

**Instructor Satisfaction in University of California Extension's
Online Writing Curriculum**

by

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Introduction

The courses selected for this case study reflect the University of California Extension's entire online program, in that they comprise a broad selection of college- and professional-level courses organized in course sequences and certificate programs. Fourteen courses are reviewed here; they range from freshman-level composition and literature courses, to sequences in business writing and English as a Second Language. Eight courses were modified from existing independent learning courses, and six others had been taught in the classroom before being developed for online delivery. (In other parts of the online program, courses are sometimes developed *de novo* for the online curriculum; for example, courses about using the Internet in various disciplines.) Most of the courses are taught via America Online, but two courses are offered at UC Extension Online's Internet site—one in ESL, and another in advanced technical communications. The courses have been developed over the last four years as part of the development of UC Extension's online program, with substantial Alfred P. Sloan Foundation funding.

Rationale

UC Extension has over a century of experience designing and offering relevant, high-quality continuing education in both classroom and independent learning formats. It has extensive experience in creating certificate programs and other post-baccalaureate training that responds to adults' needs for highly focused, current knowledge that is applicable on the job. Developing an online program has been a logical step in fulfilling our goals of reaching students where they are, and using technology in program delivery.

When considering the suitability of a course for online development, we use the same criteria that Extension programmers have used for decades. However, because online delivery encompasses many factors that differ from those required of classroom delivery (greater expense, international market, and computer aptitude), we have developed additional criteria by which we judge the suitability of a course for online instruction. Among these are:

- Appropriate for online delivery
- Good classroom enrollments
- Involves a campus course or professor
- Part of a sequence or certificate
- Funds for development available
- Subject of great public (student) interest

We have found that writing courses lend themselves to online delivery because they fit many of the criteria above, and because the flexibility of online delivery broadens the availability to a wide audience of creative people who might not otherwise be able to attend a course.

Background Information

Support is provided to instructors during course design and development as well as throughout their teaching experiences. The course design and development process is a team effort, and includes the curriculum developer, the course author, an instructional designer, a course editor, and a technical staff person. We have found the team approach to be particularly critical when designing an online course. Not only must technical staff get involved in course development at an early stage, but also course authors need to understand how the online features can be used effectively in the learning activities of the courses. This latter point is particularly critical and has important pedagogical implications: in our experience, if a course author is willing to use technology but has little experience doing so, he or she can have considerable difficulty developing meaningful learning activities using online course features. An instructional designer

well versed in the capabilities of the online features can provide valuable assistance to the course author in designing an online course that takes optimum advantage of the various online program elements. Extensive one-on-one interactions with the instructional designer are supplemented by online information and resources about course development and online teaching, and by periodic workshops which address a variety of issues related to online instruction.

Based on our early experiences, we have developed and implemented online course development guidelines for use by instructors as they design their courses. The guidelines provide copious examples from existing courses, as well as a standard format for course design; it is our expectation that the guidelines will assist instructors in developing courses that, from the outset, more appropriately incorporate our design features.

The writing and composition courses are:

Technical and Business Writing

- Technical Writing
- Technical Communication II
- Business Writing Review
- Practical Grammar for Writers and Editors

Creative Writing

- Exploring Your Creative Writing Potential
- Creative Nonfiction Workshop
- Writing the Short Story
- Popular Forms of Fiction
- Developing the Novel

Composition and Literature

- Introductory Composition
- Composition and Literature
- Writing a Successful Essay

English as a Second Language (ESL)

- Grammar and Writing for Business
- Writing for Professionals

Instructors are selected, oriented, coached, and monitored by our Instructional Support Specialist who has primary academic responsibility for ongoing course instruction, monitoring all courses for quality control, and resolving issues or coordinating their resolution with programming staff as appropriate. She monitors, coaches, and evaluates instructors; participates in the development of training activities for instructors; conducts program evaluation; monitors and resolves student problems; serves as a resource person to other staff; and determines the appropriate disposition of student and instructor technical questions.

