Book Review: 'The Basic Communication Course Online: Scholarship and Application'

Paul J. Siddens III  
*University of Northern Iowa*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca](http://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca)  
Part of the Higher Education Commons, Interpersonal and Small Group Communication Commons, Mass Communication Commons, Other Communication Commons, and the Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons

**Recommended Citation**  
Available at: [http://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol19/iss1/12](http://ecommons.udayton.edu/bcca/vol19/iss1/12)
Book Review

Paul J. Siddens III


“"The debate over whether the basic communication course should be taught online is over. Despite our reservations, we have . . . successfully created and taught the basic course as distance learning."

This first sentence in co-editor Lisa Goodnight’s preface to this source book succinctly summarizes its theme: We are past the point of debating the issue of teaching the basic course online. It is now time to ensure that we engage in this process in a meaningful, academically sound, and productive manner. As the editors point out, instructors are more and more interested in applying the use of online and other technologies to the basic course for many reasons: Some are required to do this by their institutions, some see pedagogical advantages to this and pursue it as part of their own course development, and yet others do not want to create full internet or distance learning courses, but want to use technologically based modules, units or activities in their courses. Goodnight also notes in her preface that as of 2006 “somewhere between two and five million students will be taking at least one course via the
internet.” All these factors contribute to our need to address this issue as basic course administrators and instructors.

Goodnight and Wallace provide a starting point for this dialogue in their source book, The Basic Communication Course Online: Scholarship and Application. While this book is far more weighted toward application than it is toward scholarship, it provides many interesting access points into this process of adapting the basic course from a conventional face-to-face frame to more technologically advanced ways of approaching the course. Overall the articles are brief introductions to the topics they explore, but they all raise issues that are worth further consideration.

This edited text is organized in three sections. The first section features three manuscripts that provide a general look at how the Internet and computer technology can be used to teach the basic course. The second section describes three specific models that have been used at selected institutions for teaching the basic course online. And, the third section focuses on four manuscripts providing specific strategies that have been used in teaching the basic course online, or in applying technology to the basic course.

In the first section, Co-editor Wallace begins by examining some ways that instructors can use computers in teaching the basic course. Wallace focuses particularly on the issue of time in the basic course, and how hard it is to accomplish all the goals we intend, especially for the hybrid version of the course. He then outlines several examples of how course activities can be done online to help use time more efficiently in the course, noting in most cases advantages and disadvan-
tages of this approach. Jennifer Cochrane then looks at the differences instructors encounter in interacting with students online compared to face-to-face communication. Cochrane defines computer-mediated communication (CMC), looking specifically at how communicating with students via computer can change the strength and meaning of messages. She then discusses three major ways that CMC potentially intensifies our interaction with students, offering examples and suggestions for managing communication with students via computer. Keith Kropp then describes how course management software packages function, provides some issues to consider when creating a course web site, and advocates for Kendall Hunt’s WebCOM program. Kropp’s manuscript is mainly a sales presentation designed to encourage the reader to use the publishers software program rather than other programs available such as Blackboard or WebCT. Wallace and Cochrane provide an appropriate and useful general introduction to the topic of this source book, but Kropp’s contribution is far less satisfying. An unbiased look at course management systems would have been far more appreciated than a sales presentation advocating a Kendall Hunt product.

In the second section, Deanna Sellnow and Kristen Gullicks start by describing why and how the public speaking basic course was converted and taught online at North Dakota State University. The authors also share information concerning how the course evolved as it was initially taught online. Ellen Bremen then outlines how the public speaking basic course is taught online at Highline Community College. Bremen focuses on the problems of converting the course to an online for-
mat, as well as the eventual advantages, and briefly looks at the ramifications of making these decisions at other institutions. Lynda Willer from Purdue University’s Calumet campus then explains how their hybrid basic course is taught online. Willer explains the rationale for creating the online course, describes the on-campus sessions for the course, then explains how the online portion of the course functions. It is interesting and useful to be able to compare and contrast these three different experiences with developing and conducting the basic course online. While brief and basic, each manuscript still demonstrates the advantages and disadvantages of going through this process of conversion, and provides realistic, understandable snapshots of these experiences for the consideration of others.

In the third section, Krista Longtin and Kate Thedwall describe how discussion forum assignments are created and administered in their basic course program to encourage participation in the course among students. Longtin and Thedwall offer observations related to assessing these assignments, and benefits and hurdles related to working with these assignments for students and faculty alike. April Chatham-Carpenter then outlines the process of creating three “virtual” mass lectures for use in teaching the hybrid basic course. In particular, she examines the role that a University’s Instructional Technology staff can play in developing technological applications for classes. Goodnight and Pamela Daniel then discuss the process of creating a sense of community among students in online classes. They define community and describe ways that instructors and students can foster community in online classes. And, Shannon Borke VanHorn then describes
how she enhances her face-to-face basic course sections with online resources. She outlines several ways to adapt common course features such as lectures, activities and quizzes to the web. One particular value of VanHorn’s article, and this section of the source book in general, is the demonstration of the fact that the application of technology to the basic course can be done in smaller portions. Technology can play a role as a carefully planned, strategic, but limited, part of face-to-face sections of the basic course, as well as being a central part of the course, as in sections that are entirely web-based or distance education centered.

This source book provides some interesting insights into the beginning of the process of advancing the basic course through technology. In some cases administrators, or circumstances, will demand we apply technology to the courses we teach. In some cases we will make those decisions ourselves. But, no matter how we arrive at the conclusion to use technology in our courses we still have to do it in a meaningful, pedagogically sound manner. One consistent pattern in this source book is the careful and thoughtful planning that has gone into the application of technology to the basic course by all of these instructors. We also benefit from the honesty of these technological pioneers, who warn us of the pitfalls and problems they have encountered in this process, as well as the advantages and positive aspects of applying technology to the basic course.