

# The CoB's Race to Implement Online Instruction

## A Look Back at George Carter's Fall 2005 EFIB-L Conversation

In an e-mail to EFIB Faculty dated 6-Dec-05, EFIB Chair George Carter began a philosophical discussion of online education. The text of Carter's exposition follows:

**From:** Carter  
**Sent:** Tuesday, December 06, 2005 7:46 AM  
**To:** KingE; EFIB-L  
**Subject:** RE: My Thoughts On Online - Tom Lindley

To EFIB-L:

My thanks to Ernie for posting this and to Tom for stating issues that are of EFIB concern.

Rather than starting with a point-by-point discussion on Tom's e-mail, I am going to address a general concern that I have regarding online instruction.

Our business is teaching, research, and service (with a passing recognition to economic development, which may or may not be a component of service). In that business as in all business and life, change is the most remarkable characteristic. Management has innumerable theories that are all variants of Hegel's Dialectic: thesis, antithesis, synthesis (which is the new thesis). AACSB's "continuous improvement" is simply a variant of that Dialectic. The basic idea is to make the current situation as good as you can then incorporate change to make the future situation better.

The current situation for instruction is classroom techniques that involve face-to-face activities. The recent changes that we have incorporated are large sections and technology such as IVN. In both cases, we have not digested those changes and need to find ways to get better. I would like to see EFIB-L constructively address those changes. Now, what about the future?

It seems to me in all that I read that an integral part of future university instruction is the incorporation of online technology. I guess that is the question that I am posing to EFIB-L. Is there general agreement on that point or not. If so, we must address issues of the nature that Tom has articulated and figure out how work with those concerns. If there is general agreement that online technology will not be an integral part of future instruction, we need to develop a convincing discussion that will allow us to ignore it.

So, what are your opinions on whether online technology will be an integral part of future instruction, and why?

George

As indicated by a number of e-mails forwarded to investigators at USMPRIDE.COM, Carter's initial salvo received a number of responses. One response compared the difference between

traditional and face-to-face instruction to the difference between fashion and style. To that comment, Carter responded:

**From:** Carter  
**Sent:** Tuesday, December 06, 2005 8:52 AM  
**To:** Mixon; KingE; EFIB-L  
**Subject:** RE: My Thoughts On Online - Tom Lindley

Frank, thanks for responding.

I do not deny that online is different from small section, large section, IVN, etc. My preference is for the small section. So much so that I have taught small section classes as overload classes for no extra compensation for several decades. My small section coffee and stat 8 o'clock class has started me off on Monday-Wednesday-Friday since the 1980's. In recent years, I have also taught a small section Business Ethics class for the love of it.

My personal ordering (from best to lesser) is small section, IVN, online, large section. I dearly hate the impersonal nature of large sections and have real problems with my part in the learning that I think should take place in large sections. My conception of online is that I will make more of a difference, probably because I do not envision online sections as being humonguous.

When it is all said and done, an instructor's essential function is to ascertain to what extent learning has taken place. Learning is peculiarly a student activity. Instructors like to think that that they make a difference in that activity. In small sections, I think maybe so. In large sections, I question it. For IVN and online, I am somewhere in between.

So, sure there are differences (fashion and style). But, will online instruction be an integral part of future instruction, and therefore, are we going to have to deal with it?

The question I am posing, I am posing not only to Frank but to the whole department.

George

To this response, the beginning of a barrage of e-mails hit the EFIB-L listserv enumerating all of the problems associated with online instruction. To those Carter responded by way of the following two e-mails:

**From:** Carter  
**Sent:** Tuesday, December 06, 2005 2:24 PM  
**To:** Salter; EFIB-L  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** RE: My Thoughts On Online - Tom Lindley

Sean,

Before we address a horde of details, I would like to get a sense of the department on whether there is general agreement that online instruction is and will be part of instruction. If so, we must deal with it.

There are two comments that you make that seem to address my question. "It is my belief that online education is, in fact, a fad and not truly education," and "It is, in my opinion, credentialing, which is not the same as education."