Instructor Selection. Instructors are chosen for the online program based on their expertise in the content area, their teaching experience, and their interest in developing and teaching an online course. Because Extension courses are often designed for adult professionals, "real-world" experience combined with the appropriate academic preparation is critical. While we may seek ladder-rank UC faculty to teach certain online courses, we more frequently find that practicing professionals and faculty from other institutions are more available and, in some instances, more appropriately prepared to teach a particular course.

The instructors in the English composition and creative and professional writing curricula had previously been independent learning or Extension classroom instructors, or were recruited specifically to teach the online courses. Some instructors teach more than one course, although seldom do online instructors teach more than three. The instructors bring a wide variety of backgrounds, experience, and academic preparation to the online program:

BRIA, Suzanne
Business Writing Review
Writing a Successful Essay

Ms. Bria holds an MA in English from Sonoma State University, and a California Community College Teaching Credential in Language Arts and Literature. Ms. Bria has been a Lecturer in English at the University of California at Berkeley Extension Program, and an Adjunct Professor of English at John F. Kennedy University. She has been both an Instructor Assistant and a Teaching Assistant in English at Sonoma State University, and has worked as a Student Affairs Officer at the College of Letters and Science, University of California at Berkeley. Ms. Bria has developed a syllabus for a Master of Arts in Teaching six-unit thesis course, as well as courses in Freshman Reading and Composition.

DRISCOLL, John
Grammar and Writing for Business

Dr. Driscoll holds a Ph.D. in English and Linguistics from Uppsala University, Sweden; and an MA in American Literature from Sussex University, England. He has been Academic Director at Master Projects, Inc. in Singapore, and Director of the English Language Skills Center at Golden Gate University. Dr. Driscoll has also taught English at the University of San Francisco, ESL/Literacy Methodology at UC Berkeley Extension; and English as a Foreign language at University Extension college in Uppsala, and at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas. He is also the author of the *Accelerated English* CD-ROM interactive TOEFL Preparation Course (Disks 1-4), published by CPI/Harcourt Brace.

EVANISKO, Joseph N.
Writing the Short Story
Popular Forms of Fiction

Mr. Evanisko holds an MA in Writing from the University of San Francisco, with emphasis in teaching fiction, nonfiction, and narrative writing. He has taught College Writing I and II for the Expository Writing Department at the University of San Francisco, and has worked as a volunteer and substitute teacher in the Sonoma County school system. Mr. Evanisko is a member of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the Modern Language Association.

GANNAWAY, Gloria
Creative Nonfiction Workshop

Dr. Gannaway holds a Ph.D. in English/Rhetoric from the University of Texas at Austin. She is currently an instructor with the Academic Talent Program at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education, and has also been an Adjunct Lecturer for UC Berkeley's College Writing Programs. In addition, Dr. Gannaway taught English at the University of Texas at Austin, the

University of Mississippi, Northeastern University, and Cukorova University in Adana, Turkey. She is the author of Transforming Mind: A Critical Cognitive Activity (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1994), and has worked as a technical writing consultant for Applied Research Laboratories at the University of Texas, and for Apple Computer.

GILBERT, Rondi
Writing for Professionals

Ms. Gilbert holds an MA in English from the University of California at Berkeley. She has taught “English and Writing Skills for Non-Native Speakers,” “Composition for Students,” and “Writing Skills for UC Berkeley Staff” at UC Extension for almost twenty years. Ms. Gilbert has also trained others to teach English Composition in Tutorial Practicum courses, and has coordinated preparation courses for the GMAT, LSAT and GRE since 1979. Currently she is an Academic Coordinator, Research Coordinator and Principle Analyst at UC Berkeley’s McNair Scholars Program, as well as the Educational Technology Coordinator at the Student Learning Center.

HARTLEY, Denise
Exploring Your Creative Writing Potential

Ms. Hartley holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Mills College, and a BA in English/Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. She has been an Instructor in English at Pierce College in Tacoma, Washington, where she also served on the Distance Learning Committee and the English Outline Revision Committee. Ms. Hartley has also taught English at Diablo Valley College, Las Positas College and Ohlone Valley College in California, and has worked as a journalism coach at California State University at Hayward, and as a guest lecturer at Mills College.

