

4-2-2015

A Teaching Strategy for a Christian Virtual Environment

Andrew Babyak

Messiah University, ababyak@messiah.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://mosaic.messiah.edu/bus_ed



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Digital Humanities Commons](#), and the [Educational Technology Commons](#)

Permanent URL: https://mosaic.messiah.edu/bus_ed/4

Recommended Citation

Babyak, Andrew, "A Teaching Strategy for a Christian Virtual Environment" (2015). *Business Educator Scholarship*. 4.

https://mosaic.messiah.edu/bus_ed/4

Sharpening Intellect | Deepening Christian Faith | Inspiring Action

Messiah University is a Christian university of the liberal and applied arts and sciences. Our mission is to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society.

A Teaching Strategy for a Christian Virtual Environment.

The current landscape in education is changing rapidly as online learning programs are experiencing great growth. As online learning grows, many professors and students are entering into new learning environments for the first time. While online learning has proven to be successful in many cases, it is not a journey upon which Christian professors or students should begin without some preparation. This article articulates a basic Christian teaching strategy by providing recommendations for those who are entering the online environment for the first time or desire to improve their online teaching effectiveness. These principles and recommendations are presented so that Christian professors can create Christian virtual environments in which they can have a significant impact on their students' spiritual development in an online environment. It is critical that professors design their courses with the needs of online students in mind, ensuring that students of all learning styles are able to excel. Furthermore, professors should understand that online teaching often takes more time than traditional methods of teaching, increasing the importance of clear instructions and communication with students.

Distance education is not a new concept that began with the advent of online studies, but instead actually began in the 1890s in Europe, Australia, Africa, and Asia when universities offered "external degrees" (Eliceiri, [12], p. 33), which gave students an opportunity to study without having to move to another city or country. The opportunity to learn without having to move is one of the reasons that online learning has been growing so quickly; however, the growth of online studies is also attributable to a change in the nature of employment in which people do not expect to maintain the same job for their whole life, flexible hours of study so that students may continue their current employment, and a change in culture that is now extremely knowledge driven (Cartelli et al., [6]). Professors and students alike need to be aware of the differences between traditional and online learning before starting a course.

Smith, Ferguson, and Caris (2002) interviewed 21 professors who utilized online learning and found that bandwidth limitations, the asynchronous nature of the courses, and the emphasis on writing make the online learning experience very different from the traditional model. Professors must be prepared to make changes when designing programs because learning styles can be impacted through the change in medium (Henry, [18]). In a similar manner, Christian professors also must carefully consider and develop methods of establishing a Christian virtual environment in which students are challenged and freed to grow spiritually. These differences are examined in this article and practical advice is presented, understanding that teachers must facilitate learning, redesign courses, and intentionally train students (Delamarter & Brunner, [7]) in an online environment.

Gresham ([15]) suggests that the main component of divine pedagogy is adaptation, meaning that the church is called by God to adapt the message and its communication channels as necessary. Online education represents an important adaptation because it helps to serve students who cannot attend a brick and mortar school due to geographical, family, and professional reasons. As Gresham notes, "Just as the divine adaptation involved accommodation on God's part, requiring the translation of transcendent divine truths into the humble language of the human audience, so online adaptation calls upon theological educators to accommodate traditional practices to a new virtual environment" (p. 25). In the current digital age, Christian universities should adapt and move forward with the opportunity to strengthen students spiritually in an online learning environment by following the virtual teaching strategy described in the following paragraphs.

ESTABLISHING A CHRISTIAN VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

Unfortunately, many educators doubt that spiritual formation can occur in an online setting, which is problematic for Christian professors who believe that one of their main goals in teaching is to relationally model Christ-likeness to the students in the classroom as they integrate faith and learning (Lowe & Lowe, [23]). Despite those fears and doubts, distance education has been proven to provide learning opportunities can capitalize on relational values as professors are vulnerable, authentic, display integrity, and create community online by making sure that the online community is safe, transparent, intimate, and has clear boundaries (White, [35]), which can actually help students grow spiritually.

