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E^2: Experiential Learning in an Electronic Classroom

By

Jody Siegler Hicks

A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Arts in Political Science

Idaho State University

April 2014

To the Graduate Faculty:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of Jody Siegler Hicks find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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Dr. Mark McBeth,
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October 24, 2013

Jody Hicks
101 Skinner Rd
Oneida, NY 13421

RE: Your application dated 10/22/2013 regarding study number 3994: Experience Government Online,

Dear Mr./Ms. Hicks:

I agree that this study qualifies as exempt from review under the following guideline: 2. Anonymous surveys or interviews. This letter is your approval, please, keep this document in a safe place.

Notify the HSC of any adverse events. Serious, unexpected adverse events must be reported in writing within 10 business days.

You are granted permission to conduct your study effective immediately. The study is not subject to renewal.

Please note that any changes to the study as approved must be promptly reported and approved. Some changes may be approved by expedited review; others require full board review. Contact Patricia Hunter (208-282-2179; fax 208-282-4529; email: humsubj@isu.edu) if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Ralph Baergen, PhD, MPH, CIP
Human Subjects Chair

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Abstract

As online education gains popularity and has become the fastest growing segment of higher education, there appears to be a gulf between the literature of what is possible and the reality of what is actually happening in the online classroom.

The goal of this research was to determine if it was practical to combine experiential learning in an online classroom. This research includes a literature review of best practices in online education and experiential learning. It also includes a study of experiential learning in a traditional classroom to identify the positive impact of directly participating in some level of government. The participants include students enrolled in an Introduction to Government class at a community college in upstate New York. There were 44 students in the experimental group (participated in experiential learning project) and 14 students in the control group (did not participate in the experiential learning project).   The students were given a pre-test/post-test survey measuring political knowledge, confidence in that knowledge and internal and external efficacy. The results show that the students in both groups experienced a significant increase in all areas tested, while participation in the experiential learning project significantly improved confidence in political knowledge more than the students who did not participate in that project.

 The second phase of the study includes a national survey of 37 online government instructors. The survey was designed to identify which pedagogical techniques instructors find most helpful and to understand their perceptions of how online education compares to traditional education.   The results show that instructors receive very little training in online pedagogy and they consistently rate online students lower than traditional students in all the categories measured: Student motivation, critical thinking, independent thinking, student to student communication, communication between faculty and students, student

connectedness, student efficacy, promotion of community involvement, ability to spark

enthusiasm, ability to relate information to real-life, student enjoyment and overall quality

of education. In fact, only 9% of respondents thought that online education was superior to

a traditional education.

The goal of this study was to incorporate the research in best practices of online

education, the information gained from professionals in online education and to synthesize

all this information to create an online Introduction to Government course which includes

an experiential learning project.

Chapter One

Introduction

Picture this- a cool fall day, leaves of various colors carpet the ground, gray stone buildings covered in ivy, classrooms filled with eager young students hanging on their professor's every word while furiously taking notes.
Now picture- a mother of three, exhausted after a long day's work, having just put the kids to bed, she sits in her living room folding laundry by her computer taking an online course.

The reality of college is changing.

6.7 million; that is the number of college students in the United States taking full or part time classes in degree granting universities (Sloan Consortium, 2012). Almost half of all college students who have graduated in the past 10 years, have taken an online class (Pew Social Trends, 2011). Additionally, 77% of all college institutions and 89% of all four-year public colleges and universities now offer online classes (Pew Social Trends, 2011). Coursera, a company providing Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), has more than one million users from 196 countries (Time Magazine, 2012). The number of college students taking online courses is sky rocketing, in 2012 there were 560,000 more students taking online classes than the previous year. To further document this growing trend, higher education in general is growing at about 2% while online enrollment is experiencing a 10% rate of growth (Sloan Consortium, 2012).

It is obvious that distance learning is a growing trend in education. Instructors need to educate themselves about the positive and negatives of this new paradigm and must learn and adopt best practices for this emerging forum. As an instructor at a community college in upstate New York, I am acutely aware of the recent push for online education. Nancy Zimpher, the Chancellor of SUNY Schools, recently

announced that she is in the process of creating Open SUNY, the largest provider of online education in the nation. The goal is that this program will have 100,000 students enrolled in degree seeking programs.

As a Doctoral student interested in spending my career teaching at the undergraduate level, I conducted this research in the interest of learning about the techniques and skills required to create the best possible course for my students and my college. With that goal in mind, I have completed a literature review compiling information about the pros and cons of online education and best practices in online teaching. I am particularly interested in finding out if the very benefits of service/experiential learning can be replicated in an online classroom. The first phase of this research included a study measuring the impact of experiential learning in a traditional classroom. Students were given a pre-test survey measuring political knowledge, confidence in that knowledge, internal and external efficacy. During the semester the students in the experimental group participated in an experiential learning project where they had to actively involve themselves in the implementation of some public policy. One group of students proposed a security camera be installed in the student parking lot and then worked to achieve that policy objective, another group actively worked to change the Student Health Center policy so they could offer the Plan B pill. At the end of the semester, the students in the experimental and control group were given a post-test to measure change in the areas listed above.

The second phase of the research developed as a result of the literature review. The research in online education is overwhelmingly positive with numerous studies outlining the benefits and possibilities of online education. This research is contrary

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to what I have hard anecdotally from online instructors and from my students who take online courses. With this in mind, I decided to conduct a national survey of online Introduction to Government instructors to determine the reality of online education. I surveyed the instructors about the pedagogical techniques that they use in their online classes and their impression of online education when compared to a traditional brick and mortar education. The final phase of the research was to synthesize all this information and create an online Introduction to Government class that would use best practices from the research, the lessons learned from the survey of instructors and the incorporation of an experiential learning project.

This research was conducted as dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctor of Arts degree in Political Science at Idaho State University. The Doctor of Arts degree was conceived out of concern that the traditional Ph.D. programs were not preparing graduates for the requirements of teaching undergraduates at liberal arts institutions. The Ph.D. was great at preparing someone for a highly specialized career in research but not appropriate for the challenges of teaching a diverse range of courses within their discipline which is required of someone working at a smaller institution (Cardozier. 1968). By comparison the Doctor of Arts degree is designed to prepare a graduate to teach a wide range of classes within their discipline. This is accomplished by incorporating classes about teaching into the required coursework. For example at Idaho State, D.A. students are required to complete classes in Pedagogy and Learning Theory and are required to spend a semester team-teaching with a professor and then solo-teach for a semester under the supervision a professor.

While the Doctor of Arts degree does focus on teaching, it does not abandon the research component traditionally required of Ph. D. students. D.A. students at Idaho State University have an option of completing a research dissertation or a teaching based dissertation. To fulfill my degree requirement, I chose the teaching based dissertation as I plan to spend my career teaching at the undergraduate level. This research has allowed me to delve deeply into the subject of online education and to develop a niche that will serve my students well. I feel as though I can take the information that I have learned and help facilitate training programs at the college where I work, this will in turn have long lasting effects on the students we serve.

Online Education

This new forum in education has many positive and exciting possibilities for both the colleges and the students. As tuition costs continue to skyrocket, in 2011 the average yearly cost of a public four year school reached $13,600 and private institutions cost an average of $36,300. This is a 31%- 42% cost increase over the past ten years (US Department of Education, 2011). As colleges are looking for new ways to cut expenses, online classes offer some exciting opportunities. Online classes are cheaper for universities by not requiring a classroom, parking, utilities, and security. For the students, the benefits include no commute time, no parking worries, no adjusting of work schedules, no babysitters, and no cancelled classes due to inclement weather. As long as students have internet access and a computer, they can attend "class".

While there is clearly a growing trend with substantial benefits, there is a downside to online education. The first being a concern with the quality of the

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education and the question of whether or not the on-line students receive the same high level of instruction they would in a classroom. As far as technology, the students who do not have access to the internet or to computers, do not have possibility of taking an online course. Not only do online courses require students to have access to technology, they also must be able to effectively use technology. Additionally, an online course requires a slightly different skill set then traditional courses. Online classes require self-motivation, discipline, organization and time management skills (Illinois Online Network, 2010).

Online education suffers from the very real problem of perception. Only about 30% of Americans think that an online education has the same value as a traditional classroom education and only about 51% of college presidents think that it has the same value (Pew Social Trends, 2011). In a survey of college faculty, researchers asked the instructors about their perception of online education. The staff with more experience in online education had a more positive perception in contrast the staff with less experience had a less positive perception (Ulmer, Watson & Derby, 2007). When comparing online degree to degrees earned in a traditional classroom, researchers have found that they are not seen as valuable by educational institutions and employers alike. Jonathan Adams and Margaret DeFleur have conducted interesting research determining the perception of online degrees. In one study they conducted a national survey to determine what perception online degrees play in granting admission to graduate schools (DeFleur & Adams, 2004). They discovered that 11% of the administrators at public institutions and only 7% at private institutions would be willing to accept students with bachelor's degrees earned online. In a

similar study these researchers found that academic search committees were even more unwilling to accept job candidates who earned doctoral degrees online (Adams & DeFleur, 2005). As far as employers, the results were similar; in response to a job advertisement, the researchers created hypothetical applicants, one with a traditional degree, one with an online degree and one with a mix of traditional and online. The employers were asked to choose between the applicant with the traditional education and the online only education. The employers chose the applicant with the traditional education 96% of the time. When asked to choose between the applicant with both online and traditional coursework, the employers again overwhelmingly chose the traditional degree 75% of the time (Adams & DeFleur, 2006).

As daunting as this seems, there is some light at the end of the tunnel, it appears that this perception of online education is shifting as it is getting more popular and more understood. In a recent survey by the Sloan Consortium (2012), it was revealed that seventy-seven percent of academic leaders rate the learning outcomes in online education as the same or superior to those in face-to-face.

While online education clearly has some perception issues it is a widely expanding educational opportunity for many students and one that is embraced by most colleges trying to reach the untapped market of student who would find taking classes in a traditional manner impossible. One key question in this trend is to determine exactly who is taking these online classes and find out if the population is the same as that of a traditional brick and mortar college. The U.S. Department of Education compiled statistics about the type of student who take online courses. While the percentages are rising, currently 20% of all undergraduates take online

classes, the percentage falls to 15% for students under 24 years old. Four percent of

students are pursuing their full degree by taking only online classes, however for

student under 24 that number drops to 1% (National Center for Education Statistics,

2012). Interestingly, some studies have found no relationship in the age of the

students and their performance/completion in online courses (Osborn, 2001; Wang &

Newlin, 2000; Willging & Johnson, 2004) while other research shows that older

online students perform better and have higher rates of completion (Dille & Mezack,

1991). The age of the average online student is not the only thing that differentiates

them from the traditional college student. Most online students are undergraduates

and most are the first generation to attend college (National Survey of Student

Engagement, 2008). The highest percentage of distance learning students are enrolled

in public 2 year institutions and are seeking 2 year degrees (Radford, 2011). Many of

the online students are working parents who juggle school and family obligations

(Karber, 2003). In fact, flexibility is found to be the number one reason that students

are drawn to online education (Tricker, Rangecroft, Long & Gilroy, 2001).   In

keeping, online students tend to need higher levels of independence in order to be

successful with this type of instruction (National Survey of Student Engagement,

2011).

John White, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Rural Outreach for the U.S.

Department of Education, claims that students living in rural areas are the least likely

to enroll in or complete a post-secondary education (Hayes, 2013). While online

courses could be the bridge allowing them access, a problem remains, there is a lack

of adequate bandwidth and high speed internet in many rural areas. As communities

work to improve the infrastructure in these remote locations, the opportunities for rural students to get a college education improves.

Typically the success and completion rates for online college students tends to follow that of the traditional rates of success and completion among certain demographics. While some research has found no significant difference between males and females in online education (Yukselturk & Bulut, 2007) other studies have found that women perform slightly better than their male counterparts (Price, 2006; Xu & Jaggars, 2013). This is attributed to women being more confident, independent learners (Price, 2006) and greater academic preparedness (Xu & Jaggars, 2013). This research also combats that common assumption that women do not have the same technological skills as their male counterparts (Dolan, 2008). Research has also shown that black students do not fare as well in online course as their white counterparts (Rovai & Gallien, 2005; Xu & Jaggars, 2013).

To understand why this mode of education is so popular among students and institutes of higher education it is necessary to find out if the negative image of online education is founded. Many researchers have found that the negative perception of online education is completely unfounded, and have concluded that online education is actually a better and more effective means of teaching and improves student learning outcomes (Brenton et al., 2005; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2008; Schoenfeld-Tacher, McConnell & Graham, 2001; Schwarz, 2011).

There are the obvious benefits of the class being more convenient because students pick the time and place which is suitable for them. Students who live in rural or remote areas can still receive a college education. Also students who have

outside obligations and normally would not consider college a possibility may be able to fit an online class into their already busy schedule. There are lower costs because lower tuition rates, the ability to continue living at home, and the ability to continue working part of full time (McKeown, 2012). Maybe not as obvious, is that physical stereotypes are eliminated in an online classroom (Karber, 2001). Other students are not aware of what the other students look like, including physical disabilities, age, weight, race, sex, etc. In keeping, this forum allows for students to have greater opportunities for interaction with people from various cultural and backgrounds (Karber, 2001).

The main argument against online education is that the quality of education is not the same as that of a brick and mortar classroom, that students just get shuffled through and there is no real way to ensure that they are actually learning the material. Researchers have even found that technologies are damaging the ability of students to do quality research and to think creatively (Rothenberg, 1998). Others have found that electronic resources have stifled creativity and independent thought (Jaeger, 2001). While this stereotype is prolific, research suggests that this is does not have to be true, online education can actually yield better results and deeper learning than can be achieved in a traditional classroom (Dolan, 2008). One commonly held misconception is that students just become a number and there is no personal interaction between the students and the instructor (Waldner, Mcgorry, Widener, 2012). Brenton et al. (2005) challenged this assumption and found that an online setting gives the students even more opportunity to express their individual voice. Along with his colleagues, Brenton conducted a study defied the expectations of the

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faculty teaching the class. The faculty teaching an online course found that they were able to get high quality discussions and interactions that they don't usually get in a small classroom and never in a large classroom. They found that students were even more willing to respond electronically than they would in person (Breton et al., 2005).

In 2008, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) found that, when you compare online students to students in a traditional classroom, the online students were more likely to participate is intellectually challenging activities, to participate in culturally stimulating discussions and increase their sense of social responsibility. This finding was supported by another study in which a professor taught an upper level science class. He taught one section of the class online and one section of the class in a brick and mortar classroom. He reported that the online class had higher levels of interactions between the students, performed better on the tests and even formed an unprompted study group. He also noted the online class was interacting socially while the students in the traditional classroom were not. Therefor it is clear that merely sitting in a classroom with other students does not ensure the students will interact and form relationships (Schoenfeld-Tacher et al., 2001).

One reason that online classes tend to yield more positive results is that they force organization. An instructor must have the course thoroughly planned and organized before the class begins (Edwards, Cordray & Dorbolo, 2000). Another positive feature of an online class in that the instructor is offered the freedom to adapt the class to fit various learning styles and can customize the class in ways that would be impossible in a traditional classroom. For example, in an online class students can have "discussions" with each other to seek clarification, and understanding etc. in real

time during the lecture (Breton et al., 2005; Schwarz, 2011). In a traditional

classroom this would not be possible and probably would not be allowed.

The demand for rigid preparedness and organization does have associated

costs. An instructor cannot prepare for an online class throughout the semester.

Prior to the start of the course, the instructor must have most, if not all the material

and lectures and links posted to the site. This task is particularly difficult for an

instructor who has never taught an online course. It is difficult to prepare for all the

unforeseen issues that will undoubtedly arise during the semester. An example of this

would ben when students are not technologically savvy or even have different

operating systems which are not compatible.

Taking this into account, students who are in online classes can perform better

than those in brick and mortar classrooms (Means, Toyama, Murphy & Jones, 2010).

Edwards et al. (2000) wrote a paper about how methods used in an online classroom

could be adapted to fit a traditional classroom to aid in the student's deep learning.

The example used in the article clearly shows how online learning can be preferential

to a traditional classroom. The lecture is about teaching sociological imagination and

the students are given three scenarios. 1) Your mother lives 100 miles away and is ill,

she probably will not make it. What do you do? 2) You are chopping wood and cut

your leg. What do you do? 3) You are hungry. What do you do? Each student has

to respond to the scenarios in two ways, first, as though it is 100 years ago and then as

though it was today. The student in the traditional classroom would probably be

asked to get into groups and discuss the scenarios and come up with answers. The

student in the online class would be expected to do some online research into the

technology available at the given time and then would respond to the scenario. These students would be expected to have an in-depth discussion about the daily life during the time period and people dealt with regular issues of life and death. They would have conducted their own research and would also have to respond to others. Clearly, the depth of learning in the online classroom would be much greater and more meaningful then the traditional classroom.

An example for an introductory to government class is to have the students read a chapter on political parties, followed by the students going to four different websites about different political parties. They would have to read and determine which political party they most identify with and write a lengthy discussion about it and then respond to three other posts from other students (Botsch & Botsch, 2001).

There are additional considerations for the online course providers. A specially trained staff is required as an instructor who is effective in the traditional classroom setting may not be versed in conducting an effective online course. Online learning is well suited for teachers who are comfortable not being at the center of all information. It works well for teachers who view learning as a relationship or exchange between all the people in the relationship (Dykman & Davis, 2008). Additionally, online course development is a very time consuming process, and according to Sondra Cosgrove, a professor at College of Southern Nevada, each online class she creates, takes about 100 hours. She explains that in a traditional setting, the class is taught through lectures and reading assignments but an online class requires more interactive material. (Takahashi, 2012) Tricker (2001) explains that an online course tends to require more upfront preparation because even minor

changes to the course tend to take place after the course is finished in preparation for

the next course. Most of the course material is placed online at the beginning of the

course so the students have full access to it.

<div align="center">**Best Practices in Online Education**</div>

In the mid 1980's Chickering and Gamson developed 7 Principles of Good

Practice in Undergraduate Education, since then they have refined and defined the

principles in slightly different ways but the principles are widely accepted as good

practice (Chickering & Gamson, 1999). Despite the changing times and changing

modes of instruction, good principles in teaching have not changed. The first practice

recommended is that the student and faculty should have frequent interactions.

Secondly, the faculty should encourage cooperation among the students. The third

principle is that faculty should use active learning techniques. The forth lesson is to

give prompt feedback. Emphasizing the time on task is the fifth principle of good

practices. Lastly, the instructor must communicate high expectations. These are all

great practices and were obviously made with a traditional classroom in mind, there is

no reason however, that each of these principles could not be adapted and applied to

an online course.

The importance of the role of the teacher should not be underestimated in an

online course. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2010)

claims that the single most important factor in student learning and achievement is the

quality and effectiveness of the teacher. Whether the classroom is tradition or in a

virtual setting, this fact does not change. There is no shortage of research about the

qualities that make a good teacher. Edwards, Perry and Janzen (2011) claim that the

key to becoming an exemplary online teacher is to challenge your students, be affirming and to influence them. Mowrer-Reynolds (2008) identified that great teachers show respect for their students both for who they are and for their opinions, they are enthusiastic, fun and funny, are experts in their field and are willing to provide outside assistance. As though this were not enough, he also indicated that great teachers should also promote student self-efficacy/self-esteem in their students. Feldman (2007) found that students value "understandablness' and transparency. They want teachers who are well prepared, who are organized, and who meet the objectives of the class while elevating the performance of the students and kindling their interest in the subject.