PRICE, Georgia
Practical Grammar for Writers and Editors

Ms. Price holds an MA in English (Teaching of Writing and Literature) from George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. She is currently a project manager and writing instructor at PeopleSoft Inc. in Pleasanton, California, where she has produced print and online implementation materials, and taught “Effective Writing” seminars to employees. Ms. Price is also a writing instructor with University of California, Berkeley Extension, and has taught writing and editing to students both in classroom and online environments. Previously, Ms. Price has worked as a writing center tutor at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia; a reporter for the Fredericksburg *Free-Lance Star*; and a writer/editor at Stewart Communication Associates.

SOLES, Carol
Developing the Novel

Ms. Soles holds an MA from the University of Toronto in French Drama, and has done Ph.D. work in French Literature. She also possesses an “A-Certificate” teaching credential from the Ontario College of Education. Since 1991, she has taught the self-designed “How to Write a Novel” course at George Brown College, and has also conducted the “Nomads Writing Workshop,” as well as creative writing and French language classes at Seneca College. Ms. Soles has appeared as a guest panelist and workshop facilitator at a variety of fantasy and science fiction conventions.

TABOR, John
Technical Writing
Technical Communication II

Mr. Tabor holds a BA in English (with a Writing emphasis) from Loyola Marymount University. The author of more than 300 technical manuals, Mr. Tabor has taught technical writing at the UC Center for Media & Independent Learning, and is a consultant to various corporate and government clients for John Tabor Publications. Mr. Tabor is a Senior Member of the Society for Technical Communication, and the Editor of the Southern California Paleontological Society Journal.

TOMBLESON, Gary
Introductory Composition
Composition and Literature

Dr. Tombleson holds a Ph.D. from the University of California at San Diego, and a Masters in Library Science from UC Berkeley. He is currently Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Humanities at Armstrong University in Berkeley, California, where he previously held the posts of University Librarian and Dean of Instruction. Since 1980, Dr. Tombleson has been an instructor in the novel and composition at the University of California, Berkeley Extension. Dr. Tombleson is also an Adjunct Assistant Professor in Library Science and English at Chapman College, and has been a Lecturer in English at the University of San Diego.

Transfer of Teaching Skills. While it is natural to assume that great classroom instructors will be able to transfer their teaching skills to online delivery, we have found that this is not always the case. Online delivery of a course requires that the instructor be able to write down every word of a lecture. The instructor must take the bare bones of a course outline and infuse it with words and examples that bring it to life. In addition to being able to clearly articulate concepts and ideas, the instructor must be able to look at a course she or he may have taught for years and find

completely new ways to achieve course objectives. The online instructor must be a creative writer and thinker.

Instructor Computer Literacy. Our experience further tells us that the qualified online instructor must possess an above average degree of computer literacy at the time of undertaking the course design. We have found that instructors who have weak computer skills are often unable to master the complexities of online course delivery.

Of the nine responding instructors, only three had not used computers in their classroom teaching. But even these were computer literate, having used computers for their own research or writing. The other six instructors had involved information technology in some aspect in their classrooms. They reported using web pages to support their classroom teaching, using campus computer labs as part of the course, and assigning students to use the Internet for course research.

Extension's Audience. UC Extension's audience is largely comprised of college-educated working adults who are seeking professional development, career change, or personal enrichment. Online students tend to be people who cannot attend regularly scheduled classes because of work or travel schedules, family commitments, or a preference to study at times and places of their own choosing. More than 3,000 students have enrolled since the program's launch in January 1996. Currently, about two-thirds of the students enrolled in UC Extension Online are from California, with the remaining students from 46 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and countries such as Russia, Mexico, Japan, and Canada.