From a holistic perspective, every student in an online classroom is already involved in their own ecology or environment, which may be extremely different from the other students. This should be viewed as a positive aspect of teaching in an online environment. Lowe and Lowe ([23]) argue that people who have a more diverse ecology tend to develop better spiritually; therefore, online communities can be very helpful as they are a part of a group with diverse experiences and backgrounds that "mirrors the fullness of Christ" (p. 90). Additionally, the online environment is a great opportunity for Biblical interpretation assignments that can hold students accountable for content, but also encourage side-to-side learning (Delamarter et al., [8]). This article presents five concrete recommendations that professors can follow to establish a Christian virtual environment in their online classes.

The first recommendation is that professors adapt a biblically based, relational pedagogy: "Pedagogy in theology requires a kind of accompaniment or willingness to walk with students; it presupposes embodied presence, a companionship in real time" (Esselman, [13], p. 162).

Ricciuti ([28]) explains that the Greek office of paidagogos was the "slave-attendant who escorted male children to school. It [paidagogos] is an idea, then, that relates to accompaniment: a teacher willing to walk alongside, to accompany to school, in a sense to companion along the way" (p. 149). In this manner, Jesus invited his disciples to become his friends of wisdom (John 15:5), and the wisdom of God may be found during the communion that flows out of the friendship (Esselman, [13]). Wisdom communities can be created in an online environment that reflects the nature of a church, which focuses on "communion for the sake of mission to the wider world" (p. 165). Further, Esselman explains that:

The Johannine vision of community life stresses the inclusion of all, their equal participation, and the conviction that all the baptized have something important to share. The Pauline vision, moreover, highlights the fact that wisdom demands that Christians participate in the suffering and rising of Christ for the church and the world, that wisdom is a paradox, a message of suffering possessed not by the elite but by the "least" members (1 Cor 1:18-31). (p. 165)

Dialogue-based discussions are often the means by which spiritual formation and development are created in this community life (Forrest & Lamport, [14]). Students should be challenged in these dialogues to think about spiritual matters from different perspectives without fixating on core beliefs as this might become counterproductive.

The passage in 1 Cor 13:12 explains that Christians only see things dimly in a mirror right now and that they cannot expect to know all of the answers. The online discussions with other Christians who might have different interpretations of Scripture can be very useful and faith building (Prov 27:17). Biblically,

knowledge refers to understanding (Gal 3:7; Eph 5:5; 6:22; Phil 1:12), but professors must accept human limitations (Rom 11:33–34) and acknowledge that the human mind is not able to grasp the mind and understanding of God (Thorne, [32]). This idea of exploring and increasing knowledge is an important component of online Christian pedagogy and more tips relating to leading online dialogues are presented later in this article. Professors who model the role of learner and the importance of lifelong learning set the standard for the students to follow in the virtual environment.

Second, professors should make sure that they take the time to deliberately encourage students online (Rom 1:8, 11; Forrest & Lampert, [14]). Whether in the classroom or in an online setting, professors provide a lot of feedback to students, most of which focuses on how to fix errors. One difficulty that some students have in an online setting is that they cannot see the professor's smile or body language as the feedback is being given. Therefore, the professors must focus on encouraging the students throughout the course to let them know that they are there to help and build them up through the course. Additionally, students need to be encouraged by professors to be receptive to God's work in their lives, which can move in deep and life changing ways (Kretzschmar, [21]). Professors should try to be transparent with the students, sharing how the material that they are covering in class has impacted them spiritually and asking students to reflect in assignments how God is working in their lives.

Third, professors need to pray for the students (Romans 1:9–10; Forrest & Lampert, [14]). Professors should be praying for the students on their own, but it is also helpful to pray with students. Torma ([33]) suggests that conference calls with small groups of four to six participants are most effective to encourage participation by all students. These calls can be used to connect with and pray for students. Therefore, even though the students might be separated by large geographical boundaries, they can join with the professor to pray for each other, the course, and the world.

