Chapter 17
Online Studio Design Pedagogy:
Community, Personality, Graphic Design, Usability

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ABSTRACT

ART765 Design for the WWW serves as the capstone course in the online post-baccalaureate certificate Interactive Media Design at Towson University. The course and program provide students with the opportunity to advance their web and interactive media design knowledge. The opportunity to design and produce a four course graduate certificate prompted the careful consideration and creation of an online course design system intended to enhance student learning and usability. ART765 Design for the WWW became the design prototype for the IAMD certificate. The pedagogical and design strategies used to create ART765 Design for the WWW include: creating a sense of community and personality, considering the needs of the online learner, graphic design, information architecture, web usability, appropriate multimedia methods, Web 2.0 technology and MUVE's, and the Quality Matters® peer review. These strategies serve to unify the online teaching and learning environment for all four of the Interactive Media Design courses.

INTRODUCTION

ART765 Design for the WWW serves as the capstone course in the online post-baccalaureate certificate Interactive Media Design at Towson University. The course and program provide professionals, artists, and educators the opportunity to advance their web and interactive media design knowledge by offering coursework via the Internet. Students must complete four graduate-level courses to earn a certificate: *Elements of WWW Design, Graduate Typography, Interactive Media Concepts and Theory,* and *Design for the WWW*. The certificate emphasizes visual communication and graphic design theories and practices within the applied context of website and interactive media authoring.

The opportunity to design and produce a four course graduate certificate prompted the careful

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consideration and creation of an online course design system made up of essential design strategies each intended to enhance student ease of use and improve student learning. *ART765 Design for the WWW* became the design prototype for the IAMD certificate, and ultimately the course served as the template for subsequently designed IAMD online courses. The pedagogical and design strategies used to create *ART765 Design for the WWW* include: creating a sense of community and personality, course content that considers the needs of the online learner, graphic design, information architecture, web usability, appropriate multimedia methods, Web 2.0 technology and MUVE's, and the Quality Matters® peer review. These strategies serve to unify the online teaching and learning environment for all four of the Interactive Media Design courses.

ART765 DESIGN FOR THE WWW CASE STUDY

Overview of the course. Through a series of WWW exercises and projects ART765 *Design for the WWW* students analyze and apply current aesthetics and methods of World Wide Web design and authoring in order to create comprehensive and effective WWW sites. Students utilize digital imaging methods for image generation, and WWW authoring techniques. Students utilize current industry WWW authoring software including: Adobe Dreamweaver®, and Adobe Photoshop® to engage in the design and production of websites that are published via the Internet. Students also participate in researching various aspects of design for WWW and it's impact on industry, culture, education, and the visual dissemination of electronic information. Additionally students utilize Web2.0 and MUVE technology as a means of raising their awareness to how these new web technologies expand and alter the expectations of today's web users.

ART765 *Design for the WWW* is delivered online through the Blackboard® environment, permitting students from remote locations to complete the course without attending classes at the main campus. Students are expected to have basic to mid-level computer skills. Access to a suitable computer with Internet service is required, and a high-speed Internet connection is recommended.

Creating a Sense of Community in an Online Course

In a face2face studio teaching and learning environment the physical meeting time and place of the class creates a sense of community by default. Face2face group and one-on-one critiques of design projects require much discussion and the in-class interaction further fosters the development of the classroom sense of community. Creating a sense of community in an online course is integral to the student experience and their ultimate success in the course. The *Sense of Virtual Community* (SOVC) is a recognized significant feature of virtual communities and is defined by Blanchard (2007) as, "members' feelings of membership, identity, belonging, and attachment to a group that interacts primarily through electronic communication." (Blanchard, 2007) The challenge lies in recreating elements of the face2face community for the online learners. Quite often in an online course, as in face2face teaching and learning environments, the strength and dynamic of the group enhances the students' learning experience. Likewise a poor group dynamic hinders the pedagogical success of the course–leaving students confused and disillusioned.

Palloff and Pratt (2007) noted, the following indicators "provide evidence that community has formed in an online class:

- Active interaction involving both course content and personal communication
- Collaborative learning evidenced by

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