Distance Learning in the Visual Arts

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Abstract

Projects submitted in both online and in face-to-face versions of *Introduction to Drawing and Design* are explored and compared. Students in both versions of the course explored problems in drawing, painting and design using a variety of processes and materials with no loss of quality. In many instances, the online version of the course excelled. This was especially true in discussion board "critiques", where students experienced freedom from face-to-face stress and were far more enthusiastic and forthcoming with their comments and constructive criticism. This paper demonstrates the successful online version of a seated studio course using digital photographs of actual student drawings. Ability to use the digital camera and Blackboard technology for class presentations and critiques demonstrate student progress to educators considering developing an online studio course at their institution.

Keywords: Critique, Color Theory, Discussion Board, Impatica, Mandala, Turnitin, Value, Negative/Positive, PowerPoint, Second Life

Introduction

Online *Introduction to Drawing and Design* works well as an online course because most of the objectives are suited to an online format. The face-to-face version of the General Education course was developed for non Art Studio majors with little or no formal art instruction. The course offers assistance in the development of artistic potential. The online development of the course is discussed in detail in "Online Development of 09105: Introduction to Drawing and Design" (Miiller, and Smith, 2007). The curriculum is very similar to the face-to-face course except for the substitution of online digitized images of student drawings rather than the physical presentation of in progress and completed student artworks. The rationale for an online version of the face-to-face studio course was a matter of necessity because many students were away from campus and unable to physically attend classes, especially in summer. Students may be out of state or overseas in summer but wish to further their education. An online version of the GE course, *Introduction to Drawing and Design*, would satisfy the needs of students wishing to advance their learning and fulfill their degree requirements. Assignments, discussions, critiques and portfolios have due dates that replace dates for the face-to-face course. This paper compares online, digitally submitted photographs of actual student drawings to those physically submitted in the face-to-face version of the course.

Purpose

The rationale for an online version of the seated studio course is a matter of necessity because many students are unable to physically attend classes, especially in summer. Students may be away from campus, out of state or overseas during the summer but wish to further their education. An online version of the General Education course, Introduction to Drawing and Design would satisfy the needs of students wishing to advance their learning and fulfill their degree requirements. Assignments,

discussions, critiques and portfolios have due dates that replace meeting dates for the existing course as students may be physically located in another time zone while taking the class.

Introduction to Drawing and Design is well suited to online learning. The curriculum is very similar to the seated course except for the substitution of digitized images of student drawings and exercises. Slides, video clips and discussion boards give students solid foundations of art fundamentals and materials, purposes, theoretical bases, history and techniques of art. Students learn how to develop their drawing and design skills as well as how to look at, describe, analyze, interpret, evaluate and enjoy the arts.

Committee Concerns

The online version of the existing face-to-face course needed several committee approvals. Each committee raised many concerns that were addressed in meetings with the researchers. Examples of resolutions to committee questions and concerns follow:

Would students show competency with and have access to a digital camera? This issue was quickly resolved as every student who enrolled in the course either owned or had access to a digital camera and knew how to use one. Figure 1 shows an example of a clearly photographed student drawing.

Would Online Introduction to Drawing and Design be taught using hands on drawing approaches or use only computer graphic approaches? Students primarily used hands on approaches for the online version of the course. Figure 2 shows a hand-drawn, charcoal drawing and one example of the many hand-done drawings submitted by students in the online course.

Would the drawing media used for assignments be recognizable online? Firstly, students are asked to use specific media such as graphite for value assignments. Secondly, students are asked to identify the media they used for their drawings. Lastly, Figures 1-5 show examples of student drawings with clearly identifiable media from graphite to charcoal, and color pastel to magic markers.