Fourth, Christian professors must integrate spiritual truths and principles online and their goal should be that the students do not simply regurgitate information and then forget it but that the things that they learn become a part of their "every-day experience of discovery and grace. The goal is not disconnected knowledge, but rather an invitation to maturity and wholeness" (Kretzschmar, [21], p. 70). The gap that has been constructed between Christian and secular knowledge is not Biblical and must be avoided in the virtual Christian environment. One of the keys to integrating course material is internalization, which is really a deeper level of knowledge (Thorne, [32]). As students internalize the things that they learn, they are more apt to really integrate it into their understanding of life and truly increase their knowledge.

Fifth, professors should teach everything from a Christian worldview to create a strong Christian virtual environment. Thorne ([32]) explains that:

A Christian worldview is an ordered set of propositions that a Christian believes, especially propositions about life's most important questions as governed by the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This Christian worldview is the result of the "captivity" of bringing everything under the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Col 2:8). (p. 107)

The Bible mandates students to seek truth (Prov 1) as they grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18). God and His Words are applicable to every academic discipline and it is important for professors and the academy to act as the greater church by engaging in teaching and learning (Eph 2; Thorne, [32], p. 106). As the mind is renewed in the virtual Christian environment that is taught from a

Biblical worldview, the end result should be students who are being transformed by the renewing of their mind (Rom 12:1–3).

Christian professors can create a Christian virtual environment that encourages spiritual development and intellectual growth. Professors need to remember that, "instructional technology can never replace the critical presence of faculty members as mentors and guides in the lives of their students" (Esselman, [13], p. 162). Ultimately, professors can create meaningful relationships with students online and that should continue to be the focus of Christian professors. It is important that Christian professors become accomplished teachers in the online environment. The following section outlines some practical considerations for professors who are entering the virtual environment for the first time or are interested in increasing their effectiveness online.

PRACTICAL COURSE DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Online learning has the potential to serve as a rich learning medium if the professor is willing to take the necessary time to construct the course, which normally takes more of the professor's time than a traditional course (Zsohar & Smith, [38]; Young, [37]). Ruth ([29]) provides a firsthand example of a professor who successfully overcame some initial fear and trepidation when converting a face-to-face course to an online course and concluded that the online teaching environment can reinvigorate a passion for teaching. Ruth explains that formal lectures and standardized tests had been the main pedagogical staples utilized in the classroom, but the transition to online teaching forced the professor to rethink the most basic pedagogical approaches. The result of these changes led Ruth to create a discussion-based classroom in which students could have a meaningful conversation with the subject, each other, and the professor" "Teaching online has shown me that my old goals in lecturing were to cover a wealth of data and convince the students that my opinion was right. The online dynamic no longer allowed me to do those things" (Ruth, [29], p. 240). Although some professors may fear the transition to online teaching, the following nine practical tips should be helpful to professors who are entering the virtual environment for the first time or are looking for ways to improve their effectiveness online.

First, when professors design an online course, they should resist the urge to simply replicate the traditional course online (Hege, [17]). Professors have the option to design an online course just like a face-to-face course, like a mediated correspondence course, a student-centered constructivist course, or a hybrid type course (Delamarter et al., [8]). A face-to-face course that focuses on lectures, notes, and standardized testing is an option. Another option that might be considered safer would be to combine a student-centered constructivist course and a traditional type course online; however, the reality is that the students and professors are probably best served if they realize that the education medium that occurs online is totally different from the one in the traditional classroom. In addition, it might be most effective to simply focus on developing a student-centered constructivist course, which occurs when "we reconceive the teaching-learning process from the ground up" (Delamarter et al., [8], p. 258). In order to reconstruct courses in this manner, every part of the course needs to be examined for its pedagogical principles because the pedagogy of the course "is essential to the effectiveness of all of our teaching, no matter what the content or mode of delivery" (Ascough, [2], p. 28). The design of online courses is very important and lays the foundation for the professor–student relationship, coursework, and grading guidelines. Therefore, the first consideration a professor must make is to examine all of the content and teaching methods that will be utilized in an online course and to begin to make choices

from a pedagogical perspective about the best way to design a course. Without taking this first step of realizing that the online course must be designed in a totally different manner from a traditional course, the professor will start teaching online at a tremendous disadvantage.

