



# The Telegraph

The Newsletter of the  
Distance Learning Committee

<http://www.terra.edu/amatyc/>

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## 31th Annual AMATYC Conference

**November 10 - 13, 2005**

**San Diego, California**

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### Don't miss these Committee Sponsored Sessions

- **Themed Session: Math on the Web**  
Thursday, November 10, 2006; 8:45 – 10:40 a.m.
- **Using Technology to Deliver Instruction**  
Friday, November 11, 2006; 10:30 – 11:20 a.m.
- **Before, During, and After Teaching Math Online**  
Friday, November 11, 2006; 11:45 a.m. – 12:35 p.m

See your program for meeting room information

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### Distance Learning Committee

#### Meeting

Friday, November 11, 2006

4:30 – 5:30 p.m.

See your program from meeting room information.

## Online Discussion . . .

Many topics of are interested to teachers contemplating teaching a distance course. Below you will find discussions that have occurred on the MathViaDistance Listserv on testing and Course Management Systems. Please note that the Distance Learning Committee presents this information as a discussion. There are no endorsements.

### Proctored vs. Un-proctored Tests

*Question: There are many arguments for giving tests proctored and un-proctored for distance students. Could we have a discussion of what you do and the pros and cons of both?*

In my distance course, I give my chapter tests un-proctored. Students download them from the Internet and work the problems. Some scan the tests and send them back to me through email, others drop them off, others fax them, others send them back to me through regular mail. For their final, they must come on campus to our testing center. If this is not possible the students use a proctor. In terms of grades -- in all of our math classes, we have a common syllabus and a common final. My students have the same final as students in traditional classes. However, my student's final exam is worth 40% of the final grade whereas the classroom student's final exam is only worth 25%. My students "take-home" tests are worth less points than the students attending the same course on campus. I spoke with our lead math teacher before doing this. My students were having a difficult time getting to Terra when the testing center was open, particularly in the summer when the center's hours are cut back. I saw it as a compromise situation.

**I do something similar--the final exam is proctored but everything else is not. I have LOTS of individual grades (several per week--including many discussion postings) and take the point of view that it is tough to find someone who will do that much homework for you.**

Students who are outside of reasonable driving distance of my campus arrange for a proctor. For me this is a con because it takes time to fax or mail these tests and to ensure that the proctor is a reliable professional and not a friend or relative. My campus does not yet have a secure testing center so I must announce a date, usually a Saturday morning, to get my students together. Our math lab can handle the few who have a conflict. Some students can come during my office hours. Each chapter is quizzed online with a multiple-choice quiz through BlackBoard. These are 20% of the grade. I prefer to see my students' work, which is why I use the review problem sets before the exams and try to include some quiz questions that address the issues of process rather than just product. The other 40% of the grade is based on a combination of homework done through the textbook website, group projects, discussion board contributions, and writing and computer assignments for my stats students.

**My school requires two "proctored activities" for online classes. For algebra and statistics, I choose to give a midterm and a final exam which are each worth 20% of the grade. To prepare for these tests, students have a review problem set which they are**

encouraged to fax or drop off early for feedback. I set the grading scale this way to satisfy colleagues who were worried that someone else would do all the work for these online students, but in seven years I have not encountered anyone who did not seem to be doing his or her own work.

I agree, I have been teaching online for few years and I can confirm that it has been extremely difficult for students to find someone who would be willing to do their homework when their are do especially when students have to complete so many tasks every week. My experience has been that weak students do poorly whether taking quiz online or a proctored test whereas good students tend to do well whether it is a test online or proctored on campus. We have been trying to reach out to students who live within a driving distance from our campus. Therefore it has not been a problem asking students to visit our campus 4 times a semester to take 3 monthly exams and the final exam. I give students a week time (Monday through Saturday) to come on campus to our learning resources center and take the test during opening hours. My tests on campus count 70% of the final grade and the other 30% can be earned online in the form of quizzes, homework online, forums, and take home weekly assignments that have to be sent to me for grading. There have been times where I had to make arrangements with the library at some colleges to proctor tests for students taking my course online. I look forward to hear from others if there are secured ways to administer most of the tests online.

