantive intellectual task of structuring a political science course within the context of a "detection" theme that encompassed two other courses. Second, I was exposed to a range of subjects not easily accessible to a political scientist, such as the genre of detective fiction and the standards of historical analysis. While that material is not easily integrated into other political science courses nor into my research program, it provided the sort of intellectual stimulation from other faculty that is sought for the purposes of professional development. Third, I was exposed to varying methods of syllabi construction, evaluation of student performance, and teaching techniques. While those benefits accrue to any faculty member involved in team teaching interdisciplinary courses, they are pronounced in distance education because of the level of preparation and planning involved for televised proceedings.

One informative illustration of the virtues of interdisciplinary team teaching over an interactive network arose on the last evening of the course, with a showing of Alfred Hitchcock's classic film, "The 39 Steps." Following broadcast of the movie, the English professor spoke to Hitchcock's formula for suspense, the historian discussed the context of the time the film was made (1935) with its symbolism vis-a-vis Nazi Germany, and I addressed the issue of right-to-know versus need-to-know, along with elite movement within a mass society. Thus, a short black-and-white film about a man memorizing the steps to make an atomic bomb became a treasure trove for connecting courses in different disciplines.

The interaction with colleagues in other disciplines may be particularly beneficial to those faculty housed in small departments and/or those without graduate programs, where the prospects for creative collaboration within the unit are often minimal. One important component of such interdisciplinary team teaching, based on my experience, is that it transpire among faculty of relatively equal rank, since the planning and execution of intertwined courses necessitates negotiation over the content and ordering of material. It seems preferable to have faculty similarly situated with regard to tenure and it may be optimal to have them relatively equal with respect to disciplinary accomplishments, simply to mitigate hierarchy among participants during the planning stages of the course. The Art of Detection involved two tenured associate professors and one tenured (recently promoted) full professor. We were able to operate unbothered by rank. Interdisciplinary teaching does not present the same potential for senior faculty mentoring junior faculty as does team teaching within the same discipline (where both research and teaching links can be made), so it makes sense in an interdisciplinary setting to

put collegiality above hierarchy.

In addition to working with faculty outside of disciplinary boundaries, another benefit of the Art of Detection was learning and/or utilizing available technology. The learning dimension was embedded in the mechanics of a televised course, such as speaking crisply and learning camera angles; more important than learning the mechanics of broadcasting, though, was incorporating visual materials to reinforce the learning process. When lecturing on the Watergate scandal, for instance, I was able to have a technician show several slides of the Senate Watergate Committee, play an audio excerpt of President Nixon's resignation speech, show a television clip of President Nixon's actual departure from the White House, and scan a written list of the articles of impeachment passed by the House Judiciary Committee. Those materials consumed about fifteen minutes of class time, reinforcing the lecture and reading material. In the absence of a studio setting and technician, I would have had to manage a slide projector, cassette tape player, and video cassette recorder to achieve the same result. While teaching in a multimedia setting seems artificial, it can provide the faculty member a range of tools without sacrificing the intellectual integrity of a course or having to perform the pedestrian tasks of procuring and operating equipment. This area will continue to mushroom with the growth of electronic resources easily brought into the classroom, such as C-SPAN or "Congressional Quarterly" through America On Line. Students are able to participate in electronic "town hall" discussions with political figures with relative ease, at least at this juncture, because those areas are not fully utilized.

In comparison, the pitfalls of technological delivery were minimal, such as staying within a fixed location for the purposes of television or channeling questions from the remote sites into the flow of discussion because a short lag time usually existed between class discussion and incoming phone calls. That subset of mechanical issues bothered very few students, evident in the fact that only 6% expressed dissatisfaction with visual and only 3% with audio delivery of the course, as measured by the CED evaluation questionnaire. Moreover, problems like channeling questions into the flow of class discussion are not restricted to distance education, but rather are a constant component of all teaching. Technological delivery presents a more difficult challenge, with the burden of proof squarely on the shoulders of those who claim that students can receive an experience in distance education similar to that in the traditional classroom, but the delivery differences should be seen on a continuum rather than in dichotomous terms. Technological delivery per se does not seem like a compelling argument against distance education, particularly when two-way interactive delivery is feasible.

