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A Project to Foster Spiritual Formation in Online Classrooms

Robert Vaughan

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

A PROJECT TO FOSTER SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN
ONLINE CLASSROOMS

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

ROBERT VAUGHAN

PORTLAND, OREGON

OCTOBER 2008

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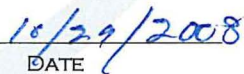
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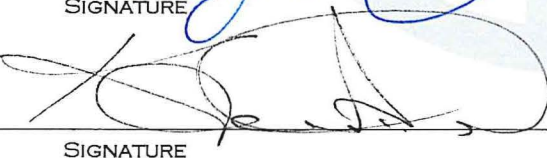
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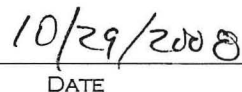
**A PROJECT TO FOSTER SPIRITUAL FORMATION
IN ONLINE CLASSROOMS**

**WE THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ
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FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN
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SECTION 1

ABSTRACT

Online programs are a growing phenomenon in adult education. Many Christian colleges and universities use this method to meet the educational needs of non-traditional students. A drawback of online education is the challenge to address the spiritual needs of students in a virtual environment. This project will propose an approach for fostering spiritual formation in asynchronous, adult online educational programs.

Section 2 will demonstrate the problem of fostering spiritual formation in online environments including the following issues: the demographics of the project, an organizational analysis of the project, and historical timelines of online adult education.

Section 3 will explore how other schools have approached this problem and evaluate their solutions. In addition, it will evaluate the educational level, number of courses, length, content, and educational delivery system of the courses offered as alternative solutions.

Section 4 will substantiate the claims that underlie the approach proposed in this project by presenting educational theory, spiritual formation concepts, and possible tests and measurements. Online students experience spiritual formation, either intentionally or unintentionally. Asynchronous, adult online education provides an opportunity for Christian colleges and universities to reach their online students in a holistic manner.

Section 5 will present the project that was developed. It will also report on the successes and areas of improvement for the project.

Section 6 will present the project specifications including cost, number of students, workload, number of credits, course content, structure, educational aspects, and administrative aspects.

Section 7 will describe effective revisions of the project and will explore the future of online education and spiritual formation.

SECTION 2

THE PROBLEM

The Problem Statement

My research demonstrates that an online college education inadequately fosters spiritual formation in adult learners. Section two will demonstrate this inadequacy by analyzing the 102 schools affiliated with the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities. This project proposes a solution through a course designed to foster spiritual formation in an online educational environment. The ministry problem that this project seeks to address is the conspicuous absence of online spiritual formation courses. While the internet has proven itself to be a useful resource for community building at all levels, yet educational institutions have largely ignored this resource when it comes to developing individual and corporate spiritual formation. Online course offerings are growing at an exponential rate, but there is a dearth of spiritual formation courses available.¹

¹ See page 7 below for further documentation.

The Current State of Online Courses

I had three fundamental questions with respect to online courses in spiritual formation: (1) Do schools that offer online courses include courses in spiritual formation among their offerings? (2) Does the approach used by the schools that offer online courses in spiritual formation differ from the schools lacking such courses? and (3) What are the best practices for creating online courses in spiritual formation? Only schools that maintained membership in the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU) were included in this study. CCCC membership ensures that schools are comparable because they meet the following criteria:

1. Strong commitment to Christ-centered higher education
2. Located in the U.S. or Canada
3. Full regional accreditation (U.S. campuses)
4. Primarily four-year comprehensive colleges and universities
5. Broad curricula rooted in the arts and sciences
6. Christians hired for all full-time faculty and administrative positions
7. Sound finances.²

All 102 schools that are members of CCCC³ are interested in the spiritual development of their students and most offer spiritual formation in face-to-face (F2F) courses in a traditional college setting. Some use a hybrid approach that combines face-to-face and online teaching. Only four schools offer asynchronous spiritual formation courses taught exclusively online. The following chart delineates the possible configurations for fostering spiritual formation:

² Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, "Profile," Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, http://www.cccu.org/about/contentID.0_ChildContentID.2/about.asp (accessed June 26, 2007). For the full requirements of membership, see <http://www.cccu.org/about/contentID.7/about.asp>.

Traditional College Spiritual Formation		Hybrid College Spiritual Formation		Online College Spiritual Formation	
Face to face	Face to face	Online/F2F	Online/F2F	Online	Online
Real time	Real time	Real time	Real time	Asynchronous	Asynchronous
One - one	One - many	One – one	One - many	One - one	One - many
Mentoring, Coaching, Service	Group Bible Study, Chapel, Service	Instant messaging, Web Cam, Phone Calls, Email, Threaded Discussions	Chat rooms, Video Conference, Conference Calls, Email, Threaded Discussions	Email, Threaded Discussions	Email, Threaded Discussions
Spiritual Director	Classroom Setting	Spiritual Director	Classroom Setting	Spiritual Director	Classroom Setting

Figure 1. Approaches to teaching spiritual formation in CCCU member colleges

In order to determine the current state of spiritual formation in online classroom at CCCU schools, I searched all 102 schools for evidence that they offered any online courses. If there was a doubt, I called and spoke with the registrar at the school under consideration. This initial survey revealed that 56 schools offered online courses. Consequently, I searched the catalogues of each of these schools for courses in spiritual formation. Only six of the 56 schools offered courses that dealt specifically with spiritual formation. Of these six, two of them offered hybrid programs that required students to attend face-to-face courses and they were eliminated from this study. If a class appeared to address spiritual formation concepts, but I was unclear on the content, I called the registrar of that school for clarification. Finally, I determined that only four schools

³ Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, "Members," Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, <http://www.cccu.org/about/members.asp> (accessed June 26, 2007).

offered online courses in spiritual formation. This doctoral project focuses on developing a course in spiritual formation in an online, asynchronous classroom setting. Therefore, further examination is limited to the four schools offering asynchronous spiritual formation courses.

Organizational Analysis

Four CCCU schools offer at least one online course in spiritual formation. Three schools offer undergraduate level courses and one school offers graduate level courses. A review of their mission statements reveals that the four schools with online courses in spiritual formation have mission statements phrased similarly to those schools that lack courses in online spiritual formation.⁴ A review of the course descriptions of the asynchronous online spiritual formation courses reveals content similar to those courses in spiritual formation offered only in a real-time classroom format. I concluded that these four schools are attempting to meet the spiritual formation needs of their students in much the same way as the other 98 schools. The only difference is that four schools developed courses to address the specific dynamic of the online environment. Section three will address the course content for the four schools with asynchronous online spiritual formation courses.

⁴ These mission statements can be accessed at the following URLs: Crown College, "The Crown College Mission Statement," Crown College, <http://www.crown.edu/3374.0.html> (accessed July 26, 2007); Dallas Baptist University, "Mission of DBU," Dallas Baptist University, <http://www.dbu.edu/about/mission.asp> (accessed July 26, 2007); Missouri Baptist University, "About MBU," Missouri Baptist University, <http://www.mobap.edu/info/about/mission.asp> (accessed July 26, 2007); and Northwest Nazarene University, "Our History and Purpose: Who We Are," Northwest Nazarene University, <http://www.nnu.edu/2961/> (accessed July 26, 2007).

Historical Timeline of Online Education

The material in this section serves to corroborate my claim that online course offerings are increasing exponentially. Individuals have sought greater spiritual truths through spiritual formation for thousands of years, but asynchronous, online education has existed only since 1997 with the beginning of various learning management systems including Blackboard.⁵ In an article on the history of online education, Jay Cross describes the pre-history of online education and charts the progression from computer-based training (CBT) where individuals sat alone with a CD-Rom and tried to gain information to the recent developments in learning management systems (LMS).⁶ In the most recent Sloan-C⁷ report, Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman provide the results of nationwide surveys and demonstrate that enrollment in online courses is continuing to grow. In the fall term of 2004, 2.3 million students enrolled in at least one online course, and 3.2 million enrolled in at least one online course in the fall of 2005. This increase is more than twice the number added in any prior year.⁸

⁵ Blackboard Company, "Elevating Education," Blackboard Company, <http://www.blackboard.com/company> (accessed July 26, 2007). While there were a variety of learning management systems (LMS) being used, Blackboard claims to be the first one to integrate the use of the internet and modern online learning techniques such as discussion boards, grading, and communication capabilities.

⁶ Jay Cross, "An Informal History of eLearning," *On the Horizon* 12 (November 2004): 103-110, [http://www.internetttime.com/Learning/articles/An%20Informal %20History%20of%20eLearning.pdf](http://www.internetttime.com/Learning/articles/An%20Informal%20History%20of%20eLearning.pdf) (accessed July 26, 2007).

⁷ Sloan-C is explained on page 24, footnote 30.

⁸ Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, *Making the Grade: Online Education in the United States, 2006* (Needham, MA: Sloan-C), 2006, http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/survey/pdf/making_the_grade.pdf (accessed July 26, 2007).

This section demonstrated that while online course offerings have increased at a remarkable pace, a number of online spiritual formation courses are just beginning to be developed. There is an opportunity to enhance spiritual formation in online classrooms. The use of online education will continue to grow and Christian colleges can make greater use of the available tools to foster spiritual formation in the lives of their students. The next section will examine other proposed solutions.

SECTION 3

OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

The mission statements of the four schools under consideration and, more broadly, of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, demonstrate an interest in the spiritual formation of college students. CCCU schools offer a number of variations in spiritual formation processes. This section examines other proposed solutions and extracts pertinent information on best practices in asynchronous online spiritual formation courses. A careful examination of the courses offered by the four schools reveals several key considerations including the following: educational level, number of courses, length, content, and educational delivery system of the available courses.

All of the following schools offer valid attempts at courses in online spiritual formation. They do show that it is possible to conduct spiritual formation courses in an online, but the fact that they are the only four schools that offer courses in spiritual formation illustrates the problem under consideration.

Crown College

Crown College offers a single online course in spiritual formation titled CHM 300: Spiritual and Personal Formation. The course description states,

This course focuses on the spiritual development of the individual, especially reading from the modern classics in spiritual formation. Biblical principles and

spiritual disciplines that govern the character and conduct of Christians will be addressed. The course also considers issues of personal formation.¹

This five-week course addresses a wide range of topics in spiritual formation. It incorporates a spiritual retreat, emphasis on prayer, extensive use of discussion boards, and contemporary texts. The college uses eCollege as the educational delivery system. This system allows video and audio in the course and the course designer took advantage of both capabilities.