### Course Management Systems

*Question: My school district has adopted a Course Management System called Etudes, based at Foothill College in CA. I've been corresponding with the campus expert, and can still see no convincing reason to use any stand-alone CMS (like WebCT or Blackboard or Etudes or Moodle) when virtually every publisher offers its own CMS with lots of extra goodies that are even textbook specific, not to mention better tools for the students to enter math notation and draw graphs For those of you who do use a generic CMS rather than the one tied with the textbook publisher, can you tell me what advantages you find? Thanks for your help.*

The advantage we find is that since everyone in the University System of Georgia uses the WebCT VISTA, a) students are familiar when they transfer, b) all

courses reside in the same location (as opposed to different ones for each textbook) so it is easier for students to keep up with them, c) similarly it is easier for faculty to keep up with them all, d) training can be offered more easily since we all use the same thing, e) data about the use of the CMS can easily be collected by the institution, ... There may be more but those are the ones that are obvious to me at the end of a long day of teaching.

**Although there are some limitations in using a CMS supported by textbook publishers, the great benefits include the incorporated software tutorial packages which substitute for the presence of the teacher in the classroom and work as the backbone of the course. It is critical that students taking a math course online have access to such interactive tutorials. Migrating a publisher's textbook to a generic CMS supported by individual colleges can be a difficult task. Updates and fixes that are performed periodically on the publisher's server are done automatically whereas updates on the local server have to be performed by college technicians. It is my third year teaching a course online and I have not heard any complaints from students about technical support when needed. There are times where the publisher's server goes down but this does not happen very often. My reason for choosing a publisher's CMS was the interactive textbook and the prepackaged tutorial software which I believe it took years to develop and personally I don't see a reason to put the time and the efforts to reinvent the wheels given the excellent tutorial packages that are available on most CMS supported by textbook publishers and they are almost offered for free with a textbook package. Some of the limitations when using publisher's CMS: not much flexibility in moving contents from one location to another. Internal links are a little hard to change and move around in different areas of the system. Some of the CMS do not support files of type asp or databases and I work around that by using external links to my own website.**

I feel the biggest advantage of using a CMS system at the institution level goes much beyond math classes. If a publisher CMS is used, students (and teachers) MUST have multiple logins to access multiple courses. By using it at the school level, a student need only login in once to have access to all his/her classes. This also allows for the use of a global calendar and, in some cases, a global gradebook so students can easily monitor all their classes at the same time. I admit that, on the surface, this does seem a bit trivial, but it really does carry a lot of weight in the grand scheme of things. With

cooperation between institution and publisher technicians, many of the tools provided in a publisher CMS can be implemented with links or even downloaded to the institution CMS rather easily, even if one does not use an e-pack.

**I've used Blackboard (very positive experience) and WebCT (not so positive) to supplement traditional classroom delivery for the past three years. This year, I am using CourseCompass (Prentice Hall) to support Bittinger's Intro Algebra text. My initial assessment is that the CMS packaged to support the textbook is a real time saver and also provides flexibility for those instructors who may want to customize the package or use it as a pure distance learning system. Login procedure is easy -- none of this double login that someone else has mentioned.**

We are actually fighting this battle at XXX Community College. The administration wants us to use WebCt, but we do not believe we can possibly produce the same quality materials that are supported by the publisher. Also the publisher has technical support 24-7. The support of our campus system is limited to 8-4 at best. Overall, the publisher's system is much more reliable than our it is down (as ours is frequently) having an external system gives the student a second option.

One participant choose to lists the con's: CON: Embedding the publisher materials within the generic CMS defeats the goal of limiting the students (and instructors and IT support) to a single interface. CON: Embedding the publisher materials adds another layer of logins. (The CMS called Etudes already has two separate logins, one for the system and a second to access the discussion board. My school's implementation assigns the first login name and password, which the student cannot alter, and allows the student to set the second.). CON: Embedding will increase probability of inaccessibility of materials do to a crash somewhere. CON: Not embedding the publisher materials means forfeiting a lot of good materials.

**I would agree with these cons. Like so much in life, this is another one of those problems with no clear "winner." It also highlights the reason that in most things we ultimately come to a "standard" (like the height of a light switch, turning radius of a handicapped ramp, DOS, DVD, VHS, Betamax--oops! Not that last one;-) Sooner or later this will happen also with our technologies so that we can merge one into another.**

**Have you tried "blogging?" Blogging refers to Web-logging and is a form on-line journaling. It began as an on-line diary. Interaction, the ability to comment of the posts of others, was a feature of the earliest blogging tools. Many sites are available to start your own blog. Some sites are <http://www.livejournal.com/> or <http://www.blogger.com/>**