Journalism 101
Professor T. Jackson
Final Paper
Due: December 6

Online Classes

I have had the opportunity to take 6 separate online courses during my term at WVUP, and I'm almost

overwhelmingly in favor of them, vastly preferring them to in-person classes. Since I am a part time student and

work full time, I much prefer the flexibility to work when and where I want. Secondly, I've found that the quality of

the online classes that I have taken is directly proportional to the effort put in by the instructors to make the subject

matter interesting and coming up with creative assignments that require participation. In addition, I find that the

quality of examples and the responsiveness of the teacher and teacher's aides directly correlate to the student's

success, at least in my case. Finally, I find that having the entire course schedule and assignments available at the

beginning of the class is a huge bonus, because then I can work at my own pace.

Last spring I took an online sciences course. It was a late-start course, only 12 weeks long instead of 16,

and the professor hadn't adjusted the schedule appropriately, so by the 3rd week we were still 4+ weeks behind in

the expected curriculum. The professor ended up canceling the final paper for the course, and assigned 2 questions

from the end of each chapter as a "Quiz". We still only ended up covering 12 weeks worth of curriculum, and there

were no tests or finals. The entire effort that was required was roughly 30 minutes a week - to download the set of

questions, write an answer out of the book and hand it in. The problems with this class were numerous - there were

no interactions, no message boards, no activities, no assignments, and the pacing was off.

As a contrary, during the same semester, I took what I consider to be the best online course that I've taken

at WVUP - English 403, Children's Literature. The professor had a well paced schedule, including short weekly

assignments that the students were expected to comment on and discuss. The assignments weren't just simple

reports or analyses, they incorporated multiple media sources, comparison papers, and a variety of literature. This

class had all of the assignments available from day one, so I was able to finish the short, weekly assignments well

ahead of time, thus allowing me to focus on the longer, more involved papers during those weeks, without having to

be distracted by multiple assignments.

One of the items that I find plays a large role in my own success is the quality of examples that I'm given to

work from, and compare my own work to. When starting a new class and acclimating to a new teacher, I find it a bit

nerve-wracking to try and guess what a teacher is looking for when it comes to evaluating or grading a paper or

assignment. When a solid grading rubric is provided and one or more examples, especially high quality examples of previous student's work, it makes it a lot easier to produce my own high quality work. A secondary part that can assist this "feeling out" process is when the first few assignments are graded and returned very quickly, and with copious notes. I had one online class where the first three weeks (and three assignments) went by before the first one was graded and returned, and so I wasn't able to adjust to some of the teacher's preferences until assignment 4.

Interesting assignments can also make a huge difference. If a teacher hasn't bothered to do anything for a class other than assign reading and questions from a book, it definitely comes across - and if the teacher isn't interested in teaching, or making me think about the material, I'm much less likely to find it interesting. On the flip side, if a teacher has gone to a lot of trouble to create engrossing experiences and assignments, and is making me not just read, but think about, analyze and apply the information we're learning, I'm probably going to be much more engrossed in the subject matter. The assignments in this class are a good example - we have to read about each type of media in the text, but then we're doing our own research and analysis on them, and making them personally relatable. If I'm asked to do the bare minimum, I probably will only do the bare minimum that I need to to get an A.

Responsiveness of the teacher or aide plays a fairly large factor as well. Due to the nature of online classes, students will work at their own pace, and according to their own timeframes. Additionally, this may mean that the time that students have to do classwork may be limited. When a problem is encountered, the student may need it to be resolved as quickly as possible, and so having a teacher or aide that is available to respond within a day or a few hours can be the difference between being successful or not for some people. Although this problem isn't unique to online classes, it is exacerbated by not having a regular set of "office hours" or "in-class" hours where it's guaranteed that a professor can be found.

Lastly, I do occasionally find that there are parts of assignments, course materials or quizzes that I wish I could discuss in person with other people. I will generally do a lot of my own research on things that interest me, but sometimes having discussion and discourse can open up new ideas or viewpoints that I wouldn't normally consider.

In conclusion, I have found that online classes work very well for me specifically, and with the fullness of my work and home schedule, the flexibility of online courses is almost required for me to continue my education. I do struggle with the content and organization of assignments, and very occasionally I wish that there was an ability to discuss the assignments with others in real-time, but for all the reasons listed, I much prefer online courses.