The number of students in a course can range from one or two, to more than fifty. Our enrollment projections were originally based on 1.67 enrollments per course per month. Recent data indicates that we are seeing a "build" effect which we believe can be attributed to having more courses from which students can choose: the average number of enrollments per course per month in 1998 was 2.0, compared to 1.42 in 1997 and 1.03 in 1996. Thus, our current goal for each course is an enrollment of 24 students annually; our hope is that, over time, enrollments will

build to considerably higher levels. Of the fourteen writing courses, three have reached or exceeded that enrollment goal and two more had 23 enrollments this year. Average annual course enrollment in the writing courses is 14, lower than our overall average. (Our strongest enrollments are in computer science, engineering, and business courses.)

Method

Content Delivery. Courses are typically delivered asynchronously; most are delivered via America Online, and the writing curriculum is no exception. Of the courses under discussion here, twelve are offered via America Online while the other two are delivered via UC Extension Online's Internet site. Thirteen are open to enrollment at any time, on a rolling enrollment basis, while one is offered in a cohort, fixed-date format. The cohort course, "Writing for Professionals," has been offered three times since its development in July 1998.

"Grammar and Writing for Business" was initially offered as a cohort course. We attempted to offer it three times; however, we only secured sufficient enrollments once and had to cancel the course the other two times. Therefore, we modified the course to make it available on a rolling-enrollment basis in order to attract more enrollments over time.

America Online. At the outset of our project, we selected America Online (AOL) as the service provider for UC Extension Online. Because of the rapidity of technological change, we opted to focus our attentions initially on the curricular and program support components of an online program. This required that we find an appropriate existing delivery system to provide connectivity for our students and instructors.

AOL was a strong candidate for a number of reasons. Their interface is intuitive and easy to use. The system runs on all major hardware platforms and is available nationwide (and beyond). They provide technical support to users via an 800 number. Users have Internet access, and we can also provide course-specific software and services. We also have found that AOL subscribers are

demographically similar to Extension students in their educational levels, income, and age. And because AOL is market-driven, they are incorporating new technologies such as Java, streaming audio, and streaming video as the installed user base acquires equipment sophisticated enough to access them.

Internet Program Site. With our program infrastructure and basic processes in place, in March 1998 we built our own Internet program site with essentially the same online features as the America Online program site. The site serves as a delivery mechanism primarily for courses designed for Internet-proficient audiences; for example, engineering and computer sciences. We have also used the site to deliver regional programming such as curricula, and courses designed for State of California licensure or credentialing requirements. Additionally, the option of delivering courses directly on the Internet opens international markets that currently have limited connection to AOL; the writing sequence for ESL students is a good example of courses appropriately delivered via the Internet. We have one ESL course on our Internet site and plan to add others in the future.

Online Course Features. The primary objectives of UC's online format are communication, interaction, and access to resources. Our online courses require individual study and one-on-one interaction with the course instructor, and online contact with other students. They may also require online group activities. In addition to submitting course assignments to the instructor, the student participates in class discussions and other online activities designed especially for the course. The student is required to demonstrate mastery of the course material through original work on course assignments and projects and, in most courses, by sitting for a proctored final examination.

Courses are largely text-based in order to be accessible to the widest audience possible; this is particularly true of the writing courses. Course materials include an online syllabus with links to related study resources; lecture notes, typically online and sometimes additionally printed when extensive; textbooks; and supplementary materials such as videotapes, software, or other learning

aids. Course materials that are not posted online are shipped to the student when he or she enrolls.

A number of the writing courses use Web links extensively for specific course materials and for more general reference materials. In a number of the courses students engage in research on the Internet as part of their studies.

“Writing for Professionals” has an added feature on its opening page: an audio welcome message from the instructor. In addition, at several points during the course, the instructor has recorded audio clips illustrating key concepts for non-native English speakers. This course won a Meritorious Course Award from UCEA’s Division of Independent Study, in part due to its thoughtful use of audio.

Technology and Infrastructure. AOL courses are mounted using the service's proprietary software and delivered via AOL. Internet courses are mounted using NetObjects Fusion, and delivered using Netscape Collabra for message boards and I-Chat for the live chat feature. The network is currently comprised of three Windows NT servers, one UNIX server, and one Macintosh server. The servers run Netscape Enterprise, Netscape Collabra, Netscape Directory, I-Chat, and RealMedia software.