I have been thinking about education. Several aspects seem relevant. First, learning is uniquely the student's activity. Second, the instructor participates in the student's learning process, but in different degrees depending on the mode of instruction. Finally, the instructor may assist the student in learning, but the instructor's primary activity is evaluation of learning. My bias is that the more the instructor participates in the student's learning process, the better. Thus, I rank the various modes of education along the two dimensions as follows (from better to lesser):

Small Section - Substantial instructor participation - Instructor evaluates  
IVN - Good instructor participation - Instructor evaluates  
Online - Some instructor participation - Instructor evaluates  
Large Section - Little instructor participation - Instructor evaluates  
Correspondence Courses - No instructor participation - Instructor evaluates  
Self-learning - No instructor participation - Individual (not instructor) evaluates

I spent thirty years in the Naval Reserve where correspondence courses were the primary method of professional development education, and I understand the strengths and weaknesses of that mode of education. Also, every faculty member who is current and relevant according to AACSB expectations has spent inordinate time in self-learning by reading manuscripts, journals, books, etc. without the benefit of instructor participation or evaluation.

In the ranking above, please note that I consider online a mode of education. While it may be a fad that waxes and wanes, online is truly an educational mode in which the student has the opportunity to learn, the instructors has the opportunity to guide that learning, and the instructor has the responsibility to evaluate the student's learning.

I also am intrigued by your credentialing reference. I am intrigued because that is what we as faculty do, and you seem to denigrate it. While instructors may participate with students in their learning process to varying degrees, the primary responsibility of faculty is to evaluate that learning. That is the only activity that faculty have control over in education. I know that some people think that instructors teach in the sense that instructors are responsible for student learning. That thought cannot actually be true since we may lead the horse to water, but we cannot make the horse drink. What we as instructors can do is evaluate whether and to what degree that horse drank. Thus, ultimately our job is to give grades and degrees, to credential. Credentialing is not all of education, but it is the

only part of education that instructors have control over. In self-learning, instructors have no role in that mode of education.

After all of this, do you think that online instruction is a legitimate mode of education? If not, please help me understand.

George

**From:** Carter  
**Sent:** Tuesday, December 06, 2005 2:32 PM  
**To:** Green; Salter  
**Cc:** EFIB-L  
**Subject:** RE: My Thoughts On Online - Tom Lindley

I am reading a lot about the problems of offering online courses. I am not getting, however, any sense that there is general disagreement that online instruction is a legitimate mode of education in the sense that small sections, IVN, large sections, correspondence courses, and self-learning are modes of education. If I can assume that agreement, then we can move to the next level of discussion: the details, one at a time.

George

A number of responses to the e-mail above were sent to Carter. Two of them pointed out that there was disagreement that online instruction is a legitimate mode of education, while the third requested that Carter consider assigning "self learning" courses to a faculty's course load.

To one of these responses, Carter initiated a discussion about the definition of "legitimacy" by way of the following e-mail:

**From:** Carter  
**Sent:** Tuesday, December 06, 2005 5:21 PM  
**To:** Salter  
**Cc:** ECO; FIN; IB  
**Subject:** RE: My Thoughts On Online - Tom Lindley

Can you articulate your concern about legitimacy? I want to get beyond the question of whether online instruction is or is not a legitimate mode of education. If we can agree that it is, then we can address the details. If we cannot, the details do not matter.

George

One of the EFIB faculty members then provided a dictionary reference to "legitimacy," and a number of others launched into another barrage of criticism of online education. Carter disappeared from the debate for a time, then reappeared with the following e-mail:

**From:** Carter  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 08, 2005 7:39 AM  
**To:** KingE; EFIB-L

**Cc:**

**Subject:** RE: What now?

From George,

I had to drop out of the discussion yesterday so I will not individually discuss yesterday's e-mails. Several comments though. Sean, Tom, and John helped me understand the concerns much better. Trellis hit the maintenance and training issues that bother me a lot, and have to be addressed. And, Daniel really got at what I want to get a handle on: consistent evaluation and course integrity, regardless of delivery method.

I think that we must get into the online delivery business for two reasons. First, Mississippi students need the access. We are all familiar with the stats: 40% do not finish high school and 83% do not finish college. The information economy of the 21st Century is going to be hugely biased toward college-educated workers since work will be based on knowledge instead of upper body strength. Second, identifying and incorporating change is a professional responsibility. Advancing technology has introduced online education as a change agent so we must incorporate it, in a professionally responsible manner.