Response

I taught this course and the student feedback was positive. In my opinion as a researcher in spiritual formation, this course was very content heavy. It focused on dispensing as much pertinent information as possible during the five weeks of the course. The course placed little emphasis on being formed within a community, which might be a natural consequence of such a brief educational experience. I believe a sense of community is essential to any educational experience, especially in an online environment. In the text *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace* Palloff and Pratt write, "The development of community, then, becomes a parallel stream to the content being explored. It is given its own equal status and is not seen as something that 'mucks up' or interferes with the learning process."² This course would benefit by dividing it into two five-week sections, which would allow the students sufficient time to interact in a

¹ Crown College, "2008 Non-Traditional Undergraduate Catalog," Crown College, [http://www.crownonline.org/D1index.real?area=550&sem=2 6485& node= 405196](http://www.crownonline.org/D1index.real?area=550&sem=2%206485&node=405196) (accessed May 2, 2008).

² Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt, *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace: Effective Strategies for the Online Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 30.

more significant manner. Several constraints, however, prevent allotment of more time to undergraduate courses. A later section will describe these constraints.

Dallas Baptist University

Dallas Baptist University offers one course in spiritual formation titled CHST

3309: Spiritual Formation in Christian Ministry. The course description states,

The course is designed to overview the student's resources for spiritual growth and examine various methods of discipleship, including Bible study, prayer, and scripture memorization. The student will learn to nurture interdependent spirituality within the context of our contemporary culture.³

This 16-week course uses Blackboard as the educational delivery system. This system allows for audio and video use in the classroom, and a chat feature allows instant communication with the instructor or fellow students. A growing number of institutions are seeing the benefit for providing synchronous communication. For example, Kaplan college requires a one-hour synchronous seminar each week, Colorado Technical Institute requires synchronous meetings each week, and George Fox Seminary requires a one-hour chat session for students. In addition, hyperlinks facilitate the interactive lectures. This well-designed classroom provides a rich learning environment. Each class includes a weekly devotional and an opportunity to post prayer requests in the classroom.

³ Dallas Baptist University, "2007-2008 Catalog," Dallas Baptist University, [http://www.dbu.edu/academics/course_description.asp?course_num=CHST 3309](http://www.dbu.edu/academics/course_description.asp?course_num=CHST%203309) (accessed May 6, 2008).

The course content addresses specific areas of spiritual formation and attempts to create a sense of community.

Response

This extensive course on spiritual formation is beneficial because it focuses on Christian ministry. The 16-week period enables significant interaction among students and between individual students and the instructor. The course design provides a clear outline of subject matter. The virtual classroom contains a clearly placed syllabus and calendar, and the instructor's role as facilitator is well defined. Malcolm S. Knowles, in the text *The Adult Learner*, emphasizes the importance of instructors as facilitators of learning rather than content provider or teachers.⁴ This thoughtful course serves the purpose of spiritual formation.

Missouri Baptist University

Missouri Baptist University offers one undergraduate course in spiritual formation titled RRED 343 Discipleship and Evangelism: Leading in Spiritual Formation. The course description states,

Any theology of leadership in the New Testament church grows from involvement in the spiritual formation of Christians. Through a study of Biblical, classical, and contemporary material, this course assists the students in disciplining themselves "for the purpose of godliness," as commended in 1 Timothy 4:7 (NASB) and in understanding, practicing and teaching spiritual

⁴ Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III, and Richard A Swanson, *The Adult Learner* (New York: Elsevier, 1998), 253.

disciplines in the life and worship of the church. This course presents the emphasis on the how to and the importance of private and corporate worship.⁵

This 8-week course employs Blackboard as the educational delivery system. This system allows the use of audio and video in the classroom; however, there is no evidence of their use. This classroom has an average user interface that does not go beyond the standard Blackboard settings.

Response

This virtual classroom uses all the tools necessary for a well-rounded set of learning experiences. An excellent chat feature is available in the online classroom; however, it requires students and instructors to be online simultaneously. This synchronous element adds to the sense of community in the class and can create an improved asynchronous discussion.

The course focuses on spiritual formation in terms of evangelism and discipleship, which moves the emphasis from being to doing, and makes spiritual formation another task rather than transformed by the Spirit of God. The 8-week period for the course does not allow as much time for group interaction and bonding as in a 16-week course, but it allows more time than a 5-week course. This course also emphasizes private and corporate worship, which is a positive feature. Dallas Willard confirms the relationship between spiritual formation, study, and worship, and he notes that worship reinforces

⁵ Missouri Baptist University, "2007-2008 Course Descriptions," Missouri Baptist University, http://www.mobap.edu/academics/divisions/humanities/religiousedu_program.asp-desc (accessed May 6, 2008).

learning while providing a creative outlet for self-expression.⁶ This effective course would benefit from having greater opportunity for peer interaction.

Northwest Nazarene University

Northwest Nazarene University offers a completely online graduate program in spiritual formation. Many additional courses address spiritual formation. Three good examples of the courses in this program are PT 511: Introduction to Spiritual Formation, PL 503: Theoretical Foundations for Spiritual Formation, and PT 514: Topics in Spiritual Formation. The course descriptions for these courses are as follows,

PT 511 Introduction to Spiritual Formation: This course gives an intensive examination of the discipline of spiritual formation. Particular emphasis will be placed on the examination and practice of the fourteen Disciplines of Spiritual Formation with the purpose of helping students in their personal spiritual formation.

PL 503 Theoretical Foundations for Spiritual Formation: This course explores the theoretical foundations, or basic assumptions, of spiritual formation. The course will be primarily concerned with issues related to human anthropology and the development of the self. This will include study in the following areas: critical reasoning, human psychology, and character development.

PT 514 Topics in Spiritual Formation: This course focuses on historical and contemporary issues, and draws upon the expertise of noted experts in the area of spiritual formation in order to optimize relevance for the student.⁷

Northwest Nazarene University also uses Blackboard as the online learning environment. The graduate courses are eight weeks in length. The program offers the

⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 363.

⁷ Northwest Nazarene University, "2006-2007 Graduate Catalog," Northwest Nazarene University, <http://www.nnu.edu/fileadmin/Content/AcademicResources/Registrar/06-07Graduate.pdf> (accessed May 6, 2008).

Master of Arts in Spiritual Formation degree (MASF). This is a two-year online learning community designed for pastors and Christian leaders. The program assumes a Wesleyan approach to spiritual formation with particular attention to the role of the minister as a spiritual guide and mentor. Students receive a theological and practical foundation for providing spiritual direction and leadership to others while being mentored by a spiritual director.⁸

Response

This excellent program successfully uses an asynchronous online learning environment. The course does not use chat rooms or any real time requirements. The classroom includes a place for prayer concerns, incorporates multiple discussion threads, and uses groups to facilitate learning. The well-organized virtual classroom is easy to navigate. Since this entire program on spiritual formation uses a cohort model, a single class does not need to cover too much information. The course of study includes applications for ministry, spiritual direction, and opportunities for further study. It has a distinct Wesleyan approach to theology and spiritual formation. Christian leaders who want to advance their understanding of spiritual formation in an online environment will benefit from this program.

⁸ Northwest Nazarene University, "Program Description: Masters of Arts: Spiritual Formation," Northwest Nazarene University, <http://www.nnu.edu/1284/> (accessed May 6, 2008).

Conclusion

The problem that I am trying to address in this project is that there is a glaring lack of online spiritual formation courses despite the known quality of the internet for creating community. There are a growing number of online courses being offered but the number of online spiritual formation courses is extremely limited. These four schools offer specific approaches to this topic. There is much room for improvement in each of these courses, but I was able to use ideas from each course. A detailed review of four schools and an examination of a number of schools outside this study's scope reveals a strong need for enhanced opportunities for online spiritual formation. All four of the schools under consideration provide courses that meet their students' needs with clear differences in quality and learning environment.

Section four addresses several aspects of developing and delivering a quality asynchronous online course in spiritual formation. These include educational theory, spiritual formation concepts, and possible tests and measurements.

SECTION 4

THESIS

Section four substantiates this paper's claims that asynchronous, spiritual formation classes are possible by presenting educational theory, spiritual formation resources, with possible tests and measurements. This analysis assists in creating a thoughtful, thorough online course that addresses adult students' spiritual formation needs.

Educational Theory

This subsection examines the educational environment, principles of andragogy, and community in online education.

The Online Educational Environment

Evaluation of the technology involved in the online learning process helps to provide a meaningful educational experience. T. Craig Montgomerie notes that one of the important questions to ask about any online educational experience concerns the technological capabilities provided to the students and faculty.¹ He adds that in the advent

¹ T. Craig Montgomerie, "Flight of an Academic Magpie: From Face2Face to Virtual Presence," in *Online Learning: Personal Reflections on the Transformation of Education*, ed. Greg Kearsley (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology, 2005), 239.

of online education, institutions implemented a myriad of technologies. As technology changed and grew, the online educational environment also matured. He notes that online educational technology lacks standardization.² Each institution can create its own educational platform, use a prepackaged educational delivery system, or employ a combination of the two. I am competent with seven of the most common educational delivery systems: Angel, Moodle, eCollege, Blackboard, University of Phoenix's Online Learning System 3, Jenzabar, and Intralearn.³ Each of these has unique qualities and requires individual training. The basic format provides a system for asynchronous discussion using discussion threads, a system for students to submit written material and assessments, a system for grading assignments and returning feedback, and a system for presenting educational materials. Each system can add to or subtract from the students' educational experiences.

The discussion threads are the heart of the asynchronous learning experience. Ken White and Bob Weight provide helpful insights into the nature and practice of online discussion. They note that online discussion is similar to face-to-face discussion except for the following aspects: online discussions are less inhibited, status is less of a consideration, interaction is more evenly distributed, and group decision making requires

² Ibid., 246.