Generally speaking, technical support for AOL courses is provided by AOL, while CMIL staff provides support for Internet courses. We provide instructors teaching via AOL with a resource manual about using AOL, and provide online technical information for our Internet site to those using the Internet for instruction. However, we work very closely with each instructor to ensure that his or her comfort level with technology is sufficient to satisfactorily teach the course.

Course Production and Costs. We currently are budgeting \$20,000 per course, which includes course design and development, technical infrastructure support, and marketing. However, the per-course development cost is variable depending upon the scope of the course; the amount of

instructional design, writing, and editing required; the technological features incorporated; the ability of the instructor to write appropriate course notes, identify Web resources, and develop other course features such as message board threads; and the extent of coordination of team members.

Because the writing courses are heavily text-based, they involved less production time than many of our other courses. The exception to this was the Writing for Professionals course with its audio features. However, we are encountering in this curriculum—as in others in the program—the need for regular modification of courses added to our inventory.

Generally, course maintenance falls into two categories: labor-intensive activities such as revisions necessitated by textbook edition updates, instructor revisions of course content, finding and training replacement instructors, and course rewrites (this primarily occurred in redesigning the early online courses to our improved course design). Additional, less labor-intensive “fixes” include deleting/changing dead links, adding second sections of courses, catalog changes, and debugging.

We have done major maintenance work on ten writing courses during the project, with an estimated average of 40 hours of production work per course. We revised the content of three courses, modified “Grammar and Writing for Business” from fixed-date format to asynchronous format, and modified six other courses to reflect new instructor information due to instructor replacements.

The fixed-date writing course, “Writing for Professionals,” requires maintenance each time it is re-offered, and our goal is to offer it two or three times annually. We are developing strategies for streamlining fixed-date repostings; however, we expect that the maintenance work on these courses will be at least 20 hours per re-offering (it currently ranges between 30 and 60 hours per course).

Results

For this study, we conducted an informal survey of the writing instructors. Nine of the ten instructors were able to respond. Our questions and a summary of their responses follows:

Why did you want to develop and teach an online course?

Instructors indicated an interest in professional development and an interest in technology and trying a new way of teaching and learning:

“Online is a new and growing phenomenon; teaching online is being promoted at most colleges now...looking for teachers willing to...and who have had experience.”

They felt that online delivery was particularly appropriate for writing courses. They also wanted to reach more students, and saw online delivery as a way to accomplish that. One instructor expressed interest in seeing how students would react to online course delivery.

Did you have any experience with using information technology in your courses before teaching an online course?

Instructors gave a wide range of responses, from one instructor who had experience only with her personal computer, to several who use selected online features such as online research in their classroom courses, to two instructors who had extensive experience with computers in the classroom.

Did you find the training adequate? Do you have any recommendations regarding training?

Response to this question was generally positive. Recommendations included developing a stronger community among instructors and providing a handbook for online training.

How have you had to adapt your teaching for online delivery?

Instructors reported extensive modification of their teaching approaches for online delivery. They commented on needing to provide lots of motivation for students, the amount of writing they are doing to engage students appropriately, and the amount of time their teaching takes. A comment peculiar to the writing courses was what one instructor observed as the difficulties demonstrating editorial suggestions online. Another instructor has identified the following teaching strategy:

“...encourage students to connect with each other. Usually they bond with two other students. This makes the class feel more like a community, less like a private tutoring session.”

How satisfied are you with your online teaching experience?

Instructors reported being generally satisfied with the experience: six gave strong “yes” responses while three others expressed mixed reactions, identifying concerns related to lack of student motivation (and thus, dropouts or nonstarts), difficulties adjusting to asynchronous course delivery, and compensation.

Please discuss your experience with technology, such as e-mail, message board, and chat room in this course.

Instructors reported generally positive reactions to the use of message boards in their courses and uniformly found e-mail satisfactory. However, many reported less than satisfactory experiences with the live chat feature, often due to lack of participation, and found its use very limited in their courses:

“Message board is a decent substitute for discussions. Chat—forget it; can’t accommodate enough students.”