There are numerous details that must be addressed, which we must do in the future. My overall belief is that we must incorporate online delivery in a way that maintains course integrity. The learning of material is something that only the student can do, although faculty can facilitate that learning. Evaluation is the only aspect of learning that faculty control. Thus, the integrity of the learning process must rely on consistent evaluation across modes of education (small section, large section, IVN, online, correspondence) and, more controversially, across instructors. EFIB cannot control other departments, and EFIB cannot control other institutions. EFIB can only control EFIB. Can EFIB get at consistent evaluation and therefore assure course integrity regardless of mode or instructor? AACSB calls it "continuous improvement." In what more fundamental way can EFIB continuous improvement be addressed than in EFIB course integrity, or more consistent evaluation?

George

To this e-mail, one faculty responded:

**From:** Green

**Sent:** Thursday, December 08, 2005 8:00 AM

**To:** Carter; KingE; EFIB-L

**Cc:**

**Subject:** RE: What now?

While George and all of us have conducted a robust discussion of online learning, I must take issue with this statement by George:

"Evaluation is the only aspect of learning that faculty control."

I am not sure if George really means that literally, but in face-to-face delivery, there is not a single doubt that some professors can get points across better than others, and that faculty have an immense impact over the student's learning. I will agree, however, that the "degree" of this impact varies by course type.

Trellis

Carter responded with the following statement:

**From:** Carter  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 08, 2005 8:28 AM  
**To:** Green; KingE; EFIB-L  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** RE: What now?

Trellis,

I am not sure of the issue. To me, the faculty member completely controls the evaluation of a student's learning in a course (let's ignore administrative interventions and similar overrides such as grade appeals). I think that an individual student completely controls that individual student's learning in a course. Faculty members can intervene in the student's learning process in a variety of forceful, persuasive, stimulating, entertaining, etc. manners, but student has to allow that intervention. No doubt that a faculty member can have an immense impact over a student's learning, and a face-to-face delivery is usually a better way of getting that kind of impact. The student still has to allow the impact, and I can envision a motivated online student allowing it in that delivery method while a small section student would not allow it.

Are we really disagreeing?

George

To some of the other comments, Carter responded with the following e-mails:

**From:** Carter  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 08, 2005 11:06 AM  
**To:** jlindley@comcast.net; Carter  
**Cc:** Salter; EFIB-L  
**Subject:** RE: My Thoughts On Online - Tom Lindley

Tom,

I do not regard online as an inferior product. It certainly is a different product. To a farmer tied to the land, online courses could be superior courses compared to small section courses that he would not be able to attend. Learning is the reason for having courses. Course integrity is the key, and if course integrity is maintained in all modes of course offerings (small section, large section, IVN, online, correspondence) then each of the modes should be not only reasonable but effective substitutes. Each mode is a tool in our arsenal for most

effectively addressing learning needs in various niches. The largest niche, by far, is and probably will continue to be classroom instruction. We should not shrink from identifying other niches and addressing them. I think that EFIB has a big job ahead of it in addressing course integrity across modes and across instructors. We will never be perfect, but we certainly can get better.

George

**From:** Carter  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 08, 2005 12:38 PM  
**To:** Salter; EFIB-L  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** RE: My Thoughts On Online - Tom Lindley

Sean,

The standard that we are holding the students to is knowledge of the subject matter. If students demonstrate knowledge of 90% of the course content (usually defined by chapters in a textbook) then the student is evaluated with an A. face2face, online, tutorial does not matter in that assessment, although we would expect the student to more easily learn the material in tutorial as opposed to correspondence. When we talk about course integrity, we talk about honestly and effectively assessing the degree of learning that has taken place. If we lay down five FIN 300 tests (identical in questions and answers) (one by tutorial, one by classroom, one by IVN, one by online, one by correspondence), each test should receive the same grade, a C if each test shows knowledge of 70% to 79% of the tested subject matter. Our articulated problem is that an online instructor may give an A for that demonstrated achievement. That action is just wrong, and rationalizing that the course is online is no excuse.

In response, yes <yes>, it is correct to hold students to the same standard when there is a fundamental difference between the faculty input provided. The playing field is unlevel because of the variation in students' intellectual abilities, the variation in instructor resources, the variation in working commitments, the variation in students' access to other students, etc. But, those variations are understood and accepted. The variation that is unacceptable is adjusting evaluation because of mode of delivery.