Second, in order for the professor and students to get to know each other before interacting in a virtual environment, each person, professors and students alike, should create a power point presentation at the beginning of every course to introduce themselves (Zshoar & Smith, 2008). It is critical that the members of an online community of learning develop trust with one another. This simple assignment of creating a personal PowerPoint slide or two will help build a foundation that will hopefully lead to a greater amount of trust in the group as they understand more about the other people who comprise the virtual environment.

Third, professors should train students to initiate communication with them (Blair, [4]), which will help students develop self-directed learning characteristics. This allows students to take control of their own learning as they investigate their suggestions, thoughts, and needs (Wojnar, [36]). In the traditional classroom a professor calls on students or observes the same hands raised during a lecture; however, in the virtual environment where there is less room to hide, all students should be trained to be completely engaged. If a professor notices that a student is not reaching out to classmates or the professor in the virtual environment, the professor should at once write an encouraging e-mail that pushes the student to begin engaging others immediately. This type of approach should answer some critics who argue that professor–student interactions are not as great online as they are in a traditional learning environment. The reality is that many professors who have actually taught online state that their interactions with students were richer online than in person (Young, [37]). One of the reasons why the interactions can be richer is because online professors have the ability to create a sense of freedom in which students are encouraged to become co-creators of information instead of simply regurgitating information (Arroyo, [1]). Harlow ([16]) reflects on personal experiences from teaching online and explains:

I seek to develop a different relationship with online, busy, part-time adult students than with younger, traditional, face-to-face students. The relationship is more of a peer-to-peer nature, one of a dialogue of equals. I may know more about Greek or Hebrew than they, but many of my online students are very experienced and very accomplished in their field. Some have distinguished themselves in a singular fashion in their professions. (p. 20)

Humans often resist change, but the change to learning in a virtual environment can in many ways be superior for the student–professor relationship and learning overall.

Fourth, professors must choose a method to encourage online discussion. The two most common types of discussion in e-learning are live-chats and asynchronous discussion groups. Brookfield and Preskill ([5]) explain that the use of discussions in teaching online does not differ very much qualitatively from teaching in traditional classrooms and that main principles of discussion-based teaching apply to e-teaching as well: research, responsiveness, respect, and relationships. These foundational principles must be upheld by the professor and displayed to the class through various interactions.

The asynchronous discussion learning option, which tends to utilize threaded dialogues, is one of the most popular and simplest online learning tools because it "allows students to carefully craft their contributions to the ongoing dialogue without the pressure of face-to-face interaction" (Nam, [26], p.

60). Threaded dialogues are a strength of a student-centered constructivist approach because if they are properly utilized, they will lead to in-depth discussions in which all students participate (Smith, Ferguson, & Caris, [30]). Threaded dialogues are normally utilized by groups of students who are expected to research, write about, and argue specific points in a short essay. Students are required to read the posts of other students and respond directly to them by either affirming points or pointing out what they perceive to be weaknesses in the other student's argument. In this way, threaded dialogues are both an individual and group activity as students interact with specific material and one another. Lee and Choi ([22]) found that online students were positively influenced in their development in the areas of becoming more aware of different perspectives, new ways of problem solving, and learning how to justify their beliefs and positions. Threaded dialogues allow this to happen.

Threaded discussions are a great tool for students to investigate their own thoughts and the thoughts of fellow students because they give students opportunities to teach one another. Students who teach others in these forums retain the material that is being discussed five times better than if they had simply read or heard the material (Deulen, [9]). This approach is one of the main strengths of threaded dialogues as a method of online discussion as every student should have the time to respond and learn in this environment.

