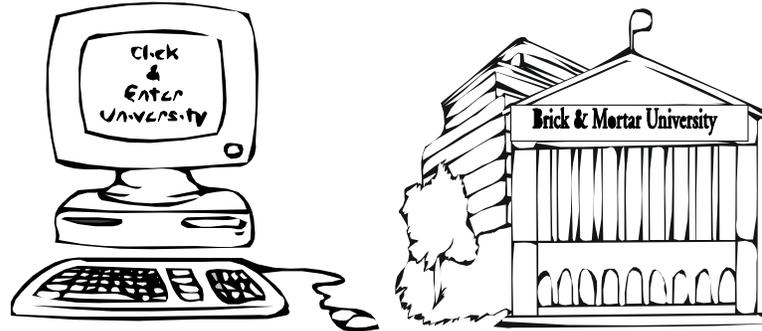


## Part 1

### Teaching in Cyberspace - Brick and Mortar to Click and Enter

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The academic doors of continuing education are now open to anyone that chooses to enter and the barriers to quality education have been broken down as technology makes it possible to learn from any place and at any time through the doors of the virtual university. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, there are 2.6 million on-line students projected in the next year alone and there are not enough qualified teachers to accommodate those students! If you have a graduate degree, you have the credentials to teach and series of articles presented in “Inside Higher Ed” will provide the information that you need to get an adjunct position as an on-line instructor.

#### ***A Brief Introduction***

Allow me to take a moment to introduce myself. I am Christina Anastasia, a virtual instructor of organization development, behavior, diversity, human resources, and change management. I also dabble in basic business principles and presentations on occasion as well. I received my Masters degree in organizational management from the University of Phoenix in 2001 and began my journey pounding the virtual pavement in search of an adjunct position with a virtual university shortly thereafter.

It only took three years to finally get my very tired foot in the virtual door, but once I was given the chance to teach online, I took advantage of every opportunity to learn from experiences, students, colleagues, and literature to increase my skills.

Today I teach for several universities both on-line and traditional, was nominated mentor of the year in 2005 for Colorado Technical University and selected as the first virtual instructor to ever receive the “Educator of the Year” award or Career Education Corporation.. Let me tell you, no one knows quite what to do with a virtual educator that has received an award traditionally given to brick and mortar instructors. Ok, so I am a little driven! Look at it this way, my drive is your gain because in the articles that follow I will show you the tricks for getting hired at a virtual university and how to be the best teacher you can be in the process.

As a doctoral learner and college instructor, my life evolves around education both personally and professionally. I have had over two thousand students pass through my virtual classroom. Here are some of the comments that my students have made:

*...I feel that you are indeed a conscientious teacher - knowledgeable and compassionate, with you placing your students first. .... Lynny*



*...I just wanted to take a moment and tell you how much I enjoyed this course. Your method of teaching, your live chat content, and your constant encouragement to us (and me) was just lovely. I feel better prepared to face the next steps. ....Jennie*

*..... I honestly feel you go above and beyond in your efforts for your class. I think a coffee cup couldn't be confused on how you grade a paper or any of the other preparations you made sure we have for the beginning, middle and toward the end of the class. ... You should know that people appreciate your efforts!! ....Gerald*

*...There is a difference in being a teacher and going the extra mile. You have seen to it that all of your students have all of the information necessary in as many forms as you could have. You have done everything that I expect from a professor and then some. We do not get that out of many of the instructors that we have had so far. You obviously care about whether we actually learned anything from class and have done a marvelous job. .... Joe*

The majority of my students are adult learners that bring knowledge, skills, and experience into the classroom. I look at each new class as an opportunity not just to teach, but also to learn, and ironically, it is a simple process. In the field of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one of the factors for success is the ability to teach for real world applications.

### ***Transitioning from traditional to virtual – Brick and Mortar to Click and Enter***

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the one thing that remains constant is change. Technological advances have made it possible to go global overnight with the click of a mouse. Where travel and telephone once connected the world, today the internet brings together people from each corner of the globe.

Obviously, the transition is affecting the way we learn and teach as well. In 1992, when I returned to school at the age of 32, there were no adult-focused programs available, the average age of my classmates was 18 years, most of which were attending college on athletic scholarships. Talk about a culture shock, and once I overcame the urge to powder and diaper my classmates I realized that my desire to learn was the most important driver in my life.

Entering into a Business Administration Bachelors degree program brought on a new type of academic environment. This time I opted for a relatively new program that catered to adult learners. The program required the learners to be over 25 years of age and a minimum of five years of professional experience was mandatory to enter into the program. Each student even received a laptop computer with new windows 3.1 operating system (*What can I say? Technology was still in its infancy!*).