You ask, is the educational experience the same for online and face2face students? Of course, the experience is not the same. Our primary responsibility is evaluating student learning. There is an educational experience associated with the learning process ranging from intense in a tutorial to slight in correspondence courses. There are a lot of collateral benefits from education. The experience is only one. Others include attitude adjustment; civic responsibility; differences sensitivity; entertainment (such as sports); mental, moral, and physical development. However, learning is education, first and foremost. If learning takes place without any of the many collateral benefits, then education still has taken place. The stories of Vietnam prisoners of war who educated themselves to maintain sanity are vivid

illustrations of education devoid of what we on college campuses call the education experience.

I agree that EFIB literature should clearly indicate the learning expected and the methods used to help students in their learning processes. Students learn differently, have different circumstances, and therefore have preferences. I do not agree that we should differentiate degree programs by delivery mode. The learning is what is important. We must fight the implication that a classroom degree indicates greater competence than an online degree. We can best fight that implication by making sure that there is no difference in competence ascertained by the obtaining the degree by those two methods.

George

**From:** Carter  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 08, 2005 3:08 PM  
**To:** Salter; EFIB-L  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** RE: Further Online Thoughts

I certainly believe that the face2face is a richer form of education for the reasons you mention, and more. But, it is not the only form. Where the student chooses an alternative less-rich form, learning that takes place is valuable. It is incumbent on us to evaluate that learning consistently with the rich face2face learning.

There is so much that takes place in a classroom and among students outside class, and indeed on an active, stimulating campus that does not occur in a correspondence course setting. All that is valuable. However, with a course it is the content learned that is truly important, and that we evaluate. All the other stuff is helpful to learning, valuable to life, enjoyable as an experience, etc. And, that is great. But, why a student who just wants the content, and may only have the opportunity to obtain the content, should have that opportunity.

Your last sentence on evaluation criteria and instructor resolve are at the heart of my concern.

George

**From:** Carter  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 08, 2005 3:26 PM  
**To:** jlindley@comcast.net; EFIB-L  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** RE: When Most Fail

Tom,

SAVE this e-mail!



If the learning of students in online courses is what would pass as failing in classroom courses and the students receive passing grades, I will do what I can to surface it. If I receive pressure to lighten up on grades, I will throughout it. I do not care what the Dean and others have at stake, the faculty's stake in honest, consistent, and fair evaluation is our paramount stake. I know the Dean receives criticisms, it is part of the job, but of one thing I am convinced: He has substantial academic standards. Just ask the Round Building.

I want a transparent department where faculty governance is operational. Only an informed faculty can govern.

My concern is not with administrative pressure. My concern is that the EFIB faculty will not constructively address consistent evaluation across delivery methods and across faculty. We shall see.

George

The last e-mail in the series above is particularly interesting. Carter states that he wants a transparent department where faculty governance is operational. After the series of events leading up to and including "Black Tuesday" in the EFIB, these thoughts are comical. Carter also takes a shot at his own faculty at the end of the e-mail by stating that administrative pressure does not concern him. To the contrary, his concern is that his faculty would not constructively address consistent evaluation across delivery methods and across faculty. Of course, Carter's comments about Doty's academic standards are also laughable.

At this point, one EFIB faculty asked if it were true that Mississippi State University already has an online MBA program, and questioned the benefits of duplication in the online area. To that Carter replied:

**From:** Carter  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 08, 2005 3:33 PM  
**To:** Mixon; EFIB-L  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** RE: More Online

Frank,

I have heard that they do. They also have an Economics program, a Finance program, etc. Matter of fact, they have a university. Duplication of courses, programs, and universities is a topic that I was dragged through while I was at the College Board from 1984-1989, particularly 1986 when we tried to shut down Mississippi Valley State University, Mississippi University for Women, the Dental School at the University of Mississippi, the Veterinary School at Mississippi State University, and Gulf Coast Research Laboratory at the University of Southern Mississippi. Let us just say that duplication is not an issue to address. It is a topic more suited to the sterile discussion of partial inebriation. As I was told by numerous legislators, "That dog won't hunt."

George

We will end on this note – a department chair who is concerned that his faculty will not constructively discuss the issue of online education is himself addressing faculty comments in a condescending and disrespectful manner. From what you've seen at USMPRIDE.COM, do the CoB's administrators deserve the positions of public trust that they currently hold?