Threaded discussions are the main arena for students to interact with one another, but it is also the main arena for professors to interact with students: "The many instructor hours spent online create an 'online presence,' a psychological perception for students that the instructor is out there and responding to them, without which, students quickly become insecure and tend to drop the class" (Smith et al., [30], p. 65). This highlights the importance of a 24–48 hour response commitment on the part of the professor to provide regular feedback that is necessary for students (Zsohar & Smith, [38]). If students lose interest in a particular thread, Blair ([4]) proposed the idea that professors can log into dialogues as students and make provocative statements to create interesting discussions. Although some professors may not feel morally comfortable posting as a student, professors may make provocative statements under their own identity and likely have the same end result of developing interesting discussions.

Another element similar to threaded dialogues, real-time discussions, has also been found to be helpful (Blair, [4]). The positive aspect of the real-time discussion is that the students are able to react to the professor and one another in real time. However, it is often difficult to find a time when everybody is available to meet in a real-time virtual discussion and some students are not able to process information fast enough to write intelligible comments that contribute to the group. Although it sounds like a good idea to have the possibility of real-time online chat groups, some serious challenges exist that must be carefully considered before implementing this method into online courses.

Whether the professor chooses to utilize asynchronous dialogue threads or real-time chat sessions, it is important to remember that students learn best when they are exposed to different perspectives of other students (Cartelli et al., [6]) and when they work through complete ideas, events, and materials instead of subparts that are isolated from real life situations (Wojnar, [36]). Adult learners in an online environment often have a rich pool of experience upon which they should draw to provide a basis for constructing new knowledge (Knowles, [20]). As Wojnar ([36]) explained, "balancing the immersion in experience and expression must be opportunities for learners to reflect, debrief, abstract from their experiences what they have felt and learned" (p. 3). Many times students from several different countries study together in an online environment. In these situations professors should encourage

students to engage material from their native contexts (Nam, [26]). Professors need to make sure that their expectations and standards are extremely high for these online discussions because approach is one by which the online learner will likely learn and develop the most.

Third, professors must emphasize the importance of respect to the students. Respect is the most critical component of the four main discussion principles that Brookfield and Preskill ([5]) present. Students need to feel that the professors and classmates respect them before they are able to probe deeply in online discussions that involve critiquing and challenging other viewpoints. Discussions that do not involve critiques and probing of replies become bland, and opportunities to learn are lost. Respect is needed in order for critiques to be taken constructively, and this respect can be difficult to establish with a group of students who might be from different cultures with limited previous interactions between one another. Professors and students alike need to be aware that the anonymity that initially comes from online learning can be detrimental as it causes some students to be very aggressive in questioning authority (Smith et al., [30]). A good course design and frequent interactions with professors should be enough to avoid this pitfall. Philippians 2:3 instructs Christians how they should regard and interact with others, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." Teachers must establish a climate of trust and respect in the online community to encourage deeper levels of interaction, which will increase the students' level of learning.

Fifth, clear grading rubrics for every assignment help to provide necessary clarity (Zsohar & Smith, [38]) as online professors often do not have the opportunity that traditional professors have to explain and answer questions in the classroom about assignments or the syllabus. As noted by Torma ([33]), "We have found that the social dislocation of online learning can be eased by being very specific about what students are expected to do in a given week and how students will be expected to interact with one another" (p. 275). Student progress and grades should also be communicated clearly and frequently so that students know how they are doing on a regular basis and therefore do not feel disconnected from the course (Cartelli et al., [6]). Instructors will have a large amount of work as they lead threaded dialogues, answer questions about the material, and grade assignments; therefore, professors should ensure that instructions for all course-work are clearly laid out in order to limit the amount of questions that may arise (Smith et al., [30]).

In addition to clear grading rubrics, clear guidelines must be established regarding professor–student interactions (Wojnar, [36]). Students should have clear expectations on how to contact the professor and the professor needs to be held to a standard timeframe in which they should respond. Young ([37]) suggested that professors make a commitment to students to respond to their work in 24–48 hours. The needs of the professor should be balanced by the needs of the student, so it is important that professor response guidelines are very clearly presented (Zsohar & Smith, [38]). Clear grading rubrics and instructions for assignments are critical to the success of online teaching in order to protect the time of the professor from having to answer clarifying questions about those assignments that take extra time.