³ Edutools is a web site that provides side-by-side comparisons of a variety of course management systems. Administrators can use this site before deciding on which course management system to use in an educational program. See Edutools, "CMS Home," Edutools, <http://www.edutools.info/static.jsp?pj=4&page=HOME> (June 16, 2008).

more time.⁴ They note that one helpful method for communicating in an online discussion includes being “warm, responsive, inquisitive, tentative, and empathetic.”⁵ Rena Palloff and Ken Pratt emphasize that two of the most important practices in online education include encouraging student-faculty contact and encouraging cooperation among students.⁶ Koontz, Li, and Compore maintain that engaged discussions include three major components: collaboration, problem solving, and realism.⁷

In my seven years of online teaching experience, the best discussions require the facilitator’s active participation. I use a system that includes acknowledging the students’ contributions to the discussion, building on their contributions by adding current content, and concluding with Socratic questions to drive the discussion deeper. As the facilitator and students engage in the discussion, the thread moves peer-to-peer (horizontally) rather than peer-to-facilitator (vertically). This horizontal appearance indicates that many different students engage in discussion, share ideas, and bring their life experience to the classroom. Figure 5.4 illustrates this horizontal movement.

All course management platforms include a system that allows students to submit written assignments and assessments and a system for returning feedback and grades to the student. These systems vary among the learning management platforms. Most involve

⁴ Ken W. White and Bob H. Weight, *The Online Teaching Guide: A Handbook of Attitudes, Strategies, and Techniques for the Virtual Classroom* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000,) 16-17.

⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁶ Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt, *The Virtual Student: A Profile and Guide to Working with Online Learners* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 130-131.

⁷ Koontz, Li, and Compore, *Designing Effective Online Instruction*, 121.

students submitting documents as attachments to a drop box or thread. Martin Weller notes the following points about student assessment: “collaborative work and group assignments have increased in online environments, the use of exams has decreased, the use of projects has increased, and creative use of the online environment has allowed for a greater variety of assessment such as student web sites, peer assessment, and portfolios.”⁸

Mercedes Fisher adds that formative assessment allows students and faculty to gauge the progress of students throughout the term. Formative assessment provides checkpoints during the class as students build toward completing a final project. Fisher contrasts this with summative assessment, which focuses on the final project or assignment.⁹ Maryellen Weimer supports the use of formative assessment and proposes that peer assessment and self-assessment may be the best approach to promote a positive educational experience.¹⁰ The use of self-assessment in particular applies to a course on spiritual formation because only individual students can accurately determine his or her spiritual progress. These classes promote knowledge acquisition and experiential learning, but only the students can measure their spiritual formation. Creating clear learning objectives and applicable learning activities fail to fulfill the assessment process effectively in the absence of thoughtful feedback.

⁸ Martin Weller, *Delivering Learning on the Net: The Why, What and How of Online Education* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2002), 129.

⁹ Mercedes Fisher, *Designing Courses and Teaching on the Web: A “How-To” Guide to Proven, Innovative Strategies* (Lanham, ME: ScarecrowEducation, 2003), 129-131.

¹⁰ Maryellen Weimer, *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 139.

All course management systems include a feature to provide individual feedback to students. Feedback mechanisms can include grade book entries, email, or individual discussion forums. White and Weight note characteristics concerning effective feedback. They differentiate between formative feedback, designed to modify students' mental processes or behaviors to increase learning effectiveness, and summative feedback, which assesses how well students accomplish specific tasks for grading purposes. In addition, they note that comprehensive feedback should include the following qualities: multidimensional, objective, supportive, timely, and specific.¹¹

One of the techniques I use to provide feedback is to refer specifically to students when giving praise or encouragement and to refer to the submitted work when suggesting improvement. For example, rather than saying, "Your writing contains many errors in spelling and punctuation." I would say, "This paper would be improved by having an error free presentation. Please see my comments in the body of the paper for details." By referring to the paper, I direct the constructive criticism toward the paper instead of the student. Feedback is a crucial part of the online experience and many authors address it.¹² The discussion threads, grading, and feedback are important; but self-directed adult learners must have content available to them to be able to learn effectively.

¹¹ White and Weight, *The Online Teaching Guide*, 168-169.

¹² There are many other texts that demonstrate the need for and techniques of providing feedback. Some of them include: Rita-Marie Conrad and J. Ana Donaldson, *Engaging the Online Learner* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004); John Stephenson, *Teaching and Learning Online* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2002); and Rens Palloff and Keith Pratt, *The Virtual Student* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

All course management systems contain a method for presenting course material. This can be as simple as written documents posted on a website and as complicated as green screen videos, real time chats, interactive games, and flash media. An analysis of the 13 schools where I teach reveals a wide range of techniques for presenting course material. One of the most progressive schools is Kaplan University, which incorporates written documents, websites, audio, video, flash media, RSS feeds, and real-time chats. Devry University also leads the market with the use of written documents, websites, audio, videos, flash media, and live lectures. Crown College presents course material with written documents, web sites, green screen videos, and audio lectures. Some of the other schools are experimenting with these innovations, but most use written documents and web sites to present course material.

After completing an analysis of the market and educational trends, it appears that the movement is toward greater variety in presenting course materials and includes using developing technologies. Several sites support this conclusion. One of these is www.merlot.org, Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT). This site is an excellent resource for online educators and includes many multimedia presentations on a wide range of topics.¹³ Furthermore, the web site www.sloan-c.org is a database of effective practices including use of technology to

¹³ MERLOT provides resources to online educators in many different fields. This organization also offers an annual convention where academic presentations are provided, research conducted and new insights are explored. MERLOT, "Home," MERLOT, <http://www.merlot.org> (June 19, 2008).

enhance the learning environment, educational experience, and classroom materials.¹⁴

The web site www.ed.gov is a clearing-house of educational resources. This is the official web site for the U.S. Department of Education. A report from www.ed.gov demonstrates the need for advanced technology in the classroom and provides insights into the implementation of online education in the public arena.¹⁵

In addition to these online resources, several texts provide excellent guidance on creating online educational environments. Koontz, Li, and Compore's *Designing Online Instruction* provides a systems approach to designing online education. It focuses on the ASSIST-Me model that presents a seven-step process of course development including step three, "Select instructional materials, organize content and present media."¹⁶ *Delivering Learning on the Net* by Martin Weller is a comprehensive text that includes a chapter on technology and media and covers a wide range of topics on online education.¹⁷ *Learning Theories and the Design of E-Learning Environments* by Bijan B. Gillani is a very technical text that includes chapters on Visual Design and E-Learning; Text, Color, Images, and Icons; Animation, Video and Audio; and Page Layout and Site Architecture. This is a good beginning manual for course developers.¹⁸ *Designing*

¹⁴ Sloan-C is sponsored by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and is an excellent resource for all online educators. Sloan-C, "Home," The Sloan Consortium, <http://www.sloan-c.org> (June 19, 2008).

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Education, *Innovations in Education: Connecting Students to Advanced Courses Online* (Jessup, MD: ED, 2007).

¹⁶ Koontz, Li, and Compore, *Designing Effective Online Instruction*.

¹⁷ Weller, *Delivering Learning on the Web*.

¹⁸ Bijan B. Gillani, *Learning Theories and the Design of E-Learning Environments* (New York: University Press of America, 2003).

Courses and Teaching on the Web by Mercedes Fisher is a more general text that includes a chapter on Effective Planning and Design for Online Teaching as well as one titled, Foundation for Instructional Screen Design.¹⁹ As online education and technology matures, adult learners' educational experiences continue to change and expand.

This subsection addressed specific content in the online educational environment including systems for asynchronous discussion using interactive threads, systems for students to submit written material and assessments, systems for grading assignments and returning feedback, and systems for presenting educational materials. The next subsection explores the use of andragogy, including how adults learn, expectations of adult learners, and best practices for teaching adults.

Andragogy and Adult Learners

This subsection investigates the concepts of andragogy, the differences between andragogy and pedagogy, expectations of adult learners, and best practices for teaching adults online.

Andragogy Defined

Malcolm Knowles promoted andragogy, the concept that adult learners are different from children, in the 1970s. The process of defining andragogy has been long and involved, and Knowles concluded "Andragogy presents core principles of adult learning that in turn enable those designing and conducting adult learning to build more

¹⁹ Fisher, *Designing Courses*.

effective learning processes for adults.”²⁰ In a discussion of adult learning theory, Raymond Wlodkowski asserts that defining adult learners can be problematic and results in varying definitions. He offers two ideas on who would be considered adult. First, an adult is someone who is serving in a social role as an adult. Second, and adult is a person who see himself or herself as being responsible for his or her own life.²¹ Adults are different from children and have different educational needs. The next section delineates the differences between andragogy and pedagogy.

Andragogy versus Pedagogy

Adults do not learn in the same manner as children. This basic idea changed the design and delivery of adult education. Table 4.1 illustrates Knowles’ ideas on the difference between pedagogy and andragogy.

Table 4.1 Differences between pedagogy and andragogy ²²

Concepts	Pedagogy	Andragogy
The need to know	Learner only needs to know that he or she must learn what the teacher has to teach in order to be promoted, not how it applies to their life.	Learner needs to know what they are learning and why it is important to their lives.

²⁰ Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III, and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development* (New York: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005), 2.

²¹ Raymond J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 10.

²² Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 64-68.

Table 4.1 Differences between pedagogy and andragogy²²

Concepts	Pedagogy	Andragogy
The learner's self-concept	Derive sense of self from adults.	Adults have their own self-concept; need to be treated as capable of self-direction; often creates conflict between learned dependency models of learning and need to self-direct.
The role of experience	The learners experience is not a good resource for learning; transmittal techniques should be used.	Adults come into the classroom with a great amount of varied experience. Their experience is a good resource; experiential techniques and peer-helping techniques are helpful. However, this can be a problem when adults come in with presuppositions and biases.
Readiness to learn	Becomes ready to learn what the teacher tells them they must in order to be promoted.	Come ready to learn those things they need to know and are able to cope effectively with their real life situation.
Orientation to learning	Subject-centered orientation; learning experiences are organized by subject-matter content	Life-centered (task centered or problem centered); learn best in the context of applications to real life situations.
Motivation	External motivators such as grades and teacher approval.	Some external motivators such as better jobs and promotions, but mostly internal pressures such as increased job satisfaction and self-esteem.

Expectations of Adult Learners in an Online Environment

Table 4.1 reveals several expectations and characteristics of online learners.

Online students are pragmatic and often focused on learning what they need to know to advance their career or ministry. Adult students expect to be treated as adults who are capable of self-directed learning. The experience of adult learners can enrich the learning environment. They are prepared to learn and expect real life, practical applications in the classroom. They are motivated both internally and externally.

