



Dear Subscriber,

Welcome to the Winter 2001-02 Issue of the IVC Newsletter.

This issue features the perspectives about online instruction from two experienced faculty members in fields that are very challenging for distance education. Dr. Randall Ott, Professor of Production Medicine/Theriogenology at the College of Veterinary Medicine University of Illinois at Urbana, and Ms. Paula Willig, Associate Professor of Interpreter Preparation at John A. Logan College, provide very useful insight about online instruction that applies to many other subject areas. This issue also features Parkland College, the first IVC provider to offer the Associate in Art, Associate in Science, and Associate of General Studies degrees completely online, and John Wood Community College, an IVC provider and an IVC Student Support Center that is involved in an interesting tri-state partnership for providing distance education.

Ivan J. Lach, IVC Associate Director

### **Faculty Perspective...Why Online?**

Dr. Randall Ott is a Professor of Production Medicine/Theriogenology at the College of Veterinary Medicine on the Urbana campus of the University of Illinois where he teaches courses in animal reproduction and production medicine. Currently he is also serving as the Director of Online Degree Programs for the College of Veterinary Medicine, and in this capacity, he is charged with helping others in his college get started with online teaching. He considers himself to be an advocate, user and early adopter of technology for online learning.

Sparking his interest

Dr. Ott investigated online teaching after seeing his younger son using online materials developed for an astronomy class at the University of Illinois. He saw the possibilities and benefits provided by online course materials, and used that as a springboard. Initially, he had no knowledge of HTML, but was able to look at the source codes for Web pages that interested him, use some common sense, and cut and paste code in order to develop simple pages for use in his courses. Currently, he uses FrontPage as a web management tool and teaches his courses using WebCT.

His original interest in online focused around the fact that the Internet is a wonderful way to provide learners with information around the clock. Regardless of the schedule of the student or professor, the information remains on the Web for the students to visit and revisit at any time. The Web also has the potential to provide much additional information for aggressive learners.

If students are learning in the classroom without online support, they take a quiz and don't realize they answered questions incorrectly until some time later when the teacher returns the graded quiz. While that time elapses, incorrect answers have been reinforced. Taking that same quiz with computer aided instruction allows the student to have immediate feedback. Dr. Ott requires his students to take self-assessment quizzes throughout the semester. They can take the quizzes as often as they like, and spend as long as they wish on each question. The only requirement is that they eventually score 100% before moving on. Through this method, each student is able to attain the correct answer for every question asked, and is able to reinforce those answers. Dr. Ott is able to see, through the online information provided to him in WebCT, how many times each student has taken the quiz and how long he or she spent on each quiz. Exams that determine the student's grade for the course are not given online.

#### Online vs. On-Ground ... Convergence is the Key

Currently, all of Ott's courses have an online component. The College of Veterinary Medicine doesn't have many courses that are totally online because of the hands-on nature of most medical courses. Exceptions are the set of continuing education courses used for licensed veterinarians to re-certify and keep their licenses current. Rather than attending several daylong conferences, these online modules allow veterinarians to take the updates on their own time, and complete an exam at the end. Besides being convenient for the audience, the online alternative has the benefit of ensuring that the participants have learned something over the course of the certification.

Ott says that the key is "convergence." He believes, particularly in his field, that it is not a good idea to have on-ground classes with no online information, or online courses with no on-ground component. The exception would be for the aforementioned graduate veterinarians who are taking advantage of online certification opportunities. He points out, however, that these students have already completed their on-ground course and lab components in order to obtain their DVM. There are certain courses in other subject areas that could successfully be done 100% online, but working towards a DVM degree does not lend itself to a fully online curriculum. Materials that are provided online enhance the on-ground experience and provide exponentially more information for students' reference for course projects and assignments.

#### Online in the Future

The Internet is the medium with the most impact since the book, as far as he is concerned. It is interactive, however, and may one day be an even more powerful medium for that very reason. The best online courses emphasize learners' learning more

so than teachers' teaching. Learners can react to information, and repeat lessons as needed. Online learning isn't about computers anymore; it is about communication, and successful learning depends on communication. Teachers and learners using the Internet must discriminate and be able to select information that is accurate and useful.

Ott points out that the most compelling reason instructors need to become involved with online teaching is because their "competitors" are doing it! To illustrate this point, he uses the analogy of the tractor and the mule. When tractors were first invented, there were many, many reasons for farmers to continue using a mule. People knew everything they needed to know about mules, and, besides, they got the job done! Tractors were unknown. They could break down, they could explode?? The best reason to leave the mule behind, however, was that other farmers were using tractors, and getting more done.