Interaction

Researchers found that instructors need to foster interaction between the students and the faculty and student to student interaction (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006; Wilson, Pollock & Hermann, 2007). Baghdadi (2011) suggested that it is even more important for an online instructor to guide and facilitate learning because of the lack of classroom students will require even more guidance and motivation. "It is important that this physical separation of the student and the teacher be off-set by frequent, rapid interaction via e-mail or other electronic means" (Karber, 2001, p. 535).

One option to achieve this interaction could be through the use of discussion boards. This can be used on a formal or informal basis. On a formal basis, an instructor could use the discussion board to assign discussion topics and then provide guidelines for the discussion (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). Or it can be achieved in

a more informal setting with less structure to let the students freely discuss the topics (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). Depending on the size of the class, the discussion groups could include the entire class or in could be broken down into smaller groups. One recommendation is that the groups should be mixed gendered, this format yielded the most positive interactions and longer discussion board statements (Pollack, Hamann & Wilson, 2005).

Because of the nature of an online course, it is possible, even probable that some students may not be prepared for the different set of skills that are required in an online class. In particular, an online class requires that the students be skilled at reading and comprehending because that is often the only means of communication in an online classroom. A skilled professor will understand the importance of this skill and will work to develop the skill in their students. One means to both teach the skill and build confidence is not scaffold activities in the beginning of the semester. This means that the teacher will give very simple assignments in the beginning of the semester and will offer a great deal of assistance and guidance until all of the students are skillful and confident enough to move on to the more difficult assignments (Naeem, 2011). One tip is to start off the semester with an assignment where the students have to post a bio about themselves and then respond to five other bios in class. (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). This is a way to start off the class on the right foot and get the students to feel comfortable interacting with each other. This also sets up the structure for the rest of the class where the instructor should post interesting questions and make the students respond.

When posting questions on the discussion board, seasoned online professors

advise not to give "no brainer" questions because all the class will respond the same way and there will not be any discussion (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). Research has shown that instructors who use effective moderating and questioning skills can get students to achieve higher levels of critical thinking (Williams & Lahman, 2011). This research also found that students' capacity for reasoned discourse improves when they interact with other students in a focused way (Williams & Lehman, 2011). Research suggests that even the students who do not respond or post discussions themselves, still benefit from reading the posts of other students. Simply reading posts from others students significantly improved the students' performance in the course (Hamann, Pollock & Wilson, 2009; Wilson et al., 2007).

To encourage more formal discussion, the instructor can grade the students on participation in the discussion board by providing them with a framework. The key to successful discussions was to fully explain to the students the importance of group work and to provide clear expectations for what they are required to do (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). This means that the instructor must actively monitor and participate in discussion boards. Because online discussions can encourage active learning, which is linked to improved course grade, instructors should encourage participation through assessment (Wilson et al., 2007). They can act as the guide and encourage the students who are less active. An online class actually provides more opportunities for the professor and students to interact because they are not constrained by the limited amount of time in a classroom (Baghdadi, 2011).

Another tip to encourage all the students to participate is to follow up with the students who are not participating. Ask questions about how you could make it easier

for the student to participate in the class and the assignments (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). The researchers report that this is particularly effective because it helps to combat the feeling of anonymity that sometimes plagues an online course.

To foster collegiality among the students, one professor suggested setting-up a chat room where students can discuss any topic they want, even things not related to the class; this instructor sets it up so he did not have access to it, giving the students a sense of freedom. (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006).

Another interesting option is to use online learning communities, where the same group of students take online classes together. The goal would be for these students to bond with each other and develop a sense of community. Schrage explains that the goal of the learning community is not just that the students have an experience which is shared but that they create a shared experience (1990). In a learning community the students must collaborate and support one another (Jonassen, Peck & Wilson, 1998). Enomto and Tabata found that students' relationships developed as the course progressed (2000). Students began relying on each other more, their communications became more frequent and more personal. As they began to share their problems and frustrations with one another they also began to provide support. Enomta and Tabata found the class was much more student centered, with students complimenting, supporting, reinforcing and responding to each other.

Hybrid courses, classes that blend online instruction with occasional face to face meetings, is another option in combating some of the issues cited above. However, research has shown that when you compare hybrid classes to purely online courses, the mode of instructions makes less of a difference than other factors such as

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the course content, the quality of student to teacher communications, and the use of effective pedagogy (Hooman, 2012).   Along the same lines, when one research taught two political science classes with identical content, just the mode of instruction was varied (on traditional face to face and the other a hybrid course) the student outcomes were similar (Roscoe, 2012). Academic performance was not impacted, and there were very few attitudinal difference with the exception of the hybrid class having a lower sense of community.

Feedback

Numerous studies have reported the importance of feedback. In fact, the quality of feedback is paramount in how well students assess a class (Tricker, 2001). However, even before the assignment, it is important to provide clear expectations for the assignment. One suggestion is to provide a rubric of how the assignment is going to be graded prior to the students even starting the project or discussion. Explain to the students what the expectations are for an A, B, and C paper (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006).   Also include an opportunity for the students to ask questions during the project so they can get active feedback as they are working on their projects.

Prompt feedback is particularly important in a virtual classroom where the student cannot be sure that their work was received electronically. Online instructors need to give prompt feedback that the assignment was delivered (Kraber, 2001). Feedback should be immediate and staff needs to be online a minimum of a once a day to respond to questions and concerns (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006).   Because providing immediate and meaningful feedback can be onerous, one seasoned professional suggests that instructors create a bank of frequently asked questions.

This will help the students and will help to minimize the amount of time an instructor spends answering questions (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006).

Facilitating Learning

This area requires a lot of work from the professor prior to the beginning of the class. One study by Waldner et al. (2012) found that students in online courses lacked interaction, engagement, reflection and an ability to demonstrate knowledge. The very nature of an online course gives a student far more anonymity than a traditional classroom would. To combat this fate, an instructor's first priority is to clearly lay out the course goals and objectives prior to the course. One suggested that instructors should provide an area for students to give feedback on the course objectives and to pose questions to their peers (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). This practice would aid the instructor in understanding where they need to provide more clarity.

A primary goal of college instruction is to develop the writing skills of students. One great way to develop this skill is to assign the students online reflective journals. This is a strategy that will encourage students to familiarize themselves with the ways they think and learn, while practicing their writing in very brief non-threating tasks (Naeem, 2011).

One of the principles of effective education was to have the students engage in active learning. Constructionist Learning Theory tells us that for active learning to be achieved the learners must be able to organize, and integrate what they learn into their existing knowledge (Hacker & Niederhauser, 2000). David Kolb, a leader in the field of experiential learning, theorizes that learning is a process of experiencing,

reflecting, generalizing and then applying the knowledge (Kolb & Fry, 1975). In order to truly achieve learning, all these stages must occur.

Online Instructors have the benefit of being able to use synchronous and asynchronous learning. Synchronous learning, is the type of learning that happens in a traditional classroom where the instructors relay information to the students and the students learn (hopefully). This type of learning is also achievable in an online classroom, it happens when the students are "together" and actively learning through lectures and discussions which happen in real time. The beauty of an online class however, is that it can also implore the use of asynchronous learning. Asynchronous discussion forums are unrestricted by location or time while still allowing for individuals to communicate in a collaborative manner (Lewinson, 2005).

Students learn best when they can ask questions, get clarification, and discuss their thoughts, all within a timely manner (Harrington & Hathaway, 1994). Some researchers have even argued that this form of communication is actually more effective than face to face communication because the students have an opportunity to reflect and revise their questions before sending them.

To facilitate active learning, one professor encourages the students to provide real world examples from personal experience (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). This allows them to consider the subject in a different light. Another suggestion which would work particularly well in a government class, is to post news articles which are relevant to the current topic (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). This gives the students the opportunity to relate the terms and concepts to real world events which they could explore on their own. One seasoned professional claims that pop-quizzes are not the

way to go with online courses, a more effective way to encourage participation is to post interesting articles prior to class and require that students have a discussion of it (this can be graded). This practice ensures that they come to class prepared for the specific discussion (Trudeau, 2005).

It is well documented that students learn through a variety of sources. A great feature of online education is that, because students are taking the class on their computer, it very simple for the instructor to arraign to have a variety of highly regarded/interesting speakers, relevant video clips and movies (Karber, 2001). Instructors can implement variety devices to teach the course, they can use streaming lectures, post notes and relevant readings, and provide links to other information (Karber, 2001). This technology is much more accessible to student in the online format than it would be in a traditional classroom. Imagine asking your traditional class to read a story in the New York Times, chances are very few of them would comply, however in an online course, the instructor can post the link to the story and then ask the students to read it. Then the students are required to post their reactions on the discussion board about the article and reply to three other posts. Before the class even starts, the instructor knows who has read the article and what their thoughts and reactions are to it. A capable instructor could tailor the lecture to the fit the class, something that would be impossible in a traditional classroom.

Maintaining Enthusiasm and Organization

A large body of research points to the importance of planning and organization in an online class. Horng (2006) found that students taking online classes cite poor organization as one of the top three qualities that make a poor

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teacher (lack of feedback and unfamiliarity with the technology are the other two).

Online courses require a lot of prep work before the class ever starts. Instructors need to have clearly laid out the class and the objectives. Assignments need predefined rubrics and clear expectations and a well-defined structure (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006; Dolowitz, 2007). Additionally, a concern with online courses is that there is always the potential for problems with the technology. Technology is not always reliable and dependable. Faculty needs to be prepared for the difficulties that will inevitably arise.

Good teachers make sure that every part of the class relates to the whole and that students are always aware of the big picture and can relate the work they are doing back to the topic. An instructor who is sloppy can fake it in a traditional classroom by having documents, such as a syllabus, which do not specifically lay out the plan for the semester (Edwards, 2000). This is not as possible in an online setting; online course require clear objectives and a clear timeline so students know what to expect and what is expected of them right from the beginning of the course.

Because of the nature of an online course, students need to be independent and self-motivated. Despite the lack of classroom, facilitators can set the tone of the class and keep the students motivated. One online instructor claimed that she needed to be even more energetic and enthusiastic in the online classroom (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). To keep students motivated and on track, one professor suggested that you could send weekly email reminders of what the students should be doing and what they should be looking at (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). Research has shown that students expect much more from their teachers than just a person who relays

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information, teachers are also supposed to be inspiring, and affirming and should have a substantial impact on the lives of their students (Edwards, 2011).

Finally, it is necessary for teachers to complete the loop and determine if they are actually meeting the expectations of their students.   Most online courses provide the students with an opportunity to rate the quality of instruction. We have all heard instructors complain that the students only give good evaluations to the instructors who are easy and don't require them to do work. (I assume these are the professors with poor evaluations). Research has not upheld this assumption, studies have indicated that the students rating of their professors in an online class is a good indicator of the quality of instruction (LaPrade, Marks, Gilpatrick, Smith & Beazley, 2011).

The recommendations above are a compilation of things that teachers can do improve the success of an online class, but there also strategies that a college could adopt to increase the success of an online program. The researchers of Xu and Jaggars have identifies three recommendations which lead to student success (2013). During their research they found that typical student experience some difficulty in an online course, while a select group of students are very successful. The successful students tend to have higher GPAs and are more adaptable. A suggestion for the college would be to set restrictions on which students can take online courses.   Xu and Jaggers suggest a GPA requirement of 3.0 and/or the completion of a course in online learning should be the standard. There second suggestion is to scaffold the courses. The researchers identified certain courses in which students have the least success, these classes tend to be in the Social Sciences and Applied Professions.

Having this information should lead a college to make sure that these courses are developed to specifically teach online learning skills. The introductory classes could be designed to be much easier and user friendly to attempt to teach the skills that will ultimately lead to future success. The finally suggestions is that the college could build an early warning or detection system into online courses so the students who are struggling can be identified and assisted. The final suggestions is that the college focus resources and time into ensuring that all the online courses are of the same quality of a brick and mortar class. This would mean the college would have to spend time and resources training the staff on specific online skills and techniques which have been proven effective.

The preceding recommendations are an attempt to improve online education. This is not foolproof. Very talented instructors have struggled creating a quality online course. Hewson & Hughes (2005) explain that there are real advantages which are lost in an online course. Instructors do not have commonly used motivational techniques at their disposal. They cannot convey enthusiasm, they can't use body language or even gauge student interest by evaluating their non-verbal cues (eye rolling, sleeping etc.).

Instructors also cannot control technology and the skills that the students come to class with. If a student signs up for an online course with very weak computer skills, there is little the instructor can do to ensure that students success. Even if all the students are technologically savvy, technology breaks down and there will be times when students will not be able to meet deadlines and participate.

There is also genuine concern over the lack of quality education. Studies have

found that online students struggle to achieve higher level thinking (Wilson et al., 2007) they lack participation is caused by a lack of skills, time and motivation (Kuyini, 2011) and an overall lack of engagement (Waldner et al., 2012). While these are all legitimate concern, most can be mitigated if the instructors receive proper training and education in online course development. Again, there is the issue of time and resources, it is a substantial time commitment for an instructor to be trained and there are associated costs to the university to pay for such training.

This brings us to the purpose of this paper, online education is obviously becoming a main stream form of instruction in higher education. There are pros and cons of online education and a desperate need to provide instructors with tools to aid them in creating a quality educational experience. The incorporation of experiential learning into online courses is one such means.

Chapter Two

Experiential Learning

Democracy is Latin for the people rule (Oxford Dictionary).   By the very definition, public participation is vital for our government to be successful. There has been much debate about the declining political participation in our country. Records indicate that there has been a decrease in voter turnout and a decline in party identification; both are seen as a sign of public disenfranchisement (Stoker, 2006). Robert Putnam wrote an entire book explaining how young people lack the motivation necessary to run this country (Bowling Alone). If we accept this premise there is certainly plenty of blame to be doled out; is it the young people who are at fault, is it a societal issue, is it a failing of the education system?   However, rather than focusing on who we should blame, it would be more constructive to focus on finding the solutions.

Former Senator Bob Graham argues that our government will be in peril if the colleges of today don't teach students to become engaged citizens (Graham, p 22-23). He explains that colleges are doing a disservice to students because they are teaching civics without teaching the students how to get involved personally. He equated it to a basketball coach simply lecturing on how to play basketball and never letting the students get out on the court and actually try to play. It is only by getting on the court that you fully understand the game (p 24). Graham is not alone, there are volumes of research explaining how firsthand experience in political knowledge is better retained and becomes more relevant (Delli Carpini & Keeter 2000; Hepburn, Neimi & Chapman, 2000; Hunter & Brisbin, 2000). Instructors in government classes have an

edge over other disciplines because their subject matter creates a unique situation where the students can have total access throughout their lifetime to the subject being studied (Mc Beth & Robison, 2012; Fox & Ronkowski, 1997.) Very few subject areas have such an advantage of real life application.

While we know that political participation is vital to a democracy, and we see constant reports of the decline in political involvement, we see relatively little research conducted to determine what factors can increase political participation and political understanding. Gorham argues that the premise is all wrong, it is not that Americans don't know about politics, they may know a lot about politics but it is the structure of the government that they don't fully comprehend. He claims that the very nature of how we define politics is political. While a student may not be able to recall the lecture about the three attributes of the media and specifically how it impacts politics, they do comprehend the significant the role media plays in our understanding of political issues. Citizens come to understand politics through their actual life events; from working with classmates to compromise and bargain, to handling a conflict at work, to recognizing how to manipulate your parents to get the desired result, this is politics. If we accept that students are already gaining their political knowledge through these real life events, what can government teachers do to encourage more participation in the political system?

Increasingly, the role of the secondary institutions has come to involve not just the education of students but also the role of preparing them to become civically engaged and active members of the community who are able to solve issues on a local and global scale (Prentice 2011; Hurtado 2005; Thomas, et al 2001). Research has

identified a few key factors that seem to increase a student's political knowledge, for example, having students actually engage in the subject appears to be linked. The depth of a student's involvement can vary from something as complex as having the students complete a project where the students actually get personally involved in accomplishing a policy objective (Mc Beth & Robinson 2012) to something very simple. One very simple exercise for instructors in introductory government classes is the inclusion of regular discussions of current events within the class period (Delli Carpini & Ketter, 1996; Popkin & Dimock, 1996; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Amadoe et al, 2002). Another simple option is to require the student read a newspaper; one study found that when they required student to read the New York Times as part of the class assignments, the students reported that the experience made the class more relevant and increased their knowledge (Huerta and Jozwiak, 2008).

This brings us the concept of service/experiential learning. Hepburn, Neimi and Chapman (2000) explain that a formal education should act as a link between learning and community, learning should occur through actual life experiences. This is particularly relevant in a government course where students can directly participate in the political process. Service learning is "a process of integrating volunteer community service combined with active guided reflection into the curriculum to enhance and enrich student learning of course material" (Johnson, 1995). The primary goal of service/ experiential learning is to get students out of the traditional classroom and into the real world where they can help and gain firsthand knowledge of the real world (Guthrie & McCracken, 2010; Holland & Robinson, 2008). Service learning is distinguished from volunteer work in that the students must constantly

reflect on the work that they are doing. The role of the faculty is to tie the student's

activities outside of the classroom to the learning which is taking place inside the

classroom (Billing 2011).

Benefits of Service/Experiential Learning

Academic learning

Research has shown that participation in service learning had a favorable

effect on numerous aspects of student's academic achievement and their success in

college (Driscoll et al 1996; Astin & Sax 1998). Researchers were able to credit

service learning with students receiving higher GPAs, (Gray et al 1998; Astin & Sax

1998) increased retention in college, higher rates of degree completion, and an

increase in knowledge, when compared to students who did not complete service

learning (Astin & Sax 1998). Students scored significantly higher on exams,

specifically essay questions and student narratives (Strage 2000). Additionally,

research has shown a significant improvement in final class grade when comparing

service learning student to non-service learning students (Berson & Younkin 1998).

Along the same lines, experiential learners reported higher levels of satisfaction in the

course, the instructor, the grading and reading assignments (Berson & Younkin 1998;

Gray et al 1998). One study conducted at Oberlin College, found that for African

American students, the strongest factor correlated to graduation was service learning

(Roosevelt, et al).

 Of course not all research has been as positive, while I have not found any

research with negative effects of experiential learning, Miller (1994) did not report

any differences in student's GPA. Along the same lines, Kendrick (1996) found that

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there is no significant difference in the student grades as a result of participating in a service learning project. While these researchers were not able to find a significant correlation between grades and experiential learning, they also did not report any negative outcomes.

Apply knowledge to the real world

Ultimately the goal of an instructor, particularly a teacher of government, is to arm the students with knowledge that they can use throughout their lifetimes. The research about service/experiential learning appears to do just that. The experience of being involved in this type of learning led student to have a deep understanding of the concepts, which was evident in their ability to apply the classroom concepts to real world experiences. (Markus, Howard & King 1993; Miller 1994). Kendrick found that service learning increased personal efficacy, social responsibility and the ability to apply the academic work to new situations (Kendrick 1996). McBeth and Robison also found that students who completed projects involving actively trying to change public policy, experienced a significant increase in their political efficacy (2012).