In addition to the expectations of adult learners mentioned above, Palloff and Pratt note that online learners should be:

1. Able to access a personal computer and the Internet
2. Open-minded about sharing personal details of their lives
3. Able to communicate without visual cues
4. Willing to commit significant time to weekly studies
5. Critical thinkers or be willing to be trained in critical thinking
6. Able to exercise reflection on their lives
7. Convinced that asynchronous learning can be high quality²³

These expectations recognize technical and educational abilities necessary for successful online students. Course designers and facilitators will enhance student learning if they address these expectations as they prepare the classroom.²⁴

Best Practices for Teaching Adult Online Learners

After considering the nature of andragogy and the expectations of online learners, this study will address the best practices involved in facilitating online classes. Palloff and Pratt present an extensive list of best practices summarized in eight areas. They say that in order for an institution or instructor to meet the needs of online learners, they must:²⁵

1. Understand the personal and social characteristics of the students
2. Understand the learning styles of students
3. Understand the life situations of the students
4. Understand how to provide support for the students

²³ Palloff and Pratt, *The Virtual Student*, 9-12.

²⁴ Further material on course design and online facilitation can be found in the following texts: Bijan B. Gillani, *Learning Theories and the Design of E-Learning Environments* (New York: University Press of America, 2003) and Rita-Marie Conrad and J. Ana Donaldson, *Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

²⁵ Palloff and Pratt, *The Virtual Student*, 133-135.

5. Understand how to help the student develop critical thinking skills
6. Provide an opportunity for student feedback on the course
7. Demonstrate respect for the student
8. Assist in retaining the students

In my experience of teaching online classes in the last seven years, the practical applications of these eight points include:

1. Reading students' introductions to gain an understanding of their background. This is a way to communicate course expectations and to anticipate questions.
2. Providing additional resources for students who seem to be struggling in the online environment. This might include recorded lectures, writing or math labs, and teleconferences.
3. Acknowledging students' life transitions and helping them succeed by accepting late work or providing alternate assignments. Working adults face tremendous stress and the loss of a loved one, illness, or financial difficulties. Facilitators will need to acknowledge and accommodate these needs.
4. Assisting students by directing them to the appropriate support venue. This often means providing them with contact information to technical support and academic advisors.
5. Guiding discussions using Socratic questions to help develop critical thinking skills. The use of Socratic questioning is the one of the best tools available to online educators.
6. Soliciting feedback on the course throughout the course and using end of course surveys. This can be both formal and informal. For example, a facilitator can post a note in the last week of class asking for insights from the students.
7. Using respectful language and modeling respect in the discussion forums, grade book, and all correspondence. This includes using a salutation and complimentary closing on emails and threaded notes. Using first names adds a sense of humanity to the course.
8. Reaching out to students who are struggling. This is particularly important if the problem is a technical or administrative issue. This requires that the facilitator be proactive in helping students who may drop the course without additional contact. One way to do this is sending an email to students who have not responded in the first week or who have responded well below the required minimum.

The previous section provides a brief overview of the principles of andragogy and best practices in online education. The next section addresses the issues of collaborative learning.

Community in Online Education

This section examines how collaborative learning affects online education. As early as the 1980s the value of group learning for adults was recognized. Knowles notes that the use of groups in adult education makes the educational process more efficient and provides a richer educational environment.²⁶ Weller supports the use of collaborative learning and notes that this approach reflects the philosophy of learning as a social process. The advantages of collaborative learning are that it promotes the following ideas:²⁷

1. Reflection on the part of the students when they have the opportunity to explain their thinking and work
2. Active learning in the lives of the students as they actively interact with peers to develop new content and apply the course learning
3. Communication skills for personal and professional development as students learn to interact in an online environment
4. A deeper understanding of the material as each student works to create new projects and reinforces the learning of fellow group members
5. A wider scope of information and experiences as the group shares cooperatively to solve problems and address current issues
6. Greater diversity in the classroom when students from different backgrounds share their views and bring insights from different cultures.

Current practices at many colleges and universities echo this emphasis on collaborative learning. University of Phoenix, one of the largest for-profit universities in

²⁶ Knowles, *Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 135.

²⁷ Weller, *Delivering Learning on the Net*, 69.

the country, uses learning teams in every online class as a cornerstone of its educational philosophy. Margaret Riel notes that collaborative learning allows students to learn from each other as they solve problems and engage in social interaction.²⁸

Many online colleges and universities use collaborative learning. All 13 colleges and universities for which I teach use discussion threads based on the collaborative learning principles. Of these 13 colleges and universities, 6 actively use learning teams in addition to threaded discussions and 7 do not. These six represent the largest colleges and universities and the seven who do not use learning teams represent schools with much smaller enrollments. This disparity indicates a lack of universal agreement on the use of learning teams.

Several disadvantages affect the use of groups in online courses. Weller notes that some disadvantages include overcoming the objections of students who prefer to work independently, lack of group performance because of inactivity or personality conflicts, extra time required to establish team roles and practices, social slacking, students who drop the course or group, extra stress of a “failing” group, and the reduction of independent, asynchronous learning.²⁹

Many of these objections exist in face-to-face environments; however, the considerations of working in a virtual environment require additional training and oversight. Many schools that focus on using groups in collaborative learning have

²⁸ Margaret Riel, “Building Communities of Learning Online,” in *Online Learning: Personal Reflections on the Transformation of Education*, ed. Greg Kearsley (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology, 2005), 315.

²⁹ Weller, *Delivering Learning on the Net*, 70.

specific training material and host a specific course on how to interact in groups. Those schools that specifically base their educational philosophy on group interaction require groups to begin each class with a charter. This charter details how to address conflict, inactivity, and other important group issues. Weller notes that while collaborative learning has specific advantages, its use should be judicious.³⁰ Often groups exist only for a specified period within a class in order to complete an assigned task; however, groups can carry over from one class to the next. The next subsection will explore this cohort method.

A cohort model allows students to progress through a prescribed course of study with the same group of students in each course. A cohort model has several advantages. These include the ability to build and maintain ongoing relationships with fellow learners, give and receive support from members of the cohort, acquire knowledge and hone skills in a sequenced manner, focus on single subjects at a time,³¹ engage in the free exchange of ideas in a comfortable environment, and gain additional experience through social and professional interaction.³² Mercy College uses a cohort model to meet the needs of its faculty and student body and to increase student retention. Their study of the

³⁰ Ibid., 71.

³¹ Grand Canyon University, "Cohort Learning," Grand Canyon University, <http://www.gcu.edu/online/cohort.php> (June 17, 2008).

³² Mountain State, "Cohort Learning," Mountain State, http://www.mountainstate.edu/prospective/programs/extended_distance/cohort/ (June 17, 2008).

cohort model indicates that it positively affects the satisfaction level of faculty and students and allows for greater student retention.³³

Kelvin Seifert and David Mandzuk's study found both negative and positive effects from the use of cohorts. One of the most intriguing factors they observed was that although cohorts provided social connection and cooperation, they did not add significantly to the academic, intellectual component of learning.³⁴ In terms of online learning, this additional social connection and cooperation is positive. The virtual environment creates an additional level of separation in terms of human interaction. Cohorts can help reduce this separation and allow students to form greater sense of community.

This first section of the educational theory of fostering spiritual formation in an online, asynchronous environment focused on the technology and the process of learning. It also explored the differences between pedagogy and andragogy, delineated expectations of adult learners, and detailed best practices for meeting these expectations. Finally, this section provided a brief overview of collaborative learning and the cohort model. The next section reviews the possible literature in an online, asynchronous course in spiritual formation.

³³ Benjamin, Barbara, "Mercy College – Using Cohorts to Build an Online Community," Sloan-C. http://www.sloan-c.wiki.org/wiki/index.php?title=Mercy_College_-_Using_Cohorts_to_Build_an_Online_Learning_Community (June 17, 2008).

³⁴ Kelvin Seifert and David Mandzuk, "Student Cohorts in Teacher Education: Support Groups or Intellectual Communities?," *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 7 (July 2006): 1296-1320.

Spiritual Formation Resources

This section presents a number of possible resources in an online, asynchronous course in spiritual formation. A number of possible texts emphasize an aspect of spiritual formation, and many have a specific theological bias. For the purposes of this study, the body of spiritual formation texts will be selected from those that meet the theological standards of the CCCU. By definition, this excludes any texts that promote eastern or western religions outside of Christianity and heretical Christian theology. Texts that are effective for use in an undergraduate, online course in spiritual formation will appropriately match the educational level of the students, contain introductory information in spiritual formation, and meet the requirements for use in a college classroom. The following list of texts provides an overview of possible texts rather than a comprehensive discussion of all possible texts used in a spiritual formation class. The first section of texts demonstrates a systematic approach to spiritual formation. The second section of texts contains examples of supplementary texts used in an online, asynchronous class on spiritual formation. The following treatment addresses specific positive aspects of each text and provides brief annotations of the content.

Systematic Approaches to Spiritual Formation

Kenneth Boa's *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* is a thorough text designed for use as a college textbook on spiritual formation. Boa uses the imagery of a gem with many facets to describe the process of spiritual formation. He includes chapter overviews and objectives, questions for personal

application, and a glossary. Some chapter highlights include Disciplined Spirituality, Devotional Spirituality, and Process Spirituality. This text views spiritual formation as “a journey of the spirit that begins with the gift of forgiveness and life in Christ and progresses through faith and obedience.”³⁵ This text would be well suited for an undergraduate class on spiritual formation.

Richard J. Foster’s *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*, a well-developed text, traces spiritual formation through a historical perspective and presents six streams of traditional spiritual formation. The imagery used in the text is of a set of streams that flow together to form a whole. It contains a historical setting for each stream, positive and negative aspects of each stream, and practical applications. Some of the chapter highlights include The Contemplative Tradition: Discovering the Prayer-Filled Life, The Holiness Tradition: Discovering the Virtuous Life, and The Evangelical Tradition: Discovering the Word-Centered Life. This text notes, “When we carefully consider how Jesus lived while among us in the flesh, we learn how we are to live—truly live—empowered by him who is with us always even to the end of the age. We then begin an intentional *imitatio Christi*, imitation of Christ, not in some slavish or literal fashion but by catching the spirit and power in which he lived and by learning to walk ‘in his steps’ (1 Pet. 2:21)”³⁶ This text is appropriate for an undergraduate class on spiritual formation.

³⁵ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 19.

³⁶ Richard J. Foster, *Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 3.

Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell's *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, is a well-documented, comprehensive text, that explores the roots of western spirituality and provides an overview of a wide range of spiritual traditions. This text lacks overarching imagery; however, the authors note, "Think of this book as a map containing a number of routes to the same destination."³⁷ The chapters contain individual and group exercises to help readers understand and apply the specific spiritual tradition. Some chapter highlights include The Tradition of Prayer in Teresa and John of the Cross and Black Spirituality and Feminism. While explaining spirituality the authors note, "An authentic 'Christian' spirituality is one that binds us to Christ and leads us through the power of the Holy Spirit to God the Father. It must therefore be both Christological and Trinitarian."³⁸ This text would be beneficial for seminary students, but it is too in-depth for an undergraduate course in spiritual formation.

M. Robert Mulholland's *Invitation to a Journey: a Road Map for Spiritual Formation* presents a clear, four-part spiritual formation process, and the imagery incorporates components of a journey including the road map, the vehicle, the journey, and companions on the way. The text lacks specific application exercises; however, its writing style renders it useful to small group study in a church setting. Some chapter highlights of this text include Holistic Spirituality, The Classical Christian Pilgrimage, and The Nature of the Spiritual Disciplines. This text presents a clear, fourfold definition

³⁷ Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 20.

³⁸ Ibid., 17.

of spiritual formation as “(1) a process (2) of being conformed (3) to the image of Christ (4) for the sake of others.”³⁹ This text would be acceptable as a text for an undergraduate college course on spiritual formation, but it seems more suited for use in a church setting.

Gary Thomas’ *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul’s Path to God* details nine sacred pathways to God. The premise of the author is that just as humans have unique personalities, so they also have unique paths to God. Each chapter contains a survey to determine if the reader would fit into one of the nine categories and makes an application of each. The imagery of spiritual formation used in this text is of a journey with a number of different paths. Some chapter highlights of this text include: Naturalists: Loving God Out of Doors, Ascetics: Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity, and Contemplatives: Loving God through Adoration. This text does not delineate a definition of spiritual formation, but emphasizes that individuals need to follow their own paths to God as they seek to become more like Christ.⁴⁰ This text would be acceptable as a supplemental text in an undergraduate course in spiritual formation.

W. Donald Wellman’s *Today’s Disciple: Discipleship Series* is a discipleship guide for individuals and groups. The text lacks unifying imagery and historical overview or context; rather, it presents 13 chapters on a variety of topics involved in spiritual formation. Some chapter highlights include The Word of God in the Life of a Disciple, The Spirit-filled Life, and the Priorities of the Christian Life. This directive study defines

³⁹ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 15.

⁴⁰ Gary Thomas, *Pathways: Discover your Soul’s Path to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 17.

spiritual formation as being totally committed to Christ, diligently saturating life with the Bible, experiencing a daily quiet time, demonstrating love by serving in the church, and sharing faith.⁴¹ A lay training conference or ongoing discipleship relationship would use this text to its fullest potential. This text not well suited for use in a college course in spiritual formation.

Dallas Willard's *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* presents a clear picture of why and how Christians can know and obey the teachings of Christ today. The text lacks an overriding image; rather, it emphasizes the real life application of scriptural truth. Some chapter highlights include Gospels of Sin Management, On Being a Disciple, or Student, of Jesus, and A Curriculum for Christ-likeness. While the text lacks a clear definition of spiritual formation, Willard notes that believers should "dearly love and constantly delight in that 'heavenly Father' made real to earth in Jesus."⁴² In addition, he notes that we are to put away the enslavement of sin and submit to God.⁴³ While this is a tremendous resource, it does not fit well as a textbook for an undergraduate course in spiritual formation.

Supplementary Texts for Spiritual Formation

Thousands of books and articles are available as supplementary texts in an undergraduate course on spiritual formation. A quick search of Amazon.com reveals over

⁴¹ W. Donald Wellman, *Disciple: Discipleship Series*, 4th ed (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1996), 14.

⁴² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 321.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 322.

5,000 texts that address the topic of spiritual formation, a daunting number to review; however, the following is a list of supplementary texts I have used in courses on spiritual formation either as a student or as a facilitator.

- Anderson, Neil T. *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*. Glendale, CA: Gospel Light, 2004.
- Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.
- Foster, Richard J., and James Bryan Smith, eds. *Revised and Expanded Devotional Classic: Selected Readings for Groups and Individuals*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.
- Huggett, Joyce. *The Joy of Listening to God: Hearing the Many Ways God Speaks to Us*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986.
- Kinlaw, Dennis F. *The Mind of Christ*. Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1998.
- Louth, Andrew. *The Wilderness of God*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997.
- Manning, Brennan. *Ruthless Trust: A Ragamuffin's Path to God*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000.
- Ortberg, John. *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.
- Taylor, Richard S. *The Disciplined Life: The Mark of Christian Maturity*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1971.

The choice of supplementary texts depends on the course objectives and the developer or facilitator's bias. This choice would also be influenced by distinctive denominational doctrines, administrative prerogative, and reactions to texts used in previous courses.

This section provides an overview of several possible texts for use in an online spiritual formation course and a brief summary and evaluation of each text's suitability. In addition, it provided a list of possible supplementary texts. The next section defines and measures spiritual formation.

Definition and Measurement

This section defines spiritual formation and provides a means to measure it for the purposes of this project. In order to use tests to measure any behavior or concept, the behavior or concept must have a clear definition. Robert Mulholland notes many definitions of spiritual formation including: unquestioning and complete obedience to a leader or ruling group, specific external behavior that confirms one's spirituality, fulfilling specific requirements, and almost any behavior imaginable.⁴⁴ From a survey of the resources listed above, most definitions of spiritual formation involve the analogy of moving toward, growing in, or abiding in Christ. Mulholland describes spiritual formation as "a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others."⁴⁵

The web site Metamorphia is an online community for Christian spiritual formation. It has videos given by leaders in the field. They are available at <http://metamorphia.com/Voices/TabId/55/Default.aspx>. In one of the videos, Bill Hull gives a two-part definition of spiritual formation. He states that the first part of the definition is the theological portion. This portion, derived from Galatians 4:19, notes that humans are being formed into the likeness of Christ. The second, practical part of the definition is a focused development of character. It addresses issues of what individuals are like inside and emphasizes being rather than doing.⁴⁶ On that same web page in a

⁴⁴ Mulholland, *Invitation*, 15.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁶ Bill Hull, "What Is Spiritual Formation?" Metamorphia, <http://metamorphia.com/Voices/tabid/55/default.aspx> (June 17, 2008).

different video, Steve Porter notes that spiritual formation is correctly located in the theological domain of sanctification.⁴⁷

Other groups define spiritual formation differently. For example, the Renovare web site describes spiritual formation in a broad sense. This definition of spiritual formation includes:

It is the forming of our spirits. Everything we experience shapes our spirits—family, job, movies, music, health, environment, and more. Everything. By doing spiritual disciplines such as worship, prayer, study, celebration, solitude, etc. our spirits are shaped for the good. Things that are bad—dissension, violence, greed, lust, and jealousy to name a few—lose their attraction as our spirits are formed, conformed, and transformed into the image of Christ.⁴⁸

In addition, The InterVarsity web site defines spiritual formation as occurring when “we cultivate intimacy with God and growth in Christ-like character through personal and corporate spiritual disciplines, empowered by the Spirit.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, The Barna Group, a leader in polling and statistics, focuses on observable, measurable behaviors by tracking church attendance, stewardship, and volunteerism.⁵⁰

Spiritual formation has many definitions. The definition will be broader or narrower based on individuals’ perspectives; however, in the broadest possible definition

⁴⁷ Steve Porter, “Why Is it Important to Have a Clear Understanding of Doctrine of Sanctification?” Metamorphia, <http://metamorphia.com/Voices/tabid/55/default.aspx> (June 17, 2008).

⁴⁸ Renovare, “What Is Spiritual Formation?” Renovare, http://www.renovare.org/contact_faq_spiritual_formation.htm (June 17, 2008).

⁴⁹ InterVarsity, “Spiritual Formation,” InverVarsity, <http://www.intervarsity.org/news/spiritual-formation> (June 17, 2008).

⁵⁰ The Barna Group, “Barna By Topic,” The Barna Group, <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topics> (June 17, 2008).

that fits this study's purposes, spiritual formation is the process of becoming like Christ through the empowering Holy Spirit and application of spiritual disciplines.

Measurement

One way to measure spiritual formation in an online course is to assess spiritual formation as the course begins and administer the same assessment at the end of the course. This pre- and post-test strategy provides students with a picture of the changes in their process of spiritual formation over time. I searched for instruments to measure spiritual formation, and found the web site called "Assess Yourself." The spiritual formation audit provided on this site is repeatable, confidential, and focuses on a number of critical areas in spiritual formation. The URL for this assessment tool is <http://www.assess-yourself.org/schoolsurvey.html>. The assessment tool has three sections including: Christian Character, the Love of God Scale, and the Worldview Index. The site also collects non-identifying demographic data. I took this assessment to determine how it would rate my level of spiritual formation. I found that it was accurate in most areas and I gained new insights into my own progress in spiritual formation. The students in the class all took this assessment as a pre-test. They reported that they gained benefit from applying it to their lives. Unfortunately, the third class was cancelled before this assessment could be applied as a post-test. This would have quantified any areas of improvement in spiritual formation.

Conclusion

This section addressed the theoretical underpinnings of an asynchronous, online spiritual formation course. It looked at the educational theory, spiritual formation resources, and possible tests and measurements for facilitating spiritual formation. It demonstrated that the tools available in an online, asynchronous classroom to foster spiritual formation. The discussions, course material, and feedback are sufficient to prompt students toward a greater level of self-awareness. The next section presents the project, reports on the successes and failures of the class, and demonstrates that spiritual formation in online education is possible.

SECTION 5

THE PROJECT

With careful planning, course designers and content experts can overcome the challenges of fostering spiritual formation in an online classroom. The interaction, content, and support necessary for nurturing adults' spiritual formation can be present in an online, asynchronous environment. Section five presents the project and reports the course's successes and areas for improvement.

