

EVALUATING THE USE OF AN ONLINE FORUM
FOR WRITING PEER CRITIQUES
IN AN UNDERGRADUATE GRAPHIC DESIGN COURSE

Diana Marie Ganju
M.A., California State University, Sacramento, 2005

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Submitted in partial satisfaction of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

EDUCATION
(Educational Technology)

at

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

FALL 2005

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I sincerely thank Dr. John Cowan for sharing his wisdom as an educator and advisor. Dr. Cowan not only provided the tools necessary for me to gain a masters degree, but also provided support and encouragement throughout the process. I would also like to express my appreciation to Dr. Mike Menchaca for having confidence in my teaching and providing reassurance at many times. I would like to thank my husband, Neil Kamal, for encouraging me to pursue a graduate degree and for his unwavering support and assistance on a scholarly, professional, and personal level. I would like to recognize all members of the iMet7 cohort for being both extraordinary individuals and classmates. I would like to express additional appreciation to my past group members: Ben Anderson, Dave Margolis, Monica Range, Bonnie Sugiyama, and Sue Womack.

DEDICATION

This thesis project is dedicated to all of my past, present, and future students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
DEDICATION.....	ii
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Area of Focus.....	1
Research Question.....	4
BACKGROUND OF STUDY.....	5
Institution.....	5
Program.....	5
Course.....	6
Study Participants.....	7
DESCRIPTION OF STUDY.....	7
Logistics.....	7
Assignments.....	9
Trustworthiness of Study.....	10
TIMELINE.....	12
PRESENTATION OF DATA.....	15
Data Collection Methods.....	15
Analysis and Findings.....	17
CONCLUSION.....	39
Reflections.....	39
Recommendations.....	40

TABLE OF CONTENTS
(Continued)

APPENDICES. 41

A. WebCT Forum Guidelines Provided to Participants. 41

B. Instructions for Participants for WebCT Critique Assignment. 45

C. Consent to Participate in Research. 46

D. Questionnaire. 47

REFERENCES. 49

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Common In-class Critique Formats.	3
2.	Archival Scheduling Data.	8
3.	Scheduling Data.	9
4.	Data Findings.	18

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. On-time Posting and Response Rates.	30

ABSTRACT

The time constraints of traditional class periods in higher education often do not allow for personal feedback. This study evaluates the implementation of a WebCT forum for extending peer feedback beyond the graphic design classroom. The integration of technology created a hybrid course, utilizing both classroom and online communication tools. The researcher observed fourteen student participants. Data collection methods included a questionnaire, discussions, email, example posts and responses, and a research journal. Findings of the study were organized by the perceived value and challenges of the implementation. The researcher observed a positive response to peer critiques including expressed appreciation and consideration for peer suggestions. The hybrid structure of the course allowed for increased contact between students resulting in a supportive community. The researcher reflected on her role as the instructor and community facilitator while organizing logistics and adapting to evolving situations.

INTRODUCTION

Area of Focus

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to implement and evaluate the use of online forums for extending design critiques outside of the classroom and encouraging students to become less dependent on faculty critiques. There were two goals to this implementation:

- 1) Provide a collaborative learning experience outside of the classroom using WebCT that allows students to provide and receive constructive feedback from their peers.
- 2) Encourage students to become less dependent on faculty critiques by learning to evaluate their own work through the process of critiquing their peers.

The Critique

The study of graphic design in higher education relies heavily on faculty and peer critique. Elkins (2001) presents a history of the art critique beginning at its origins of public art criticism during the age of the Renaissance. This original form of art criticism consisted of a public opinion process of judging and ranking architecture. The competitive ranking of art, as a form of art criticism, was widely practiced in art education until the early twentieth century. The modern system of critiques was developed in order to relieve students from unfair comparisons and decisions lacking in explanation. Today's art teacher uses the word "critique" to describe an activity consisting of "analyzing, inquiring, debating, finding fault, and giving praise" (Elkins, 2001, p. 112).

Graphic designers experience multiple types of critique from audiences as their education and careers evolve. Entry-level design students in higher education participate

in a mentor/mentee relationship with faculty, often practicing a “do as I do” approach to design. One-on-one critiques with the instructor continue as “desk crits” throughout the education of the design student (Shaffer, 1997). As design knowledge and abilities improve, the desk crit becomes a dialogue. The student presents their project to the instructor and an open-ended discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the design commences. The desk crit serves a secondary purpose as a collaboration model for interaction with classmates or peers in the design studio. Shaffer points out that upper level students talk about “getting” and “giving” critiques among their peers based on the model they experience with design faculty.

Upon completion of a design education, new designers experience critiques from clients, who typically are non-designers. While a critique at this stage is often focused on who is right or wrong, or who is more persuasive (Craig & Bevington, 1989), the critique still plays an important role in the design process. McKim (1972), in a historical text on visual thinking, describes the feedback loop as cycling through several stages of expressing an idea and testing an idea. In professional situations, the client serves as the force with which to test an idea.

At the university level, critique format and objectives are dependent on faculty preference, length of class period, course level, and design project stage. Faculty may choose from a selection of standard formats or create unique combinations to best suit student needs at the time. Table 1 displays common critique formats.

Table 1: Common In-class Critique Formats

Critique Type	Participants	Display of Work	Critic
Formal critique	All students and instructor	Projects mounted on studio wall	Instructor
Formal collaborative critique	All students and instructor	Projects mounted on studio wall	Instructor and students
Formal group critique	~3-8 students and instructor	Projects mounted on studio wall or round table format	Instructor and students
Group critique	~3-8 students	Round table format	Students
Desk Critique	1 student and instructor	Desk	Instructor

Length of class period is an important factor for deciding on an appropriate critique format. Graphic design class periods at this university are between one to three hours. Shorter class periods only allow for minimal desk critiques and discussion regarding a specific student's project. Upon the conclusion of formal critiques and casual group critiques without the instructor, students often request one-on-one meetings with the instructor after class or during office hours. These requests exhibit a dependence on faculty critiques and an overall desire for additional feedback.

As stated by Shaffer (1997), the potential benefit of critique in the study of design is two-fold. On one level, students benefit from feedback regarding of their work and suggestions for improvement. On a second level, students experience a model for evaluating their own work and the work of their peers. It is at this second level that students may become less dependent on faculty and better prepared for a professional design career.

Forums

Asynchronous computer conferencing is a leading component of distance learning (Schrire, 2005). Forums, a form of asynchronous online conferencing, provide users with

the ability to conduct threaded or linear written discussions with public or private groups. The asynchronous nature of forums allows users to post discussion topics and respond to posts at their convenience, providing flexibility of scheduling and location.

In higher education, use of forums can be found in both distance learning and hybrid courses. Hybrid, in the context of this study, is defined as the combination of online course material with traditional classroom sessions (Willett, 2002). The hybrid strategy for education combines two dissimilar parts to work together and create a distinct result (Sands, 2002). Commonly, students in hybrid courses benefit from more flexible schedules and residential locations. Distance learning or hybrid courses often bring with them an added dependence on peers to complete interactive assignments online. Online collaboration found in such courses necessitates students to interact with course content and each other, while moving the focus from the instructor toward student-centered learning (Paine, 2003).

The university provides WebCT for distance learning or hybrid course management software. WebCT, developed at the University of British Columbia (Willett, 2002) provides general course management and communication tools, including chat rooms, course email, and discussion groups for the creation of a virtual classroom or learning community (Paine 2003). For the purpose of this study, a WebCT forum was used to provide peer critiques in a hybrid graphic design course.

Research Question

What are the results of assigning senior graphic design students with the task of critiquing their peers' projects using an online forum?

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Institution

This action research study was conducted during the spring 2005 semester at a state university in the western United States. The university has a population of 28,000 students, of which approximately 1,100 are residents on the 300 acre campus. The student to faculty ratio for the 2004-05 year was twenty to one. (University web site, 2005)

Program

The graphic design program is a division of the School of Arts and Letters. This undergraduate program requires 30 unites of lower division courses, 27 units of upper division courses, and 9 units of electives. In the fall 2005 semester, 409 students were enrolled in the graphic design program. The Department of Design web site (2005) states the mission of the graphic design program as:

In support of the University's mission, the Graphic Design Faculty, Graphic Design Program in the Department of Design, encourages students to actively pursue their educational objectives in the field of Graphic Design. Our role is to guide students in their development as future graphic designers: as critical thinkers / problem solvers; in their creative endeavors; and in their understanding of the role technology plays in an ever changing climate. It is the Graphic Design Faculty's goal to teach students the power and universality of visual communication as well as the responsibility that comes from that knowledge.