Personal Growth

While there have been countless studies documenting the benefit of service learning for students, some research has shown that students experience growth or development in some very personal ways (Driscoll et al 1996; Eyler & Giles 1999). Something as personal as a student's moral development can even be enhanced through service learning (Gorman 1994; Lies, et al 2012). When comparing service learning students to non-service learning students, the participants experienced a positive increase in their social competency, self-worth in social situations (Osborne

et al 1998) and social self-confidence (Astin & Sax 1998). Some studies have also

identified an increase in self-esteem as a positive attribute to service learning

(Peterson 1998). The development of effective leadership skills and interpersonal

skills were shown to result from participation in service learning (Astin & Sax, 1998),

as well the development of professional effectiveness (Manring 2012). In one study

of business students, researchers report that their students increased their social and

emotional intelligence as well as civic values (Manring 2012). Additionally, research

has found that service learning leads to an overall improvement in the student's

interpersonal skills (Eyler & Giles 1999). It is pretty amazing to think that the

incorporation of service learning into a course can have such far reaching effects on

the students.

As mentioned previously, students who engage in service learning projects

experience the personal development of skills which can prove beneficial for their

career, however not mentioned is the growth that can occur which is beneficial for the

community at large. Students may experience a shift in their outlook regarding their

own role in the world and the treatment of minority populations. Service learning is

linked to an improved knowledge of various races and cultures (Astin & Sax, 1998)

and a reduction in a student's stereotypical perceptions of various populations as a

result of working closely with them. Along with that, students can become more

tolerant, more empathetic, and more open to new ways of thinking (Eyler et al 1997;

Osborne 1998). These effects can be more far reaching than one can imagine,

influencing other aspects of the students' lives and the communities in which they

reside.

The benefits of experiential/service learning can also be seen in the way students view the world and their place in it. Students who participate in service learning have an increase in their sense of social responsibility (Eyler and Giles 1999; Kendrick 1996). In becoming more aware of their position in the world, they began to recognize some of the privileges that went along with it (Rice & Brown 1998). Studies have shown that service learning students have an increase in their belief in their ability to solve problems, and to make a difference in the world (Eyler, Giles & Braxton 1997). Particularly exciting to a government teacher, is the research that has found that experiential learning can increase the students' efficacy (Eyler & Giles 1997; Eyler, Giles & Braxton 1999; Mc Beth& Robison). Internal efficacy is person's belief in their ability to impact the political process. There is also research which shows that service learning increased their score on a civic participation scale (Rice & Brown 1998).

One study at St Ignatius University found that the students who participated in a service learning course reported significant increases in their political voice, their awareness in social and political issues, an increased commitment to philanthropy and socially responsible work. Finally, it strengthened their commitment to working for social change (Seider et al 2012).

While most research has supported the finding mentioned above, there has been some research to the contrary. Fenzel & Leary (1997) found that students did not experience a positive gain in their attitudes towards social or personal responsibility or even in their moral judgment. Other research did not find any significant change in self-esteem (Osborne et al 1998) and Miller noted that he found

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no significant difference in personal development (1994). Even when researchers found that service learning did not significantly impact the level of student concern for others and commitment to community, they did find that students in the service learning were more empowered than the control group (Hudson, 1996).

College

Much has been said about the role of a college on improving the community in which it operates.   Some have suggested that colleges have a moral obligation to the community, to ensure that the research being conducted at the school, and that the students being taught at the school must in some way improve the surrounding community (Holland & Robinson 2008). One way for the college to build this bridge between the community and the university is to implement service learning. Guthrie and McCracken (2010) explain that the primary goal of service learning is to get the student out of the traditional classroom and into the community where they can make a positive impact. Holland and Robinson agree, the goal of service/experiential learning is to benefit the student while helping the recipient of the services (2008). The benefits to the community will be discussed later, for the college, the incorporation and fostering of service learning within the curriculum is beneficial on many levels. As mentioned above, students report higher levels of satisfaction, higher rates of completion, and higher GPAs (Astin & Sax, 1998). These results are real and significant and are a positive way for colleges to achieve a two pronged goal of increased student success while improving the relationship in the community in which they operate.

Faculty

Clearly service learning is a great way for a college to foster and improve community relations and a means to improve academic performance; however it is the faculty who are on the frontlines. Numerous studies have been conducted to outline the positives and negatives of service learning for the faculty.   We will start with benefits. Faculty report that in the classrooms where service learning had been employed, classroom discussions were more stimulating, there were higher rates of student involvement, and the classes were more academically challenging (Berson & Younkin 1998).   It has also been reported that service learning allows students to learn more and to be able to put the material they learn in the classroom into a more meaningful context (Cohen & Kinsey, 1994).

Another comprehensive study of almost 300 college students found that the students who completed 20 hours of service learning earned significantly higher grades than those students who did not complete the hours of service. As mentioned above, the students also reported higher levels of satisfaction with the course, the reading assignments, the instructor and the grading system (Berson & Younkin, 1998).

While there are clearly many benefits to service learning for faculty, there are drawbacks too. In a study by the colleges and universities in Michigan, 130 faculty members who utilize service learning in their classroom responded to a study where they reported that they had concerns about the increased time it takes to coordinate experiential and service learning projects. They had to take on the difficult task of coordinating the multiple people associated with the project and some difficulty in

adjusting their pedagogy (Hammond 1994). This study was not alone in finding that implementing service or experiential learning in a classroom requires a great deal of time, due to the additional responsibility of fostering community relationships with the agencies (Heckert 2010).

For teachers of government, the findings are particularly exciting. Students' scores on civic engagement scales significantly increased along with their scores on civic behavior and concern for civic responsibility (Prentice 2011; Myers-Lipton 1998). Service learning was linked to students choosing a career in service to others and in attempting to influence the political process (Eyler, Giles, Braxton 1997). Even after a student graduates, participation in service learning during college was shown to increasing civic engagement (D'Agostino, 2010). While evidence does support this, there has been very little research that links service learning with an increase in a student's ability to understand society and politics (Eyler & Giles, 1999). To counter this, Eric Gorham conducted an in-depth study linking service learning to politics, but not in the traditional sense. Teaching about politics is not limited to teaching about federalism and the three branches of government, rather it is about teaching students that politics is pervasive and present throughout every aspect of our lives. He claims that the incorporation of service learning into a course is the perfect opportunity to demonstrate this relationship. Gorham argues that instructors should not consider the service learning as more important than the classroom instruction; rather the instructor needs to use the service learning activity as a means to teach the students that real-life politics goes on in the classroom as well (Gorham 2005).

Community/world

While there is a clear link between volunteerism and helping the larger community, service learning has an impact that last long after the service hours have been completed. Studies have shown that service learning increases a student's civic responsibility and awareness. This was accomplished in a number of ways, first it increased the number of students who had a commitment to the idea of community work and volunteerism and it strengthened their belief in the idea of volunteerism (Fenzel & Leary 1997; Driscoll, 1996; Kendrick 1996). Research even suggests that the process of service learning could act as a catalyst that would encourage students to use their newly acquired skills to improve their community where they reside. (Ponder et al 2011). Amazingly, service learning even increased the number of students who set a life/career goal of helping others (Astin & Sax 1998). Euler, Giles, Braxton (1997) and Rice and Brown (1998) found that service learning led students to become advocates for community service.

The students who experienced service learning also had a change in their perception of the impact of volunteerism. These students felt more compassion for the disadvantaged, and increased their belief that they could make a difference in their community and their world (Fenzel & Leary 1997; Driscoll, et al 1996). Students also experienced a positive change in their attitude towards those they served. Their perception of the people they were serving was more positive. Students working with the elderly reported that their perspectives on aging had broadened and they had a reduction of stereotypical images of the elderly (Greens & Diehm 1995). Students working with homeless people had a greater concern and attitudes for the

homeless (Rice and Brown, 1998). Students working with populations with high

racial diversity had a decrease in their own racism and a change in attitude about the

importance of promoting racial understanding (Myers-Lipton 1996a; Astin & Sax,

1998). Students who completed a service learning project where they were feeding

the homeless, they had an increase in general concern, activism and attitudes about

world hunger and homelessness (Rice & Brown, 1998). The work with this diverse

population increased the students their belief in the importance of equality of

opportunity (Kendrick, 1996).   Generally, the inclusion of service learning into the

curriculum increased student's awareness and involvement in the community and

sensitivity to diversity (Driscoll,et al 1996).

For the agency being served

There is a lingering question coming from the agency being served; is having

a bunch of college students volunteering in your agency actually helpful. Researchers

have attempted to answer this question by surveying agencies where students

complete service learning. Agencies reported that the students demonstrated a

dedication to their work and were helpful to the agency and were friendly to both the

staff and the clients. The students were said to have a positive and appropriate

relationship with the clientele and they were sensitive to the needs of the clients, even

showing empathy for their needs. Overall the agency reported that the experience

was positive for the agency (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000). This research supports the

findings of other research, in one study 99% of agencies who worked with service

learning students, reported that the experience was positive and the beneficial. The

claimed that any challenges were far outweighed by the benefits of the experience

(Gray et al, 1998).

How to Create an Experiential Learning Activity

While there is general agreement in the research that service/experiential learning is a great benefit for the students, the college, the agency and ultimate is good for the community and the world, the down side is that research also shows that this activity is time consuming and challenging for the instructor. The following literature will attempt to outline advice and best practices from the research about how to create the best possible service/experiential learning program.

Holland and Robinson outlined six rules to create an effective service learning course. The first rule is that the instructor must clear objectives linking the classroom learning to the community based learning. Second, the activities of the students must address a need in the community. Third, if a student is working within an agency, the employees of the agency being served need to act as co-educators who are vital to the students learning. Fourth, the experience has to be symbiotic, where there is an exchange of information from the student to the agency and from the agency to the student. This ensures that both parties feel as though it is a beneficial relationship. In the classroom the instructor must encourage constant reflection, creating parallels between the two modes of instruction. Finally, the instructor must assess the student learning and inform the agency of the outcomes (2008).

Clearly, when comparing the workload of a traditional class to a service/experiential learning course, an instructor has to take on additional work to achieve these goals. To make the additional burden of requiring service/experiential learning work better for faculty, researchers have come up with some suggestions.

The first responsibility of the staff is to ensure that the students are in a placement which is appropriate (Eyler & Giles, 1999). However, coordinating these agencies can be time consuming; one option to reduce the time spent on this activity is to have the students engage in activities on their own campus. They can work with a particular department or can team up with an existing organization (Heckert, 2010). This helps to ensure a quality placement and allows for easier supervision by the instructor. Another suggestion is for the instructor to require that students work together in groups. This practice reduces the number of different projects and agencies that need to be coordinated. To further support this practice, researchers have found that students who collaborate with other students on these type of projects found that working together in groups was more helpful than working alone (Lu & Lambert, 2010).

The second recommendation is that faculty must link the learning in the classroom to the learning outside the classroom (Holland & Robinson, 2008). When an instructor is able to continuously link learning in the classroom to experiential learning, the students benefit significantly. Eyler & Gyles research shows that this practice can significantly improve a student's ability to think critically and can improve their complexity of problem solving (1999). Other researchers saw the improvement is academia and life skills (Ondaatje et al 1998).

To help students make the connections between their experiences and their classroom learning, instructors are advised to have the students engage in constant reflection (Eyler & Giles 1999; Mabry 1998). Not only does reflection improve their success rate (Eyler & Giles 1999) but it also gives instructors some insight into what

is actually happening in the field. One particularly effective means of reflection is to have the students write journal entries about their experiences (Mabry, 1998). Greene & Diehm (1995) found that journaling was most helpful when the instructor read the journal and provided written feedback rather than merely a checkmark for completion.

A criticism of having the student engage in service/experiential learning is that there is a significant time commitment from the students to achieve this goal. In fact, time constraints are one of the top complaints of students (Rosing, 2010). However, research indicates that the more time a student engage in the activity the more they benefit (Mabry, 1998). The more time the students spend in field, the more professional skills they developed (Lu & Lambert, 2010). The reality is that students have busy lives and are not able to dedicated endless hours to one particular class. Most research has supported the practice of limiting service/experiential learning hours to about 20 hours during the semester. Ondaatje, et al (1998) still saw improvement in life skills and academic improvement with a 20 hours commitment. Twenty hours of additional, outside the classroom work, is still a significant commitment on the part of the student. One option to mitigate this increased time commitment is to have the student complete some of their work during the regularly schedule class period (Jenkin, 2011). Jenkins found that the reduced face time in the classroom was offset by the benefit of the outside work. When McBeth and Robinson decided to incorporate experiential learning into their classroom, they went through their syllabi class by class and eliminated any non-essential lessons to allow the students to focus their attention on the most important topics and experiential

learning activity (2012). Another option to offset the difficulty of managing the increased workload is to have the instructors make the service/experiential learning an optional assignment (Parker- Gwin, Mabry, 1998).

Gorham uses the following argument to illustrate this point; take two students, student A and student B, both students sit through your Introduction to Government class. Student A does not complete any experiential leaning but is able to answers more questions right on the test and gets a higher grade in the course. However, student B has been working on a project to make her college campus smoke free. She worked with other students in a group; she came up with a plan and a proposal. She researched the pros and cons of such a policy and argued her point. She arraigned meetings with various officials and governing bodies.   In the end she was able to effectively implement change in her community and make her college more reflective of her desires. Through this process the student gained confidence and a genuine understanding of how politics works. As a teacher of government, would you prefer student A or student B?

Chapter Three

eeLearning

In 2011, the Institute for a Competitive Workforce (McMahan & Loyola, 2011) issued a report which stated that the US higher education system is not using online education to its full potential. The report issued a call for more successful learning outcomes and an improvement in the quality of instruction through the use of innovative teaching techniques. One particularly exciting practice, with enormous potential for improving educational outcomes and student success, is the combination of experiential learning in an online classroom.

Clearly online learning has many positive attributes and benefits for the students and the larger community, additionally research has shown that experiential learning provides many great advantages for both the student and larger community. The research about combining these two pedagogues, however is limited. The practice of combining experiential learning in an electronic classroom has been dubbed "eelearning" (Trevitte & Eskow, 2007). The learning theory for the online environment is the same as in the traditional classroom, students learn by building new experience on to old ones. Kolb (1984) further explains that knowledge is created through experiences which are solidified when a student has the opportunity to reflect on the activity and receive feedback. The difficulty of an online classroom is that it is more challenging to incorporate experiential activities because the students do not share a physical location (Eastmond & Legler, 2007).

If implemented appropriately, the merging of the two pedagogues could be fantastic for the student, the institution and the community. Experiential learning in

an online course could help to combat the often sighted complaint in online classes, of student disconnectedness (Waldner, McGorry, Widener, 2012). It could also help the common complaint of service/experiential learning, which is that students just don't have the time to devote to such a project. This complaint is particularly relevant in an online course. As mentioned previously, students in online classes tend to be older, have jobs and more commitments outside of school (Karber, 2003). This makes giving them an additional assignment even more challenging. The benefits of an online course is that all the experiential/ service learning hours can be completed online if the student chooses. This allows the student to be completely free of geographic limitations, they could work on a particular issue which is important to them, they could work for a particular candidate they like, they could even work on some sort of global initiative (Malvey, Hamby, Fottler, 2006).

Through an extensive literature review, Waldner, et al. (2012), have come up with best practices in the incorporation of experiential/service learning in an online course. The first practice is to make sure that all the students are prepared from the course. This not only includes making sure they are capable of using and are familiar with the technology required for an online course, but also ensuring that they understand experiential/ service-learning. The author suggests that the instructor design the course home page with the inclusion of an experiential-learning icon. The students can click on the icon and learn all about the process and expectations of experiential learning. The instructor should also include an icon for online learning. The students should be able to click on it to find instructions on the use of technology and numbers to call for assistance.

Through the study of a large quantity of student evaluations in online courses, researchers have found that freshman are particularly sensitive to being overwhelmed by the experience of taking online college courses (Liu, 2012). Therefore the instructors need to be aware and take particular care to familiarize these students with the expectations in a college course, the technology and the resources to get assistance.

The next step is to ensure open communication from student to student and student to instructor. One suggestion is to have the students form groups to complete a project together. This could be aided by the use of video-teleconferencing so the students might develop a more personal connection to each other (Waldner et al., 2012). Along the same lines, the students need to feel a connection with the instructor. Guthrie and McCracken (2010) have found that the role of the instructor is even more important in this type of environment. They explain that learning is a choice made by the student and it requires action from that student. The teacher needs to foster a relationship with the students so they are willing to take on the challenge of personal development. As was stated previously, it is vital that the student receive frequent feedback in an online class, including guided reflection and continuous linking of experiences to learning goals (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

When creating an online experiential learning course, the instructor should take great care to the course design. Prior to the beginning of the course, the course homepage should be set up with all the appropriate icons for the student s to follow and ask questions. The learning objectives and expectations need to be clearly stated. The discussion boards and journals need to be easily accessible.   It has been

suggested the instructor include memorandums of understanding to ensure everyone is one the same page (Waldner et al., 2012).

Through their research Guthrie and McCracken (2010) have also come up with some strategies to facilitate a successful collaboration between experiential learning and an online course. The first tip is to create an online learning environment that fosters continual communication and interaction among the students and between the instructor and the students. Next, the course should be set up to encourage collaboration among the students while allowing for autonomy. Thirdly, the course needs to provide the students with the opportunity to critically reflect on their learning and their experiences. Finally, the students need to be have the ability to use the technology to achieve the learning goals. These four goals follow other similar research, combining the ideals of online courses and of experiential learning (Eastmond & Legler, 2007).

Following the research of best practices in experiential learning and in online learning, students benefit from reflection (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Mabry, 1998). Electronic journaling allows students to reflect on their experiences, making their experiences relevant to the course material, while building a community with other students in the course. Mills (2001) suggests that students should journal daily and the instructor should provide feedback, questions, and encouragement. One option, to spark this interaction between the students, is to have students read various selections on a particular topic and then react to it in an asynchronous discussion forum.   This is where an online classroom may have an advantage; these students cannot read the selection and then sit idly by while their classmates react and discuss the material. In

an online classroom, all the students have to post personal reactions to the material and then respond to the posts from other students. An additional advantage of this type of assignment is that it is difficult for students to plagiarizer because they are asked about their personal reaction to the material (Murphrey, 2010). This is great way to encourage interaction between the students right from the first day of class.

Murphrey (2010) conducted a case study to determine how active learning could be used in an online classroom. She suggests that students could be asked questions or to research a topic, they would report back the information they found. Then the students would have to relate the information to them personally and give their reaction to the material. Finally, the students had to explain how the information could be altered to increase relevancy.   They are not required to cite the information but need to gather it, react to it and then build off of it. It is easy to see how this type of project could be used in an introductory course in government. The instructor could assign the students various topics from the shifting controversy over gun rights, abortion rights, immigration reform, voting rights, etc. The students could do the research, and report what they have found on a discussion board with other students assigned to the same topic. They could be required to post their reaction to the material and how it related to them personally and finally they could build off that information and come up with ideas of how they could effectively insert themselves into the bigger conversation on such issues.   An instructor could then require the students find an organization (online) working towards their goals on the particular issue. They could then do some sort of work for the organization and gain the firsthand knowledge of how it works.