Sixth, online programs must assign students a faculty advisor or mentor during online programs so that they have somebody to turn to when there are issues (Maddix & Estep, [24]). This consideration is more of an administrative decision that should be implemented at an online program level instead of at a course development level. However, if a professor is teaching in an online environment in which students do not have a specific advisor to go to with their issues or problems, the professor should

encourage the program administrator to implement an official advisor program that should help students feel more connected with the program and reassured that they have an advocate throughout the program.

Seventh, professors need to be very organized with their own time. Due to the fact that online teaching takes more time than that of a traditional classroom (Young, [37]), it is important for professors to be concise in their verbal communication skills in order to be effective with the great amount of communication required (Blair, [4]). One professor from Regent University (Virginia Beach, VA), who has years of experience teaching solely online has suggested that an organized schedule is absolutely vital to one's success in teaching online. The professor explained that the first two hours of the morning were devoted to research, then an hour or two for e-mails, an hour to review threaded dialogues, and then the rest of the day to grade written assignments and drafts (G. Oster, personal communication, May 10, 2011). Professors who are able to manage their time well should be able to balance the complex nature of teaching online.

Eighth, videos are an important component of the online learning experience. Dey, Burn, and Gerdes ([10]) found that personalized, live videos were rated higher by students than taped ones, but taped videos used in online learning were still viewed as important by students. Videos are needed to help students whose learning styles might not naturally be tapped through threaded discussion, readings, and e-mails. These videos might be shorter in length than a regular lecture because their purpose is normally to introduce new topics that will be discussed in online discussion groups.

Ninth, professors must deliberately attempt to help students whose learning styles might not naturally fit in an online learning environment. Battalio ([3]) identifies several types of learners as part of a study to examine how structure affects e-learning. Reflective learners, those who prefer to have time for quiet thinking more than interactive learning with others, were found to be the type of learners who excel in e-learning, while learners who need to have interaction and direct supervision may struggle. Professors need to be actively monitoring every student so that they can find out why students might be struggling. One professor who teaches online has found that some students simply need to have a short, 10-minute phone conversation every 2 weeks with the professor so that they feel like they are really connected to the professor (T. Norbutus, personal communication, October 3, 2012). Every student has different learning styles and all students cannot be treated the same online.

Vigentini ([34]) examined how the relationship between individual learning styles and computer learning technology affects the learning process for undergraduate students in a psychology course. The class consisted of 288 students, and 63% of the students never accessed the material that was online (e-pack). Vigentini found a significant difference in the results of the multiple choice section of the examination, which supported Vigentini's hypothesis of a correlation between the usage of the online material and academic performance. Additionally, Vigentini found that students in the course preferred to multi-task and prioritize their own activities, which displays the difference of the new i-generation that is able to use different streams of information and multi-task. Therefore, professors should utilize many different tools of e-learning as they encourage the students to learn in an autonomous manner.

THE FUTURE OF ONLINE LEARNING FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The efficacy of e-learning has been discussed and analyzed from many viewpoints, and these analyses will certainly impact the future of online learning (Díaz & Entonado, [11]). It should be noted that all

researchers are not convinced that online learning is effective. Muirhead ([25]) argues against online learning and posits that e-learning simply caters to the "stamp-me-smart" current culture that inhibits the development of critical thinking. Because e-learning is more of a top-down, institutionally led approach to student development that prohibits students from achieving the greatest amount of growth possible. Although many professors who teach in a brick-and-mortar setting believe that the virtual environment is inferior and inhibits student–professor relationships, some believe that these relationships are often stronger online than those made on traditional campuses (Smith et al., [30]). These strong relationships have been evidenced by studies showing that online learning can be just as effective, if not more effective, than traditional learning (Thirunarayanan & Perez-Prado, [31]). Humans naturally struggle with change, and the change from a traditional classroom to virtual environment is significant and in many ways radical.