Course

The implementation described in this study was conducted in an upper division course titled Corporate Identity and System Design. (University Course Catalog, 2004-06) describes the course as follows:

Applied design and typography. Combines the study of symbol, function, and implementation. Investigates design problems from their origin, defining the problem through exploration of various creative solutions, to a final design of a symbol applied to various corporate and business collateral.

This course is one of the final upper division courses completed in the graphic design program. It has a reputation of being one of the most advanced and demanding courses in the program. Corporate Identity and System Design is a project-based course. During the spring 2005 semester, students individually designed a mock corporate identity system for the local art museum. The project consisted of designing a logo, stationery system, two sub-marks, and collateral piece, such as a website or brochure. Class sessions were held January 24 – May 13, 2005 on Tuesday and Thursday from 4:00 p.m. – 5:50 p.m. Seventeen students were enrolled in the course. A course web site provided a link to the WebCT home page, a list of student emails, and details of the weekly homework schedule. The implementation described in this study transformed this traditional course into a hybrid course, combining online learning with face to face class periods.

Study Participants

Fourteen of the seventeen enrolled students participated in the study. All study participants were seniors, twelve of which graduated at the conclusion of the semester. Students vary in age (20-35) and ethnic background. As graphic design seniors, a majority of students have substantial knowledge of graphic design, but many still struggle with the work load and depend heavily on feedback from the instructor. Students have elementary to intermediate level skills in Adobe and Microsoft software. Most of the students work and live off campus.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

Logistics

Introduction to Technology

The WebCT forum was introduced to students on March 10, 2005 during the last twenty minutes of the class period. The introduction included a presentation explaining how to access WebCT and how to use the forum features. Students were also provided with guidelines for forum etiquette and writing online critiques (Appendix A). Two introductory assignments were given. For the first assignment (March 10-14), students read and responded to two logo critiques written by anonymous student designers from another university. The second assignment (March 15-21) required students to critique a professionally designed logo. Students were given detailed instructions for writing the critique. These two introductory assignments provided practice using the WebCT forum and translating thoughts and ideas concerning design criticism into written online posts.

Pairing Participants

Participants were divided into two groups. During class sessions, the researcher would lead a critique with one group, while the other group conducted a group critique without the researcher. Participants were paired with a different peer each week from the opposite group for online critiques. This system attempted to reduce potential redundancy between in-class and online critiques. Participants were first paired with a peer for online critiques on March 24. The researcher assigned pairs while restricting students from critiquing each other. It was the perception of the researcher that to avoid retaliation comments, participants would critique someone other than their evaluator. Participants were required to provide a photocopy of their current project to their evaluator in class the day the critique was assigned.

Scheduling

The scheduling of WebCT assignments evolved throughout the study. Prior to the data collection period (beginning April 21, 2005), the researcher recorded the archival assignment schedule in Table 2.

Table 2: Archival Scheduling Data

Assignment	Peer work provided	Critique due	Response due
March 29-April 4	Tuesday, March 29	Friday, April 1	Monday, April 4
April 5-11	Tuesday, April 5	Friday, April 8	Monday, April 11

Data collection from participants began at the onset of the final project. At the time of the first critique of the final project, a majority of participants were still at the idea phase and had limited materials to provide to a peer. The researcher provided the option of voluntary critiques during that week (April 21-25). Mandatory critiques of the final project during the next two weeks were assigned inline with the schedule in Table 3.

Table 3: Scheduling Data

Assignment	Peer work provided	Critique due	Response due
April 21-25*	Thursday, April 21	Saturday, April 23	Monday, April 24
April 28 – May 2	Thursday, April 28	Saturday, April 30	Monday, May 2
May 5-9	Thursday, May 5	Sunday, May 8	Monday, May 9

* *Voluntary critique assignment*

Assignments

WebCT Critiques

WebCT assignments consisted of two parts. For part one, participants wrote a critique of their assigned peer's project by a set due date. In part two of the assignment, participants wrote a response to their evaluator, thanking them for the critique and asking for clarification if necessary. Assignments were listed by start and end dates and posted as new topics on the forum by the researcher. Due dates of part one and two and specific design issues to be addressed were provided in the researcher's original post. (Appendix B).

Rubric Assignments

In addition to using WebCT for writing peer critiques, participants created a rubric for assessing their own projects on WebCT. The rubric project consisted of three posts, an initial criteria list, rating descriptions, and a self-assessment of semester work.

Assignment scheduling data from rubric posts was analyzed for its potential impact on critique assignments. However, rubric assignments are not an integral component of this study.

Trustworthiness of Study

Context of Research

The researcher has taken great care to provide extensive detail regarding the context of this research study. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed anonymously and confidentially when possible. Primary data have been included, leaving statements in context whenever possible. Participants were appropriately informed and provided their written consent upon participating in the study. Constructivist rigor was utilized throughout the study instead of trustworthiness evaluation procedures alone, thereby defending this study as valid and trustworthy (Barrett et al., 2002).

Triangulation

This study exercises data triangulation by collecting data from a variety of sources (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Data sources include written and spoken comments from participants, examples of student work, researcher's reflections in journal form, qualitative and quantitative questionnaire results, and documented email correspondence. Conclusions were made only from findings supported with at least three data sources.

Member Checking

Member checking is essential to an action research study, as action research is participatory research. Member checking provides affirmations or rebuttals of the researcher's assumptions and early theories. This study used member checking at several instances during the researcher's interaction with the participants. In addition to testing theories, the researcher used the process of member checking to confirm that oral comments were interpreted and recorded correctly.

Cross-checking Data

The researcher practiced diligent data cross-checking during analysis. The process included many cycles of reading, categorizing, and analyzing data, as well as developing and cross-checking theories using multiple data sources. Through the cross-checking procedure, the researcher revealed contradicting data that were either included for purposes of discussion or removed on the basis of their idiosyncrasy (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The cross-checking procedure used in this study took full advantage of the purposes of triangulation.

Personal Biases

The researcher acknowledges her personal bias inherent in the study. The researcher is the instructor and the participants are her students. As a passionate educator and promoter of technology in the classroom, the researcher desired a positive response to her teaching methods and technological implementations. The researcher did not attempt to hide her personal bias in presenting the research journal. The personal reflections and opinions of the researcher were cross-checked with other data sets and incorporated into the findings when appropriate. While the personal bias of the researcher is apparent, this study has been conducted in compliance with various validity methods outlined above, and the findings should be considered legitimate.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are unique to the specific environment, the study participants, and the researcher. The researcher does not claim that the findings can be recreated or that the conclusions will be found by others conducting similar studies.

TIMELINE

Introduction

March 10-2, 2005

Participants were introduced to WebCT and assigned two introductory assignments. Introductory assignments provided the opportunity to become familiar with WebCT and writing critiques. Assignments did not include response posts.

Assignments

March 29-April 12, 2005

Copies of logo projects were exchanged in class on Tuesday with assigned pairs. Critiques of logo projects were scheduled to be posted by Friday and responded to by Monday. General observations were made in the research journal. Scheduling and assignment completion data were recorded.

April 12-21, 2005 (Break)

A break was taken from WebCT as participants began the research and concept stages of final projects. Each student was engaged in a unique project. Two participants were working as a pair, the rest individually. Details of project choices were listed in the research journal.

April 21-25, 2005 (Participatory data collection begins)

Level of development for the final project varied among participants. Several participants were still in the concept stage with little down on paper. Critiques were voluntary.

Participants exchanged hard copies of their work and had brief discussions about the

direction of their project, and shared questions they would like their peer to address. Data were collected from WebCT posts and observations recorded in research journal.

Class Session

April 26, 2005

The class period began with a discussion about voluntary critiques. The four participants that engaged in voluntary critiques were asked to provide feedback using the following questions:

“How was the experience for those participating in the voluntary critiques?”

“How was it different responding to work in such early stages?”

Observations were noted during in-class critiques. The researcher compared tone of voice, depth of ideas, and student interaction with results of online critiques.

Observations were noted in detail during discussions and were elaborated along with the researcher’s reflections in the research journal.