The limited research on eelearning has reported some positive findings. One study reported that the students had positive experience incorporating active learning in an online classroom (Murphrey, 2010). They claim that the technology actually allowed them greater freedom to expand and communicate their ideas in collaboration with other students. This research does caution the instructor against assuming that students will come to class with the computer skills needed to be successful. This brings us back to the research by who Naeem (2011) recommends that online classes be scaffolded to allow the students to build on skills they already have until they are computer literate enough to be successful in the online academic environment.

Active learning is a great option for getting the students involved in a project right from the beginning of the course. The following is an example of how an instructor could use such a technique. On the first day of class the instructor could assign (or allow the students to choose) a topic of study; for example the Arab Spring from Egypt's perspective. The students would have to read 10 current news articles, watch 3 documentaries and then write a paper from the perspective of either a pro-government supporter or a citizen against the establishment. Now that the student is familiar with the situation and has an informed opinion, they would be required to find a related organization to work with. The organization could be either something over the internet like the International Red Cross or an actually facility, like a Refugee Center (Stover, 2005; Williams, 2006). This make the historical event "real" for the student because they now have a stake in the game.

Rather than see the options for experiential learning in an online course as limited, through some innovative thinking an instructor should realize that just the

opposite is true. The options for online experiential learning are limitless. Students

could find an organization that they maybe interested in, they could conduct research

or write a grant for a project, they could volunteer doing organizing for a major

political campaign or they could find a local campaign   and make phone calls or

assist the candidate with web development or marketing.   The possibilities are only

limited by the imagination and innovation of the student and the instructor.

A blended learning environment is another option for instructors and students

who do not want to complete their experiential learning online. The students get web-

based instruction coupled with an on-site placement (Guthrie & McCracken, 2010).

To create a successful online learning environment coupled with on-site experiential

learning project takes a great deal of planning. Since the students do not share a

physical location one option is for the students do their experiential learning at a

location in their own community and then to share the experience with their

classmates in the discussion board (Eastmond & Legler, 2007). This could be seen as

a positive for surrounding communities, where the college is not immediately located,

and where the students do not typically serve (Eastmond & Legler, 2007). Again this

leads back to the role of the instructor and the need for them to have good

communication and relationships with their students to ensure that the students are

participating in a positive experience when learning outside the classroom. It should

also be noted, that researchers recommend that students be given an alternative to

working in an agency, some students will find juggling their personal, professional

and academic lives too much and will not be able to work in an agency, for these

students, the instructor needs to find alternate assignments while maintaining the

experience learning experience.

In addition to creating a list of the best practices, Waldner et al. (2012) also describes the limitations of setting up an online course incorporating experiential learning. He claims one thing that makes a course like this possible is also the biggest pitfall; technology. The students may not be familiar with the technology and the technology may fail. It is also important to note that the students will not all be on the same operating systems which could lead to greater confusion (Malvey et al., 2006).

Communication is another source of difficulty in an online class, however with support and guidance from the instructor, these issues can be mitigated. The instructor needs to be familiar with the technology and with the online teaching prior to taking on the incorporation of experiential learning in an online course (Waldner et al., 2012; Capdeferro & Romero, 2012).

Clearly conducting an online experiential learning class is huge time commitment from the instructor. While undertaking the rigors of implementing an experiential learning project in an online classroom it is important to remember that the troubles are worthwhile. The students are able to learn greater problem solving skills, they have the opportunity for personal development and greater self-confidence and increase their employability (Peterson, 1998; Craig, 2010). Through this process they will gain firsthand knowledge of the political system and will hopefully gain an increase in their political efficacy which could translate into greater confidence in dealing with political issues through their lifetime (McBeth & Robinson, 2012).

Chapter Four

Methodology

The goal of this research is to determine if it is practical to incorporate experiential learning in an online course. There are three parts to this study. The first part of this study is a quasi-experimental design to determine if participation in an experiential learning project will increase students' scores on a survey measuring general political knowledge, confidence in that knowledge, internal efficacy and external efficacy. The second phase of the study was a self-administered survey of instructors of online government courses. The goal of the survey was to find out the opinions and practices of people teaching online government classes. The final phase of the research was the creation of an online government class using best practices including the incorporation of an experiential learning project. The content of this chapter includes a discussion of the research design, the population, the process of data collection, the research instruments and finally the analysis procedures.

Phase One: Experiential Learning

Research Design

The first part of the study used a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent research design to explore the use of experiential learning in an online classroom. Specifically, this research was conducted to determine if students in a traditional introductory class in American Government would experience similar increases in their general political knowledge and their internal efficacy as the students did in a 2012 study by McBeth and Robison. Included in this study, was also a measure of change in external efficacy scale. The research questions were:

1. Would the students who participated in the experiential learning project's general knowledge scores improve more than the students who did not participate?

2. Would the students who participated in the experiential learning project's knowledge confidence scores improve more than the students who did not participate?

3. Would the students who participated in the experiential learning project's internal efficacy scores improve more than the students who did not participate?

4. Would the students who participated in the experiential learning project's external efficacy scores improve more than the students who did not participate?

To find the answers to the research questions, pre-test/post-test design was used. This design is widely used to measure change resulting from an experimental treatment (Mitchell & Jolley, 1992). In this case the experimental treatment was the participation in the experiential learning project while taking Introduction to American Government.

When using the non-equivalent groups there are several threats to internal validity. The first and most obvious design threat is that there is a selection bias, in that the subjects were not randomly selected to the experimental or the control group. As a result, it is possible that the groups were different prior to the beginning of the study therefore any differences in the post-test cannot necessarily be contributed to

the treatment (Borg & Gall, 1989). Thus these results cannot be generalized to the rest of the population (Salkind, 2012). The students in this research signed up for the classes on their own because it was part of the curriculum and it fit their schedule.

Mortality was an issue in this research. Eight students either dropped out of the course or were absent the day of the post-test survey was administered. Other students were absent or added the class after the pre-test surveys were administered. Without both a pre-test and post-test from these students, it was not possible to included then in the study.

To determine if there was a cause and effect relationship, three criteria must be established, temporal precedence, co-variation of cause and effect and if there are any other plausible alternate explanations (http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/causeeff.php).

First, temporal precedence had to be established. To establish this you must determine if the cause came before the effect, that is, the rise in knowledge and internal and external efficacy was a result of participation in the experiential learning project. To establish this, all participants took a pre-test to get a baseline of knowledge and internal and external efficacy before the experimental treatment and then followed up with the post-test.

The second step in establishing a causal relationship is to determine that there actually is a relationship. Simply put, if you have the treatment you get the effect, if you don't have the treatment you don't get the effect. In this case, I needed to establish that the students who participated in the experiential learning project would have a significant increase in knowledge and efficacy that would not be present in the

students who did not participate. In other words, the experimental group would see a significantly higher increase on all the variables, than would the control group.

Finally, you must eliminate all plausible alternate explanations. In this study there are two plausible alternate explanations for the increase in general knowledge and efficacy. The first is the testing effect, this is concept that students will do better on a test the second time they take the test. In this case, the students may have remembered that they were asked a question like "what office does Joe Biden currently hold?" Therefore, the second time they took the test, they would have a greater likelihood of knowing the answer. The second plausible scenario is that something else happened between the time of the pre-test and post-test that would have impacted the students' performance. For example, if there were a presidential election taking place over the course of the semester, it is possible that students would be paying more attention to politics/government and would have greater knowledge. In both cases, the use of a control group would be able to measure any change not associated with participation in the experiential learning project.

To improve the internal validity of this research and to determine if there were significant differences in the knowledge, confidence and internal and external efficacy between the control and experimental groups, the null hypothesis were tested as follows:

1. Ho1: Participation in the experiential learning project will not improve the student's general knowledge post test scores more than the control group's scores.

2. Ho2: Participation in the experiential learning project will not improve the student's knowledge confidence post test scores more than the control group.

3. Ho3: Participation in the experiential learning project will not improve the student's internal efficacy post test scores more than the control group.

4. Ho4: Participation in the experiential learning project will not improve the student's external efficacy post test scores more than the control group.

The independent variable is participation is the experiential learning project while the dependent variable is the students' scores on the various measures; general knowledge, confidence in that knowledge, internal efficacy and external efficacy.

Population

The population of the experimental group was 44 students enrolled in an Introduction to American National Government course at a community college in upstate New York. There were 21 males and 21 females with an average age of 21.6. The students voluntarily signed up for this course, either as a requirement for their major or as an elective. The data collected from these students were used to get a baseline of the change in political knowledge and internal and external efficacy by students engaging in an experiential learning project in a traditional brick and mortar classroom. Additionally, there was a control group made up of 14 students enrolled in the Introduction to American National Government course held in the evening. The class was made up of 9 males and 5 females, with an average age of 28.4. The average age of evening class students is higher than the traditional students in the day class. This is in keeping with the research, night students are traditionally older and

have more outside activities (family, jobs, etc.) similar to that of online students (Kraber, 2003; Walton-Radford, 2012).

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a pretest-posttest design. To determine the students' levels of political knowledge and internal and external efficacy, the students were given a survey. The measure used in this study was the same as the measure used by McBeth and Robison (2012) See Appendix A. The survey included 5 current event questions about American Government. They included questions like "What office does Joe Biden currently hold?" These were scored as either right or wrong. The next portion of the survey included 33 questions measuring general political knowledge and confidence in that knowledge. The questions were paired with a 5 point Likert Scale, so the students could answer the questions with 1= Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. An example of a test question measuring knowledge is "I can identify the executive office holder at different levels of government." and an example of confidence in that knowledge is "I can identify different government agencies that are most likely to solve my issues of concern."

The survey also included 4 questions measuring internal efficacy and 4 questions measuring external efficacy. These were also answered using the same Likert Scale 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. An example of a question measuring internal efficacy is, "I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics." An example of an external efficacy question is, "I don't think public officials care much about what

people like me think." The external efficacy questions were all in the negative so a rise in external efficacy would be indicated by a lower score on the post-test.

The student survey also included a demographic data instrument. This included three questions; age, sex and population of their hometown.

Data Collection Procedures

The Human Subjects Review Process was completed by Idaho State University, see page iv. The office of Institutional Advancement at Mohawk Valley Community College was also approached in seeking approval. The Chair of the Committee determined that the pretest-posttest surveys of political knowledge and efficacy were part of normal evaluation of pedagogical effectiveness routinely conducted in courses, therefore no approval was necessary.

During the first week of the semester, students enrolled in 3 day a week Introduction to Government course were asked to complete an Informed Consent Form, see Appendix B. All of the student consented to be a part of the research. Next the general political knowledge and internal efficacy surveys were administered. Each student was asked to put a specific code at the top of their survey so they could be matched to their post-test survey, to determine if there was a change in knowledge and efficacy. The surveys took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The students who added the class late or were not present on the day the survey was administered, were not included in the study.

Over the course of the semester, the students were required to participate in an experiential learning project. During the first week of the course the experiential learning project was explained and the students were asked to think about their areas

of interest and to begin to consider possible topics. In order to foster civic engagement, the students were asked to think of an issue/problem at the local government level or an issue within the college that they felt needed addressed.

During the third week of classes the students presented their ideas to their classmates. There were 30 to 40 students per class. Each student gave an informal presentation of their project idea, there were some obvious themes; security on campus, parking on campus, and recycling/composting on campus. Some other groups that formed addressed local snowplowing practices, a local speed trap near campus, potholes on local roads and the issue of allowing the student health center to distribute the morning after pill.

The students formed their groups, exchanged contact information and were asked to make a formal presentation the following week outlining exactly what their project would look like. The following week the students were asked to present a list of people they were planning to contact in order to move the project forward. This presentation proved very helpful because the students were able to share information with each other and make suggestions on who they thought others should be in touch with and the best ways to contact specific people.

Periodically throughout the semester, the instructor would call on various groups and have them report on their progress. During the 8th week of class, the groups had to write a rough draft and give a formal presentation of their progress thus far. The papers were graded and suggestions were made. Again the presentation proved a valuable tool for students to network. When a group faced a road block of not having their phone calls returned by some official, other groups made suggestions

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on how they dealt with similar issues. It was also inspiring for some groups to see the actual results achieved by other members of the other groups. During the 15th and 16th week of the semester, the students had to do a final presentation of their successes and failures. The students watching the presentation had to give each group a grade based on how well they felt the group did. I wanted the students to see and think about what quality work looked like. The students within the group giving the presentation were also required to grade the other students within their group. This was done to help combat the students who were not pulling their weight.

On the last day of the course, before the students took their finals, they were asked to complete the post-test survey which was exactly the same as the pre-test survey they took at the beginning of the semester. The students were again asked to write their code at the top of their survey in order to match them up with their pre-test survey.

Analysis

The data from the first phase of the study will be analyzed using analysis of covariance or ANCOVA. This method is used to analyze the mean differences between multiple variables (Iverson & Norpoth, 1987). The analysis will consist of examining the data to determine if there is a significant different between the control group (the class who took the introduction to government course but did not participate in an experiential learning project) and the experimental group (the group who took the class and participated in the project). The data will be examined to determine if the groups differ on general knowledge, confidence in that knowledge and their internal and external efficacy scores.

Phase Two: Survey of Educators

The second phase of the research was conducted to gain knowledge about the realities of online teaching from professionals in the field. Instructors of online government classes were surveyed via email about the pedagogical techniques they employ and their opinion about the quality of education students are receiving from an online classroom. The data collected from the instructors will be analyzed using descriptive techniques. I will report the quantitative data, "how long have you been teaching?, what techniques do you use in online teaching?, how do you compare online courses to traditional courses?" but I will also report on the more qualitative information gathered from the open ended question about overall impressions of online teaching. Qualitative methods is a nonmathematical way to interpret data and organize into some sort of explanatory theory. This is an especially effective technique to draw meaning out of people's experiences (Maxwell, 1996).

Research Design

The research design for the second phase of the study was a survey. Surveys are widely used to gather opinions, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of a selected group (Mitchell &Jolley, 1992). In this case the tool was a self-administered questionnaire and the selected group was instructors of online government classes.   Mitchell and Jolley (1992) warn researchers conducting a survey to keep the survey brief and to make sure each question is directly related to your research.

There are several advantages and disadvantages to the self-administered survey. The first advantage is that it is relatively easy to distribute to a wide number of people and it is relatively inexpensive.   Another advantage is that the survey can

be anonymous. One disadvantages is a low return rate, because the return rate is so low, there may be a biased sample in that the people who do return the survey may not be typical of the entire population. Another disadvantage is that the people responding to the survey do not have the opportunity to interact with the administrator therefore they cannot get clarification for ambiguous questions. A final disadvantage with this questionnaire is that I gave limited choices for question answers. It is possible that respondents had answers that were not represented in the set answer choices.

Population

The second part of the study had a population of instructors of online government classes. The surveys were administered via email and were collected via Survey Monkey so this researcher has no way of knowing exactly who responded. However, the population that the surveys were sent to was acquired through internet searches of colleges in various states. Once a state was chosen, all the colleges with political science or government programs were identified and an email was sent to the Chair of the Department. This email included my identity, my academic affiliation and the purpose of my study and it included a link to the survey. In all, 172 colleges in 50 states were contacted. Thirty-seven surveys were completed and returned for analysis.

Instrumentation

Data collection was carried out online using the Survey Monkey program. The program required the researcher to input questions and options for responses. Once the survey was completed and ready to be published, Survey Monkey provided

you with a link to the completed survey. This link was included in the emails I sent out to 76 Political Science departments (see Appendix C). When potential respondents clicked on the link, they were taken directly to the survey (see Appendix D). The first page of the survey included the informed consent form. It informed respondents that their consent was implied if they fill out and submit the survey (see Appendix E). Once the respondents submit the survey, the answers are stored on the Survey Monkey website.

The survey included a few questions about the type of training the instructors had prior to teaching, and how much time they put into the creation and running of an online course. The questions had a pre-selected answer bank from which the respondent had to choose. The next set of questions were designed to identify which types of pedagogues instructors believed were most effective in online teaching. The final question on the survey was open ended question asking the respondents their overall impression when comparing online class to traditional classes.

Analysis

The information gathered through the survey of instructors was analyzed using descriptive statistics, this is a way to simply describe what the data says without generalizing the results to the entire population (http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/statdesc.php). The results collected are only used to describe the experiences of those surveyed.

Phase 3: Creation of the Web Site

The creation of the website was a culmination of all I learned from the literature review, the survey of the online instructors and my experience with

incorporating an experiential learning program in a traditional Introduction to Government course. The creation of this website was a completely new experience for me, I had to draw from my areas of knowledge listed above but I also had to learn how to create a website and use my experience as an internet user and a teacher to figure out the best and most user friendly ways to navigate the site. As Joseph Maxwell stated, this type of research has no set starting point and does not proceed through a fixed set of steps, it involves interaction and interconnection between various design elements (2006, p. 3). The website was created through godaddy.com and can be found at www.experiencegovernment.com.

Traditionally, it was assumed that you should complete your research free from any personal biases and experiences. For this portion on the study, I am rejecting that notion and embracing all experience and bias and incorporating myself as an instrument of research. Alan Peshkin wrote that:

My subjectivity is the basis for the story I am able to tell. It is the strength on which I build. It makes me who I am as a person and a researcher, equipping me with the perspectives and insights that shape all that I do as a researcher (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 104).

The creation of the website was challenging and took an extraordinary amount of time. I wanted to make sure the website incorporated all that I had learned and that it would be easy to navigate so students would be comfortable. I created links to all the important information and tried to put information in many different places so it was easy to locate. On the homepage, I included an easy to read section of expectations: my expectations for the students, what the students should expect from me and what the students should expect from the college. I created links to

technological assistance and to my email and other contact information. I also

included a menu where students could easy find a link to course information, class

notes, the experiential learning project and the discussion board.

The second page is the Course Information page. It includes all the

information that would normally be included in a syllabus such as the grading policy,

a statement of academic honesty, a course description, etc., but written in a more

interesting user friendly manner than a traditional syllabus. This page goes into a

little more detail about the specifics of what will be expected from the students

throughout the semester.

The next link takes the students to the "classes." Each class is listed by week

and by subject.   By clicking on the link the students are taken to the material they

need to read for that week. This portion of the website creation took by far the

longest amount of time. I do not normally lecture through Power Point. I have a

more open ended style of teaching, where I bring a skeleton outline of the lecture and

let the students guide the discussion. As a result, I had to create a digital copy of all

my lectures. I did not just want to post all my lectures and have the students read

them, I wanted to take advantage of the technology and make the classes as

interesting and varied as possible. Some of the class links take the students to a

Power Point document or a Word document which includes external links to

information or websites about the weekly topic. Certain weeks the students will be

directed to websites where students will have to read material and then take quizzes

which can be linked back to me. In other weeks, the students have to watch movies

and then write about their reaction to it on the discussion board. Other weeks they

will be asked to find articles on various topics and turn in the work. There are even links where students have to play "government games" and the scores are sent to me. I also plan to include current events into the weekly lessons, but this will be accomplished through the discussion board.

