Chapter 11
A Case Study in Online Delivery:
Boarding the Bullet Train to an Online Music Degree

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ABSTRACT

This case study explores the journey that allowed the music faculty at a small public university in North Dakota to create a groundbreaking undergraduate online music major. The narrative travels from resistance to acceptance and from tradition to innovation. The events are described from the perspective of two faculty members who approached the adaptation of technology into the music program from polar opposites, one highly in tune with the world of technology and the other highly resistant. This chapter presents the history of the online music degree, including its seminal beginnings, the technology innovations that drove the process, the evolution of essential team buy-in, the skills acquired by faculty, and the processes developed for delivery. Online teaching has energized the music department at Valley City State University and the story is one worth sharing.

INTRODUCTION

Putting a complete major program online is a challenge for any department, especially one dealing with the performing arts. The following chapter tells the story of two music professors at a small North Dakota liberal arts institution and their involvement with the little department that could. These professors were diametrically opposed in their approach to technology. Dr. Sara Hagen's background included a wealth of technology experience including pioneering

research and a private computer lab that began with a Commodore 64 and the first Macintosh personal computer. Dr. Beth Klingenstein didn't know the difference between a modem and a hard drive and decided early in life never to enter the world of technology. Together they provided the impetus that ignited the Department of Music at Valley City State University (VCSU) to eventually develop an online music major.

Before addressing the nuts and bolts of *how* VCSU put its music degree online, we first outline some of the opportunities and challenges faced by VCSU and its music department. VCSU went through a period of intense transformation in the mid 1990s due to decisions that propelled the university to become the second laptop campus in the nation. With the arrival of the laptops came an almost overnight university-wide assumption that a technology component would now be stated in each course syllabus. The campus culture became one highly tuned to the heartbeat of technology.

In a study conducted during VCSU's early days of transformation, Corwin (1998) researched three North Dakota campuses implementing a notebook initiative, stating that "the infrastructure of the VCSU campus was quite different from the other two campuses" (Corwin, p. 115). Multimedia classrooms with projection units and Internet access for students were already in place. Offices were networked and dorms had access to the Internet. Her study also found no correlation between the availability of computers and the actual use of computers in the classroom among the campuses. Rather, cultural differences were the main factor cited for the significance in technological innovations at VCSU; these cultural differences were influenced by peer pressure and by changing patterns of concerns from "awareness" to higher order interactions such as "collaboration" and "refocusing."

The move to ubiquitous computing seemed to take on a life of its own. In the State of the University Address in August of 1995, VCSU president Dr. Ellen Chaffee described technology as "a bullet

train" to the 21st century. Her message received a wide variety of reactions from faculty members, especially those within the music department. Dr. Hagen's reaction to the president's address was an enthusiastic "Where do I get a ticket?" while Dr. Klingenstein imagined a despairing wave from the platform. The president's message may give the impression that the laptop initiative was merely an administrative dictate. Corwin's study, however, indicates that the decision to adopt the laptops came from faculty technology committees at two out of the three institutions and concluded that bottom-up faculty-driven decisions drove the evolution of an innovative campus culture at VCSU (1998).

President Chaffee supported the technology committee decision after considerable discussion. She then took the laptop initiative to the state legislature with a plan to reallocate funding and to increase the technology fees to students in order to fund the project. The legislature agreed to allow VCSU to make the needed infrastructure and equipment purchases. A federal grant to initiate digital portfolios was received at approximately the same time as the laptop initiative and together they combined to provide the steam in the engine. VCSU was indeed on the bullet train to cultural change.

Tyre and Orlikowski's (1994) study indicated that, when seeking change, there is a short window of opportunity to alter culture on a campus and to diffuse and modify the nature of teaching and learning at the institutional level. In other words, a "perfect storm" is needed to transform culture. VCSU was able to take advantage of this perfect storm by creating a positive culture of change, soliciting input and support from all constituents, providing adequate and appropriate training for faculty in a timely manner, and supporting the necessary infrastructure for support the new pedagogical paradigm.

Due to the increased use of technology, pedagogy shifted, with students taking more responsibility for their learning. "Faculty were

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