April 28, 2005

The class period ended with assigning WebCT pairs for critiques due on Saturday, April 30. After assigning pairs, the researcher asked several member checking questions to confirm observations made earlier in the study. Questions and comments included:

“One of the things we changed was the schedule. Is Thursday-Saturday-Monday enough time... does it need to be this structured, or can I just say here is the task, complete it before the next class meeting?” A discussion continued about deadlines and the issue of duplicating in-class critiques online. Some participants commented on the challenge of the workload. The researcher went on to ask: “Do you think it was beneficial to critique a

student working on the same project?” A discussion continued and new pairs were assigned. Conflicts arose while pairing participants because of absences. The researcher committed to including absent participants in online critiques using email to facilitate the pairing. Several one-on-one and small group discussions about online critiques commenced after class with the researcher. Observations were noted in detail during discussions and were elaborated along with the researcher’s reflections in the research journal.

Assignment

April 28-May 2, 2005

All participants were assigned to write a critique for a peer and a response on WebCT. Data were collected from WebCT posts and observations recorded in research journal.

Class Session

May 3, 2005

Observations were noted during small group in-class critiques. The researcher compared tone of voice, depth of ideas, and student interaction with results of online critiques. A one-on-one conversation began in response to an email request earlier that morning about a student that did not receive a critique from their assigned peer. Observations were noted in detail during class and conversations and were elaborated along with the researcher’s reflections in the research journal.

May 5, 2005

Anonymous feedback (on forum) and voluntary email feedback was received regarding the course and WebCT. Researcher’s reflections were recorded in the research journal.

Assignment

May-5-9, 2005

All participants were assigned to write a critique for a peer and a response on WebCT.

Data were collected from WebCT posts and observations recorded in research journal.

Class Session

May 10, 2005

Questionnaires requesting feedback regarding the course and the experience of writing peer critiques on WebCT were provided to participants. Questionnaires were completed in class and turned into the researcher.

Voluntary Feedback

May 13-16, 2005 (Participatory data collection ends)

Anonymous feedback (on forum) and voluntary email feedback was received regarding the course and WebCT.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Data Collection Methods

Students were informed of the purpose behind the research study during the introduction of WebCT on March 10, 2005. Fourteen students signed a Human Subjects waiver on April 21, 2005 (Appendix C). Quantitative data such as assignment due dates and on-time

rates collected between March 10 and April 21 was considered archival data by the researcher and has been incorporated into the study's data. All data collected from study participants was collected upon completion of a signed Human Subjects waiver.

Student Forum Posts

Student forum posts were organized into three areas: critique or rubric posts and response posts. All critiques were analyzed and divided into four types of statements: compliment, design critique, suggestion for change, and social comment. Rubric posts were separate WebCT assignments from critiques. To strengthen the focus of the study, only assignment scheduling data regarding the rubric assignments has been analyzed. Response posts were used to evaluate the level of appreciation by the receiver and plans for implementing peer suggestions. Forum posts also provided quantitative data concerning due dates, on-time rate, and expressed frustration or contentment with assignments and workload. In addition to assignment posts, the researcher collected voluntary and anonymous feedback regarding the course and the implementation of WebCT by using a discussion topic on the forum.

Research Journal

The research journal provided two types of data: 1) personal reflections by the researcher concerning the forum assignments and student pairings, data collection methods, and the possible impact of the implementation on face-to-face class periods; and 2) documentation of student/researcher discussions and class discussions concerning the forum assignments. The researcher paraphrased student's answers for data collection and member checking in the journal.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was provided to participants towards the end of the study. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather both quantitative and qualitative data concerning various aspects of the course and forum implementation. The questionnaire focused on gathering feedback concerning the use of WebCT in the course (Appendix D). The data collected from the questionnaire proved to be of most value during the data analysis stage of the study.

Email

Participants were encouraged to communicate with the researcher by email between class periods. Email proved to be a valuable tool when assigning pairs including absent participants. Participants also used email to inform the researcher when critiques were not posted by the due date, as late critiques prevent the receiver from posting a reply on time. Participants and the researcher distributed files for critique using email as well.

Analysis and Findings

Analysis Process

The researcher organized data into two main categories. Categories include perceived value of implementation and perceived challenges of implementation. When selecting data to include in these categories, the researcher applied Guba and Lincoln's (1981) categorizing process. This process advises the review of all data for recurring regularities and unique differences.

The process for analyzing data consisted of multiple cycles of evaluation. Guba and Lincoln (1981, p. 94) describe this cycling process as "each accumulation of data

give rise to a preliminary set of categories that can be tested, refined, and extended in later iterations in the field”. During data analysis, the “preliminary sets” (categories presented above) developed into subsets. Subsets were confirmed by the presence of both similarities and differences in the data across multiple collection methods. Within each subset, the researcher noted discernible findings, displayed in Table 4, through the interpretation of the data.

Table 4: Data Findings

Perceived Value of Implementation	Perceived Challenges of Implementation
Peer critiques were helpful	Assignment scheduling was challenging
Peer suggestions were considered	Late Evaluators were contrite and tolerated
Participants appreciated peer critiques	Student pairing system was complex
Participants provided support for their peers	

The following discussion details how the data was categorized, applied to subsets, interpreted, and how findings were established. During the analysis process, the researcher developed findings through the practice of triangulation, cross-checking, persistent observations, and testing of congruency (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Finding:

Participants deemed peer critiques to be helpful

On the questionnaire, one-hundred percent of participants answered ‘yes’ to “Did you find the online critiques you received to be helpful?” In addition to quantitative results, participants expressed the critiques they received were “helpful” in response to additional questions.

“It was helpful and encouraging to have a peer look at your work in depth”
 “It was helpful and also helped build relationships”

To receive help, means to benefit from assistance. Data shows the potential benefit participants received was additional feedback, or specifically more ideas.

“Effective of you need more ideas, or critiques from your peers”

“It was great. I gained more by reading what others had to say about projects”

“I like hearing other people's thought/opinions sometimes I miss something they point out”

“It was good to hear from others, sometimes they see things that you don't and you give them second thought”

“Good, more ideas”

The observation that participants regarded the critiques as helpful and felt potential benefit from additional ideas is further supported by their responses on WebCT.

Message no. 205

“Thanks for your helpful crit. I am going to explore a different idea . . . I really appreciate your feedback, thanks.” (May 2, 2005)

Message no. 214

“...your comments [were] very helpful and I will keep that in mind. It is just hard working on a project without a crit from other people. Starring at it for a while is hard to fix simple problems. Thanks.” (May 2, 2005)

Message no. 217

“Thanks for the suggestions. They were very helpful. . . .” (May 2, 2005)

Finding:

Participants Considered Implementation of Peer Suggestions

Message no. 217, presents clarification for the type of additional feedback participants desired and often received. Suggestions for improvement are an important aspect of critiques. Estioko (2005) suggests that participants should be able to move forward with confidence and with strategies for improvement upon receiving a critique. The researcher clearly stated on assignment postings that participants were not required to implement peer suggestions. However, all participants answered “yes” to “Did you implement any suggestions from your peers' online crits?” During the analysis of the data, it was important for the researcher to take note of the past tense format of the questionnaire. One participant followed the above question with the comment “I think so, I don't remember.” Through the process of cross-checking, it became apparent that excerpts

from student responses displayed intent to implement peer suggestions upon direct receipt of the critique.

Message no. 175

“Hey, Thank you for all your great feed back. I will apply it the site and see how it turns out. Thanks again and see you in class.” (April 26, 2005)

Message no. 187

“Thank you for your advice, I agree with your suggestions. I am going to work on . . . Thank you for your feedback!” (May 1, 2005)

Message no. 225

“Hi . . . , Thanks for the crit. I like the idea about blocks of color to mimic the photos. I may check that out...” (May 4, 2005)

Message no. 250

“Thanks for your great comments. I like your idea of a line drawing. I will explore that. I also love the idea of the bookmark. I will think that one over and see what I can do. Great ideas, and thanks again. See ya in class.” (May 9, 2005)

Message no. 249

“Hey . . . thank you for the very detailed critique! . . . I am going to play more with the script type like you suggested . . . You also mentioned the vertical type in my submark, which I had not even considered incorporating into my layout! I am definately going to see if that can be used either to enhance the graphics or maybe even utilized in my navigation somehow. . . . I definately feel like I have a good direction to go from here . . . thanks” (May 9, 2005)

Questionnaire data demonstrates a mixed response to the value of critiques after the initial receipt. Five participants answered “yes” and nine answered “no” to the question “Have you ever referred back to an online crit from an earlier week?” Data from additional collection methods is not available to cross-check this result.