Related to this idea, as online learning becomes mainstream, learners will seek out this medium. They will discover that it supplies an endless stream of opportunities and information. The question is this: will you be at the forefront of this trend, or will you be coming in at the end? Not only will institutions use online opportunities to do more than their competitors, but students will see that happening and go where they can take advantage of increased opportunities.

#### Faculty Advantages

A large problem with the adoption of online learning, Ott believes, is that it requires teachers to be students again, and many are resistant to this concept. This is especially true of instructors who have been in the field longer. These instructors might not see the value of taking large amounts of time to change the way they teach, only to retire in the near future. Those newer to the field, however, may be more willing to take the time to rework their lesson plans, learn the technology, and find all the available resources. Ott feels that the online revolution will eventually work to the benefit of instructors, and that the time invested will be worth the work. It is essential to keep learning and keep an open mind in order to stay at the forefront of your field.

At the outset, online courses require a much higher investment in time by an instructor. Once a good library of lessons and resources is developed, however, the instructor's job becomes easier, and the materials provided for their students will be better quality. Additionally, there are many online programs and resources to assist with quizzing and grading activities that save time and assure accuracy.

#### Student advantages

"Computers are empowering tools that allow learners to go at their own pace and repeat information as many times as necessary ..."

When he began to teach online, Ott saw the medium as a way to allow fast learners an opportunity to work through materials at their own pace, rather than being held up by the pace of the class. Through the tremendous resources available on the Web, they can get much additional information. Quick learners want quick answers, and they are able to receive that online better than in a normal, on-ground setting.

Ott has no solid data on what the learning outcomes have been for students in online environments, versus those who are strictly on-ground, but his observation has been that online delivery was beneficial for learners of all varieties. From his experience, he has learned that “computers are empowering tools that allow learners to go at their own pace and repeat information as many times as necessary in order to have a positive learning outcome,” as a result of the self-paced nature of the medium.

He has had great success with students completing online assignments, quizzes and research. Students always participate in and complete the online components of the class, whether it is something they are familiar with or not. Ott understands that his situation may not be typical, as all of his students are working in a professional program, so he may have a better participation rate than many instructors should expect.

His students are paying a higher tuition and investing a great deal of time in order to reach a very specific educational goal, so they are interested in any advantage that he can provide them.

His advice for students considering online courses ... be aware that things change fast, especially in fields that depend on scientific developments and technology. It is not possible to sustain yourself as a successful student simply by memorizing information. It is essential to learn HOW to learn, and where to find the best information. The online medium encourages students to be critical thinkers because it allows students to practice finding and evaluating data, and discriminating to weed out the bad information. Students must question everything they read, see and hear in order to reach this end. If they understand this, and take advantage of the opportunities afforded them with this medium, they will enjoy great success.

## **An Interview with Professor Paula Willig**

Ms. Paula Willig is an Associate Professor of Interpreter Preparation at John A. Logan College. She has a Master of Science Degree in Interpreter Education from Western Maryland College, a Comprehensive Skills Certification from the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, and a Comprehensive Interpreter License from the State of Missouri. Professor Willig has extensive experience in developing and teaching online courses in her field. She shares her insight and perspective on online instruction in the following interview with IVC staff.

IVC: What prompted you to get involved with online instruction?

Prof. Willig: I was interested in developing instructional materials that students could use outside of class. Because we have a two year program, we have to take advantage of everything possible to expose the students to American Sign Language (ASL). The first Web pages that I made were about fingerspelling, the manual alphabet, and classifiers (handshapes that are used to show the size, shape, location, or action of an object). Those are two particularly difficult things for students to learn. When I had success with those pages, I decided that it was time to become more involved in online education.

IVC: How can online instruction be effective in your subject area?

Prof. Willig: In the field of sign language interpreting, online course materials are good for reinforcing instruction. Also, I've seen and created some online courses that helped students to acquire vocabulary. However, in our field there is no substitute for exposure to the language in live, real-time situations.

The online sign language courses that I've seen that are worth their salt also require students to put in time socializing with deaf people using the language. In an online environment, the student is left to ferret out those opportunities for themselves. In our program we offer more direction, and even create opportunities for the students to get this experience.

IVC: How do you use online instruction?

Prof. Willig: Right now all of the classes that I teach have online supplements. I have taught two fully online classes. We just developed a new fully online certificate program for working interpreters. It will consist of four courses, a fifth one optional, and be offered during the summer.