In short, a project like The Art of Detection provides the faculty a good opportunity to grow professionally, while also giving them a better sense of the strengths and weaknesses of distance education. Those benefits are restricted to the teaching role of a faculty member, however, rather than extending to the research role. The costs to a research program are considerable during the semester the course is taught.

III. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Student assessment of the Art of Detection took two forms: 1) the regular course evaluations, consisting of twenty-nine items on a five-point scale and a space to write any open-ended comments (which are discarded if unsigned and retained in a faculty member's personnel file if signed); 2) the CED questionnaire already noted, composed of eight demographic questions, nine questions measuring student satisfaction, and five open-ended questions.

My individual course evaluations suggested the viability of the project, with scores of 1.18 on the summary question, "Overall, how would you rate the instructor?" and 1.75 on the summary question, "What is your overall rating of this course?" (where 1.0 is the highest and 5.0 is the lowest ranking). The first score is consistent with my teaching evaluations for traditional courses and the second is somewhat worse; both scores are skewed in the sense that students tend to rank professors in above average categories on teaching evaluations (3). Even so, those scores suggest strong student satisfaction with the course, a conclusion buttressed by the fact that eleven of thirteen signed student comments were of a positive nature.

Items #23 - #29 on the student evaluations highlight one of the problems with distance education, even though the evaluation scores (of 1.1 - 2.2) are credible. The logistics of distance education make it difficult to conduct examinations during class time -- exams consume valuable broadcast time and require close supervision by unknown site directors at every location where a student is taking a test. Moreover, students at the sites are in the awkward position of having to obtain permission to call with any questions about the exam. Those problems are compounded by the fact that exams must be collected at the various sites, sent to the instructor for evaluation, and returned to the students once they are corrected, with a considerable lag time naturally built into that process. I tried to circumvent those problems by requiring papers rather than offering examinations, which is what students were actually evaluating on questions #23 - #29. The process seemed to work well, but at the expense of requiring students to perform independently within the confines of a testing period. The University of Maine system has a distance education logistical service that handles the task of collecting and disseminating all student work, but it labors under time constraints and imperfect information. One of the ironies of distance education, which can provide instant information to many people in multiple locations, is that it can militate against prompt feedback from an instructor. This is a serious issue because prompt feedback aides retention.

The cumulative CED course evaluations are hard to interpret because they flush out student sentiment regarding the individual courses and the entire Art of Detection without easy demarcation of those differences. Thus, a student who took one course and a student who took three courses are asked to respond to The Art of Detection as a whole, with the former not having taken the entire set of courses and the latter probably having different views on the various courses. In any case, student satisfaction was quite high on the various domains assessed, with roughly three-fourths of the students or more being satisfied or somewhat satisfied with everything ranging from scheduling, to the classroom experience, to enrolling in multiple courses. (More substantive assessments of the courses would interfere with faculty rights to have their evaluations done in accordance with regular university procedure,

using standard forms, so those questions were not asked). While student satisfaction is not the sole index of academic quality, it is one index. As one student put it in a written comment: "The integrity of the class was maintained despite the untried format of this experimental ITV project."

One other interesting dimension of the data generated by the questionnaire was that most students responding took the distance education course simply for intellectual stimulation rather than toward a degree. Some 70% of the students in the English course, 63% in the history course, and 65% in my course were not enrolled in a degree program at any one of the University of Maine system campuses. For the most part, they were people located around the state who had completed some college (but never a degree) and who sought intellectual stimulation in a geographically remote and sparsely populated state. Of the respondents, 69% were women and 61% did not hold an undergraduate degree. To the extent that those findings hold for other distance education courses, at least some of the debate over distance education is illusory. Distance education may not necessarily supplant the traditional degree students matriculating on campuses so much as reaches out to those who seek intellectual stimulation or job advancement by completing college courses. It is conceivable that distance education might even prompt people without degrees to complete them.

In short, student assessment of the Art of Detection project was favorable. The students enrolled in my course and those who responded to the CED questionnaire provided positive evaluations. Accordingly, the report accompanying the CED survey questionnaire concluded: "Overall, students reported satisfaction with the Art of Detection. This project, received at thirty-three sites across the state of Maine, offered many students the opportunity to enroll in upper division courses utilizing one time spot on ITV (interactive television). The project's strengths tapped into outreach, credit building and academic improvement....It appears that the Art of Detection filled the academic needs of many students (4)."