Would the lighting and clarity of the digitally submitted photographs be of an acceptable quality for critique boards? Figures 1-5 show examples of well-lit, clearly photographed student drawings submitted online.
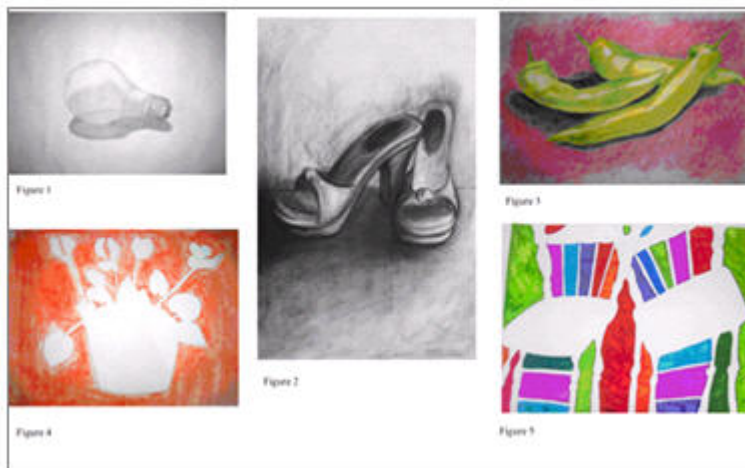
Would there be available instructions on drawing media and how to use them? Online handouts and video clips of artists instructed students in the variety of media and drawing techniques. Figure 6 shows an online example illustrating methods of sighting for the Sighting assignment and a resulting student drawing.

How would actual work be verified as opposed to plagiarized work? Stylistic approaches to drawing could be seen in each student's work. If a student's style suddenly changed, the question of someone other than that student creating the drawing would be raised. At the end of the semester, a final portfolio of the entire semester's work was physically submitted from each student. The images in the portfolio were compared with the images digitally submitted. The portfolio constituted a major portion of their grade.

Teaching Tools and Methods

As shown in Table 1, the online course was very similar to the face-to-face version of the course except for the substitution of online digital photos of actual student drawings taken with the digital camera and submitted for both critiques and final assignments. Sighting methods of observing and recording qualitative horizontal and vertical measurements were demonstrated using examples from Mendelowitz and Wakeham's *A Guide to Drawing*. Online artwork presentations, online critiques, online handouts and video clips were included as important parts of the course. Figure 7 shows an example of an online handout for the Perspective assignment. PowerPoint slide presentations were presented on artists and art movements of the 20th Century. The use of Impatica dramatically reduced the size of image files and allowed the students more timely access to the material.

Students were required to purchase an 18"x24" white drawing paper pad, kneaded erasers, 2B and 6B graphite drawing pencils, soft compressed charcoal sticks, a set of 12 colored chalk pastels, a small set of watercolors, a ruler and collage material. Other materials were included depending on the student's interest and/or level of experience. The Mandala Project included materials such as collage, montage or assemblage.

Figures 1-5: Student drawings using graphite (upper left), charcoal (center), pastel (upper right, lower left) and magic marker (lower right)

Figure 6: Online example of "Sighting"

Table 1: Comparison of the common teaching tools used in online and face-to-face courses

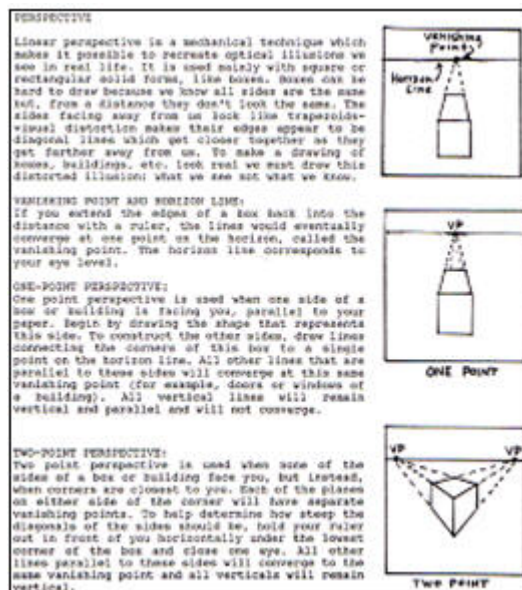| Online:	Face-to-Face:
PowerPoints, some narrated, all "Impaticized"	Lecture
PDF's, online handouts	Paper handouts
Streamed video clips	Videos, demonstrations
Websites	Museum visits
Typed "Critique" discussion boards, Second Life	Verbal critiques