The Online Spiritual Formation Classroom

This subsection on the online spiritual formation classroom presents the project's foundational concepts and describes the project chronologically. After curriculum committee approval, Christian College offered an online course in spiritual formation.¹ The initial plan for the three-unit course of study included a one-year program of spiritual formation divided into three 14-week courses. Each 14-week course equaled one unit. The three-course sequence included the designations CHM303, CHM304, and CHM305. I adjusted the course content to ensure that the single-unit courses over 14 weeks

¹ Names of institutions and individuals have been changed to protect confidentiality. The project is presented using screen shots since access to the course is restricted to individuals with user names and passwords.

represented the appropriate amount of academic work and rigor. The grading of the course was on a pass/fail scale, rather than a graded option, which encouraged students to focus on the process of spiritual formation rather than the grade. Students had to complete 100% of the work in order to pass the course.

Course Description and Scope

Course Description: This course is one of three courses that focus on online students' spiritual formation and major formation emphasis in church history. The course framework focuses on the six historical streams of spiritual development found in Richard Foster's text *Streams of Living Water*. This course includes personal spiritual growth and community building as students pray for and encourage one another.

Scope of Course: This course familiarizes students with historical and current theories and practice in spiritual formation. The process includes assimilation of historical concepts of spiritual formation, personal introspection, participation in online discussion, and personal application of the material. This course provides continuity in an otherwise segmented series of courses and aims to foster spiritual community among students.

This course includes six learning outcomes. After completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Define spiritual formation and illustrate spiritual formation in their lives.
2. Give examples of spiritual formation principles and practices from each of the six historical streams in the church.
3. Record their spiritual formation process by keeping a journal and interacting in an ongoing accountability discussion.
4. Analyze their needs in spiritual formation.

5. Set a goal for their spiritual formation and develop new goals to pursue.
6. Assess their progress in spiritual formation and recommend a new goal to pursue.

Course Work

Table 5.1 shows requirements in the first fourteen-week course.

Table 5.1. CHM303 course work

Time Frame	Assignment
Unit 1: Weeks 1 and 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read chapters 1-2 of the textbook. 2. Post a greeting in the cohort discussion forum. This is due by Thursday of Week 1. Read all other greetings and post a response to the work of two of your fellow students by Monday of Week 2. Please be in prayer for fellow students. 3. Complete the spiritual formation assessment. This is due by Thursday of Week 2 in the digital drop box.
Unit 2: Weeks 3 and 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read chapters 3-4 of the textbook. 2. Post a thoughtful answer to the cohort discussion question in the discussion forum. This is due by Thursday of Week 3. Read all the other messages and post a response to the work of two of your fellow students by Monday of Week 4. Please be in prayer for your fellow students.
Unit 3: Weeks 5 and 6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read chapters 5-6 of the textbook. 2. Post a thoughtful answer to the cohort discussion question in the discussion forum. This is due by Thursday of Week 5. Read all the other messages and post a response to the work of two of your fellow students by Monday of Week 6. Please be in prayer for your fellow students.
Unit 4: Weeks 7 and 8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read chapter 7 and Appendix A of the textbook. 2. Post a thoughtful answer to the cohort discussion question in the discussion forum. This is due by Thursday of Week 7. Read all the other messages and post a response to the work of two of your fellow students by Monday of Week 8. Please be in prayer for your fellow students.

Table 5.1. CHM303 course work

Time Frame	Assignment
Unit 5: Weeks 9 and 10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submit a brief summary of the text. Each stream should have a three-sentence summary. This is due by Thursday of Week 10 in the digital drop box. 2. Post a thoughtful answer to the cohort discussion question in the discussion forum. This is due by Thursday of Week 9. Read all the other messages and post a response to the work of two of your fellow students by Monday of Week 10. Please be in prayer for your fellow students.
Unit 6: Weeks 11 and 12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Post a thoughtful answer to the cohort discussion question in the discussion forum. This is due by Thursday of Week 11. Read all the other messages and post a response to the work of two of your fellow students by Monday of Week 12. Please be in prayer for your fellow students. 2. Carefully consider the content of the previous weeks and select a personal goal for spiritual formation from one of the six historical streams. This process follows the Renovare model of spiritual formation. This goal should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-phased. Pursue this goal for two weeks and then report on progress. This goal may be repeated. This process is for the student's benefit. This goal is due by Thursday at midnight of Week 12 in the threaded discussion.
Unit 7: Weeks 13 and 14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Post a thoughtful answer to the cohort discussion question in the discussion forum. This is due by Thursday of Week 13. Read all the other messages and post a response to the work of two fellow students by Monday of Week 14. Please be in prayer for fellow students.

Course Details

Figure 5.1 depicts the opening screen of the first section of this course and shows that the course was divided into seven units each consisting of a two-week period. This course's format required students to complete their work before the final week. This screen also shows that I used eCollege as a learning management system.

Spiritual Formation Group (8/14-11/20/06)
Instructor: Robert Vaughan

Course Admin Gradebook Email Chat Doc Sharing Dropbox Webliography

Course Home Help

Announcements **Submitter** **Date**

There are no messages in Announcements.

Welcome to CHM303 - Spiritual Formation.

This course extends over three typical five week terms. Here is the schedule of weeks:

- Week 1: 8/14-8/20
- Week 2: 8/21-8/27
- Week 3: 8/28-9/3
- Week 4: 9/4-9-10
- Week 5: 9/11-9/17
- Week 6: 9/18-9/24
- Week 7: 9/25-10/1
- Week 8: 10/2-10/8
- Week 9: 10/9-10/15
- Week 10: 10/16-10/22
- Week 11: 10/23-10/29
- Week 12: 10/30-11/5
- Week 13: 11/6-11/12
- Week 14: 11/13-11/20

Figure 5.1 Opening screen of the online classroom.

Figure 5.2 shows the course's flow and the content of Unit 1. The flow of this one-unit course required that most weeks include only discussion. The course's focus was to foster knowledge of the concepts of spiritual formation and provide an accountability group for each student and the facilitator. As noted above, the learning outcomes for the first unit included a spiritual formation assessment. This assessment is located at <http://www.assess-yourself.org/schoolsurvey.html>. Each student completed the assessment and stored the results for comparison with a later attempt after completing all

three sections of this course. In addition, the students were required to post an introduction and greet one another in the biography discussion thread. The goal of this introductory unit was to begin the process of group formation. Robbins lists the five stages of group formation including forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning.²

The screenshot shows a Blackboard course interface. The top navigation bar includes links for Course Admin, Gradebook, Email, Chat, Doc Sharing, Dropbox, and Weblogography. A left-hand menu lists course components: Course Home, Syllabus, Calendar, Prayer for one, Library, WK 1-2, WK 3-4, WK 5-6, WK 7-8, WK 9-10, WK 11-12, and WK 13-14. The main content area is titled 'Unit 1: WK 1-2' and includes a 'Help' button. The content for Unit 1 is expanded, showing 'Weeks One and Two', 'Learning Outcomes', and 'Spiritual Formation Defined'. The 'Learning Outcomes' section states: 'After completing this course, the student will be able to...' and lists two outcomes: 'Define spiritual formation and illustrate spiritual formation in their lives.' and 'Record their spiritual formation process by keeping a journal and/or interacting in an ongoing accountability discussion.' The 'ASSIGNMENTS' section lists three tasks: 'Read chapters 1-2 of the text book.', 'Post a greeting in the cohort discussion forum. This is due by Thursday of week one (1). Read all the other greetings and post a response to the work of two of your fellow students by Monday of week two. Please be in prayer for your fellow students.', and 'Complete the spiritual formation assessment. This is due by Thursday of week two (2) in the digital drop box.'

Figure 5.2. Units 1-7 expanded and Unit 1 illustrated

Intercessory prayer was one of the priorities of this class. In Unit 1, the students joined in prayer for specific concerns and shared in praise concerning victories in their

² Steven P. Rollins, *Organizational Behavior* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), 240.

lives. Figure 5.3 shows the interaction between the students and the facilitator. This two-way conversational engagement demonstrates the back-and-forth interaction that one could expect to see in face-to-face environments. One of the advantages of this presentation is that the group is able to maintain a running list of prayer concerns and refer to it throughout the course.

Spiritual Formation Group (8/14-11/20/06)
Instructor: Robert Vaughan

Course Admin Gradebook Email Chat Doc Sharing Dropbox Weblogography

Course Home
Syllabus
Calendar
Prayer for one another
Library

▼ WK 1-2
Discussion
SPF
Assessment*

▶ WK 3-4
▶ WK 5-6
▶ WK 7-8
▶ WK 9-10
▶ WK 11-12
▶ WK 13-14

Select a Topic:

Praying for one another

Hello Class,

We all have prayer concerns. If you have a specific prayer concern that you would like the class to pray for, please post it here and we will join in prayer with you.

Blessings,

Robert

✶ Respond

▶ Expand All ▶ Show Options sort by: response | author | date | read | unread

Responses	Author	Date & Time
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hello! I would ask that you p	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Janice	16 Aug 06 9:06 PM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Janice,	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Robert Vaughan	16 Aug 06 9:50 PM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Thank you for your prayers. I	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Janice	18 Aug 06 12:50 PM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Janice! I will be praying	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Keisha	18 Aug 06 10:51 AM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Thanks Keisha!	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Janice	18 Aug 06 12:51 PM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Janice, I will be praying f	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MANISH	21 Aug 06 3:37 AM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hello everyone... I have been	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Melissa	18 Aug 06 12:54 PM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Melissa,	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Janice	18 Aug 06 9:09 PM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Melissa,	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Robert Vaughan	19 Aug 06 8:46 AM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Melissa,	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MANISH	21 Aug 06 3:36 AM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Melissa, i want you to hang i	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Keisha	22 Aug 06 4:21 PM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I just wanted to post an updat	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Janice	23 Aug 06 10:04 AM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> praise God janice! i am so ha	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Keisha	23 Aug 06 8:12 PM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I am glad for this good news.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MANISH	25 Aug 06 1:46 AM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Janice,	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Robert Vaughan	25 Aug 06 8:30 AM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Class,	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Robert Vaughan	25 Aug 06 8:31 AM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hello everyone, my name is Pet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Peter	1 Sep 06 7:05 PM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Peter,	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Janice	2 Sep 06 8:01 AM MST
▶ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Today I am thinking about talk	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Peter	8 Sep 06 8:45 AM MST

Exit Course Logout

Figure 5.3. Example of ongoing prayer

This interaction continued and increased as the course continued because the students and I shared more openly about our spiritual progress and daily struggles. Figure 5.4 illustrates the increased interaction. The students in the threaded discussion illustrated in figure 5.4 are responding to the following questions and set of instructions from Unit 2:

Here is your discussion question: As you reflect on the first four chapters of the text, which of the three streams that we have studied do you find is closest to your experience of spiritual formation? Which one challenges you the most? Why? Post a thoughtful answer to the cohort discussion question in the discussion forum. This is due by Thursday of week three (3). Read all the other messages and post a response to the work of two of your fellow students by Monday of week four. Please be in prayer for your fellow students.

↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I agree Keisha.	Jonathan [REDACTED] 4 Sep 06 10:21 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Of the three, the stream that'	Jonathan [REDACTED] 31 Aug 06 7:29 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Jonathon and ALL,	Robert Vaughan 1 Sep 06 10:32 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Holiness in my mind means virt	Melissa [REDACTED] 1 Sep 06 10:37 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Holiness in my mind means pur	Keisha [REDACTED] 3 Sep 06 5:48 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> My understanding on holiness i	MANISH [REDACTED] 3 Sep 06 7:44 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Manish and ALL,	Robert Vaughan 5 Sep 06 9:04 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> It seems that I am finding mys	Melissa [REDACTED] 31 Aug 06 9:44 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> wow! Melissa i couldn't have	Keisha [REDACTED] 31 Aug 06 8:43 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Melissa and ALL,	Robert Vaughan 1 Sep 06 10:37 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes... praying about every tho	Melissa [REDACTED] 1 Sep 06 10:46 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I find living a prayer filed I	Peter [REDACTED] 31 Aug 06 10:35 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Peter and ALL,	Robert Vaughan 2 Sep 06 10:10 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reading through the first four	MANISH [REDACTED] 31 Aug 06 7:19 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Manish and ALL,	Robert Vaughan 2 Sep 06 10:06 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I believe the Holy Spirit has	Keisha [REDACTED] 2 Sep 06 7:03 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Allowing God to fine tune and	Peter [REDACTED] 6 Sep 06 5:47 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Absolutely, Peter. It's probab	Melissa [REDACTED] 7 Sep 06 10:46 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Melissa and ALL,	Robert Vaughan 8 Sep 06 10:26 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I believe you can still sin e	Keisha [REDACTED] 8 Sep 06 5:30 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> i find it interesting also abo	Peter [REDACTED] 4 Sep 06 5:05 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I agree with what you all are	Jonathan [REDACTED] 4 Sep 06 10:30 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> there is nothing more powerful	Peter [REDACTED] 6 Sep 06 5:49 PM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Amen to that! Just think about	Janice [REDACTED] 7 Sep 06 7:48 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We'd have a different society.	Melissa [REDACTED] 7 Sep 06 10:48 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yeah, we would have a utopia.	Peter [REDACTED] 8 Sep 06 8:43 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hi Peter and ALL,	Robert Vaughan 8 Sep 06 10:28 AM MS
↳ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> i struggle with believing tha	Keisha [REDACTED] 8 Sep 06 5:34 PM MS

Figure 5.4. Example of active interaction

Active discussion threads often demonstrate two visual patterns. The first pattern displays a vertical movement. In this first pattern, a number of individuals respond to a question either from the facilitator or one of the students. This often makes the thread look like a series of steps. In a face-to-face situation, this pattern would be equivalent to the instructor asking a question, receiving answers and asking additional questions to draw out more information. The second pattern occurs when two or more individuals respond to one another in a dialogue. This pattern looks more like a slope to the right moving horizontally. Figure 5.4 illustrates both of these patterns. When the horizontal slope appears, it indicates that students are actively engaged in a discussion without significant prompting from the facilitator. In a face-to-face situation, this would be equivalent to students rapidly exchanging ideas while the instructor observes. Neither pattern is intrinsically better than the other is, but the sloping pattern illustrates that students are willing to respond to one another without the facilitator's prompting. This interaction continued through the remaining units and created a sense of community within the students and facilitator.

The remaining units combined knowledge acquisition and practical application of spiritual formation concepts. Units three through five addressed the text's content and provided opportunity for the students to apply the historical basis for spiritual formation in a group setting. In unit five, the students were required to submit a summary of the text. This summary demonstrated their engagement with the material and allowed for an objective formative evaluation. In unit six was the basis for the next section of this course. The unit six discussion thread instructions were:

Now that we have completed the study of our text, we will begin the process of mutual accountability and personal spiritual formation. The success of this process is greatly determined by the amount of effort that each person puts in and by the dynamic of the group. It is acceptable to challenge and encourage, but please be sure to maintain a Christ-like tone in all communication.

Please complete these exercises during the next two weeks. After carefully considering the content of the previous weeks, select a personal goal for spiritual formation from one of the six historical streams. This process follows the Renovare model of spiritual formation. This goal should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-phased. You will pursue this goal for two weeks and then report on your progress. This goal may be repeated. This process is for your benefit. This goal is due by Thursday at midnight of week eleven (11) in the threaded discussion.

Post a thoughtful answer to the cohort discussion question in the discussion forum. This is due by Thursday of week eleven (11). Read all the other messages and post a response to the work of two of your fellow students by Monday of week twelve (12). Please be in prayer for your fellow students.

These instructions repeat in seven units of CHM304. The following are some of the goals presented by students. Melissa wrote:

I would say that based on the things that I have been discovering about myself as well as in the people in my family, immediate and distant relatives. . . . I am going to make my Spiritual Formation Goal be one of Word Centeredness. I need to get to a place that I am thinking good thoughts, speaking positive things, acting out in a positive manner. . . . and speaking forth prophetic words rather than shooting myself in the foot, speaking things on myself, and even accepting negative mindsets. Much of what has happened in my life I believe has been the result of other people closest to me speaking things over me, therefore, contributing to the things that I subconsciously believe about who I am, the decisions and choices I have made. It is now time to denounce and cut off all of those soul ties and adopt and own powerful and positive mindsets and thoughts for my life and situations I encounter.

Figure 5.5 illustrates how the class responded to Melissa's spiritual formation goal.

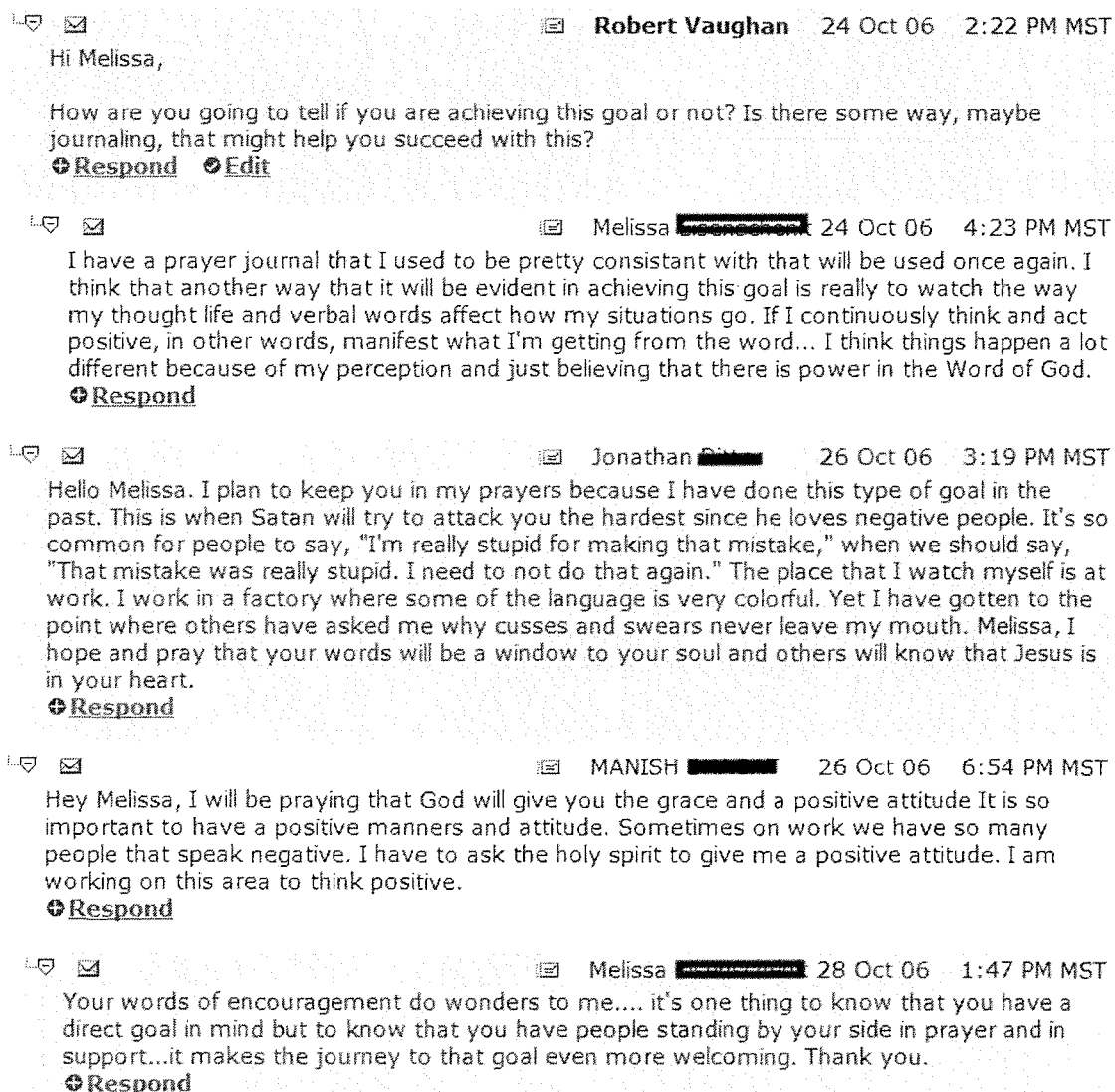


Figure 5.5. Engaged student interaction

Peter made an open confession to the class when stating his spiritual formation goal:

My goal is to live a prayer-filled life. Through prayer anything can be achieved. One of the things that I need prayer help with is patience. My wife is pregnant and she has been feeling nauseous for the past 3 weeks. I am trying to be understanding, and patient. But I find myself becoming impatient and selfish, thinking more about my needs than considering her needs. I forget that this is a new experience not only for me but more so for her. I need to remember that I

need to be thinking of her feelings and needs before my own. With constant prayer, I know that I will become more patient and understanding. Prayer for patience isn't the only thing though; I need prayer in times of temptation. I am addicted to pornography, and sometimes the temptation is more than I can bear, so I need constant prayer, and to call my loved ones especially my wife. I don't know how long it is going to take to get rid of the addiction, but I am doing whatever I can in order to not have that evil garbage in my life.