In the early nineties there were still no virtual classes however, the andragogical methods of the university required students to work as a team for two years. My team studied together, created presentations, and worked together for the entire program. This environment, which was considered cutting edge at the time, was perfect for those of us wanting to increase our skills and knowledge in a manner that was applicable to our real world professions. In addition, we worked in an environment

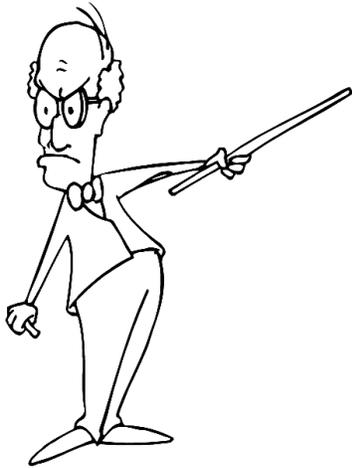
of individuals that shared a common purpose, to advance our careers. This experience set the foundation for my own philosophies as an instructor.

Officially having been bit by the academic achievement bug, I decided to attend the University of Phoenix to obtain my Masters degree in Organizational Management. In 1999, the concept of learning online was very new, but being the innovator that I am, I decided to give it a whirl. The online program at University of Phoenix consisted of a web page that offered information, including grades, services, publications, links, tools and resource information. The syllabus and class schedule were also on the web site. The idea was fabulous, albeit the school's technology was far beyond the technology of the instructors making the exchange of documents a bit of an adventure in creativity. For those instructors that understood how to use email (and we are talking dial-up here) papers could be exchanged on the email server offered by the school. However, for the not so technologically savvy instructors, faxing papers was the method of feedback, and oh yes, back then we still had a thermal fax!!

The learning program itself, required vast amounts of reading for comprehension because at the time there were no live lectures or discussion board threads. It was up to me as the student to learn the material from the literature and up to my professors to assess my learning progress through essay after essay. This went on for about 15 months until I finally emailed and faxed my way into a Masters degree in 2001. Needless to say, this is the primitive example of asynchronus virtual learning and I have no regrets as a participant in this new revolution in academics. Obviously, things have changed quite a bit since then and we can thank schools like UOP for this pioneering effort that literally opened the door for virtual education.

Today virtual learning is reaching the point of technical advancement in which the only thing missing from the equation is the physical classroom. But more about that later. We have the technology, and we are just learning how to make it work.

## What's the big deal I've been teaching for years?



For those of you that have traditional teaching experience, do not assume that if you can do one that you are suited to doing the other without some preparation and understanding of how the two environments differ. We will discuss this later on in the series.

The one thing that virtual instructors and traditional instructors do have in common is the fact that we have experience, skills, and knowledge to share with learners. Those of you that have worked with younger learners fresh out of high school may approach secondary education differently than those of us that work with a majority of adult learners. The environments are different and that does not make one preferable to the other. It simply shows that the environments are different and as instructors we need to make adjustments to the environment that allow us to do what we do best, teach.

Then there are those of you that have had the privilege of working with both young and adult learners. You know the differences and understand the adjustments that must be made to accommodate different types of learners and their learning styles. I bring up this point because in the traditional brick and mortar environment, our students have faces that we can see and use words we can hear. We see their expressions, body language, and here their voices and tones. We form opinions, whether we want to or not, about their appearance and stature. We look to see who is popular and who is shy; who the natural leaders are as well as the followers; we are a part of the culture that is created in that classroom. These actions arise out of human nature and behavior.

In the traditional environment, we have the advantage of making judgments based on what we can see and hear. However, when you enter into the virtual classroom these luxuries are not present. You do not see faces, in most cases (I will discuss the exceptions later on) you do not hear voices. All

of a sudden, two of our senses are no longer available to assist us in making judgments or forming opinions.



It's as if though we have just lost part of our eyesight and hearing. If you have taught in the traditional environment for any period of time, you will soon realize that face-to-face contact is actually a perk! In the virtual environment, this is a huge loss, especially for those of you new to the virtual classroom. The question here is how do you adopt what you have been doing to this new environment?

I began my teaching career on-line first and then moved into a traditional classroom. I learned how to teach to students with no face or voice before I realized the beauty of hearing and seeing in a traditional classroom. Talk about a wake up call in reverse! The point is that there is no better experience in the learning environment than the opportunity to work face-to-face with your learners. For this reason, I highly recommend that you attempt to teach a class at a local community college or volunteer to teach. This experience is invaluable to forming who you are as a teacher.

In a traditional environment versus a virtual environment, changes in methodologies, concepts, and philosophies are happening each day as schools learn how to manage the environment. The more you understand as an instructor, the better you will do in the environment. This is an opportunity to embrace this changing world in your lifetime. For me, this is an amazing journey into the unknown, the untried, and the untested. It's almost like having the opportunity to take a trip on the Starship Enterprise (*and I may be dating myself here*). Beam me up Scotty!

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