As online education grows, quantifiable studies are needed that will provide data on the quality of online education and the ability of professors to encourage students in their spiritual development. Online professors need to take the steps to build relationships with students and give them opportunities to express themselves in a genuine manner. During these genuine conversations, professors should explore Christian issues so that spiritual growth can occur. Christian professors should be committed to building their courses in this manner because they are not simply working for their students, but for God (1 Cor 10:31).

Reuter (2009) compared the success of online and traditional students in a soil education course with both laboratory and field components and found that online students scored better on their pre-assessment tests in the first term and improved their grade two times more than traditional students on their post-assessment tests. Furthermore, online students had better learning success in laboratory-related knowledge and skills, while both groups of students successfully completed all of the objectives of the course (Reuter, [27]).

Kamin et al. ([19]) present a balanced view of e-learning as they found that there were not any significant differences in student performance between students who were involved in face-to-face discussion groups and electronic groups. Kamin et al. explain that face-to-face groups reported a higher level of participation, but that was balanced by the way that electronic groups put more thought into their comments. Therefore, Kamin et al. conclude that both types of discussion groups are viable teaching strategies that may be employed and produce similar results for both student performance and attitudes. Díaz and Entonado ([11]) come to a similar conclusion in their examination of traditional face-to-face and e-learning when they found that no significant differences in the functions of teachers who used the two different methods and that students were actually more satisfied with the general structure of the online program.

In conclusion, online learning requires change and preparation on the part of both the professor and the student, but its results have proven that it is worth the effort if professors have a strong strategy by which students can excel. Many professors have been thrown into the virtual environment with very little preparation. As professors think through their online pedagogical techniques, hopefully the quality of the online education will continue to grow. There are advantages and disadvantages with both face-to-face and e-learning methods, yet the crucial facet of these programs seems to lie less with the method and more with the commitment and involvement of the professor in programming the courses (Díaz & Entonado, [11]).

REFERENCES

- [1](#) Arroyo, A. T. (2010). It's not a colorless classroom: Teaching religion online to black college students using transformative, postmodern pedagogy. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 13(1), 35–50.
 - [2](#) Ascough, R. S. (2002). Designing for online distance education: Putting pedagogy before technology. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 5(1), 17–29.
 - [3](#) Battalio, J. (2009). Success in distance education: Do learning styles and multiple formats matter? *American Journal of Distance Education*, 23(2), 71–87.
 - [4](#) Blair, J. (2002). The virtual teaching life. *Education Week*, 21(35), 31–34.
 - [5](#) Brookfield, S. & Preskill, S. (1999). *Discussion as a way of teaching* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
 - [6](#) Cartelli, A., Stansfield, M., Connolly, T., Jimoyiannis, A., Magalhães, H. & Maillet, K. (2008). Towards the development of a new model for best practice and knowledge construction in virtual campuses. *Journal of Information Technology Education*, 7, 121–134.
 - [7](#) Delamarter, S. & Brunner, D. L. (2005). Theological education and hybrid models of distance learning. *Theological Education*, 40(2), 145–161.
 - [8](#) Delamarter, S., Gravett, S. L., Ulrich, D. W., Nysse, R. & Polaski, S. (2011). Teaching biblical studies online. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 14(3), 256–283.
 - [9](#) Deulen, A. A. (2013). Social constructivism and online learning environments: Toward a theological model Christian educators. *Christian Education Journal*, 10(1), 90–98.
- Dey, E., Burn, H. & Gerdes, D. (2009). Bringing the classroom to the web: Effects of using new technologies to capture and deliver lectures. *Research in Higher Education*, 50(4), 377–393.
- Díaz, L. & Entonado, F. (2009). Are the functions of teachers in e-learning and face-to-face learning environments really different? *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 12(4), 331–343.
- Eliceiri, E. (2000). Nuts and bolts of distance education. *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings*, 54, 33–48.
- Esselman, T. (2004). The pedagogy of the online wisdom community: Forming church ministers in a digital age. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 7(3), 159–170.
- Forrest, B. K. & Lamport, M. A. (2013). Modeling spiritual formation from a distance: Paul's formation transactions with the Roman Christians. *Christian Education Journal*, 110–124.
- Gresham, J. (2006). The divine pedagogy as a model for online education. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 9(1), 24–28.
- Harlow, J. (2007). Successfully teaching Biblical languages online at the seminary level: Guiding principles of course design and delivery. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 10(1), 13–24.
- Hege, B. R. (2011). The online theology classroom: Strategies for engaging a community of distance learners in a hybrid model of online education. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 14(1), 13–20.