Finding:

Participants Appreciated Peer Critiques

In addition to receiving helpful feedback, participants expressed a general appreciation for the critiques. Appreciation was indicated by being thankful and recognizing the personal attention provided during the critiques. The value of personal

critiques received by participants on WebCT was not unlike the benefit received from desk critiques with the researcher. This benefit can be interpreted as time spent, or personal time critiquing a student's project. Elkin (2001) concludes that in general, critiques in the design studio are too short. He defines three necessary stages of a valuable critique: stage one, personal opinion of like or dislike; stage two, acclimation to the objectives; and stage three, analysis. Elkins (2001) claims that a critique complete with all three stages would be on average forty-five minutes long, an impossible service to provide individually in a class session.

In response to the question "How did you feel about receiving crits from your peers using WebCT?" the following comments were considered as examples of appreciation for personal critiques.

"Good – I think everyone got better at it as the semester went on"

"I appreciate how thorough my peers were with my work"

"I liked this part a lot. I took a lot from this"

"They gave great crits"

The following email excerpt received by the researcher provides a student's impression of a formal collaborative critique. The comments provided support for the researcher's theory that participants desire more time for personal critiques. The author then considers the use of WebCT as a possible opportunity for "more personal crits online". It should be noted that the class period in which this study was conducted was one hour and forty minutes. The author refers to longer studio sessions. This indicates an even deeper need for critiques outside of class for shorter class sessions, such as the study course.

"...At first, some students are excited to offer crits, but towards the end, everyone is looking at the clock and just wants the teacher to finish with the crits so class can be gone. During this process, interest in crits dwindles and the efficacy of them can be lost. *Furthermore, each student gets only a small window of time for their own personal crit.* [italics added] Of course, this is a necessary part of design class and the bonus is that

the critiquer and the designer are in the same room where feedback is exchanged in real-time, but forum posting can add so much more. In fact, I wouldn't be against shortening the actual class time from say 3 hours to 2 hours or 2 hours to 1.5 hours in exchange for the lost time being dedicated to mandatory posting sessions. The reason: elongated, deeper, and *more personal crits online*. [italics added] By continuing to hold the physical class, real-time feedback could still be part of the student's class (albeit condensed due to the more limited time) but by shortening the class and adding a mandatory session online, *every student would get additional feedback that will be more thought out.*" [italics added] (May 31, 2005)

In contrast to student comments regarding their perceived value of the critiques, the researcher recorded contrasting interpretations in her journal. The following journal excerpt is a reflection of an in-class data collection discussion.

April 26, 2005

“How was the experience for those participating in the voluntary crits? Lots of nodding, overall positive response, but not a lot of enthusiasm. . . . mentioned that he had just posted his. . . . said he hadn't read it yet, didn't seem to matter. Are these crits valid after the next week class??”

Inline with the researcher's concern for the perceived value of the WebCT critiques, one participant provided conflicting commentary on the questionnaire as well. The participant responded to the question “How did you feel about receiving crits from your peers using WebCT?” with “At first it was ok later didn't help much.” This one comment is not representational of the study participants, but should be considered for its uniqueness and insight into possible downfalls of the implementation. This topic will be discussed in detail during the analysis of data category two: perceived challenges of the implementation.

Finding:

Participants Provided Support for Their Peers

Conanan and Pinkard (2001) present De Young's (1996) finding on the importance of respectful relationships as a foundation for good design. Conanan and Pinkard (2001, p. 1). claim that De Young's writings “highlight the importance of social interaction in a

design environment; being able to communicate and support others is just as important as knowing design principles and having design skills”.

The practice of supporting others in the context of design can be expressed by complementing one’s work and encouraging the designer to move forward. Example salutations exhibit supportive commentary at the conclusion of critiques.

Message no. 179

“Great job . . . , as always. I look forward to seeing your revisions. Fell free to ask any questions, or email me.” (April 30, 2005)

Message no. 183

“. . . overall, your pieces look awesome. I can’t wait to see your revision. I hope that my crit make sense to you and help you a little. Email if you have any questions.” (May 1, 2005)

Message no. 207

“It looks like a very fun brochure you are designing and I hope you are having fun designing it too! The pictures are all very cute! Great work so far.” (May 2, 2005)

Message no. 238

“Your piece is really starting to look great. I look forward to seeing the finished product! Do you still have your book from typo 2, The Elements of typographic style? It will tell you what rules to follow regarding the dashes and the breaks at the ends of the paragraphs. If you don't, let me know and I can let you look it up in my book. Talk to you later” (May 7, 2005)

The author of message no. 238 extends support from commentary alone to offering materials to aid in the designer’s process. Such commentary on an online forum emphasizes the unique interaction possible in a hybrid course. The following salutations exhibit “cross-over” interaction from online to face to face. In addition to online comments relating to face to face interaction, it should be noted that participants were only weeks away from graduation while participating in the study. This shared anticipation is apparent in the discussions had on WebCT.

Message no. 240

“Hope you had a good weekend...we are in the home stretch... I'm starting to get more nervous than I've ever been for anything in the world... I'm not quite sure why... do you? See you in class dude.” (May 8, 2005)

Message no. 260

“Well, I think that’s all I can think of at the moment, but I’m sure I’ll think of something else tomorrow when I see you.” (May 9, 2005)

Message no. 262

“Hey, Thank you for the good crit . . . you are the 2nd person to tell me to look at her poster. I will have to see it in class. I agree I am freaking out about all this coming to an end. Yeah I am more nervous then I think I have been in a long time. See you in class.” (May 10, 2005)

The following excerpt from the research journal documents the physical cross-over of an online critique onto the classroom. This example can be interpreted two ways: (a) the student respects the opinion of their peers and desires their assistance in making a decision, or (b) the student is unsure of the credibility of peer suggestions and is basing the decision on the number of similar responses to their work.

May 3, 2005

“. . . presented his project during the [in class] crit with the preface of what . . . had suggested he might try [on WebCT] – moving an image from being horizontal to diagonal. In a sense he is checking for confirmation of her ideas provided through webct. The group confirmed that the idea should be explored.”

Towards the end of the study and completion of the semester, the researcher provided an anonymous topic on WebCT for participants to provide general feedback on the course. Their comments presented here speak directly to the development of a community throughout the semester as well as the benefits they received from peer critiques, albeit not specifically online critiques. The researcher understands that two out of fourteen is a small sample of participants, but included this data on the basis of the

credibility of the source. Because these two participants voluntarily took the time to provide feedback, their comments are considered important to study participants, and therefore valuable to the researcher. (Guba & Lincoln, 1981)

Message no. 230

“I’m speaking for myself on this one, but I’d complete a project, or homework, with hope that I get a good critique from [the instructor] the next day. I really wouldn’t care what my peers think, or what comments they would have...that is how I felt at the beginning of the semester, and virtually in every design class. Now that we have these groups, [small groups were utilized in class] I’m implementing more suggestions from my peers than I ever have. And I think that its because [the instructor’s] role in the critiquing process this time is very little, to nonexistent. It feels great because now I believe I’m designing for myself again, with the make believe client’s make believe thoughts driving me...I think we all tend to do better work when we think that way. Its a fantastic way to have your work critiqued, by your peers, and not necessarily by the person who is grading your work...of course to a certain degree is good, but not to the point where we think it would affect our grade if we didn’t implement the professor’s suggestions. Again, I’m speaking for myself. Even though [the instructor] may not be playing a HUGE role in the critiquing process right now, I’m sure she sees our progress in the project, just by meeting with us every other class.

I think as students get advanced in the program, such as ourselves, the professors should not serve as the sole critiquers, I’ve literally felt like my past professors are God when it comes to critiquing. Am I at all accurate for the rest of you? They should play little, to no role at all, something similar to what [the instructor’s] doing now. I can implement my peers’ suggestions, but also add a little of my spice to there recommendations.

Good luck to everyone for making it to this point. I’m sure we will all be successful after we get that piece of paper that says "Be it known that... bachelors.....CSUS....blah blah yada yada yada... (May 5, 2005)

Message no. 266

“... At first, I was not excited about the WebCT work, but it helped to create a gphd . . . [course number] community. We all communicated electronically with eachother more than I have in any previous classes. I felt like I had resources to turn to for help if I was struggling at home with a project. Though I don’t like the idea of having extra work, these exercises were helpful. I was very proud of everyone’s work in this class, and I will miss every person in it. We became a graphic design firm together.” (May 13, 2005)

The research journal entry regarding message no. 230 shows her acknowledgement that the cause of the student's response is inconclusive. This was a milestone in the action research cycle for the researcher.