The next area of the website is about the experiential learning project. I included a weekly timeline with dates and deadlines and expectations. The students will have to check the project link to find out what deadlines are coming up. They will have to present project ideas during the first weeks and join groups. The groups will be linked through the discussion board. They will be required to present a proposal during the first month, a rough draft mid-semester and each student will be required to turn in their own paper and will be required to do a group project presentation via our website.

The last area of the website is the discussion board. I believe this will be the place where the greatest learning will take place. Weekly, the student will be required to post their reactions to the material and then comment on other people's posts. The research indicates that reading the posts of other students can be just as beneficial as posting a comment yourself. As the instructor, I plan to spend a great deal of time here commenting and prompting deeper consideration of the issues. The main discussion board will have a sub-board which will be linked to the students' group projects. This will allow the students to communicate with one another freely and to discuss the progress on their projects. I will also have access to the discussion board so I can follow the groups' progress and provide guidance.

Chapter Five

Results

Phase 1: Experiential Learning

To determine the effectiveness of participation in an experiential learning project in an introductory class in government, this study used quantitative methods based on Non-Equivalent Group Design (NEGD) (Creswell, 2003). This included a pretest and posttest measuring general political knowledge, confidence in that knowledge and internal and external efficacy. The experimental group was comprised of two classes of students enrolled in Introduction to Government, who participated in group experiential learning projects. The control group was a class of students enrolled in Introduction to Government who did not participate in any experiential learning projects.

The demographics of the participants are included in Table 1. All the participants are students enrolled in Introduction to Government classes at a community college in upstate New York. The experimental group contained 44 students, 21 males and 21 females with an average age of 21.6. The control group contained 14, 9 males and 5 females, with an average age of 28.4.

Table 1

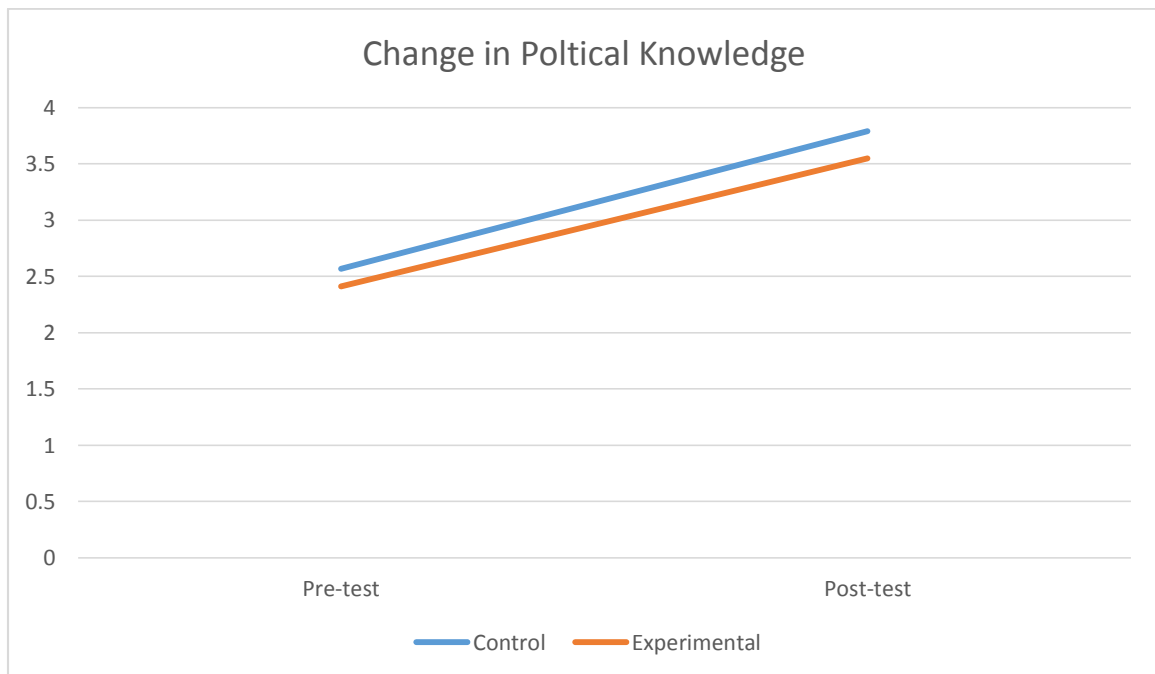|	Participants	Males	Females	Age
Experimental Group	44	21	21	21.6
Control Group	14	9	5	28.4

Research Question 1

Will participation in the experiential learning project improve the student's general political knowledge more than the students who do not participate in such a project?

The hypothesis to test this is: H-1: Students' who participate in an experiential learning project will improve their general political knowledge scores more than students who do not participate in an experiential learning project.

For the control group, their pre-test mean score on political knowledge was 2.57 and the post-test mean score was 3.79. The experimental group was pre-test mean score was 2.41 and the post-test mean score was 3.55. (See Figure 1). When a one tailed t-test was performed, both groups had a statistically significant increase in general political knowledge.

Figure 1

However, I wanted to determine if there was a significant difference between the control and experimental group once you factored in the pretest scores. I ran this data using an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). While the results show that there was an improvement in the mean score of the experimental group, when the pre-test scores are factored in the results were not statistically significant (significance of .619), meaning I cannot reject the null hypothesis.

Research Question 2

Will participation in the experiential learning project improve the student's confidence in their political knowledge more than the students who do not participate in such a project?
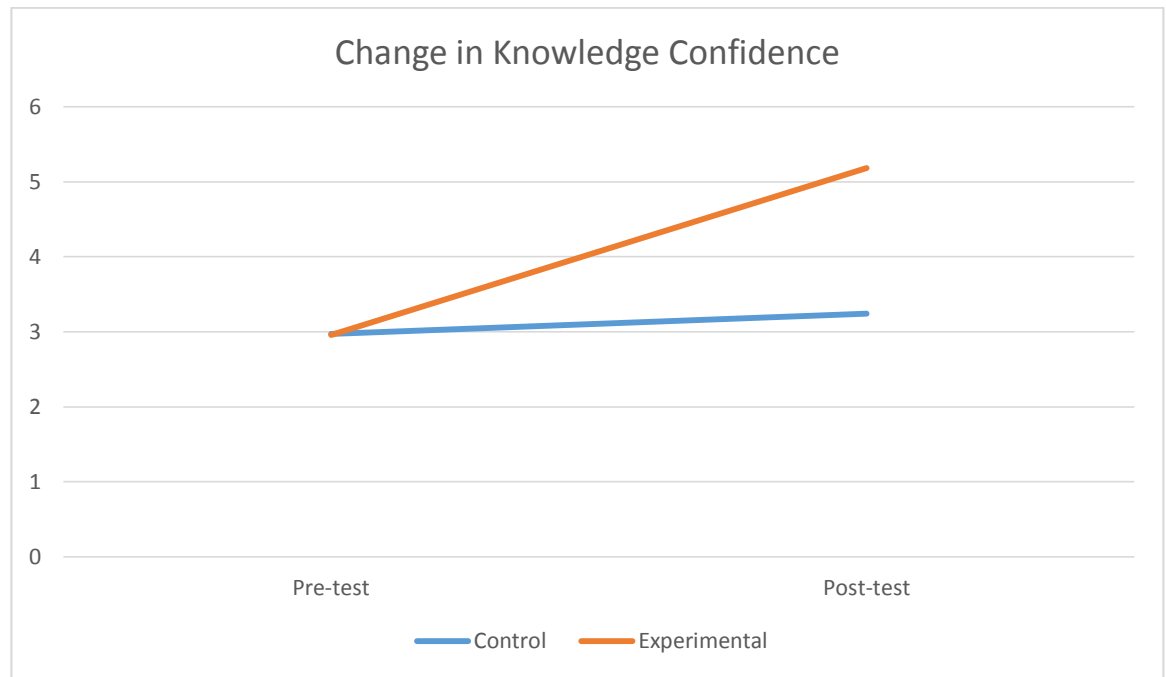
The hypothesis to test this is: H-2: Students' who participate in an experiential learning project will improve their confidence on their political knowledge scores more than the students who did not participate in an experiential learning project. The data was first analyzed using a one tailed t-test to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the pre and post-test scores for both the experimental and the control groups. The mean scores for the knowledge confidence are shown in Figure 2. The control group had a pre-test score of M = 2.97 and post-test score of M = 3.24. The experimental group had a pre-test M = 2.96 and post-test M = 5.18.

To determine if there was statically significant difference between the control and experimental group in the post-test assessment for confidence in political knowledge subset, while factoring in the pre-test scores, I ran this data using an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). The results show that there was a statistically

significance improvement in knowledge confidence (sig. level .018) between the control and experimental group.

Figure 2

Research Question 3

Will participation in an experiential learning project improve a students' internal efficacy scores more than students who do not participate in such a project?
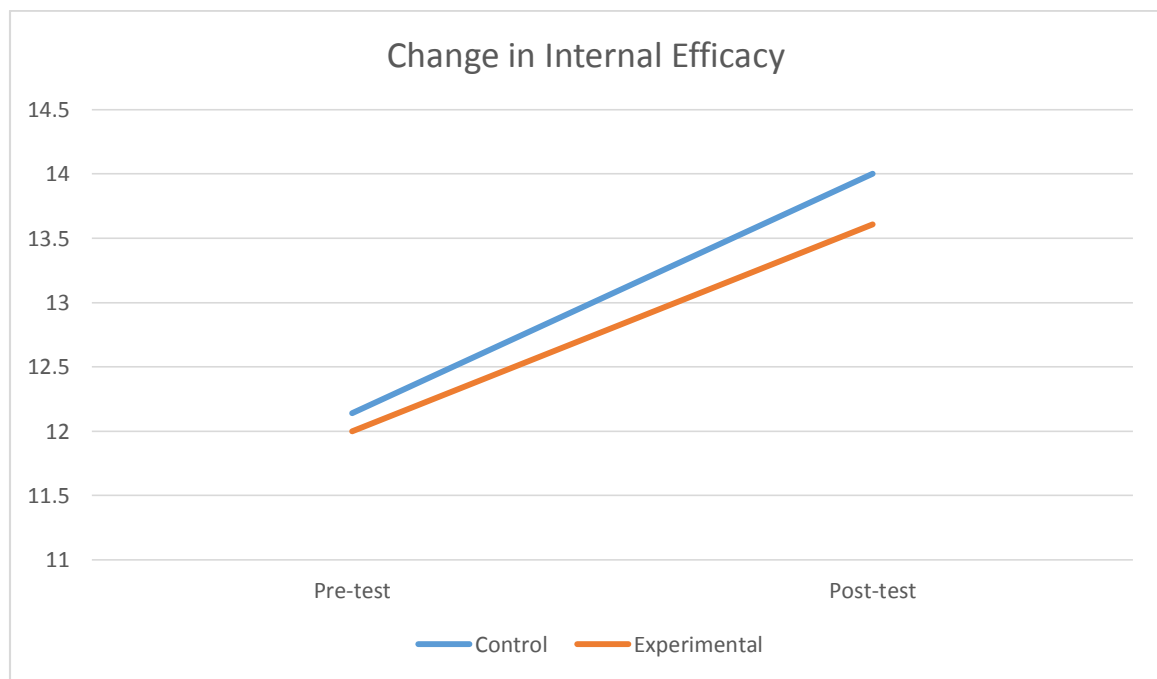
The hypothesis to test this is H-3: Participation in the experiential learning project will improve the students' internal efficacy post-test scores more than the students in the control group.

To determine if the students in the experimental group and the control group experienced a significant improvement in their internal efficacy scores, I ran a one tailed t-test. The control group had an internal efficacy pre-test mean score of 12.14 and a post-test mean score of 14. The experimental group had a pre-test mean score

of 12 and a post-test mean score of 13.61. (See figure 3). To determine if participation in the experiential learning project had an impact on the level of improvement in internal efficacy score, the data was analyzed using an ANCOVA. It was determined that there was no significant difference between the two groups (significance level of .728), therefore, I had to accept the null hypothesis. Participation in the experiential learning project did not significantly improve the students' internal efficacy scores.

Figure 3

Change in Internal Efficacy

Research Question 4

Will participation in an experiential learning project improve a students'
external efficacy scores more than students who do not participate in such a project?

The hypothesis to test this is H-3: Participation in the experiential learning project will improve the students' external efficacy post-test scores more than the

students in the control group.

Unlike the questions measuring internal efficacy, the external efficacy questions were posed in the negative. This means if a student had an increase in their external efficacy, their scores would actually go down. To determine if the students in the experimental group and the control group experienced a significant improvement in their external efficacy, I ran a one tailed t-test. The results can be found in figure 4. The experimental group had a pre-test mean score of 12.18 and a post-test mean score of 11.55. The control group had an external efficacy pre-test mean score of 11.57 and a post-test mean score of 9.64. Regardless of which groups the students were in, the students had statistically significant drop in their external efficacy scores which signifies an improvement in their external efficacy.

Figure 4
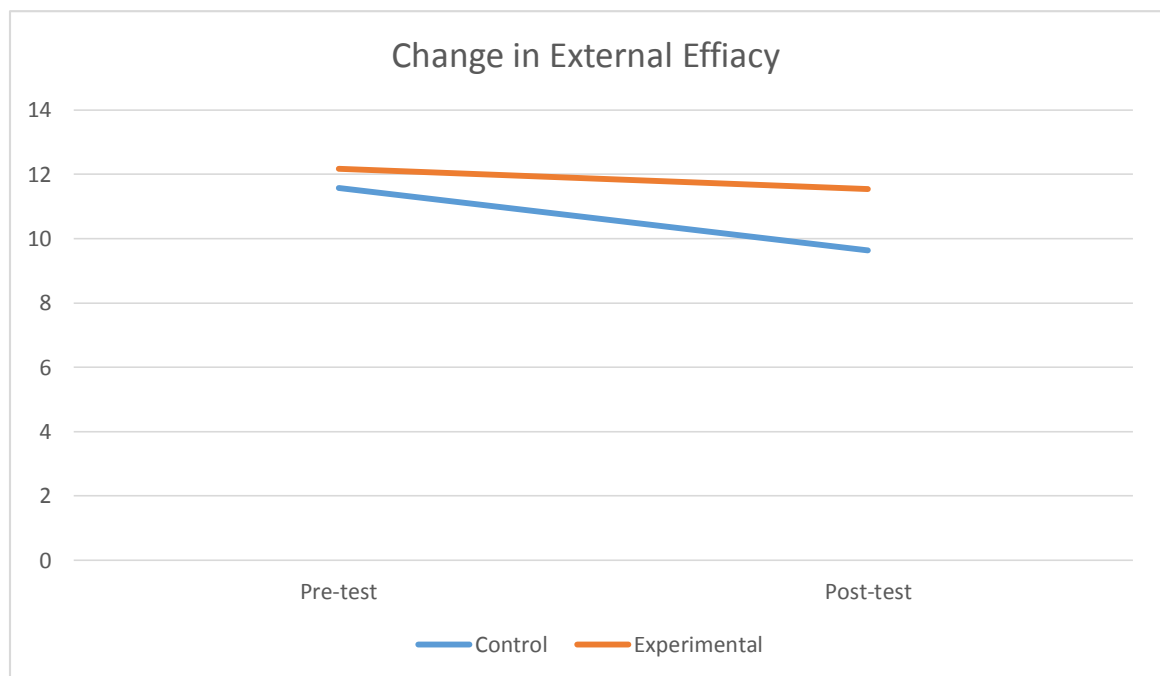
Figure 4: Note, these questions were asked in the negative so a downward slope indicates an increase in external efficacy.

To take this a step further to analyze if there is a statistically significant difference between the group who participated in the experiential learning project and those who did not, an analysis of covariance was run. The significance level was .055, so again I had to accept the null hypothesis.

Phase 2: Instructor Interviews

Thirty-six instructors completed and returned the survey. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics in an attempt to look at the big picture of what is happening in the field of online learning.

Only those people who taught government in an online classroom were asked to respond. Of those who responded, 42% had been teaching online government classes for over 6 years, 19% had been teaching online for 3-5 years and 39% had been teaching between 1 to 2 years. All the respondents had also taught government in a traditionally classroom, with 69% having six or more years of experience. Furthermore, all the respondents worked for a traditional college or university or for a community college, 83% and 17% respectively.

The next series of questions were aimed at identifying the amount and type of training that instructors received prior to teaching an online course. Approximately 38% of the respondents did not receive any training through the institution where they were employed. Of those, 15% complete some sort of training on their own. For the 62% who received training through their institution and the 15% who completed training on their own, 31% had no training in methods of instruction, 39% completed between 1 -5 hours of training in methods of online course instruction, while 31% completed 6 hours or more. The results for training in course development were

similar with 29% receiving more than 6 hours, 46% receiving between 1-5 hours and

26% receiving no training in course development. See Figure 5 & 6.
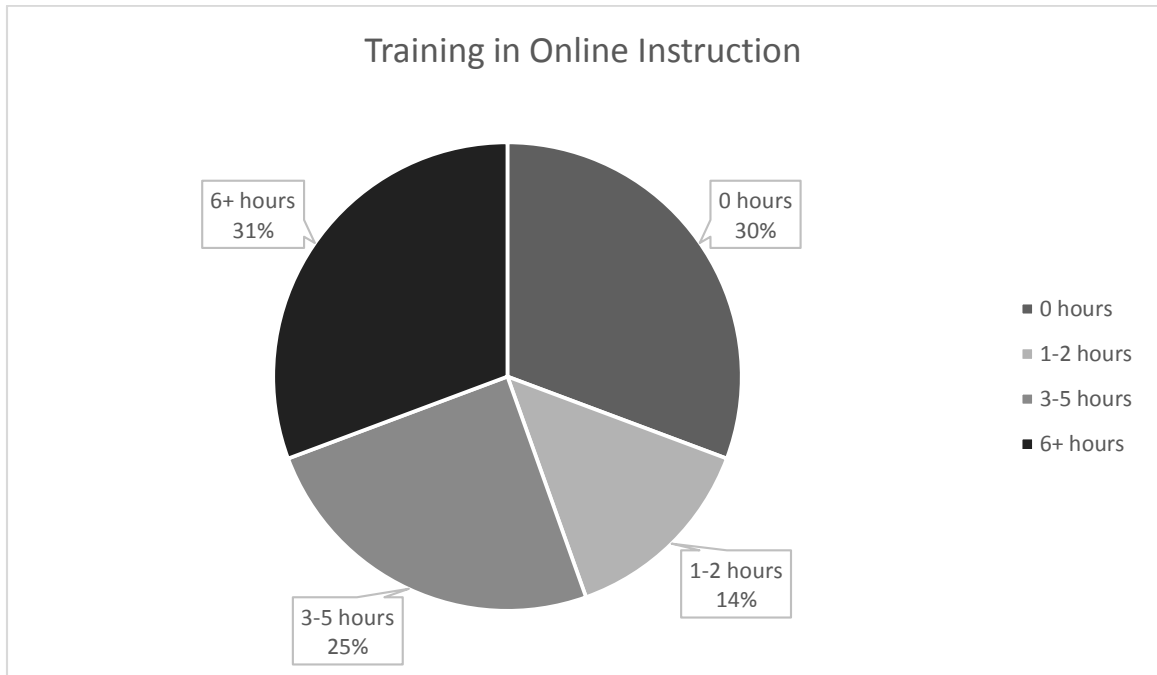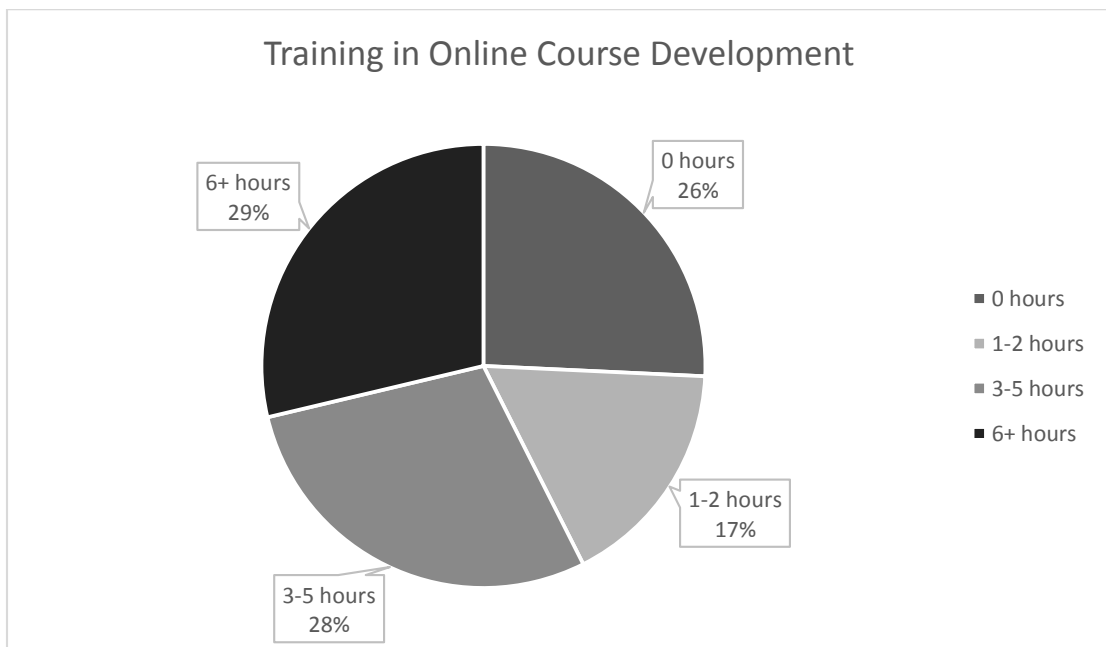
Figure 5

Training in Online Instruction

Figure 6

Training in Online Course Development

Eighty-one percent of respondents report that they spent more than 8 hours developing their course prior to teaching it, 11% report spending between hours 5-7 developing the course and 8% of respondent said they spent between 2 to 4 hours creating the course.