- Henry, P. (2008). Learning style and learner satisfaction in a course delivery context. *Proceedings of World Academy of Science: Engineering & Technology*, 40, 410–413.
- Kamin, C., Glick, A., Hall, M., Quarantillo, B. & Merenstein, G. (2001). Evaluation of electronic discussion groups as a teaching/learning strategy in an evidence-based medicine course: A pilot study. *Education for Health: Change in Learning & Practice*, 14(1), 21–32.
- Knowles, M. S. (1980). *Andragogy in action: Andragogy versus pedagogy*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Kretzschmar, L. (2011). Can morality be taught? A reflection on teaching theological ethics at a tertiary level in the Unisa open and distance learning model. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 141, 61–80.
- Lee, K. & Choi, I. (2008). Learning classroom management through web-based case instruction: Implications for early childhood teacher education. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(6), 495–503.
- Lowe, S. D. & Lowe, M. (2010). Spiritual formation in theological distance education: An ecosystems model. *Christian Education Journal*, 7(1), 85–102.
- Maddix, M. A. & Estep, J. (2010). Spiritual formation in online higher education communities: Nurturing spirituality in Christian higher education online degree programs. *Christian Education Journal*, 7(2), 423–434.
- Muirhead, R. (2007). E-learning: Is this teaching at students or teaching with students? *Nursing Forum*, 42(4), 178–184.
- Nam, R. S. (2009). Online theological education: Perspectives from first-generation Asian American students. *Theological Education*, 45(1), 59–69.
- Reuter, R. (2009). Online versus in the classroom: Student success in a hands-on lab class. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 23(3), 151–162.
- Ricciuti, G. (2003). The tensile core: Theological pedagogy in a new context. *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 6(3), 146–150.
- Ruth, L. (2006). Converting my course converted me: How reinventing an on-campus course for an online environment reinvigorated my teaching. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 9(4), 236–242.
- Smith, G. G., Ferguson, D. & Caris, M. (2002). Teaching over the web versus in the classroom: Differences in the instructor experience. *International Journal of Instructional Media*, 29(1), 61–67.
- Thirunarayanan, M. O. & Perez-Prado, A. (2001). Comparing web-based and classroom-based learning: A quantitative study. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 34(2), 131–137.
- Thorne, J. A. (2013). Biblical online education: Contributions from constructivism. *Christian Education Journal*, 10(1), 99–109.
- Torma, R. (2012). Mobile learning for congregations. *Word & World*, 32(3), 267–276.

Vigentini, L. (2009). Using learning technology in university courses: Do styles matter? *Multicultural Education & Technology Journal*, 3(1), 17–32.

White, R. (2006). Promoting spiritual formation in distance education. *Christian Education Journal*, 3(2), 303–315.

Wojnar, L. (2002). Research summary of a best practice model of online teaching and learning. *English Leadership Quarterly*, 25(1), 2–9.

Young, J. R. (2002). The 24-hour professor: Online teaching redefines faculty members' schedules, duties, and relationships with students. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 48(38), A31.

Zsohar, H. & Smith, J. A. (2008). Transition from the classroom to the web: Successful strategies for teaching online. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, 29(1), 23–28.

Andrew T. Babyak is Assistant Professor of Management at Chowan University. His research focuses on Christian Leadership, Entrepreneurship, and Human Resource Development.