May 5, 2005

. . . The feedback is very positive, specifying certain topics covered in class and the critiquing process. The student mentions how they have become less dependent on me for a response and feels the groups and peer feedback is a very good thing. I was so happy to read this. It is not clear if webct has played a part in this student's conclusions, however, this brings me to a consideration - the student development during the semester can not be connected to one thing - group discussions - lectures - or online discussions. The learning process combines all of these things and the end result is what matters. This particular student feels in control of their learning - this is what is important.

The data above identifies support for peers and appreciation for peer feedback at the end of the semester. The researcher journal also suggests peer support during earlier projects using online tools in addition to WebCT. The following are main points from a conversation had between the researcher and two participants in class, then documented in the research journal.

April 28, 2005

. . . had told me that the forum helped to make her feel "connected" while working towards turning in final projects [the referenced project was completed in March]. I asked if they used the forum during the last weekend (before finals were due) and she said yes. . . . said they also emailed each other and had a online communication process. A goal of the implementation was help build community outside and within the classroom – if . . . really did feel more connected – that is good. . . . Some students are creating new messages and discussions under the Main topic. . . . it is good to see them using the forum to communicate and answer questions between themselves, perhaps this exhibits less of a need for the instructor –also a goal for the class.

. . . She said overall she felt more connected to the class because of the online activities. I asked if she felt it was more impactful at the final stage of the project – she said it was because you knew people were “going there”. . . . agreed and said that email communication increased at that time also. . . . said . . . normally

doesn't write back on the weekend, but did that weekend. I asked if it was more important or most useful at the end of the project, and she said that it was probably stronger because they had been active up until that point. That had there not been all that activity before hand, it may not have worked so well.

The data presented here indicates the development of a community, regardless of its causation. During the analysis of data, specifically the research journal, the researcher came to an intriguing finding. The entry below, written midway into the study, displays the researcher's discomfort with her role as an instructor in a potentially self-sustaining community.

April 28, 2005

I'm going through some issues as far as letting the students become less dependant on me, which was the goal here in the first place! I don't think it is because I want more control over their projects, I truly want them to challenge themselves and not just do what I tell them to do---but, when it comes time for grading, and a project is seriously lacking in an area, I feel that I should have caught it earlier. The more I allow them to work on their own, the less time I get with there work.... Are they ready for this?

The data presented on the previous pages was analyzed for findings related to the perceived value of the implementation. Upon completion of these findings, the researcher continued with the perceived challenges of the implementation category.

Finding:

Semester and Weekly Assignment Scheduling was Challenging

The researcher observed two types of assignment scheduling: semester scheduling and weekly scheduling. Semester scheduling is the placement of the WebCT implementation during the fifteen week semester. The implementation was introduced during the seventh week of the semester and lasted until the fifteenth week. The questionnaire results for "What is your opinion regarding the use of WebCT in this course?" provided numerous comments regarding the semester scheduling.

“I don't think we started using it early enough to get into the routine of checking it – but it definitely has potential”

“It was helpful just wish it was implemented sooner because it was difficult to remember assignments sometimes”

“It was good at 1st then it started to be the last thing on my list. It started to feel like busy work toward the end.”

“Towards the end of the semester, it became difficult to complete the rubric projects. We had a lot of other work to do”

Two of the comments presented here state that there were challenges towards the end of semester, one being a conflict with the rubric assignments. The rubric assignments were in addition to the online critiques. Detailed data supporting the rubric assignments is not available for analysis. However, the researcher has included analysis concerning the impact of the rubric assignments on the completion rates of critique assignments. In addition to challenges at the end of the semester, two comments express a desire for the implementation to be introduced earlier to aid in the development of homework habits. In contrast to the above comments, one participant stated “Worked very well towards the end of the semester when things got a little more difficult”. This comment is highly contradictory, and but supports data presented in previous subsets, such as the value of peer critiques.

The researcher included a specific question concerning scheduling on the questionnaire. The specificity of the question provided a considerable amount of data, and more importantly, displays the researcher's concern with the scheduling of the assignments. This topic will be presented in detail with journal entries following the analysis of participant responses.

When asked specifically “How important was the scheduling/timing of the online crits you received?” participants provided the following feedback concerning semester scheduling.

“During the final project, it was too late, didn't help much”

“It wasn't too hard, but during the end of the semester it becomes really hard to squeeze in crits because sometimes it takes up to 1-2 hours to crit and then write about it in a way were your peer would not get offended”

The above comments provide insight into both sides of a critique assignment. It is unclear in the first comment if the critique was too late in the semester or too late in the week.

The second comment about writing a critique supports earlier data regarding the challenges at the end of semester. When provided the opportunity to share ideas for improving the system, participants expressed concerns similar to those found throughout the questionnaire.

“It should be put in effect earlier in the semester and not go near the end with req. So people could still use it but don't have to.”

“Just start it from the beginning, and people will get used to the pattern of checking and when to schedule homework over the weekend”

Student statements provide brief rationale for late posts during the last assignment. The greetings below are apologetic, noting that when the crit was written they were either experiencing a heavy workload or obstacle preventing them from posting on time.

Message no. 260

“Hey . . . , what's up? Sorry this critique is so late, I'm getting bad with them. . . .” (May 9, 2005)

Message no. 263

“Hey, I am so sorry that this is late but everything has been nuts lately. . . .” (May 10, 2005)

During the last assignment the researcher received a voluntary email from a participant which details one student's account of scheduling challenges. The email specifically comments on two trends in the data: one, the implementation should happen earlier in the semester, and two, it is difficult to complete critique assignments during heavy workload times experienced at the end of the semester.

“ . . . I have been trying to figure out why I have been having such a problem with remembering to do the assignments on time, and I think I have come to a couple of conclusions. First, I think it would be more successful in future classes to start using WebCT right from the beginning of the semester. It seems when I start a class I get into a homework rhythm and starting the use of WebCT towards the end of the semester sort of broke my rhythm. So beginning a class using WebCT right from the beginning I think will make it more of a priority, and students will begin working weekend homework schedules around WebCT deadlines. Also, I have noticed recently that there are 2 assignments going on at once on WebCT, instead I think it will be helpful to stick just to one. Therefore if you start in the beginning of the semester you can begin with the non-crit assignments, and then when there are crits needed, WebCT can shift to being online crits. I think one assignment per weekend is plenty (since it involves looking for your own crit, writing one, and responding to another). . . .” (May 6, 2005)

Figure 1: On-time Posting and Response Rates

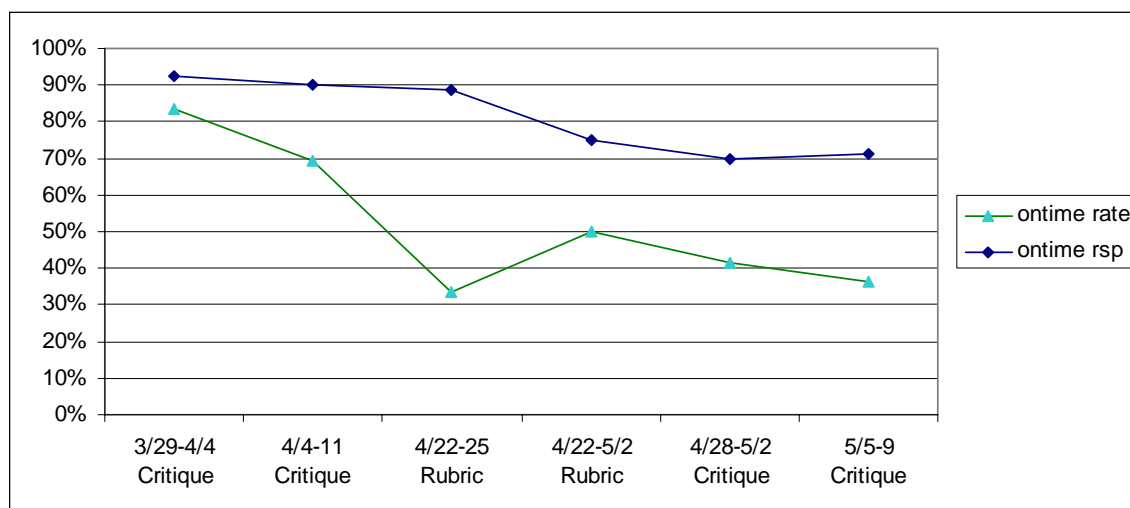


Figure 1 displays a reduction of assignments completed on time as the semester progressed. Each assignment was two fold, including an initial posting and response.