The results were very similar when you compared the amount of time instructors put into the daily running of an online course when compared with a traditional course. (See Figure 7.)

Figure 7
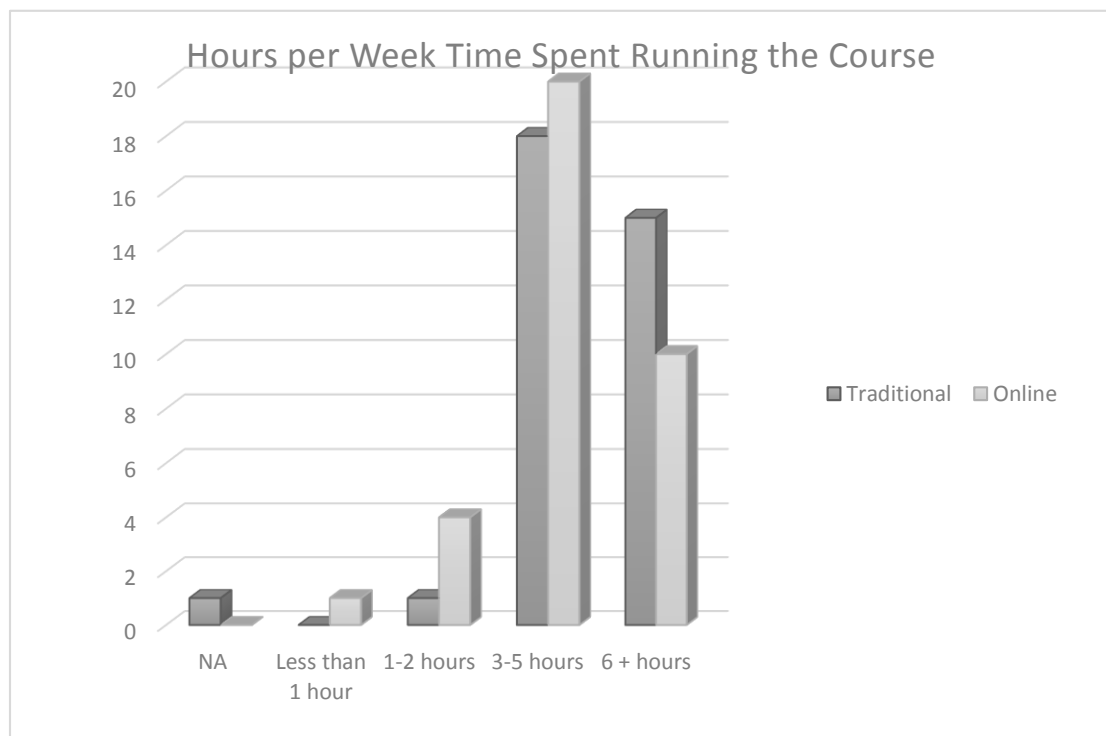
For the traditional class one person reported spending less than 3 hours a week running the course, while 5 respondents reported they spent less than 3 hours a week running their online class. Nineteen respondents said they spend 3-5 hours a week running a traditional class and 20 people said they spend the same amount of time running their online course. As for the highest bracket, 15 instructors reported

dedicating more than 6 hours a week to their traditional class and 10 said the same about their online course.

The next portion of the survey was aimed at identifying the techniques which online government teachers used to teach their courses and how helpful they feel they are in conducting the class. The first question asks about synchronous learning techniques such as employing the use of live chat rooms where students can "talk" to each other and to the instructor in real time. Thirty-four percent of respondents did not use this method and 35% found that it was either not very helpful or not at all helpful to instruction. (See Figure 8.) Only 23% of respondents found the use of synchronous learning helpful to an online class.

Figure 8
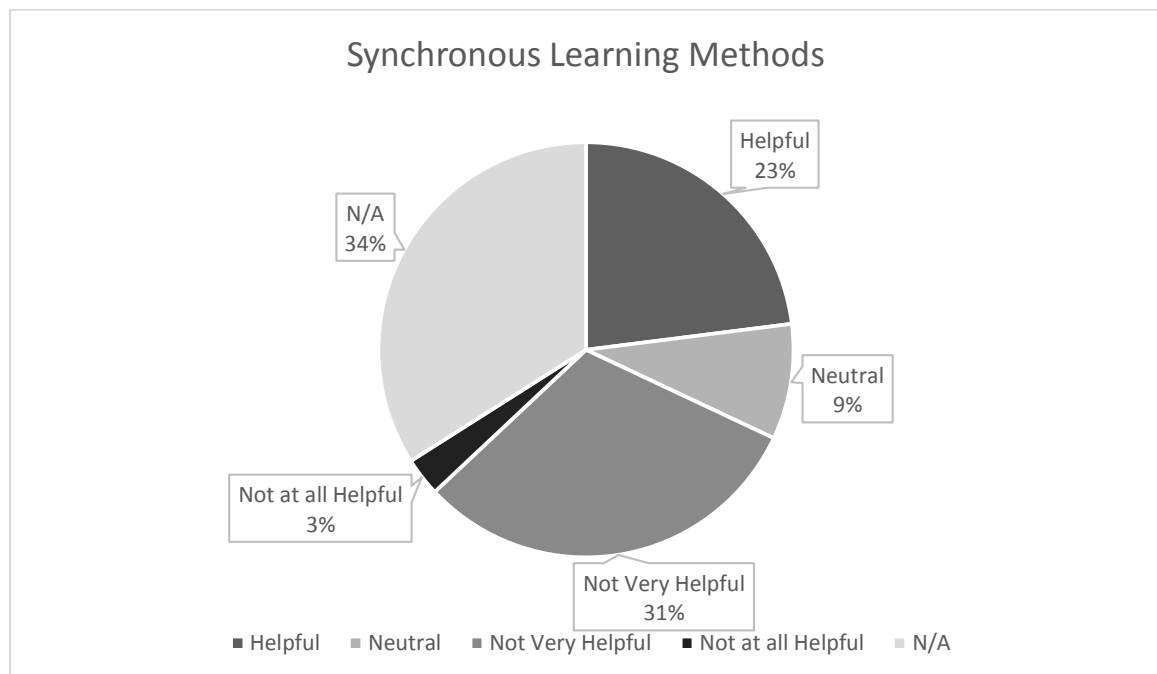
Ninety-seven percent of instructors use asynchronous learning methods, such as discussion boards where students can post questions and comments, while others

can read and respond in their own time. One person did not use a discussion board

and 20% did not find them very helpful. However, 71% of the respondents found the

use of discussion board either helpful or very helpful in conducting an online course.

The use of Skype or other live video program was not very popular, 43% of

instructors do not use it and of those who did, only 6% found it very helpful and 11%

found it helpful.

The other methods of instruction that respondents were asked to rate included

the posting articles, video clips and lectures. The results are shown in Figure 9.

Twenty-nine percent found posting articles very helpful and 57% found it helpful.

Nine percent of respondents were neutral about the usefulness and 3% found it not

very helpful. Only three percent of respondents didn't post articles.

Figure 9
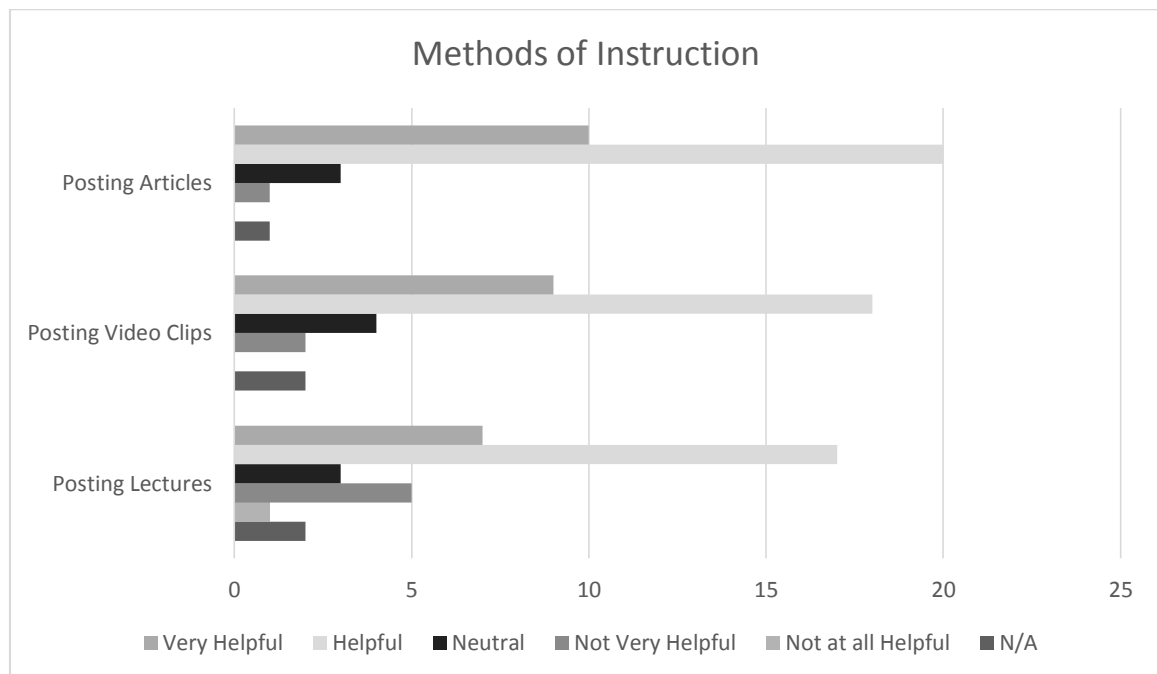
The results about the effectiveness of posting video clips were similar.

Twenty-six percent of respondents found it very useful and 51% found it useful.

Eleven percent of respondents were neutral about posting video clips while 6% did not find it very helpful and 6% didn't use this method in teaching their online classes.

Posting lectures was deemed to be very helpful by 20% of respondents and helpful by 49% of them. Nine percent were neutral, 14% found that this method of instruction was not very helpful and 3% found it not at all helpful. Six percent did not post lectures for students.

The online instructors were asked to compare online students to students in their traditional classroom on a variety of items. Fifty-four percent of the respondents reported that student motivation in an online class is the same as in a traditional classroom. Twenty-six percent said it was inferior and 6% said it was far inferior. Only 14% said that student motivation in an online class was superior.
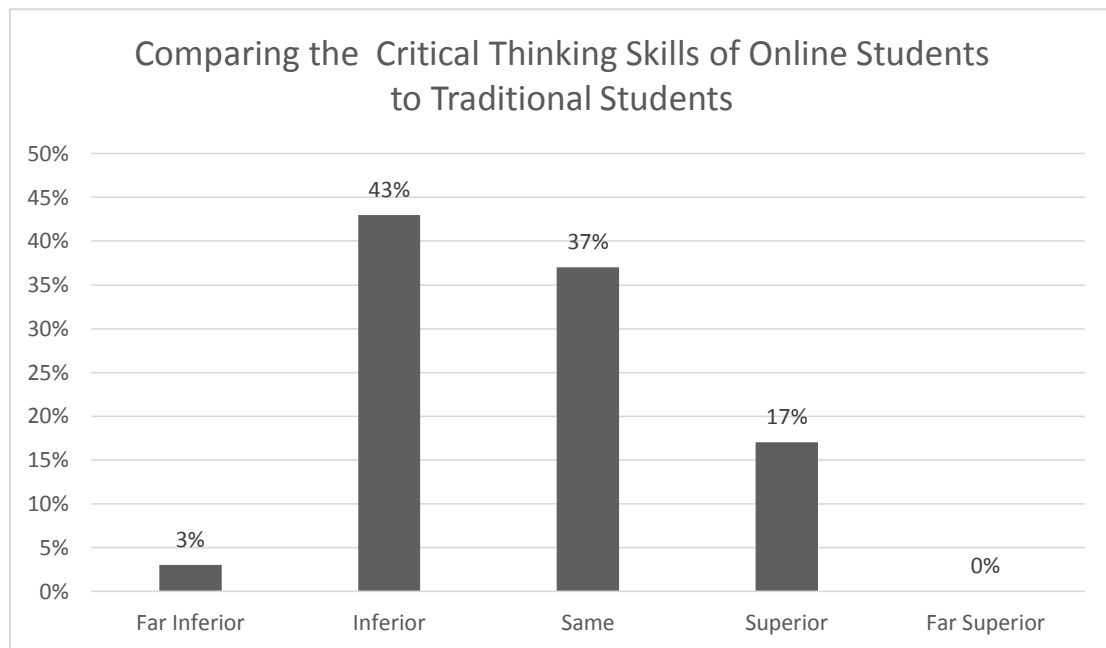
Instructors were asked to compare their ability to develop a students' critical thinking and independent thinking skills, in an online class compared to that of a traditional classroom. The vast majority of respondents thought the ability to foster critical thinking skills was compromised in an online class with 43% saying it was inferior and 3% claimed it was far inferior. Thirty-seven percent said it was the same and only 17% thought the ability to develop critical thinking in an online classroom was superior. (See Figure 10.)

The ability to develop independent thinking in an online class was rated similarly. Only one respondent thought the ability to foster independent thought was far superior in an online class and 8 respondents thought it was superior. Thirty-two percent thought the ability to foster independent thinking was comparable in the two modes of instruction. Thirty-five percent thought it was inferior with 6% reporting it

far inferior.

Figure 10

Comparing the Critical Thinking Skills of Online Students to Traditional Students

The respondents were asked two questions about communication in an online classroom; they were asked to compare student to student communication and student to instructor communication. Again the online class was thought to be inferior on both questions. Student to student communication was judged as inferior to far inferior by 60% of respondents and the same by 17%. (See Figure 11.)

Only 20% of the instructors thought online classes had superior student to student communication with one respondent reporting it far superior. As for communication between the students and the instructors 54% of the respondents thought it was inferior or far inferior, 26% thought it was the same, 17% thought it was superior and one person rated it as far superior.

Figure 11
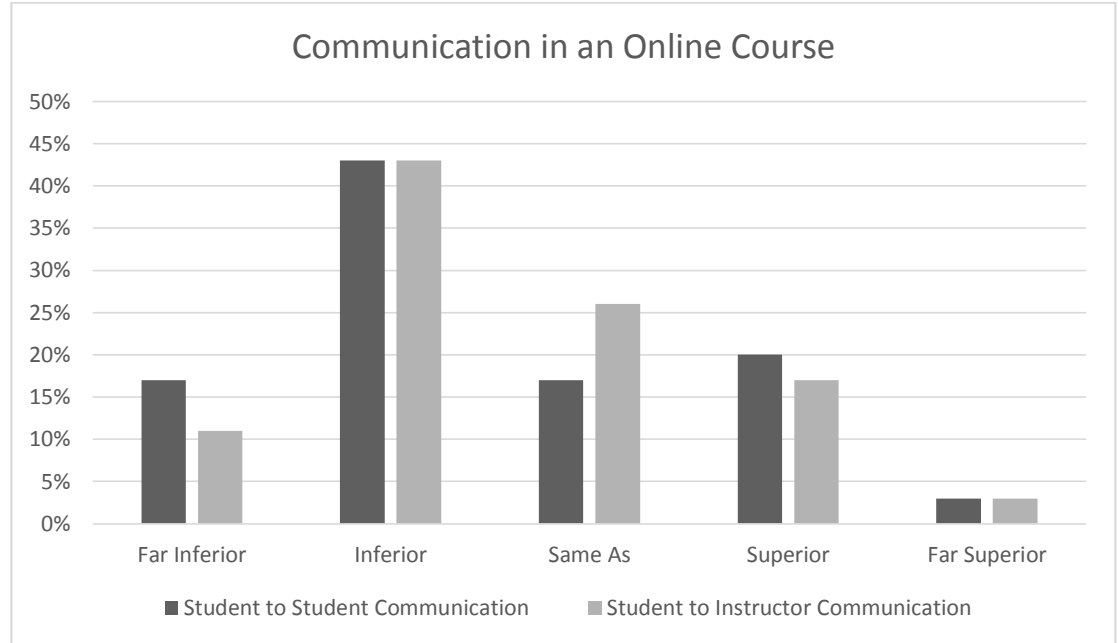
The ability to develop student efficacy was also reported to be compromised in an online course. Thirty-seven percent of the instructors reported it inferior and 6% said it was far inferior. Thirty-four percent of respondents thought it was about the same in either type of classroom while the remaining 23% thought that the online classroom had an advantage, 20% reporting it as superior and 3% reporting it far superior.