Figure 7: Example of online handout for Perspective assignment

Where this course differed most significantly from the face-to-face version was in the digital presentation of in-progress and completed artworks. An important course requirement was that students understand how to use a digital camera to accurately represent their work. A variety of texts and online handouts on digital cameras were recommended explaining the use of digital cameras. External links to important art museum sites were placed within the course. This gave the student the opportunity to visit a museum online and critically analyze materials and techniques used by artists and are able to evaluate and enjoy the experience (of course, seeing the artwork first hand was always recommended first).

Assignment Submissions

In many instances, the online version of the course excelled especially in discussion board "critiques", where students were free of face-to-face stress and were more forthcoming with their comments. By contrast, students in the face-to- face class were able to observe my facial expression and demeanor but needed encouragement to contribute during critiques. Due dates recorded the day/time for each online student posting and discussion boards could be turned off after due dates. In the face-to-face class, attendance was enforced by the syllabus and chronology of study however, weather issues sometimes affected the class due dates. PowerPoints, PDFs, video clips and online handouts could be printed or viewed anytime in the online course. This worked well for students who needed extra time to absorb detailed instructions. Paper handouts were an advantage in face-to-face classes but were often lost with students asking for extra copies. In the online course written material was passed through anti-plagiarism software ("Turnitin"). Technical issues and internet problems were sometimes cited by students in the online class as an excuse for not submitting timely assignments. Students could be observed in face-to-face classes.

For the online version of the course, emails and messages were often used to clarify questions students had about instructions or due dates with daily replies by the instructor. In the face-to-face class immediate answers to questions were a plus however, the student had to wait until class time. Both online and face-to-face versions of the course required student drawings to be a minimum size of 18"x24" (except exercises). A final portfolio showing student progress was physically submitted for review at the end of the semester. This was compared with the images submitted for the online version of the course. Table 2 compares assignment submissions in the online and face-to-face courses.

Table 2: Comparison of assignment submissions

Use digital camera to photograph the original art work	Physical drawings submitted
JPG's uploaded to discussion boards for critique	Critiques done face-to-face (originals)
"Turnitin"	Physical submission of papers

Imaginary Drawings

This pre-assignment project allowed students to draw upon their stored memory of shapes and volumes (Figure 8). A one-sentence form of instruction was given to create the drawing: "King Tut's Mummy Floating Above a Pyramid." After completing the drawing for the online course, the students took a digital photo and attached it to the discussion board "critique" created for this assignment. This assignment not only allowed them to experiment with drawing but also allowed them to confront the technical aspects of Blackboard. The online version of the drawing in Fig. 8 shows a resourceful online student who obtained an image of King Tut's sarcophagus from the course link to **www.metmuseum.org**, and appropriated the imagery to create a dynamic and successful drawing.

Figure 8: Online and Face-to-Face versions of Imaginary drawings

Negative-Positive Drawings

Students were given online handouts explaining what negative and positive spaces were and how to draw them using viewfinders (Fig. 9). Students used a variety of media and subjects ranging from plants to chairs to illustrate negative spaces in the completed 18x24" drawings (Fig. 10). Readings from Betty Edwards' "Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain" preceded the negative-positive drawings. Students also looked at examples of this approach from Jacklyn St. Aubyn's "Drawing Basics" and Brooke's "Drawing as Expression".

Increasingly, online critiques are being held in Second Life. According to Semrau and Boyer, 2008, students have found the possibilities of the virtual world a rewarding method of learning and retaining what they have learned. Academic Computing maintains a presence in Second Life for students and faculty to explore the possibilities of the virtual world. To use Second Life, students must create an Avatar and an account with Linden Labs. Tutorials and a Second Life URL are embedded in the SUNY New Paltz, Academic Computing site at http://slurl.com//cyber%20Paltz%20Preserve/173/218/22.