Responses had a better on-time rate than initial postings, however it should be noted that responses are generally brief and require less time than the initial post or critique. The considerable drop in on-time postings for the 4/22-25 rubric assignment should be noted, but extensive data are not available to support findings on the topic.

Data from multiple collection methods provides information concerning the weekly scheduling of assignments. The weekly scheduling of assignments, or the days an assignment began and ended, dictated the amount of time participants were given to complete an assignment. The following comment was received in response to “Was it difficult to write critiques for your classmates?”

“Time was an issues when critiquing someone else's work online”

While additional challenges were providing in response to this question, this response provided a starting point for the analysis of a potential substantial finding. The question “What is your opinion regarding the use of WebCT in this course?” provided further insight into student opinion in relation to weekly scheduling.

“For the most part I have a positive opinion expect I think the deadlines should've been softer”

“I think it was important to critique my fellow classmates. It was just difficult finding the time to sit down and do it”

“Maybe it needs a little fine-tuning but generally good. Its unfortunately much easier to dodge, or forget about it when there's no hard copy that's to be turned”

The issue of weekly scheduling continued to be apparent in the questionnaire results.

When asked “What were the challenges, if any, writing critiques for your peer or completing other WebCT assignments?” a majority of comments expressed problems with completing assignments by the deadline.

“Doing it on time”

- “Getting them done by the deadline”
- “Just the timing on some instances”
- “Writing crits for my peers. The time was the major issue.”
- “Forcing yourself to sit down and not be tempted to put it off till it becomes late”

In further support of participant’s feedback regarding the weekly schedule challenges, the researcher consider the following results to the question “How important was the scheduling/timing of the online crits you received?”

- “It was awkward getting them mid weekend, sometimes it worked, sometimes not”
- “Not very because I got crits in class beforehand”
- “It was sorta important but better late than never”
- “Just remembering to do them mid weekend and being disappointed when you do get a chance to go online, and not having your crit done by your peer.”
- “It was nice when you actually received the crit when you were supposed to”

- “It was important to receive a crit 3 to 4 days from the time we met in class. Personally, this was enough time to respond and make changes.”
- “Very. Getting a crit back in a timely manner helps to complete the project”
- “None – when people took forever to send you their projects that was kinda annoying”

The above comments range between positive and negative and from both sides of the critique, the receiver and the evaluator. Viewed alone these comments are inconclusive, but when considered in combination with previous data, the researcher noted a substantial finding concerning conflicts with weekend scheduling for online critiques.

The research journal documents an evolving response to weekly scheduling concerns. After the deadline for the 4/22-25 rubric assignment, the researcher addressed the issue in class. The conversation was documented in the journal.

April 26, 2005

“I started with commenting that some had not completed the rubric post yet . . . raised his hand right away to apologize for posting so late. I said it was not a big deal, that it is more important to get it done late than not to do it at all. I did mention that projects were priority. However, if you are writing a crit for someone else, it is important that you do it on time because they are expecting to hear from you by the deadline. . . .

The researcher followed this entry with documentation of a member checking discussion in class regarding scheduling issues. This entry exhibits development of the researcher's frustration with late assignments.

April 28, 2005

"I prefaced this discussion with 'I have made some alterations to the webct system based on our discussion a few weeks ago. We only have 2 weeks left so I want to make sure that we use this in the best way. So I know that I understood your comments, I would like to ask you to confirm what I have noted. (member checking).

I continued:

One of the things we changed was the schedule. Is Thursday-Saturday-Monday enough time... does it need to be this structured, or can I just say here is the task, complete it before the next class meeting. . . . and . . . felt that Sunday was okay, because they had already received a lot of feedback in class and could move forward without having to wait for the webct crit.

. . . said quietly that you have to give a 'deadline' otherwise people will wait until Sunday night. Because of the heavy workload of the end of the semester, I allowed the crits this week to be due on Sunday, not Saturday. . . . mentioned that their portfolio sites were due on Tuesday (course 150) – I mentioned that the load in the class is light compared to others in past semesters – I warned them not to take advantage of that and ignore their webct assignments.

Finding:

Late Evaluators were Contrite and Tolerated by Participants

Through analysis of the assignment scheduling data, the researcher found that participants were challenged by completing assignments on time. Data analysis continued with the evaluation of the affect late critiques had on student discourse. The following are excerpts from the initial comments of late posts. Posts from the assignment scheduling subset have been included. The evaluators are apologetic for posting a late critique.

Message no. 171

"Hey, Sorry about this taking so long for me to post. But better late than never. Ok here I go. . . ." (April 26, 2005)

Message no. 260

“Hey . . . , what’s up? Sorry this critique is so late, I’m getting bad with them. . . .” (May 9, 2005)

Message no. 263

“Hey, I am so sorry that this is late but everything has been nuts lately. . . .” (May 10, 2005)

While the greetings here express contrite on behalf of the evaluator, data demonstrating the effect of late posts on the receiver is best found in the research journal. Between the dates of May 3 and May 9, the researcher wrote detailed entries regarding a pair of participants dealing with a late post. The following is a combination of the researcher’s reflections and documented conversations.

May 3, 2005

“I was contacted this morning by . . . , because . . . had not yet posted a crit of her work and that because of this she was unable to post her response. She said she had contacted him several times via email and had received no response. I responded that I was very sorry this had happened and that I would contact him about it. At the end of class I addressed that several students had to still post their crit. I addressed that fact that everyone is very busy and has a tremendous amount of responsibility and pressure right now, but they have a responsibility to their peer and need to complete the assignment asap. I recommended that if this was the case that they talk with their partner before leaving in case they had a more up-to-date proof for them to crit.

I spoke with . . . after class about her project briefly and she said that . . . looked at her project in class and said he would be writing a crit later that day. She said it was not like him not to respond and was a little worried about him because of it – she did not seem upset or angry about the situation. I explained that students have a lot going on and need to prioritize their work, and some focus on the wrong priorities. I said it is hard to know how valuable these online crits are to one student or another. Some may be waiting for it, while some don't care very much (this a speculation on my part – not a strong conclusion). She said "and feedback is good to have" and that "we sit and look at it for so long – sometimes someone else will see something different." She said that she sometimes forgets about the peer crit, "sitting there on Sat. thinking she has until Tuesday for the class's work, and then say oh shoot, webct!" . . . has done very well getting her posts completed on time. She mentioned that when she thought of this she "wanted to make sure . . . got his crit".”

May 5, 2005

Follow up on May 3 situation

“. . . has still not provided a crit for . . . I publicly stated that he would be writing 2 crits this week, one for . . . and one for another student. He seemed to understand why and asked if he should respond to her work from last week or this week - I said to get the most recent work. There didn't seem to be any ill-will between us after this, he stayed after class to ask my opinion on a out-of-class assignment. I really hope he comes through this week.”

May 9, 2005

“I am feeling a little frustrated tonight, because several students have not yet posted a crit for their peer. I'm considering emailing him about it tonight. A big question I have is how do you get students that are very busy to make the right priorities and provide the necessary feedback to each other. I can't allow them to control their own learning if they are not willing to participate. I don't think they are understanding that spending time critiquing others will help them make decisions on their own work... maybe it doesn't help them? How should I address this at the end of the semester? Should I give priority to the students that did not receive a crit tomorrow in class? Is the timing not as important to them as it is to me? Has the motivation simply declined because of senioritis?”

The researcher asks a reflective question in the May 9 entry “Is the timing not as important to them as it is to me?” Two emails sent to the researcher regarding late critiques aided in the examination of this question.

“I just thought I would let you know that I have not heard from I have emailed him twice and gotten no response, so I cannot respond to his crit by tonight. Just wanted to let you know. I hope he is ok, because it does not seem like him not to respond. Thanks. See you tomorrow.” (May 2, 2005)

“. . . emailed me yesterday saying that there had been an urgent family situation that she had to take care of this weekend, and that she was going to be emailing you. I have not heard back from her, and I am in no way trying to get her in trouble, but i am wondering if you know anything about this situation? It is nearly 3 and I don't have her work to crit on webct...just wondering what i should do.” (May 9, 2005)

When evaluating the emails above, the researcher found that the authors were not complaining about the late crit, but concerned about their ability to complete their part of

the assignment on time. Statements such as “I hope he is ok, because it does not seem like him not to respond” and “I am in no way trying to get her in trouble” are attempts to not “tell” on the other student. While “I cannot respond to his crit by tonight” and “It is nearly 3 and I don’t have her work to crit on webct” express concern about completing the assignment on time. The researcher evaluated these comments along with the May 3-9 research journal entries and concluded that the answer to her question “Is the timing not as important to them as it is to me?” is quite possible “yes.”

