DISTANCE EDUCATION—WINE TASTING AND EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

"How do you get faculty interested and involved in teaching by distance education?" The answer turned out to be a simple yet creative solution: wine tasting by educational technology.

The Pilot Project

The goal was to offer an already existing evening course on wine tasting, using two-way video conferencing and educational technology supports. Our concerns about achieving success with this project focused on:

- recruiting full-time Confederation College faculty who would enroll in the course as students
- limiting the class size to 12 (based on type of content and delivery mode)
- ensuring appropriate technology and technical supports would be in place
- following the course content and making sure the wine tasting supplies were available and
- helping the instructor, who had never taught by distance before, achieve a suitable comfort level to deliver the course effectively.

After a few initial meetings, we had a general agreement-in principle-on three purposes of our project:

- to provide an enjoyable and enticing PD (professional development) learning experience (thus, the content focus on wine tasting)
- to expose faculty to educational technologies to increase their awareness of and interest in using educational technologies to both enhance learning and demonstrate distance education methods for course delivery and
- to pilot the distance delivery of the wine tasting course for potential offering to the general public through Community Education.

The Expected Outcomes

Keeping these purposes in mind, it was expected that on completion of the project faculty participants would:

- learn something about the content of the wine tasting course
- be motivated to use the educational technologies in traditional or distance delivery of their courses and
- give feedback that would be used to provide recommendations for future courses and serve as a baseline for future research.

Once the outcomes of the project were established, we set up and divided tasks, and continued to meet and evaluate our progress.

Implementation of the Plan

The course itself was designed with four parts: an orientation session, two one-hour live two-way video sessions with the instructor, and a debriefing session.

Faculty, as students, accessed the orientation session on Blackboard, then were encouraged to complete an assignment that directed them to use the various features posted there. Under "Staff and Course Information," faculty were instructed to find out more about their teacher. This area included a 20-second video and short bio about the instructor. Appropriate classroom etiquette for students in a distance delivery course was available in PDF format in "Course Documents." Faculty participants also were encouraged to check out the "External Links" section for 10 interesting wine websites. Upon completion of their assignments, faculty participants were encouraged to submit their answers using the "digital drop-box" feature in Blackboard. As an incentive for correctly completing and submitting the assignment prior to class, we held a random prize drawing during the first live class session.

Twelve faculty registered as students for the course, and on the first day nine faculty students came to class. These nine participants were divided randomly into two groups. Group A stayed in the classroom, and Group B went to another two-way video classroom. A PowerPoint presentation had been developed about the

10 most frequently asked questions about wine and wine products, and was shown to both classrooms on large TV screens. The instructor delivered his content by answering each question and taking time to ask faculty in both classrooms for their comments or other questions. At the end of the first session, participants were asked to complete a homework assignment—go to Blackboard and take another short five-question, multiple-choice quiz. Every answer on the quiz, right or wrong, had feedback for the participant. Every faculty student who answered the quiz was entered into another drawing for a small prize that was awarded in the second session.

On the second day, the two groups switched class-rooms. This gave each group the opportunity to experi-ence the course as distance education students. A project member was in each room and was responsible for setting up the wine and glasses. Actual hands-on wine-tasting activities consumed the bulk of this session. Along with using the two-way video to give instructions and ask questions of the students in the other classroom, the instructor used the ELMO[1] to show and discuss different types of corkscrews.

During the debriefing session, faculty students were asked to complete an evaluation survey, using Black-board. The survey consisted of six yes/no questions with a space after each question for comments. A seventh question asked faculty if they would be inter-ested in participating in an interview to gather further information. All nine faculty members responded to the survey with positive comments that suggested ex-pected outcomes were met.

Lessons Learned

Delivering a course via distance technology is about realizing that the teacher guides the tools. The technol-ogy becomes simply a tool of delivery. The "Teaching the Basics of Wine Tasting" instructor knew the content but not the delivery system. Yet, with the right supports and professional development, he embraced the challenge; and the result was a successfully delivered course through distance education.

Recommendations

The project committee reviewed faculty evaluations, summarized the learning experience, and developed recommendations around preparation, technology, and support.

- A training manual should be developed to provide "how to" support for use of the various educa-tional technologies in either the traditional or distance classroom.
- Faculty should be given time on their SWF[2] to prepare for redesigning their courses to include different technologies, whether traditional mode or distance delivery is used.
- One of the largest barriers for distance delivery is the quantity and quality of the equipment. Both classrooms would have benefited from individual microphones. Faculty should become familiar with new equipment. Going in early to determine that everything is ready and in good working order will prevent unnecessary frustration.
- The rules of distance classroom etiquette should be available and reviewed with each class to help foster a positive learning experience.
- It is important to have easy access to an Informa-tion Technology (IT) Help Desk for technical issues and to distance education departments for connec-tion and functionality issues.
- In-person, video, or audio orientations for new or established, full- or part-time faculty, as well as students, would facilitate delivery.
- Repeat the delivery of the wine tasting course as a continuing education activity, using educational technologies to allow more participation and garner more support for distance delivery.

Reflection

The success of delivering a wine tasting course by educational technology challenges the assumption that there are only certain types of courses that can be delivered by distance education. By meeting this challenge, we created a unique and dynamic approach to help our faculty identify strategies and supports for developing an effective distance learning experience for their students.

[1] ELMO is a document camera that transmits an image to the TV screen so that the students can see it in the same way as the PowerPoint presentation. The teacher can zoom in and out on an object or textbook to give students a better view.

[2] SWF stands for Standard Workload Form, and is used in all colleges in Ontario in the assignment of teacher workloads.

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