Figure 11 shows a screenshot of a Second Life critique using negative/ positive space drawings. A question was posed to students to facilitate discussion.

NEGATIVE/POSITIVE SPACE EXERCISE:

1. Select a group of chairs and arrange them so their legs and backs overlap. Barstools and chairs with slatted backs work well.

2. Holding up your viewfinder*, look through it with one eye closed. Closing one eye flattens the image making it easier to transfer to a flat piece of paper.

3. Frame the chairs in the viewfinder so that some parts of the chairs touch the edges of the opening.

4. Look at the negative spaces in and around the edges of the chairs. Draw only these spaces, one after another, creating your drawing like a jigsaw puzzle.

Constructing a viewfinder:

A viewfinder is an aid to perception that will help you to perceive negative spaces and positive forms within a format by establishing an edge to the space around forms. To construct a viewfinder, take a rectangular sheet of paper and cut a small rectangle approximately 1" by 1 1/4" out of the center.

Figure 9: Negative-Positive exercise handout

Online

Face-to-Face

Figure 10: Online and Face-to-Face versions of Negative-Positive drawings using watercolor (left) and ink (right).

Figure 11: Negative/ Positive space drawing critique in Second Life

Value Drawings

Value studies included online handouts of pencil exercises, examples of value scales, and a study of the six categories of light. Examples of value drawings from Chaet's "The Art of Drawing" were shown to students to help them visualize these approaches. Students recreated the value scale from 1-10 using graphite pencils to create three kinds of values: blended, segmented, and broken stroking (Fig. 12).
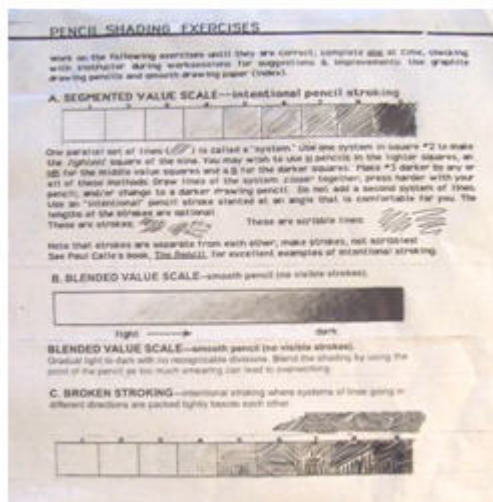

Figure 12: Pencil Shading Exercises handout
printed and completed by an online student

After they completed this exercise, students were instructed to create a drawing using all the values they could see. They were told to use a minimum of three objects and were given visual examples of successful value drawings. Although students in the online course did not have access to all the still life materials that face-to-face students had at school, they were equally resourceful at finding useful subjects for a good value drawing (Fig. 13).
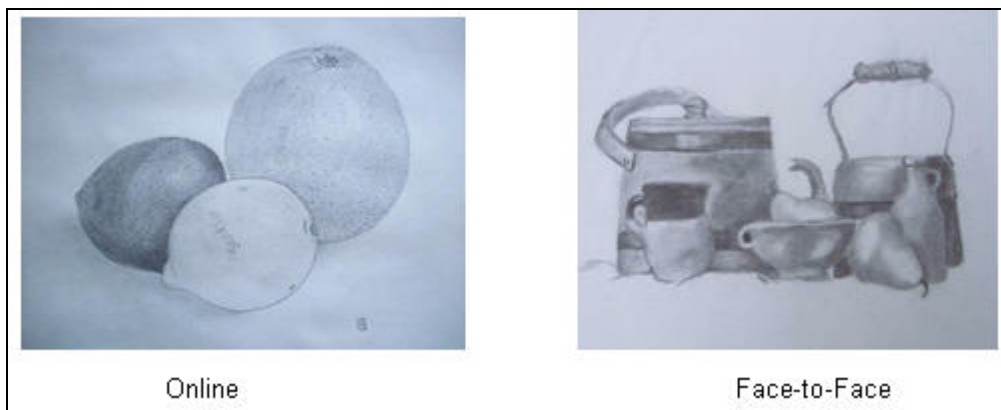
Figure 13: Value drawing examples using graphite (left) and charcoal (right)