Finding:

Student Pairing System was Valuable but Experienced Complications

The researcher spent a considerable amount of time and effort organizing student pairings for weekly critiques. The objectives behind pairing participants were to restrict participants from critiquing each other and avoiding retaliation and to provide a variety of feedback through multiple peers. The following entry displays the researcher’s query.

April 20, 2005

“I am still not sure if the pairs should change or not and how random they should be. This first week, I will be making the pairs based on similar projects because the projects are still in the concepting brainstorming phase. Once I see how they work I will ask the class their opinion and decide if partners should change or stay the same. Some mentioned having groups of 3 that rotate, a possible option.”

The researcher evaluated the system for pairing throughout the study and conducting member checking discussions in class that were later documented in the research journal. Through member checking, the researcher found that the system for pairs was appropriate according to the participants.

April 23, 2005

I also asked, do you think it was beneficial to crit a student working on the same project? Several said it didn’t matter. My fear of retaliation does not seem to be an issue at this level. They have been working together for many weeks now and, from what I can see, have developed a respect for each other. I asked if it was

necessary to be critting someone different from who was critting you, they said no. That it didn't seem to matter. I mentioned that I noticed the volunteer group wrote crits for each other and was that okay. . . . and . . . (participated in the volunteer crits) said it was fine, not a problem. I confirmed if it was still necessary for me to set up the pairs, or if they would like to choose their own. The overwhelming response was, yes, the instructor should set up the pairs.

The researcher requested specific feedback on the pairing system on the questionnaire.

Thirteen participants answered "yes" and one answered "no" to the question "Is it important that you are paired with someone new each time?" The following comments were provided.

"Some crits were helpful, as others were not. Depended on the person."

"I enjoyed seeing other people's work at various stages. It's interesting to see other student's process."

The comments included here range between positive and negative experiences, but both support the researcher's first assumption about the importance of being paired with a new peer each week.

The researcher continued the April 23 journal entry by noting a conflict in the pairing system. Because the course was a hybrid course, online assignments were intricately connected to the happenings of face to face class sessions. Participants were instructed to provide hard copies of their work to their assigned evaluator in class. Therefore, absences from class sessions complicated the pairing system and the distribution of projects for critique.

April 23, 2005

I then provided the list of pairs, realizing yet again that when students are absent that it creates a big problem. Today, two students from the same group were absent. I pondered it while those needing to make photocopies made them and people with pairs exchanged work. I decided it wasn't fair to not let those students paired with absentees have a crit from the other group. So instead of pairing them [with someone in their own group] I told the class that the absent students would

still be involved. I told them the pairings and that I would send an email out tonight letting them know what we are doing. I told them they will either have to exchange pdfs via email or attached a pdf online.”

The researcher proceeded with emailing absent participants and their partners with detailed instructions for exchanging files and completing assignments. The following is an example of this correspondence.

“Hello, . . . will be providing a crit of your work this week on webct. I am attaching the pdf file you sent me for her to download. You will be providing a crit for . . . She will send you her work or post it on webct. Crits and rubric posts (see forum for details) are due by Sunday at mid-night (extra day) and responses are due by Monday and mid-night. Email me if you have any questions.” (April 28, 2005)

In the example email above the researcher had received the absentee’s file and forwarded it to the evaluator. Future absentees were required to provide their evaluator with a pdf file through email or by posting it on WebCT. The following emails show the resulting conflicts.

“I’m out of town right now and I can’t remember the website for the class because I need . . . [peer’s] email. I am supposed to crit his work but I have yet to receive it. If he doesn’t want one that’s fine but I just wanted to give you a heads up about why I have not posted a crit yet. Can you just maybe send him a little reminder? Thanks” (May 8, 2005)

“I just wanted you to know I still haven’t received . . . [peer’s] PDF to crit. I emailed him last night but he never got back to me. I’ll email him again.” (May 9, 2005)

The issues that arose from absent participants impacted the system for participants. In response to the question “What do you think should change about the system to improve it?” one participant wrote “The system for partners. I had the same person twice, and other people I didn’t have at all.” To the question “What were the challenges, if any, writing critiques for your peer or completing other WebCT assignments?” two participants commented on being paired with an absent student.

“They would email me too late with the file so I don't get a chance to do the assignment”

“Sometimes could not understand what the designer wanted to communicate. Would have been easier if I had spoken to the designer before I critiqued”

CONCLUSION

Reflections

This study demonstrates the impact of peer feedback in a hybrid graphic design course. The participants who participated in this study expressed appreciation for peer critiques and suggestions provided on an online forum. The online critiques were used to extend the critiquing process outside of the classroom, providing the opportunity for more personal evaluations for each student. In addition to feedback, participants used the forum as a tool for providing support for each other as they progressed through the design process and towards the conclusion of their design education.

Throughout the study, the researcher evaluated her role as a facilitator in a hybrid course. In this particular instance, the researcher witnessed the development of a substantial community. The causation of the community is undoubtedly a combination of interactions both online and in class. While the researcher does not claim that the forum created the community, it is reasonable to conclude that the added communication and supportive commentary aided in its development. As peer interaction began to play an integral role in the course, the instructor questioned her necessary level of involvement in the community.

As an instructor it is necessary to manage student feedback in regards to timeliness to enable fair assessment. However, participants are focused on the quality of

their feedback and are open to flexible schedules and are tolerant of late feedback. It is the responsibility of the instructor to find a balance between controlling the learning environment and addressing the developing needs of the students. If the instructor is attempting to aid students in becoming less dependent on the instructor, it is necessary for the instructor to stay open to student requests and needs.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends implementing the forum at the beginning of the semester to aid in the development of homework habits. As the semester progresses, the instructor may adjust to voluntary critiques during final projects. This would continue to provide the resource for those that desired it, but would not cause conflicts for students whose time would be better spent completing their projects. It is also recommended that a dependable system for digital file exchange be developed.

APPENDIX A

WebCT Forum Guidelines Provided to Participants

WebCT Forum

We will be using the forum provided on WebCT to extend the feedback process outside of the classroom. You will be providing constructive feedback in the form of written critiques in response to your classmate's work.

If you have questions or problems, make sure to speak up and let me know about it at the earliest opportunity. Just like you would raise your hand in class to ask for a question or clarification, you can send an email to me to get help. If you have problems or questions, it is your responsibility to communicate that with me as soon as possible. The longer you wait, the less chance that you will get the help you need in time to solve your problem.

For WebCT questions email two addresses:
dianal@csus.edu
ganju@sbcglobal.net

General Etiquette

Be nice. Refrain from inappropriate language and personal attacks. Avoid sarcasm in your posts; this type of interaction does not translate well online. The forum is like a virtual classroom; make sure your comments online are up to the same standards you would apply in a regular classroom setting.

Your written critiques should provide both be constructive feedback and compliments. You might find it helpful to read your posting out loud before you submit

it. "Tone" is a very important part of electronic communication. When you read your message out loud does it sound the way you would speak to another student in the classroom?

Provide constructive feedback. However, never make derogatory comments toward another person in the class. Do not demean or embarrass others. If you feel someone has made a poor design decision, explain why the design element should be reconsidered and attempt to provide ideas for improvement. Always conclude your critique with a compliment on an element of the design.

Writing on the Discussion Board

Read the instructions for each assignment carefully so that you can focus on the appropriate questions and tasks.

Write your comments in a word processing file first, then paste them into the WebCT post. Thoughtfully read your comments and spell check before you post.

Use short and concise sentences. If your post is on the long side, you should break it up into separate paragraphs to make it easier for others to read online. Separate paragraphs with a double line space.

Working with Peers

Pay close attention to what your classmates write in their online comments. Reply with clarifying questions, when appropriate. These questions are meant to probe and shed new light, not to minimize or devalue comments.

Challenge others with the intent of facilitating growth and encourage them to develop and share their ideas.

Be open to be challenged or confronted on your ideas. Learning to receive and process feedback is a necessary and valuable skill for designers to have.

Differences of opinion are going to occur in any forum, and your goal should be simply to convey your ideas as clearly as possible.

