

**ONLINE NEWSLETTER**

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**Mansfield University's online Master's in Education in School Library Information and Technologies program has been certified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and is accredited by NCATE and the Middle States Association!**

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**From the Desk of Larry Nesbit:**

I would like to share an article with you that was distributed by Mansfield University on the School Library Program and its faculty which has been published in several local newspapers. It is wonderful to have outside organizations say good things about our program and the people who are associated with it. If you would like to know the details, please read the following release from the Mansfield Public Relations Office.

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Mansfield, PA -- The Mansfield School Library and Information Technology program is only one year old but its creators and instructors are garnering state and national recognition.

Larry Nesbit, director of Information Resources, School Library and Information Technologies at MU was presented with the Distinguished Library Service Award by the Pennsylvania Library Association at its annual conference in October. Nesbit is the first person in the 14 university State System of Higher Education to ever receive the award.

Joyce Valenza, instructor, recently received the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) Concord

School Library Web Page of the Year Award for her work on the Springfield (PA) Township High School Virtual Library. She also authored the cover story, *What's Not On the Web*, in a recent issue of *Learning and Leading with Technology* magazine.

Last spring instructor Debra Kachel received the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association's (PSLA) Outstanding Contributor Award, the highest award given by the PSLA, in recognition of her outstanding contributions in the field of Pennsylvania school library media programs.

"All of these honors attest to the high quality of the people in our program," Nesbit said. "They are all exceptional teachers and practitioners, committed to serving our students and to addressing the shortage of library media specialists."

Implemented in the fall of 2000, the School Library and Information Technology master's degree program is taught entirely online. The first of its kind in the U.S., it is the only program of its kind developed specifically for school libraries. For more information on the program check its webpage at <http://library.mnsfld.edu>.



Since this article has been published, several other honors have been bestowed on our faculty. Dr. Doris Dorwart received the honor of being recognized at the recent annual conference of PAECT by being given their Special Award. This award is "...to recognize people that have made a significant contribution to Educational Technology over the past year." Doris received her award based upon her work with you on the Distance learning project and the contributions that she continues to make to the overall value of technology in education.

In addition Dr. Carrie Gardner, the instructor who teaches our copyright and legal issues course, had the lead article in *Learning and Media* on the use of filtering software. While Carrie had the lead article, four other instructors were also featured. Robin Schrieter was profiled for her accomplishments in the Manheim School District and Deb Kachel, Cindy Keller, and Nancy Henry described the in-service program they provided for the state of Maryland on staff development.

### **CONSTRUCTIVE LEARNING: MY EXPERIENCE AS A COURSE FACILITATOR**

By Jane Fenn, Online Instructor

When I first began developing an online course, I read of the concept of constructive learning. The fundamental principle of this is that students learn best when they construct knowledge for themselves. The goal of constructivist programs is to encourage students to construct the target knowledge for themselves instead of telling it to them. The students' self-construction may be guided via many means, but the idea that participants in a course developed with constructive learning in mind each experience their own individual courses was an intriguing one for me. Trying to develop such a course was a great challenge, but it wasn't until I saw the course in progress that I finally understood more fully the implications of this idea.

One of the most exciting things to me about the Core Resources course has been that each participant has in fact made the course his or her very own. By the choices made of books to be read or of paper topics, by the grade levels chosen for assignments and projects, each individual has focused the course differently. It's as if each one has looked at the same goals of instruction and overall set of materials through an entirely different lens, creating a set of learnings and experiences with distinctly individual meaning. Some have emphasized topic areas of particular interest, or grade levels they already know they will be dedicated to; others have explored more widely and in more varied ways. The goals of each module are being met, but in unique ways.

This has continually made the work submitted very interesting for me to read. Also, it amazes me that course participants have such widely different

views on particular assignments or activities that had special meaning or significance for them individually. One student will tell me how and why a particular assignment was especially meaningful while another person will remark that they're happy that same one is over because it was hard work and not particularly enjoyable! I have been grateful to have feedback from everyone about their views on assignments, and I have already and will again make changes based on what they tell me.

But the most important thing for me has been to understand much more fully what is meant by constructive learning – I see it in action on every assignment, and I see it as a terrific advantage of an online program. For the first time, I understand quite well the difference between a course instructor and a course facilitator, and that exciting difference has been professionally rewarding as well as a terrific professional challenge.

## **Creating Web-Based Problem Solving Assignments**

**By Hobart King**

The web can be used as an efficient tool for delivering content, communicating within a course and assessing student performance. Let's consider an assignment format that uses these strengths of the web and has the following characteristics:

- provides an interesting way for students to learn new content,
- gives students an opportunity to apply what was learned in a practical context,
- requires critical thinking,
- gives students a clearly-defined goal,

- is easy to create by the instructor, and
- allows rapid, objective assessment.