IVC: What is your experience in teaching courses totally online?

Prof. Willig: I taught a skills class totally online. The problem that I ran into was that all of the homework had to be submitted on videotape. The students taking the class lived from the East Coast to Arizona; therefore, it took some time to send videotapes back and forth. If all the students had broadband and could send video files to me, that would have been the way to go. The main drawback to teaching this type of skill online, of course, is the time needed interacting using the language. If there were a way of doing that in a somewhat controlled environment, then doing an entire program like ours online would probably work.

IVC: What techniques and/or technologies do you use in your online courses?

Prof. Willig: Right now I use small animated clips, streaming video, and I am in the process of creating some CD's with video clips on them. The problem with streaming video clips is that most students don't have high speed internet access.

I have really found that online discussion is a very useful tool. In several of my classes I have the students respond to online questions that have been posed on a discussion board. I also have used those discussion boards to answer vocabulary questions, putting up little animations of the vocabulary word in question. That has been very useful.

IVC: What are your future goals for using online instruction?

Prof. Willig: I would like to develop more instructional materials and make them available online as well as on CD. That is my next project. I also have three new online courses to develop.

IVC: What do you like about online learning?

Prof. Willig: Online education is very interactive. I really like the fact that students in an online environment usually take more time to think about their responses to questions. It forces the interaction, even from shy, quiet students.

I really enjoyed teaching online with people who were already working as interpreters. There were some in my class who had as much experience in the field as I had. That was a wonderful, enriching experience for me. We had some very dynamic, thoughtful discussions.

By and large student comments have been very positive. I had very few students who were enrolled in online courses that dropped them. They've enjoyed the interaction and the online community that forms in the classes.

The major difficulty that students have faced is problems with technology. I had a few students drop because of things like a lightning strike that burnt up a modem, lack of reliable internet service, and waiting too long for the computer repair people to return the equipment.

Also, there is often more work in an online course because rather than making face to face comments, everything is typed and read. That takes time. Some students have been overwhelmed by the time requirement.

IVC: What is your advice for students considering taking online courses?

Prof. Willig: Be sure to understand that an online course is just as much work, if not more, than a course taught in the classroom. You will need to organize your time effectively and be motivated to complete the lessons on time. If you fall behind it will be very difficult to catch up.

## **Parkland College First to Offer Online Associate Degrees**

Parkland College is the first IVC provider to offer the Associate in Art, Associate in Science, and Associate in General Studies degrees completely online. Parkland received approval to offer these programs online from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. These online programs are identical to the on-campus programs. Students can take the entire program online or they can take part of the program online and a part on-campus.

In addition to the online associate degrees, Parkland College offers 8 certificate programs online. During the past several semesters Parkland has offered the highest number of course sections via the Internet and has generated the highest online student course enrollments of any community college in the state.

## **Online Courses and Support at John Wood Community College**

John Wood Community College is home to one of the forty IVC Student Support Centers and is also an IVC provider offering over thirty online courses on the IVC online catalog. The IVC Student Support Center is located in the Open Learning Center on the John Wood campus. Currently, there are 48 computers available for student use. The Open Learning Center is in the process of moving to a new building on campus. In the new building, there are 53 new state-of-the-art (1.6-gigahertz Pentium 4) computers for student use, another 9 computers for computerized testing, 25 computers in the Academic Support Center, and 24 computers in the student resource room. The college has also acquired the Web-for-Student module of SCT that will enable students to access their personal information such as academic records and class grades.

For faculty, the new John Wood Community College Instructional Technology Office will have five computers for work with digital photos, sound and video. Each of the thirteen new classrooms in the complex will be equipped with computer, Internet connections, graphics cameras and LCD projectors or large screen monitors for computerized presentations. Three of these rooms are Interactive classrooms that provide compressed video teleconferencing, and any of the rooms can be configured to present satellite-fed videoconferences.

John Wood Community College is a provider of 37 online courses through its partnerships with TriStateOnline and the Western Illinois Education Consortium (WIEC). TriStateOnline is a consortium of three area community colleges: John Wood Community College in Quincy, IL; Moberly Area Community College in Moberly, MO; and Southeastern Community College in Keokuk, IA. To obtain more information about these two partnerships check out their web sites at:

WIEC = [www.bhc.edu/wiec](http://www.bhc.edu/wiec)

TriStateOnline = [www.tristateonline.org](http://www.tristateonline.org)