Be personable, use people's names. When you reply to someone on a Discussion Board, use their name. You can say "Hi Jessica" or "Hi Michael" or whatever their name might be.

Sign your post in a friendly manner. "Nice work, Bob" or "I'm excited to see where you take this, Jenny"

Valuable Critiques

Your postings should be valuable and helpful to your peers. Study the work you are critiquing. Begin and end your critique on a positive note. The guts of your critique should provide sound reasoning why elements are or are not successful. Your comments should be explained and backed-up with design knowledge. Do not just give you opinion. When you find yourself writing whether you like something or not ask yourself WHY? And share that reasoning with your peer.

The following "I really like the third one, it's very interesting." is not acceptable in a posting. The following "You've explored a lot of options here. However, the third one on the top displays the most energy with its angular shapes and spontaneous use of

line. Is there a reason behind the all lower case type on the second one?" is an acceptable statement for a posting. Your posting should be at least 1-2 paragraphs.

Be open-minded when receiving feedback on your work. You are not required to implement all of your peer's suggestions or comments. You should consider what is said to be from a valid audience member and educated designer. It is never easy to have your work critiqued. However, when it is done with your development and best interest in mind, constructive criticism can be an invaluable part of the design process. Remember, you are always designing for the purpose of communication. Use the response of others to test your communication success.

Getting Started

We will begin with two "introduction" assignments. First you will read and respond to written critiques by student designers. Then you will write critiques for an existing logo designed by a professional designer. After Spring Break, you will begin providing feedback for your peers.

APPENDIX B

Instructions for Participants for WebCT Critique Assignment

https://online.csus.edu - Discussions - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help Norton Internet Security

Subject: Final Project Crit 2

Message no. 176

Author: Diana Ganju (GPHD155_DG)

Date: Thursday, April 28, 2005 5:51am

April 28-May 2 Final Project Crit 2

PART 1: due by midnight Saturday, April 30

Write a discussion board post to the person for which you are critiquing (names provided 4/28). Your post should address three things:

- 1) Designer's requests (should also be provided in writing 4/28)
- 2) What feelings and emotions are communicated by the design (color-if available, image, type)
- 3) Strengths of the design and idea
- 4) Ideas for improvement

Your post should be thoughtful while including both constructive criticism and compliments. Be polite and professional. Base your comments on sound design principles, not your opinion. DO NOT use the words "I like". Tell us what is working, what is not, and why.

Post your comments for Part 1 by midnight Saturday, April 30.
TYPE A NEW SUBJECT LINE THAT READS: "CRIT FOR JANE FROM JOHN" (using the name of your classmate and your own)

PART 2: due by midnight Monday, May 2

Respond to the person who provided a critique of your work. Use this post to ask for clarification and/or provide explanation for your design. Do not be defensive. Your classmate is providing a critique of your work to help you during the design process. Their comments should be considered as coming from an educated peer. You are not required to implement their suggestions, but you are encouraged to consider what you can learn from their critique.

Post your comments for Part 2 by replying to the post from your peer by midnight Monday, May 2.
BE SURE TO TYPE A NEW SUBJECT LINE THAT READS: "RESPONSE TO JOHN FROM JANE" (using the name of your classmate and your own)

Reply Quote Download Close

< >

start APPENDIX - Microsoft... Macromedia Dreamw... GPHD 155 Corporate ... https

APPENDIX C

Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in research which will be conducted by Diana Ganju, a graduate student in the Department of Education at [University name]. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the use of the WebCT Forum for extending peer-feedback outside of class, while encouraging students to improve their critiquing skills, define a successful brand identity, and gain confidence when evaluating their own work. These findings are important because time limitations do not allow for many students to get adequate feedback during class; using technology to extend the learning experience outside of class may prove to be beneficial. No additional time outside of class or in class will be required if you choose to participate in this study. All data collection will be conducted during class time or via email on a voluntary basis.

You will be asked to provide your opinions, ideas and information regarding your experiences while using WebCT during the study. Data will be collected through questionnaires, taped recorded group discussions, email, WebCT posts, and observations made by the researcher.

You may not personally benefit from participating in this research. However, participatory feedback is valuable when striving to improve the educational process and the course involved in the study.

The researcher will collect data anonymously whenever possible. Your comments and feedback will be immediately separated from any identifiable information. Audio tapes used during group discussions will be destroyed after they are transcribed. Data will be analyzed and presented without identification information. Your participation in this study will be kept confidential.

However, the results of the study as a whole will be presented to [University name] Department of Teacher Education as content in the researcher's thesis document. The results may be shared with the Department of Design and the educational community and become a matter of public record.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Diana Ganju at (916) 278-3600 or by e-mail at dianal@csus.edu.

WebCT assignments are mandatory homework for this course. However, you may decline to be a participant in this study and the data collection process without any consequences. If you choose not to participate or to discontinue your participation, you are requested to spend time evaluating your own work or the work of others also not participating in the study.

Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX D

Questionnaire

WebCT Assignments

Did you find the online critiques you received to be helpful?	YES	NO
Did you implement any suggestions from your peers' online crits?	YES	NO
Have you ever referred back to an online crit from an earlier week ?	YES	NO
Is it important that you are paired with someone new each time?	YES	NO
Was it difficult to write critiques for your classmates?	YES	NO
Comments on the above questions		

Were online crits and class crits redundant during the submark project?	YES	NO
Were online crits and class crits redundant during the final project?	YES	NO
Comments on the above questions		

Has writing online crits affected how you critique your own work?	YES	NO
Has writing online crits affected how you critique your peers' work?	YES	NO
Comments on the above questions		

Has creating a Brand Identity Rubric affected how you evaluate your own work?	YES	NO
Has creating a Brand Identity Rubric affected how you evaluate your peers' work?	YES	NO
Comments on the above questions		

Was there any difference between writing a critique for the submark project than for the final project ?	YES	NO
--	-----	----

What is your opinion regarding the use of WebCT in this course?

How did you feel about receiving crits from your peers using WebCT ?

What were the challenges, if any, writing critiques for your peer or completing other WebCT assignments?

How important was the scheduling/timing of the online crits you received ?

Was it difficult to provide a crit for a project you were unfamiliar with (poster vs website)?

What do you think should change about the system to improve it?

REFERENCES

- Conanan, D.M., & Pinkard, N. (2001). *Students' perceptions of giving and receiving design critiques in an online learning environment*. Paper presented at the European Conference on Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (Euro-CSCL) 2001, Maastricht, The Netherlands. Retrieved on October 12, 2005 from <http://www.mmi.unimaas.nl/euro-cscl/Papers/29.pdf>
- Craig, J., & Bevington, W. (1989). *Working with graphic designers*. New York, NY: Watson-Guption Publishing.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S (Ed.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- DeYoung, L. (1996). Organizational support for software design. In T. Winograd (Ed.), *Bringing Design to Software* (pp. 253-267). New York, NY: ACM Press.
- Elkins, J. (2001). *Why art cannot be taught: A handbook for art students*. University of Illinois: Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.
- Estioko, M. (2001, January). *Ten ideas for more effective critiquing*. Paper presented at the Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities, Waikiki, HI.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). *Effective evaluation: Improving the usefulness of evaluation results through responsive and naturalistic approaches*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers.
- McKim, R. H. (1972). *Experiences in visual thinking*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Inc.
- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2). Retrieved on November 5, 2005 from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/1_2Final/pdf/morseetal.pdf
- Paine, P. F. (2003). *An outline for designing a hybrid first year language course with WebCT*. United States: Auburn University, Alabama.
- Sands, P. (2002). Inside outside, upside downside: Strategies for connecting online and face-to-face instruction in hybrid courses. *Teaching with Technology Today*, 8(6). Retrieved on September 11, 2005 from <http://www.uwsa.edu/ttt/articles/sands2.htm>
- Schrire, S. (in press). Knowledge building in asynchronous discussion groups: Going beyond quantitative analysis. *Computers & Education*.

- Shaffer, D. W. (1997). Design, collaboration, and computation: The design studio as a model for computer-supported collaboration in mathematics. In R. Hall, N. Miyake, N. Enyedy (Ed.), *Computer Support for Collaborative Learning 97*. Proceedings of The Second International Conference on Computer Support for Collaborative Learning. Canada, Toronto, Ontario, 250-255.
- Willett, H. G. (2002). Not one or the other but both: Hybrid course delivery using WebCT. *The Electronic Library*, 20(5), 413-419.