THE NEXT STEP: CHANGING COURSES FOR PRESENTATION VIA INTERNET AND/OR TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM USING SYNCHRONOUS COLLABORATION

BY Dr. BRIAN G. MACKIE Assistant Professor, Operations Management and Information Systems, Northern Illinois University DeKalb, IL 60115 e-mail: bmackie@niu.edu

and

Dr. WAYNE E. MACKIE Professor, Finance College of Business & Management Saginaw Valley State University 7400 Bay Road, Saginaw, Mi 48734; e-mail: mackie@svsu.edu

Since 1995, the Investment course presentation at both the graduate and undergraduate level has been continuously changing. Now the course is much more interactive. Here at Saginaw Valley, at the start of the course a disk containing a bookmark file of websites for assessing investment information is distributed to the students. Basic course information is still dispensed by using power point displays and question/answer. In conjunction with the course the students are enrolled in an online product called, 'The Investments Challenge,' an investment simulation utilizing real time inputs both from the players (students) and the exchanges.

The simulation gives the student player an opportunity to invest experimentally with various investment strategies using current market prices. The student player is charged realistic commissions, accures interest on cash balances, and is charged appropriate fees for margin trading, etc..

The items that are missing from the course appear to be:

The ability to be at alternate locations A large amount of student interaction with faculty and other students Access to a continuously improved URL file that is always correct and up to date expanded lecture with the addition of live web sites accessible from the lecture ability to work in groups to evaluate securities and the investment decisions of other group members input into the investment game and evaluate the effects immediately

In a similar fashion the MIS student's classes at Saint Ambrose University lack: The ability to be at alternate locations A large amount of student interaction with faculty and other students To work collaboratively with others whether they are in the same or different locations

We believe that with the technology currently available, it is both possible and appropriate to take the next step, that is, to move the course from a lecture/ Physical lab course to an intranet/internet accessible environment with a high degree of synchronous interaction. There are many tools available to aid in both synchronous and asynchronous collaboration. We are evaluating many web-based tools and will have student and instructor evaluations and recommendations.

The tools include virtual online communities, voice chat, standard chat, integrated tools, meeting tools, group calendars and many others. The features available include:

Synchronized PowerPoint and audio lectures via the internet/intranet Question/Answer sessions via microphone and speakers Interactive PowerPoint displays and/or shared desktops with audio for student teams (groups of 2 – 4 students) that would also allow the faculty to participate The ability to interactively evaluate student understanding as the lecture /discussion continues whether in a single classroom or with students widely dispersed access the course using a computer in a classroom lab or at a remote location work on the same documents at the same time at remote sites converse verbally while using any and all of the above collaborative tools

In this environment the only limitations are:
A computer connected to the internet 26 KBPS modem access or above Sound card with speakers/headphone and microphone An ability to meet for course sessions and group meeting sessions online

To accomplish the above we have evaluated many different products and found a set of products and procedures that would allow us to meet all of the above requirements.

It is interesting to note at this point that the plan and products utilized are applicable to many business settings as well as many courses other then the investment class and MIS classes. The evaluation of products to use and ways to implement the collaboration continually adjust as new products become available. The aim is to show how different tools can be used to facilitate the collaborative environment while keeping the costs low.