One instructor did report using chats successfully for one-on-one discussions with individual students.

*How would you rate the importance of the following components of the instructional process?
(1-5 scale, 1-very important; N/A-not applicable)*

Instructors ranked course components in the following order of importance in the courses:

Graded assignments	Average 1.6; range 1-4
Informal interactions	Average 1.7; range 1-3
Message boards	Average 1.9; range 1-5
Web resources	Average 2.2; range 1-4, N/A
Group projects	Average 3.0; range 1-5, N/A
Chat room	Average 3.4; range 1-5, N/A

What have been the advantages and drawbacks of using technology in instruction?

Instructors commented on the flexibility of the online approach for both students and themselves, and the fact that teachers "...can be anywhere and do this online." They also were pleased with the number of students they've reached and their access to different sorts of students.

In terms of negatives, they commented on the time it takes to adequately respond to students online, difficulties fitting in their online teaching with their other commitments, and the lack of group interaction in some courses. One instructor commented on the possibility for confusion on the part of students and instructors: "Not all students have higher technology; students don't know how they are supposed to learn."

How has the workload for teaching this course compared to your workload in other courses?

Two instructors reported the workload to be the same and four reported that teaching online is more work than traditional instruction. Three others indicated that the workloads are not comparable, or had been very variable.

To what do you attribute your answer?

Instructors commented on the closer, more intense interactions with students, the need to provide more individualized responses, the students' expectations of rapid response, the longer time it takes to develop rapport and the fact that students turn to the instructor more for support than in a classroom.

What have you liked most about teaching online?

Instructors like the flexibility and access to students who normally could not attend their courses, the variety of students (in terms of age, ethnicity, geographical location), the closer and more intense dialogue with students, and the strong work submitted by students. They observed that they had noted increased confidence both on the part of students, and in themselves. One instructor commented, "...online learning allows students to stretch themselves more than in a traditional classroom."

What have you liked least about teaching online?

Instructors reported frustration with not being able to see students, lack of participation comparable to a classroom situation, the added instructional time required, and students' expectations for fast responses, and compensation. One instructor sees technology as a hindrance, not an aid, and also reported concerns about teaching in a rolling-enrollment environment.

Do you like teaching online courses as much as traditional courses?

Six instructors report that they like teaching online as much as teaching traditionally; three instructors prefer traditional teaching.

Would you recommend online teaching to a colleague? Have you done so?

Six say “yes,” three say “maybe” to the first part of the question. The latter response was given by instructors who didn’t feel they had sufficient experience yet to decide, and by those who felt that the teaching approach would be suitable to only certain types of instructors: “Would recommend to people who like using PCs, but would also warn of additional time constraints.”

Of those who responded regarding whether or not they have recommended online teaching to a colleague, six have done so and one has not. One instructor said s/he “supports diversity of teaching styles and learning opportunities as best for students. The more online instructors, the better.”

What changes in course development and delivery do you suggest?

Instructors gave a variety of suggestions on a wide range of matters including interface design, course design, technical features, instructor payment, and study time limits.

Obstacles to Adoption. The lack of face-to-face interaction may be an obstacle to adoption of ALN by some instructors; it was the most pervasive theme of concern expressed in our survey. In addition, for those instructors who perceive the workload to be greater than in their other teaching experiences, compensation is seen as inadequate.

Practices. Based on instructor feedback and our observations, our most effective practices have been a strong course development process and good instructor training. Problematic practices include the chat feature and instructor pay.

Critical Factors. Both programmatic and individual course critical factors can be identified. At the program level, we note the following critical factors:

Course selection

Marketing

Interface design

Reliability of technology, both server robustness and selection of software for course features

Administrative support of instructors

Administrative support of students

For individual courses, we have identified the following critical factors:

Instructor responsiveness

Instructor technical proficiency

Student technical proficiency

Reliability of technology, both server robustness and selection of course feature software

Support of instructors, both technical and administrative

Support of students, both technical and administrative

Course design

Instructor compensation