Online instructors report that their ability to spark enthusiasm for politics and government is lacking in an online setting. Only 2 respondents thought they were able to do a better job sparking enthusiasm for politics and government in an online class while 40% thought it was the same, 31% reported it as inferior and 23% reported it as far inferior. (See Figure 12.)

Figure 12
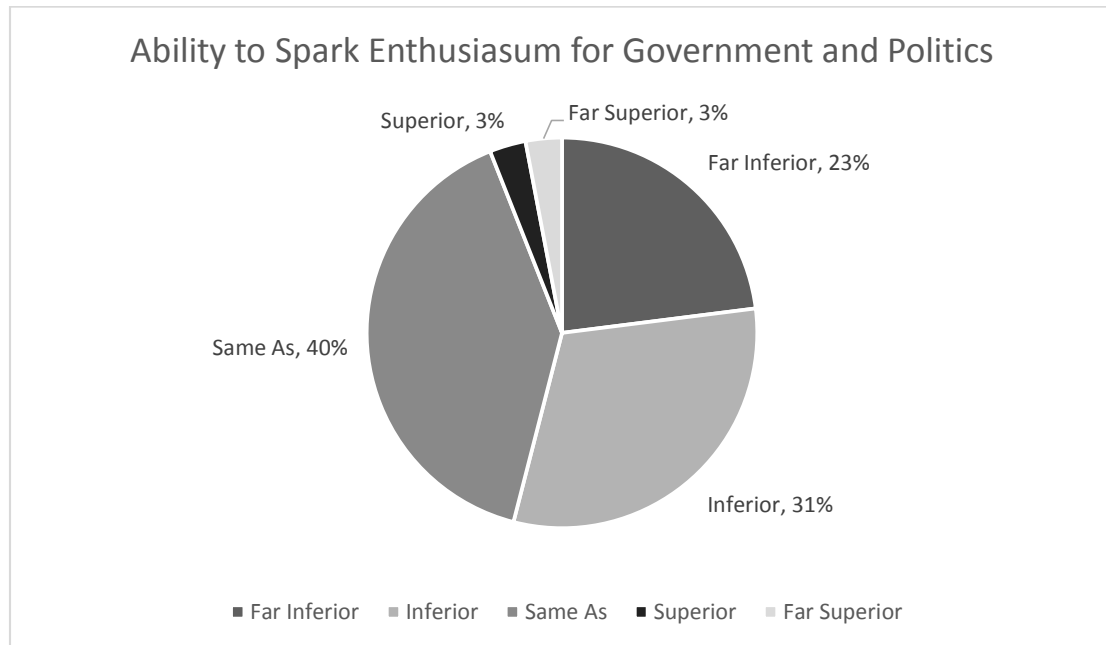
The ability to promote student involvement in the community was reported to be far inferior by 20% of respondents, inferior by 49% and about the same as in a traditional classroom by 29% of those responding to the survey. Only one person thought that the on-line class had an advantage in this area

The ability of students to relate the information learned in the classroom to real life situations was reported as about the same regardless of the mode of instruction by about half of the respondents. Fourteen percent thought it was superior in an online classroom and 29% thought it was inferior with 9% reporting that it was far inferior.
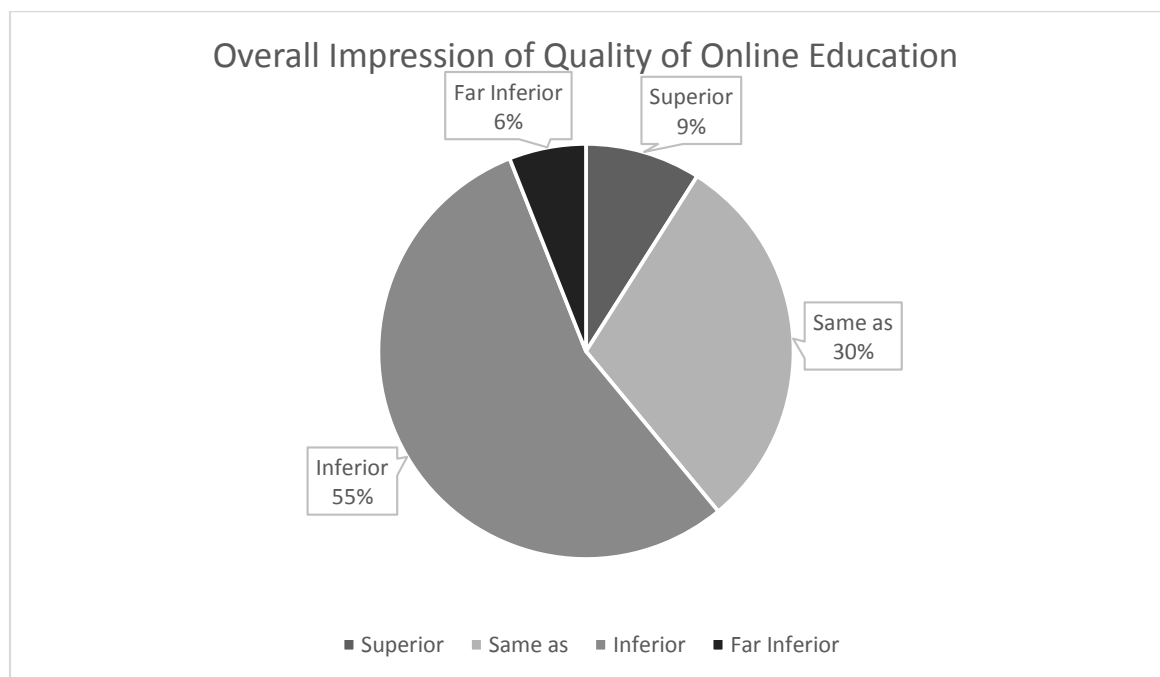
More than half the respondents (56%) thought their online students enjoyed class less with 44% reported online student enjoyment inferior and 12% reporting it far inferior. Twenty-nine percent thought the two were comparable and only 15% of

instructors thought that online students enjoyed the class more than the students in a traditional classroom.

When asked about the instructors overall impression about the quality of education in an online classroom the results were that 9% thought it was superior, 30% thought it was about the same quality as a traditional classroom, 55% thought it was inferior and 6% though it was far inferior. (See Figure 13.)

Figure 13

Overall Impression of Quality of Online Education

Far Inferior
6%

Superior
9%

Same as
30%

Inferior
55%

■ Superior   ■ Same as   ■ Inferior   ■ Far Inferior

Included in this survey was also an area for respondents to express their opinions of online education. Thirty-one people took the opportunity to make a comment. Two respondents thought that online education was superior to a traditional education in that it has the potential to reach so many people and that they were able to get much more work out of their students, particularly in written assignments. One instructor liked teaching online classes because it gave them an

opportunity to make extra income during the summer.

The other respondents were varying degrees of unimpressed, frustrated and angry. Two mentioned that the institutions of higher education were simply using these classes as a means to make money without being concerned with the quality of education. One wishes online education would be eliminated forever. Another thought universities were not the place for online education; they thought that they would be better suited for a public library where students could educated themselves without the seeking credit from an institution of higher education. Another suggested that universities only offer general education classes online and all courses within the major should be completed in person.

Numerous instructors wrote about their inability to connect with students and how teaching and learning is hinged so much on interpersonal communication and that aspect is simply lost in an online course. One instructor told a story of how she had become close with a student during the semester, communicating fairly regularly. One day this student stopped her office and she had no idea who the student was. She found the entire event disturbing and has begun asking her online students to post a profile picture to the discussion board so the interactions seem more personal.

One instructor wrote that they are never sure who is taking the course, there have been times when the student enrolled in the class was not the student who completed the online course.

While most of the respondents were unhappy with the current state of online education, they did seem to be optimistic about the future. They recognized that online education is here to stay and have hopes that the quality of education will

improve as institutions create more rigorous standards and expectations for students and instructors.

Phase Three: The Website

The result of this phase of the research is the website which can be found at www.experiencegovernment.com.

Chapter Six

Discussion and Conclusion

Phase One: Experiential Learning

Phase one of the research was the survey of traditional students participating in an experiential learning project. The results showed that the experience of taking and participating in an Introduction to Government class was beneficial in many aspects. The students in both the control and the experimental groups showed statistically significant improvement in all areas tested. They improved on their political knowledge, their confidence in that knowledge, and both their internal and external efficacy.

I wanted to determine if there was a significant difference between the control and experimental groups' post-test scores on the individual areas tested but I wanted to factor in the pre-test scores to ensure validity. To achieve this, I analyzed the data using an analysis of covariance. Unfortunately the results did not show that there were significant difference in all areas between the control group (the group who took an American National government class but did not participate in an experiential learning project) and the experimental group (the group that took the class and participated in the project).

The two areas which showed a statistically significant change in scores was the confidence knowledge and the external efficacy. I was a little surprised that participation in the service learning project did not show significant increases in the other areas but I think it may have a lot to do with the population of my study. The experimental group consisted of two classes held during the day. There were 29

students in the one class and 35 students in the other. Most of these were traditional community college students, just out of high school and attending college fulltime. The control group only had 17 students and it was held one night a week for almost 3 hours. Most of these students were older, had full time jobs and were taking a class one or two nights a week. From experience I have found that I am much more capable of tailoring a class to meet the needs of such a small group. The grades of the students in my smaller classes tend to be higher because of the personal attention I can give each student.

I believe the night class students were more motivated and put more effort towards their readings and assignments than the day students. I do not have data to back this up, but the discussions were more involved, the students seemed more "into" the class and the questions they asked were more provocative. If I had the study to do over again, I would have liked to have included the night class in my experimental group and one of the day classes as my control group. I believe this would have resulted in a more accurate portrayal of the personal growth the students experienced as a results of completing the experiential learning project.

Despite what the data showed, I really feel like the experiential learning project was beneficial to all the students. Even the student who were not able to achieve their policy objective, learned from the experience of doing the research, making the phone calls, attending the meetings and most of all, seeing the successes of the other students. Some groups were particularly concerned that the progress on the project would end when the class was over and wanted reassurance that I would present their project idea the following semester so the students could pick up where

they left off. One student, who was a duel credit student (getting high school and college at the same time) instituted Rachel's Program at her high school. Rachel's Program is an anti-bullying program started by the twin of a girl who lost her life at Columbine. She was so proud of her accomplishments that she used her experiences from this project to write her college entrance exams.

Most students took on projects or policies they wanted to see implemented or changed at the college. It is easy to see how these experiences could increase student retention and completion rates as Astin and Sax found in the 1998 study. These students saw something at the college that they thought they could improve and then worked to accomplish it. As a result, the college now is more reflective of the students' desires and now the students have a "stake in the game".

One student, who had been concerned about the lack of security cameras in a student parking lot, enlisted a group of students to join his group. They gathered the research through campus security, schedule a presentation before the Student Senate and then he was asked to join the Chief of Campus Security in presenting the idea before the College Senate. The Senate accepted the idea and budgeted the money for the project. This student was so empowered by all he was able to accomplish that he changed his major to Public Policy and decided to pursue a career in politics.

Research shows that experiential learning can result in the development of leadership and interpersonal skills (Astin & Sax, 1998). This could clearly be seen throughout the semester, these students were forced to put themselves in uncomfortable situations, such as having a meeting with the Vice-President of the College, presenting a program before the an entire high school student body and

giving a presentation to the College Senate. Despite their fears, they achieved their task and left feeling empowered and accomplished.

There was one group which started having interpersonal issues right from the beginning. This was a group of girls, all but one were friends prior to the beginning of the class. The three girls were outgoing and a little cliquey, the fourth girl was a little over weight, painfully shy and did not have a great grasp of the English language (she was a refugee from Bosnia). During the beginning of the semester, this girl did not attend class very often, she sat in the very back and never spoke. The other girls in the group were resentful that she was not pulling her weight; she was not doing the work or coming to the meetings they scheduled. I had to have 4 meetings with this group to try and resolve the issues. I was never comfortable that the Bosnian girl ever felt included in the group however on the last day of the semester when this group was supposed to give their presentation, all four girls came into the class wearing matching pink shirts, they gave a beautiful presentation and all hugged each other as they were leaving. It was really amazing to see how far they had come.

Overall, the incorporation of experiential learning in the course was great. It did require more work on my part but it was well worth it and I have begun to incorporate this project into all my courses. Initially, I receive resistance from my students. These are community college students who have many outside obligations and very little spare time however, they have all come around by the end of the semester and continue to surprise me with insight and fanatic projects.

Phase Two: Survey of Instructors

The second phase of the study consisted of a survey of online government teachers. I wanted to find out what pedagogical techniques they employ, which are the most useful, how much time they spend in an online class compared to a traditional classroom, etc. Additionally, the instructors were asked an open ended question about their overall impressions of online education.

Of the 22 respondents, about half of those have been teaching online government classes for over 6 years and another quarter have been teaching online for 3-5 years. Nearly 75% of the respondents have been teaching introduction to government in a traditional classroom for over 6 years. This gives me confidence that the survey includes teachers who have a great deal of experience teaching government in both the online and traditional classroom setting.

While research tells us that dedication and instructor expertise are the most important factors in delivering a high quality online course, very few instructors receive the training necessary to become experts in online pegagogy (Abel, 2005; Varvel, 2007). In fact, only 60% of colleges and universities offer any training for online teachers (Huett, Moller & Young, 2004). Most online teachers are familiar with the pedagogy of teaching in a traditional classroom however they are unprepared for the requirements of an online course (Wilson, 2001; Varvel, 2007). Online teachers need to learn the pedagogy, the technology, the techniques and skills to teach in an online environment (Varvel, 2007). To make this transition successfully the faculty needs training and support (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008).

Our sample revealed that 40% of the instructors did not receive any training

prior to teaching online, however about 20% of those who did not receive formal training through their institution completed some sort of training/instruction on their own.

To determine what type of training was offered by these institutions of higher education, I asked the instructors to report how many hours of training they received in online course development and online course instruction. As for training in course development, it broke down in roughly thirds; about a third didn't get any training and a third had minimal training and a little over a third received more than 5 hours of training in course development. Regarding training in online course instruction techniques; 38% received no training at all, 38% received between 1-5 hours of instruction and about a quarter received more than 5 hours of instruction.   This supports the commonly held criticism, that institutions of higher education are using online classes as a money making operation with little concern for learning. It also may explain why 70% of Americans don't believe that students receive the same quality of education in an online class. Even more surprising, but no less disheartening, is the fact that less than half of college presidents think that online education is of the same quality as traditional education (Pew Social Trends, 2011). It would seem that these college presidents could allocate more money and resources to providing training for online class thus improving the quality of education their students are receiving.

What makes the lack of training so disturbing is that the research is very clear, online education has the potential to be a great tool of educating a large number of students. However, in order for online students to be successful, they need some very

specific things from their instructors that may be different than those required in a traditional classroom. Included in that is more guidance and motivation, because of the lack of physical proximity, the instructor needs to work even harder to maintain the relationship (Baghdadi, 2011). Online students also need constant, immediate and quality feedback in order to be successful (Tricker, 201; Kraber, 2001). There are also some tips, which these instructors could benefit from knowing, which can help students be successful in an online class. A simple example is that the instructors could scaffold projects, make them very easy in the beginning and progressively harder throughout the semester (Naeem, 2011; Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). This builds confidence and allows students to familiarize themselves with the technology. If institutions of higher education spent their resources training staff about best practices in online education, it is possible that the positive results laid out in the research could be a reality for the instructors and students.

A portion of the survey was aimed at determining the amount of time the instructors spend developing their courses and the amount of time they spend each week facilitating the course. About 18% of the respondents claim they spent less than 7 hours developing the course prior to teaching it while 81% spent more than 8 hours developing the course. Research tell us that online courses require an enormous amount of time to develop (Tricker, 2011). The primary reason being that all the lectures and assignments need to be developed prior to the beginning of the course. I was surprised to find that the time spent in the weekly facilitation of the online and traditional courses was so similar. The time instructors spend facilitating the running of the online course was only marginally less than that of a traditional course. Most

respondents spend three to five hours per week on the facilitation of both their online classes and their traditional classes. I think there is a commonly held misconception that once an online class is created, it basically runs itself. It is reassuring to know, and supported by research, that the instructors need to spend time providing prompt feedback and guidance to their students (Tricker, 2011; Kraber, 2001; Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006).

The respondents were asked about the techniques they use while teaching online classes and their usefulness.   Synchronous learning techniques, such as live chat rooms, are recommended in online courses. The research claims that they combat the often sited complaint of isolation and lack of belonging (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). Despite this, a full 80% of instructors either don't use chat rooms or find them not very helpful. Only 5% of instructors found them helpful. The use of asynchronous learning techniques, such as discussion boards, were used by all respondents. They also seemed to have more success in their use, with 70% of respondents reporting them either helpful or very helpful, and 25% found them not very helpful. This seemed surprising considering the research so strongly supports their use. This could be explained by the lack of training; researchers recommend instructors post insightful, open ended question. They have found that it can promote higher level thinking and critical thinking skills (Williams & Leham, 2011). To encourage this interaction, many instructors grade their students on the number and the quality of posts to the discussion board (Wilson, Pollock & Hamann 2007). Further supporting the use of discussion boards, is the research claiming that students who simply read other people's posts (as opposed to writing one themselves) perform

significantly better in the course than student who don't reads them at all (Hamann, Pollock & Wilson, 2009 ; Wilson et al., 2007). An additional benefit of the use of discussion boards, is that they provide students a certain degree of anonymity, from the introverted student, to the student with a speech impediment, all students can participate without fear of being judged.

   If used successfully, the discussion board can allow for even greater discussion than is possible in a traditional classroom. In the traditional classroom, an instructor has limited amount of time to relay information and answer questions and rarely allows time for students to discuss it among themselves. Additionally, if a student is not able to attend that day, they miss the information. The use of discussion boards, however, allow the students to read over the material, react to it, discuss their thoughts with both classmates and the instructor, on their own time.

   The use of posting lectures, video clips and articles is a teaching method used by 90 -95% of the respondents. (I am not sure what techniques the other 5% use to teach). A vast majority of respondents find this to be a very useful tool. The research supports these findings, particularly when paired with some sort of discussion board where the students can react to what they have seen or learned. The process of reflecting on the information will allow the students to organize and integrate this new information into their existing knowledge, thus creating more lasting learning (Hacker & Niederhauser, 2000). This is an area where online teachers have a clear advantage, if I ask my typical introductory students to read 3 articles about the Chris Christie bridge scandal, very few of them would comply. However, if I ask my online students to read three articles about the bridge scandal

and I post links to those articles, then I grade the students on their posts (reaction to those articles), then I have achieved the objective of really getting my students to think about a current event (Trudeau, 2005). Along the same lines, an instructor could put a link to The Daily Show, this is an informative, entertaining political program, the student would enjoy watching the program and they would become more informed consumers of political information. This would allow for more informed discussions of current events and also to increase students' political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keter 1996; Popkin & Dimock 1996; Neimi & Junn 1998; Amadoe, Torney-Purta, Lehann, Husfeldt & Nikolova, 2002).