When designed correctly, web-based problem-solving assignments can have all of these characteristics. This type of assignment appeals to me because the learn-think-apply-solve sequence enables me to teach beyond content and give students practice at a very important skill – practical problem solving. I also like the fact that these assignments are easy to create and rapid to assess. Grading them on a server allows me to assign significant amounts of work in high enrollment courses with minimal outfall on me.

Let's take a look at a simple web-based problem-solving assignment. I deliver the Landslide Hazard Assessment to students as a small website, however, the same information could easily be delivered as a folder of documents in a course management system or as a word-processing file. I grade this assignment with a Perl program but it could have been done with a course management system. Here is the address: <http://www.geologyeducation.com/landhaz/intro.html>

The Landslide Hazard Assessment introduces students to the idea that landslide hazard can be related to two site characteristics: topography and soil type. The student learns about this relationship and then considers five sites, each with unique topographic and soil characteristics. The problem is solved by determining the topography and soil characteristics at each site and then applying new knowledge to rank the sites into categories such as "suitable," "unsuitable," and "highest recommendation." In this context, course content is used to demonstrate how geologists use geological information to solve a practical problem.

If you are interested in creating a problem-solving assignment for your course try following the five steps listed below - you

might be surprised at how easy they are to make:

1. think of a practical problem that relates to your course content,
2. develop a story-line with supporting content (or the content could be in your textbook)
3. assemble the maps, data, charts, photos, etc. needed to support your problem,
4. present the content and data as a small website or word-processor file, and
5. develop an assessment.

Simple web-based problem-solving assignments can serve as an active-learning introduction to a new course topic. Difficult ones can be used to demonstrate a mastery of concepts. They can also serve as a great way to promote student-to-student interaction through a discussion board in online courses. These discussions are richest when the assignments are difficult, have a high workload, involve elements of uncertainty, or appear to be daunting at first glance.

Here are a couple more examples of web-based problem-solving assignments.

Earthquake Damage Assessment:

<http://www.geologyeducation.com/haz/earadam/damins.html>

Volcanic Hazard Assessment:

<http://www.geologyeducation.com/haz/volhaz/vassign.html>

If you are interested in building some for your courses please feel free to contact me to discuss your approach, see other examples or ask questions.

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## **LSC 560: Seminar/Residency and Practicum**

The eleventh course in our program will be conducted for the first time during the Spring 2002 semester. Thirteen students are registered and will be participating in LSC 560 Seminar/Residency and Practicum.

The course consists of seven modules; modules one through five represent the seminar portion, module 6 is designed to help mentors guide those students who need to complete a practicum, and module seven contains the agenda and requirements for the residency. Students, who are already working as a school librarian, may not need to take the Practicum. However, all students are required to take the Seminar & the Residency. Therefore, the course is either a two-credit (Seminar & Residency only) or four-credit course (Seminar/Residency and Practicum). Students can not register for this course until they have completed at least 21 credits that includes LSC 501 Instructional Collaboration. Before students register for LSC 560, they should contact their advisor, Dr. Doris Dorwart, to make certain they have met all the requirements to register for either two or four credits.

### **The Seminar:**

All students must take the seminar. Modules one through five will help students develop electronic professional portfolios that will include personal resumes, professional development plans, and other documents that demonstrate their achievement of Pennsylvania's standards for certified school library media specialists. Of course, these modules are all online.

**The Residency:**

The residency portion, which is also required for all students, will be held in Harrisburg this year. The course will begin on Thursday June 27<sup>th</sup> and run through Monday July 1. Group rate lodging has been arranged at Days Inn Harrisburg. This hotel is situated alongside the beautiful Susquehanna River and is only a few blocks from the lovely river walk.

The curriculum for the residency directly relates to the Pennsylvania certification standards and provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their competency in a variety of ways. Assignments include individual and small group work, demonstrations, and writing exercises. Field trips will include Hershey High School, the Pennsylvania State Library, the Penn State Library at Middletown, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education where students will have an opportunity to meet with the staff of the School Library Services Division and the Certification Office.

**The Practicum:**

Students who are not school librarians are required to complete a 100 hour residency, 60 hours of which must be in continuous service. Students will be responsible for identifying a school librarian who meets specified criteria to serve as their mentor. Mentors will be given online access to Module Six. Background information on the program, the teachers, the curriculum, and the resources that the students have been exposed to as they moved through their program, is presented in this module. Dr. Dorwart will be working very closely with the mentors and will serve as the key contact person in all matters dealing

with the practicum. For more information about this course, contact Doris Dorwart at [d.dorwart@worldnet.att.net](mailto:d.dorwart@worldnet.att.net) or call (717) 569-8838

**SPRING 2002 REGISTRATION**

**Any students who have not already registered for the spring 2002 semester must contact Doris Dorwart by e-mail in order to register. Classes begin January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2002 and seats are filling up rapidly. If you want to register, send an e-mail to Dr. Dorwart at [d.dorwart@worldnet.att.net](mailto:d.dorwart@worldnet.att.net) and she will process the paperwork.**