IV. TEAM TEACHING DISTANCE EDUCATION

The Art of Detection experiment suggests that team teaching interdisciplinary distance education courses is feasible. Based on my experience, such courses may be most useful when they are taught on a regular (rather than rotational) basis; when taught among faculty of relatively equal rank; when taught face-to-face on occasion rather than completely as distance education courses; when taught with both substantive and programmatic ties among the courses. Obviously, those prescriptions for success are merely advisory since they arise from participation in one experimental project.

The different components of the Art of Detection resulted in a more complicated but also a more beneficial experience for the faculty. Each of the three components -- team teaching, interdisciplinary studies, and distance education -- provided unique opportunities for professional growth and development. One added perquisite was conveying the necessity of lifelong learning to students, which they observed as faculty prepared new courses

and delivered them in an untried format. It is impossible to quantify the effect on students, but many informally expressed appreciation for our efforts.

Clearly, team teaching and interdisciplinary studies have a better pedigree than distance education; they are established and well-regarded at many universities, while distance education is a gradually emerging concept that competes with traditional faculty roles, battles the image created by correspondence and electronic schools (5), and demands resources in an era of constraint. This mixture can be volatile. The chancellor of the University of Maine System resigned in Spring 1995 partly over his effort to create a separate distance education campus within the University of Maine System which offered degrees, prompting votes of "no confidence" by faculty governing bodies on all seven campuses of the system. It is difficult to disentangle the precise nature of the complaints (particularly the degree of dissatisfaction with the principle of distance education versus the more narrowly drawn issues of separate organizational units being created or degrees being granted), and difficult to weigh the importance of distance education issues relative to salary negotiations with a unionized faculty, both of which played a role in the chancellor's resignation. Those events gained considerable saliency when Speaker Newt Gingrich cited the tussle within the University of Maine System as a perfect example of the problems with contemporary higher education (6).

>From my perspective, distance education is neither a panacea for the rising costs of higher education nor a technological evil to be suppressed. It is perfectly suitable for nondegree students, especially in a state like Maine with its combination of geographic isolation, widely dispersed population, inclement weather, and a declining pool of prospective students. Likewise, it seems to be an appropriate component of a degree student's record so long as the integrity of the courses is maintained by having the regular faculty deliver them; based on my experience, though, it would be premature to deliver an entire degree through distance education. More assessment of student skills and learning over time is needed before embarking on that course.

The role of the faculty in setting the parameters for distance education should be paramount. Campus administrators are necessarily occupied with a variety of issues related to effective management of the organization, while students are consumers of an educational product who are not necessarily well-positioned to make appropriate choices. One student, very enthusiastic about the Art of Detection, for instance, asked at the end of the semester if I could teach another distance education course on the more specific topic of the Kennedy assassination, with little thought that a political science degree involves assimilation of a body of knowledge that can range from Aristotle to z-scores. One course on interbranch rivalry over concealment may be appropriate, but an entire curriculum built on intriguing subjects is not. Faculty are the arbiters of academic standards. It is logical that they should structure the content parameters of distance education.

The growth of distance education has an inevitable character to it. The competition among colleges and universities, the cost-effectiveness of distance education once it is established, the increasing proclivity of students to be visual learners, and the

inevitable application of technology all combine to make distance learning more prominent. Faculty can harness the technology for appropriate pedagogical purposes, but only if they are familiar enough with the parameters of distance education to enter the debate in an informed way. A project like the Art of Detection can provide that entry point.

Notes

1. I wish to emphasize that the opinions expressed in this paper are my own and are not necessarily shared by my colleagues in this collaborative project.
2. The CED questionnaire was sent to 127 participating students, with a follow-up questionnaire sent to nonrespondents. A total of 76 students returned completed evaluations, a response rate of 60%.
3. Data produced by the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Maine for academic year 1994-1995 showed that student evaluations customarily range around 1.5 - 2.5 on a 5-point scale.
4. Program Evaluation Summary, "The Art of Detection," Continuing Education Division, University of Maine, March 1995, 2.
5. In the Education component of America Online, for instance, a subdivision called the "Electronic University" offers courses over the Internet, including an M. A. in International Relations at Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island.
6. Gingrich, N. 1995. To Renew America. HarperCollins.

Note: This article is the text of a paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, September 1-4, 1995.

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