Through the surveys, I wanted to find out what these seasoned professionals thought of online learning in general. There seems to be such disconnect between the perception of online learning and the research showing that online learning can yield even more positive results then traditional classroom learning (Pew Social Trends, 2011; Schoenfeld-Tacher, McConnell & Graham, 2001). To uncover the online instructors' opinions about online learning, I asked them a series of questions comparing their online students to their traditional classroom students. The results show that the majority of instructors feel their online classes are not getting the same quality experience out of the course as the traditional students and they are overall unhappy with online teaching.

The first question was comparing student motivation, nearly 70% of respondents reported that their online students' motivation was the same or better than their traditional students. Most instructors also commented that their online students seemed to be more motivated. This is supported by the National Survey of Student

Engagement (2008) which found that online students are more willing to engage in intellectually stimulating activities. The results of this question are the outlier however, no other question yields a positive result when comparing online to traditional education.

Despite research showing that online classes can foster independent thinking and can develop critical thinking skills (Edwards, Cordray & Dorbolo, 2000) the results of this survey show the real life application maybe very different. Eighty percent of the instructors felt that their ability to develop a student's critical thinking skills in an online class was the same or inferior to their ability to develop this skill in a traditional classroom. When comparing the ability to foster independent thought, only 5 respondents thought online classes had an advantage. These results are particularly surprising because having a high degree of independence is a skill which is required for students to be successful in an online class (Illinois Online Network). These results highlight a real problem for online learning; there is a gulf between what instructors are finding in their online classrooms and what the research claims is possible.

Communication in online classes is clearly an issue for instructors in the field, 80% of instructors rate student to student communication in an online class as either the same or inferior to a traditional classroom. I have to assume that the fact that 95% of instructors either don't use or are indifferent to chat rooms, probably plays a role in this. The research indicates that student to student communication in an online class can actually be better than a traditional classroom. When encouraged and given the tools necessary, online students tend to be more open to communication and more

willing to share opinions (Schoenfeld-Tacher et al., 2001). As far as communication between the teacher and student, only 10% thought that the online class allowed for better communication between the two parties. Again the research claims that the lack of proximity can actually be an asset to communication rather than a hindrance. Students can be more open and can feel freer to express their opinions plus they are not limited to communicating only during the class period (Brenton et al., 2005). When given the opportunity to write openly about online education most educators were unhappy with the quality of education their students were receiving. One person wrote that "online education is the result of for profit universities creating a market to peddle their goods" and "as it currently exists has little to do with education and everything to do with reducing overhead while maximizing revenue." Another person wrote that online classes are "taking away from a quality liberal arts education."

I have to assume that the lack of formal training that instructors receive before teaching online courses is partially to blame for the disconnect between the research that states that online education can yield very positive results and the reality that educators do not think their students are getting a quality education. It could also be that colleges are being motivated by profits are not giving their instructors the resources they need to teach and develop quality classes. Another issue could be that online classes require such a time commitment from instructors and they are not willing to dedicate so much time.

The results of a survey of educators, identifying their motivations for teaching online and factors that discourage them from doing so, support my conclusions (Betts,

2014). The top five reasons for deciding to teach online were: 1) personal motivation to use the technology, 2) greater course increase flexibility for the students, 3) greater course flexibility for the staff, 4) to reach students who are not able to come to campus and 5) overall job satisfaction. The top five reasons cited for not wanting to teach online were as follows: 1) lack of equipment to teach the online course, 2) lack of technical support from the institution, 3) concern about the workload, 4) lack of release time (no reduction in teaching load) and 5) overall quality of education. These results support my findings, two of the top five reasons to teach online are to benefit the students, and three of the most often cited reasons are to increase job satisfaction. The top five reasons for not wanting to teach online are all related to lack of support from the college.

Phase Three: Creation of the Website

As part of this research, I decided to create my own online class using best practices from what I had learned from my research. The time commitment was extraordinary. Since I did not create this course through a university, I bought a domain through godaddy.com. The course can be found at www.experiencegovernment.com. Creating the website was a challenge. I do not normally teach through Power Point so I had to create an electronic version of all my lectures and I had research activities that students could complete online. Following the recommendations from the research, I created a discussion board where student could react to the material and could comment on posts by other students. I created a grading system where students would be graded on the quality and the quantity of

posts. Researchers have advised that the course website should be clearly laid out and user friendly. There should be links explaining the requirements of online learning and the differences between online learning and a traditional classroom. There should be information about where students can find help with technology issues (Waldner, McGorry & Widener, 2012; Lui, 2012).

I incorporated an experiential learning project into my online class. I am very interested in finding out if it is possible/reasonable to blend these two pedagogies. The research on "eelearning" claims that is possible and helps to make students feel connected to the class and to their peers (Waldner et al., 2012) however the logistics are difficult. I had my students in the traditional classroom complete an experiential learning project and the results were encouraging but when it came to implementing such a project online, things were more difficult. I realized that online students are going to need more guidance and examples of potential projects and I am going to have to think of this project in a little different light. For one thing, online students don't share a physical location so steps need to be taken to connect them to each other and recognize that it may not be possible for students to meet in person. A second issue is that online students are usually taking online classes because they have other time commitments such as families and jobs (Karber, 2003) as a result they don't have endless time to dedicate to an experiential learning project. This required me to come up with a list of project ideas that could be completed online if necessary, on the college campus or in their local community.

To come up with project ideas, I took ideas from what other government teachers were doing in their classrooms and tried to adapt it to an online setting.

When Elizabeth Bennion was trying to incorporate experiential learning into her classroom she was particularly concerned with having student complete projects within electoral process. To do this, she had her students work to mobilize voters. The students overwhelming enjoyed the activity and experienced many benefits such as: feeling like they were doing something important, making a difference in people's lives, helping the image of the college, reinforcing key concepts from the class, increased their belief that voting was important and a greater appreciation for the election process (Bennion 2006). To adapt this to an online class, students working on this project could contact their local League of Women Voters and could organize a voter registration drive in their own community or they could find out if their county Board of Elections accepts volunteers and needs any assistance in data entry or web development. Both these projects allow the online student to either work from home or in their local community. The online students in this project would not necessarily be working together but they would have similar experiences and a shared goal, which would allow for them to collaborate on a final presentation. While students with strong objections could chose to do the project independently, I do feel like working together as a team is a valuable experience and should be encouraged as often as possible.

During an election year, students could be asked to research candidates, find a candidate that they are particularly interested in and then help that person campaign. In a very similar project, students could be asked to research public policy and find an issue that they are interested in. Some policies which students may find interesting could include legalization of marijuana or gun control. For either project, students

could go to a physical location in their own community and do work such as knocking on doors and giving speeches or they could work in their own homes setting up websites, writing letters or stuffing envelopes. Either way, the students are getting directly involved in government and will have some connection to the outcome. During this past semester, in a traditional course of online government, one student chose to research the voting rights of felons. She had two felony convictions for drinking and driving, had spent time in prison and wanted to regain her voting rights. She spent the entire semester researching the issue, petitioning the state to earn her rights back and ended the semester with a great presentation that changed a lot of opinions. To incorporate an experiential learning project, she coupled her own research with a student voter registration drive held in the lobby of the Academic Building.

Curtis and Blair had their students participate in a project requiring that the students do research for local political organizations (2010). The local aspect ensured that all students could work the project into their own schedule. This project yielded impressive results with students experiencing an increase in appreciation for the political process and the politicians, increased personal efficacy, increased interested in a career in politics and an increased understanding of politics in general.   This is similar to the experiential learning project of McBeth and Robison who required students to actively work through a political issue in their community (2012). These projects are just a sample of what is possible. The online students will be presented with these ideas and encouraged to come up with their own suggestions. Once they present their ideas on the discussion board, the students will form groups

based on their interests. To help encourage student-to-student communication and collaboration on the group project, in addition to the primary discussion board, I have created group discussion boards. This is a place where the groups can get together and discuss their project and the progress. They are encourage to post all their activity relating to the project, which allows the other members of the group to follow along and is a place where the instructor can monitor the activity and give guidance and encouragement.

Overall, I created what I think is a good online class but the experience was difficult and it is hard to anticipate all the issues that will come up throughout the semester. On a bright note, I did find some websites and programs that I have incorporated into my traditional classroom but my favorite thing about teaching is the interpersonal connection with the students and broad discussion that go on in the classroom. Just yesterday, while teaching an Introduction to government class, a student asked "By the way, why does everybody hate Israel?" This launched us into a very long discussion of the United Nations, the Middle East, the Arab Spring, the Gulf War, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I am not sure this would happen in an online class.

When I actually teach this class in an online setting, there are a few things I would do differently. For one, I would use voice over lectures through Power Point or Slide Shark to make the lectures more personal and interesting. I would explore the option of pairing this class with a learning community so the students have cohorts who are sharing a similar educational experience. It would also be interesting to teach the class as a hybrid, so the students would come together a few times during

the semester, possible for the presentations but would complete the bulk of the work online. This method of instruction would help to combat some the feelings of isolation and disconnectedness.

The goal of this research was to determine if the incorporation of service/experimental learning was possible and practical in an online environment. Online education is a growing resource, providing higher level education to people who would typically not have access or the means to go to college, yet the reality is that online education lacks the quality of a traditional education.   My interest in government and commitment to community participation led me to want to determine if the benefits of experiential learning could combat the negative aspect of online education. I can confidently say yes, it is possible and it is practical to blend experiential learning in an online classroom. This type of project requires a great deal of time prior to the beginning of the class and throughout the semester. For a government teacher, online classes provide a valuable tool for a much wider audience to become familiar with and comfortable participating in their government. While it is not an easy task it appears to be worthwhile endeavor.

In the future, I plan to teach an online Introduction to Government course incorporating experiential learning while experimenting with some of the techniques and projects that I learned through this research. I would like to continue what I have started and carry on this research by surveying an online Introduction to Government course to determine if experiential learning will increase students' political knowledge, confidence in their knowledge and their internal and external efficacy.

The knowledge that I have gained through this research will have far reaching

effects. I will be a better teacher as a result of what I have learned and I plan to take this knowledge and begin the facilitation of training courses at the college where I am employed. This will allow me to share my knowledge and expertise with my colleagues so we can better serve our students. Online education is clearly the future of higher education and we need to do all we can to give our students the best education possible.

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Appendix A

American Government and Politics Survey

This survey is being conducted to evaluate the political knowledge and attitudes of students enrolled in Introduction to Peace Studies at Mohawk Valley Community College. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. If you do not want to participate please just turn in a blank survey. Please do not write your name on this survey. The survey should take a maximum of ten minutes to complete. The research is being used in a study of student knowledge and interest in American politics. If you have any questions please contact Jody Hicks at the BISS Center (315-731-5715).

Section I. Below are some questions about the government. A lot of people don't know the answers to these questions so answer them the best you can.

1. What job or office is currently held by Joe Biden? _____

2. Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is unconstitutional or not? _____

3. How much of a majority is needed for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate to override a presidential veto? _____

4. Which political party currently has the most seats in the U.S. House? _____

5. Which of the two political parties is generally considered to be more conservative? _____

Section II. In this section, we ask you to rate your agreement or disagreement with various statements about American government and politics. Rate each statement using the following scale: 1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neither agree or disagree; 4= agree; 5= strongly agree.

Write the number for your response in the space provided next to each statement.

6. If I were to have a problem with government, I am confident that I could actively engage government and get results. _____

7. I have effectively solved a problem by approaching government officials. _____

8. Voting is the best way to influence government actions. _____

9. Active participation (contacting government, petitioning, etc.) is the best way to influence government actions. _____

10. The U.S. President and U.S. Congress are the most effective government institutions for solving our daily problems. _____

11. I can identify the different elected

13. I can identify different government agencies that are most likely to solve my issues of concern. _____

14. When working on an issue of personal concern, I can identify allies and build coalitions that will help my cause. _____

15. The issues that I think are important are also important to a majority of other people. _____

16. Working effectively on issues of social importance with other people requires total agreement between you and the other people. _____

17. I can identify the executive office holder at different levels of government. (federal, state, local). _____

18. The executive branch of government (president,

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officials that are most likely to solve my issues of concern. _____

12. I can identify different levels of government (federal, state, local) that are most likely to solve my issues of concern. _____

19. I can identify the legislative bodies at different levels of government. (federal, state, local) _____

20. The legislative branch of government is the most powerful institution of government.. _____

21. I can identify the judicial bodies at different levels of government (federal, state, local). _____

22. Each public problem only has one institution or level of government that can solve it. _____

23. When presenting an issue to government, facts and evidence are the most important in persuading government to act. _____

24. When interacting with government, effective storytelling is important in persuading government to act. _____

25. Using public opinion polls, experts can confidently know what people want government to do. _____

26. The media reports primarily the facts of an issue. _____

27. I can present issues that I am concerned with to the media in a way that will make the media interested. _____

28. The most effective political campaign ads use reason and evidence. _____

29. Emotions should have no place in politics. _____

30. When the American system functions properly, there shouldn't be much conflict. _____

governor, mayor) is the most powerful institution of government. _____

31. For me to get what I need from government, others must lose. _____

32. Compromise is a necessary part of politics. _____

33. When approaching government to solve a problem, if I don't get most of what I want from government, then I have been unsuccessful. _____

34. I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics. _____

35. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country. _____

36. I feel that I could do as good a job in politics as most other people. _____

37. I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people. _____

38. People like me don't have any say about what the government does. _____

39. I don't think public officials care much about what people like me think. _____

40. It hardly makes any difference who I vote for because whoever gets elected does whatever he or she wants to do anyway. _____

41. In this country, a few people have the political power and the rest of us have nothing to say. _____

Section III. Demographics. These questions ask you simple demographic questions about your background.

42. What is your gender? (please circle your response): Male or Female
43. What is your age? _____ years old.
44. What is the population size of the community that you call home? (circle answer)
    a. less than 5,000
    b. 5,000 to 9,999
    c. 10,000 to 50,000
    d. 50,001 to 100,000
    e. over 100,000

Mc Beth, Mark; Robinson, Shea. What is Introduction to American National Government Class good for; Everything.

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am asking for your participation in a study which will take place from January 2013 to May 2013. This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required and your rights as a participant. You are not required to participate in this study, as part of the course requirements you will still be required to complete the service learning component, however you are not required to complete the survey at the beginning of the semester or at the end. This will in no way impact your grade, participation is strictly voluntary.

The purpose of this study is:
- To gain insight into the effectiveness of online education with particular attention paid to service learning.
- To determine if the success of service learning in a traditional classroom can be replicated in an online environment.

The benefits of the research will be:
- To better understand online learning with a service learning component.
- To identify strategies which could improve online education.

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose include:
- In class surveys of basic knowledge and political efficacy.

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the method I am using. Please contact me at any time with your concerns. Your answers to the surveys will only be seen by me. The results s will only be used by me for the purpose of this study. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper. Insights gathered from you and other participants will be used in writing a

quantitative research paper, which will be read by my professor and presented to my dissertation committee.

By signing this consent form I certify that I _____ agree to the terms of this agreement.

_____ _____

(Signature) (Date)

Appendix C

Hello,

My name is Jody Hicks, I am working on my Doctorate in Political Science at Idaho State University. I am writing my dissertation about ways to improve online education, particularly Introduction to Government. I have created a short survey, it is totally anonymous and only takes about 5 minutes to complete. I was hoping you could either fill out the survey or forward it on to the people who teach government online.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WQ9NVWM

Thank you so much for your time.

Jody Siegler Hicks

Appendix D

Instructors of Online Introduction to Government Courses- A Survey

Please answer the following questions. The questions pertain only to your online Introduction to Government Courses.

Demographic Information

1. Approximately how many years have you taught Introduction to Government in an online setting?

        a. 1-2

        b. 3-5

        c. 6 +

2. How many years have you taught Introduction to Government in a traditional classroom?

        a. 1-2

        b. 3-5

        c. 6+

3.   Which of the following best describes the educational system you work for:

        a. community college

        b. traditional college/university

        c. online college/university

Course Development

1. If you received any training prior to teaching this class, who provided the training

        a. on your own

        b. no training

        c. the institution where you teach

        d. other

2. How many hours of instruction in online course *instruction* did you complete?

        a. 0

        b. 1-2

        c. 3-5

        d. 6+

3. How many hours of instruction in online course *development* did you complete?

        a. 0

        b. 1-2

        c. 3-5

        d. 6+

4. Approximately how many hours did it take for you to develop the course (prior to teaching it)?
> a. 0
> b. 1-2
> c. 3-5
> d. 6+

Instruction

1. How much time do you put into the daily running of the course?
    a. Less than an hour a week
    b. 1-2 hours a week
    c. 3-5 hours a week
    d. 6+ hours a week

2. How does this compare to the time you take to run your traditional government classes?
    a. more
    b. less
    c. about the same

3. Please answer the following questions about the techniques you employ in teaching your online government class. Please use the scale below.

1.very helpful   2. helpful   3. neutral   4. not very helpful   5. not at all helpful

a. synchronous learning (ex. live chat rooms)   1 2 3 4 5   NA

b. asynchronous learning (ex. Discussion boards)   1 2 3 4 5   NA

c. video taped lectures   1 2 3 4 5   NA

d. Skype or similar live video feed program   1 2 3 4 5   NA

e. Post lectures   1 2 3 4 5   NA

f. Video clips   1 2 3 4 5   NA

g. Post articles   1 2 3 4 5   NA

Traditional classes vs Online classes

1. Please answer the following questions comparing an online classroom to a traditional classroom. Use the scale below.

1. far superior   2. better than   3. same as   4. weaker than   5. far inferior

  a. Student motivation in an online course   1 2 3 4 5

  b. Ability to develop critical thinking in an online class   1 2 3 4 5

  c. Communication in an online class   1 2 3 4 5

  d. Preparedness of the students in an online class   1 2 3 4 5

  e. Connectedness with the students in an online class   1 2 3 4 5

  f. Ability to foster independent thought in an online class   1 2 3 4 5

  g. Ability to develop student efficacy in an online course   1 2 3 4 5

  h. Quality of education in an online course   1 2 3 4 5

  i. Promotion of community involvement in an online course 1 2 3 4 5

  j. Ability to spark enthusiasm for government or politics   1 2 3 4 5

  k. The ability of student to relate material to real life events   1 2 3 4 5

  l. The enjoyment of teaching in an online class   1 2 3 4 5

  m. The students enjoyment of the online course   1 2 3 4 5

Open Ended Question:

    1. What is your overall impression when comparing online classes to traditional classes?

Appendix E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am asking for your participation in a study which will take place from October 2013 to December 2013. This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required and your rights as a participant. You are not required to participate in this study, participation is strictly voluntary.

The purpose of this study is:

- To gain insight into the effectiveness of online education with particular attention paid to service/experiential learning.
- To identify strategies which can improve the quality of online education particularly in introductory courses in American National Government.

The benefits of the research will be:

- To better understand online learning with an experiential learning component.
- To identify strategies which could improve online education.

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose include:

- Surveys of instructors of online government courses, identifying their teaching strategies and their perception of the quality of education.

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the method I am using. Please contact me at any time with your concerns.

Your answers to the surveys will only be seen by me. The results will only be used by me for the purpose of this study. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper. Insights gathered from you and other participants will be used in writing a research paper, which will be read by my professor and presented to my dissertation committee.

If you fill out and email the survey back to me, then your consent is implied.