Color

Students learned the twelve steps of the color wheel as well as important definitions and terms such as hue, value and intensity (Fig. 14). Video clips illustrated artists using a variety of color media, mixing color and using color schemes to create artworks. Examples from Teel Sale and Claudia Betti's "Drawing: A Contemporary Approach" illustrated past and contemporary artists working with color. PowerPoint slides of artists from 1900 to the present, illustrated color styles in art from Impressionism to Post Modernism. Students created a color drawing using color chalk pastels and a subject of not less than three fruits or vegetables. Online students did not have access to still life materials provided in the face-to-face class. However, they were resourceful at finding subjects for drawings readily available to them at home (Fig. 15).
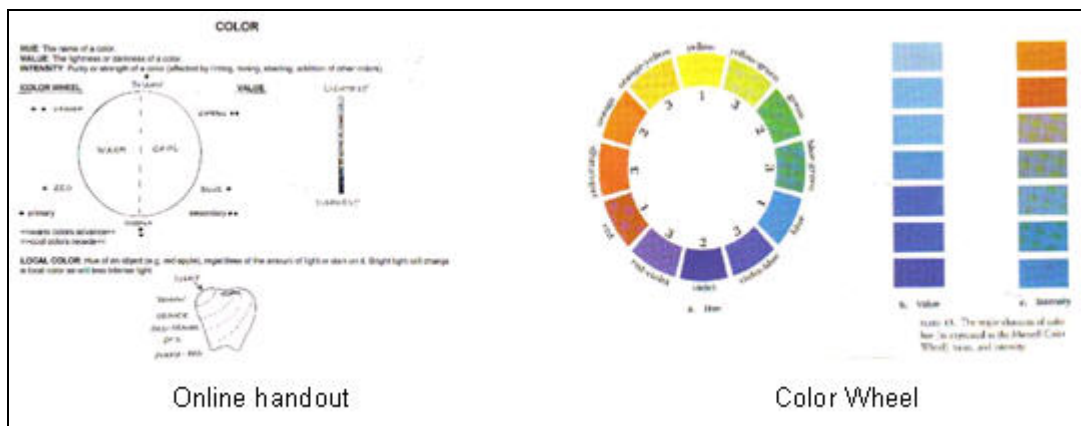

Figure 14: Online handout and color wheel illustrating important terms in color theory used in online and face-to-face versions of the course

Figure 15: Color drawing examples using color chalk pastels

Mandalas

The Mandala project drew on students' personal life experiences and allowed them to integrate concepts they had learned. Students were introduced to the writings of Carl Jung on the Mandala as reunification of the self. They were asked to write ten thoughts about their current life and doodle visual imagery next to these sentences. A circle was created and divided into ten parts. The students based their images on the sentences and doodles. They used whatever media they preferred to work with including traditional drawing materials, collage, three dimensional materials, photographs or even food. Figure 16 shows examples of online and face-to-face versions of this project.

Figure 16: Mandala examples using a variety of media and imagery

Conclusions: Intersections, Differences, Similarities

Students in both online and face-to-face versions of *Introduction to Drawing and Design* showed consistent development of skills. They developed artistic potential, explored processes, materials, and approaches to the creative experience with no loss of quality in either version of the course. Important

differences and similarities between online and face-to-face versions of *Introduction to Drawing and Design* are summarized below in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison of overall similarities and differences in online and face-to-face teaching

Online:	Face-to-face
Due dates	Attendance
Technical issues	Travel issues
Online handouts	Paper handouts
Printed lectures	Verbal lectures
"Turnitin"	Physical submission of papers
Final portfolio mailed	Final portfolio review face-to-face
PowerPoints, video clips, PDF's	PowerPoints, videos, slides
Typed discussion boards, Second Life	Verbal discussions

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