Figure 5.6 shows how the class responded to Peter's confession of a pornography addiction. This reaction indicates a high level of acceptance in the group and illustrates how the group formation process had moved from forming to performing. The students did not condemn nor present judgmental attitudes, but they reached out to a group member who had expressed a deep need. This is equivalent to what would happen in a face-to-face spiritual formation group when a member openly confesses a sin. Other students pledged to pray, provided scriptures and helpful resources, and expressed support for the hurting group member. Peter responded with heartfelt appreciation.

The interaction in figure 5.6 is typical of the support and engagement that the students shared with one another. Unit seven directly addresses the issues of online spiritual formation and provides an opportunity for the students to engage the issue of online spiritual formation. The discussion question for the week was:

Online relationships and spiritual formation: As we bring our first term together to a close, we will be moving from an intellectual process of gaining information to a relational process of spiritual formation. Here are your questions: How are online relationships different from face-to-face relationships? How are they the same? How have other people encouraged you in your spiritual formation process previously?
















-    **Robert Vaughan** 27 Oct 06 11:36 AM MST
 Hi Peter,
 Thank you for sharing this with the class. I will pray for victory in your life over this addiction.
 Dear Lord, empower Peter to overcome this addiction. Give him Your peace about it and give him a strong support group and victory in You.
 Here is a text that you might find helpful. It is "Addiction and Grace" by Gerald G. May, MD.
[Respond](#) [Edit](#)
-    **MANISH [REDACTED]** 27 Oct 06 7:19 PM MST
 I will be praying for you and your wife that the Lord will give you grace. Also, the victory over the temptation. I want to encourage you. Whenever the temptation arises go to the Lord ask the holy spirit to help you overcome this area in your life that needs to be taken out of you and your life.
[Respond](#)
-    **Melissa [REDACTED]** 28 Oct 06 1:51 PM MST
 Be encouraged, Peter, that you are not alone in such a desire to live a prayer-filled life. One thing that I remember quite vividly when I had a job about 4 months ago where I was required to drive quite a bit for my work....the conversation with God never had to end. I talked to God out loud quite a bit when I had so much windshield time... and it makes so much of a difference in how your day, week, month goes...
[Respond](#)
-    **Janice [REDACTED]** 28 Oct 06 4:09 PM MST
 Peter, I will be keeping you in prayer. Just keep telling him, "satan get behind me" and stay focused on His word. I am going through some struggles myself; especially at work. I wrote out Psalm 121 and I keep it in my pocket with me at all times. When I start to feel those doubts and so forth come on, I pull that out and go over it. Maybe you could try something similar with a verse that speaks to you.
[Respond](#)
-    **Peter [REDACTED]** 3 Nov 06 9:37 AM MST
 thank you all so much. your prayers and thoughts are greatly appreciated. i know that through the lord i can do anything. thank you all again.
[Respond](#)

Figure 5.6. Supportive student interaction

Figure 5.7 shows a typical interaction on this topic.

👤 📧 Jonathan [REDACTED] 9 Nov 06 6:42 PM MST

Online relationships need more work and "maintenance". A face to face relationship has the personal feel to it that makes people feel loved and accepted. When you build a face to face relationship you know how well it's doing and if it's a healthy, honest relationship. On the other hand though, if the people in the relationship don't keep in regular communication with each other, it becomes easy to forget about the other person... not too easy to when the person is in front of you.

They're the same in the sense that if they are well maintained and worked at, then the relationships that grow strong can last a very long time.

There are several people that help me in my spiritual formation. My wife and my pastor have been extremely instrumental.

Date Modified: 9 Nov 06 6:43 PM MST

➕ [Respond](#)

👤 📧 MANISH [REDACTED] 10 Nov 06 6:25 PM MST

Good point Jonathan, your are right, when you meet face to face you know the person and get to know them quicker. On lined takes longer to form bonds. While you are face to face while you are looking at them you can tell if they care for you. You can ministry to each other easily.

➕ [Respond](#)

👤 📧 Peter [REDACTED] 11 Nov 06 10:08 AM MST

very true. in the online world it is easy to forget about someone. and then you might run into trouble with them thinking they aren't welcome in the discussion, which nine times out of ten isn't the case at all. so i to think it is very important to try and remember everyone.

➕ [Respond](#)

👤 📧 Robert Vaughan 12 Nov 06 9:59 AM MST

Hi Peter and ALL,

With only a small number of people in our group, do you feel like you are getting to know anyone yet or will this take more time? Do you think the process would be helped if we had team projects to complete? Why?

➕ [Respond](#) 🗑 [Edit](#)

👤 📧 Janice [REDACTED] 12 Nov 06 4:29 PM MST

I think that we would have been able to get to know one another a little better if we had done more group work. I'm not necessarily talking about team projects, but perhaps if we had more questions to answer that sparked different opinions, that would have helped for everyone to get to know one another a little better.

I am so very thankful that I took the step and decided to come back to college. The choice to come back was for myself and no one else. Just this class alone has made it worth it. Over the past couple of months I have noticed a significant difference in my personal relationship with Jesus. I am so very thankful! I recently got an email that said "I'm B.A.D." Which stands for: Blessed And Delivered! I love it!! I hope everyone here is B.A.D.!!!

Figure 5.7. Student interaction concerning online spiritual formation

Some key points from this interaction are:

Jonathon notes that nonverbal communication is lacking in an online environment.

He also notes that relationships that foster spiritual formation can be successful in an online format if they are maintained.

Manish and Peter concurred with this assessment.

Janice noted that while this may be true, she had gained significant benefit from taking part in the course.

In another part of this thread, Peter noted:

Online relationships are different from face-to-face relationships in that when talking to someone online you can't see their face and expressions and hear the tone they are using.

Online discussion might give an otherwise timid person a little more "guts" by saying online what they might not be able to say in person.

Online and face-to-face spiritual formation groups are the same in that we are talking to one another, giving suggestions, listening, commenting, and asking questions. Anything that can be said face-to-face can still be said online. We can still make friends with others and find a common ground.

This first section of the Spiritual Formation Group ended well. The students were supportive, engaged, and demonstrated their comprehension of the course material through the submission of their course projects. The course ended on November 20 and the second section of this three-course program began January 8. This six-week break presented a challenge for the students and two of them dropped the upcoming course leaving four students in the CHM304.

Figure 5.8 illustrates the second section of this three-term course of study, CHM304. This course focused on the students' ongoing self-directed spiritual formation goals. They kept a journal for each two-week unit and interacted in a discussion on their

continuing goals. This allowed students flexibility to interact at their own comfort level, meet the requirement for academic rigor, and foster online relationships that promoted spiritual formation. Students used the area for prayer concerns throughout the course as they shared in prayer together. The discussions in the first several units were engaging and interactive with each student posting a number of messages; however, by the end of the 14 weeks only 3 of the 4 students posted a single message on the discussion board. This indicates that the students had discontinued their engagement with the course material.

Spiritual Formation Group (1/8 - 4/28/07)
Instructor: Robert Vaughan

Course Admin Gradebook Email Chat Doc Sharing Dropbox Weblogography

Course
▼ Course
Home
Syllabus
Calendar
Course Q & A
Prayer
Concern
Crown Library
▼ Week 1
Introductions
Discussion
Journal Entry
▼ Week 2
Discussion
Journal Entry
▼ Week 3
Discussion
Journal Entry
▼ Week 4
Discussion
Journal Entry
▼ Week 5
Discussion
Journal Entry
▼ Week 6
Discussion
Journal Entry
▼ Week 7
Discussion
Journal Entry

Week 1: Week 1 Help

Unit 1 - Weeks 1 -2

1. Select a self-directed goal for spiritual formation. This process follows the Renovare model of spiritual formation. This goal should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-phased. You will pursue this goal for two weeks and then report on your progress. This goal may be repeated. This goal should be directly related to one of the six streams of spiritual formation. This process is for your benefit. This goal is due by Thursday in each odd numbered week throughout the semester.
2. Post a journal entry on the progress of your current self-directed spiritual formation goal in the digital drop box by Thursday in each even numbered week throughout the semester. This brief report is four or five sentences in length. It begins with a thesis statement that clearly describes the topic, continues with two or three sentences of illustration and ends with a strong conclusion that applies the learning of the student. While this is very brief, it requires thoughtful consideration to be concise and complete. Please only include those words and ideas that clearly advance your presentation. Please be sure to submit an error free presentation. Please refer to the sample journal entry in doc sharing for an example. Read all the other messages and post a response to the work of two of your fellow students by Monday of each odd numbered week. Please be in prayer for your fellow students.

Figure 5.8. CHM304 outline

Two students from CHM304 enrolled in the third section of this three-term course. It was determined that this was an insufficient number of students to warrant a course and the course was cancelled.

The next section addresses the successes and failures of this attempt at developing an online, asynchronous course of study to foster spiritual formation.

Successes and Areas for Improvement

The process of developing these three courses took over a year from initial proposal to the implementation of the first course. I spent many hours in consultation with the Director of Online Learning at Christian College. The curriculum committee reviewed the proposal three times and I revised the course materials multiple times. Despite the time-consuming labor to create a series of courses that met the needs of the Christian College administration and student body, these classes yielded positive and negative results.

The positive aspects of these three courses included: significant interaction between students and faculty, ongoing intercessory prayer for one another, and engagement with quality materials on spiritual formation. In a face-to-face spiritual formation class, students can interact with one another at each class meeting. In an online spiritual formation class, the students can interact any time during the day at his or her convenience. This asynchronous feature in the online format allows individuals to share details about their lives in a non-threatening environment.

As shown above, the students in CHM303 shared intimate personal details of their lives and received unconditional positive regard from their fellow students and facilitator. In addition, students presented ongoing prayer concerns for intercessory prayer and their fellow students prayed for them in the discussion thread and followed up on the concerns. The same process would occur in a face-to-face setting. The group generated a list of ongoing prayer concerns and gave updates on the concerns as time goes by. This shared sense of prayer in a spiritual formation community creates emotional and spiritual bonds. I based these courses on *Streams of Living Water* by Richard Foster. The students fully explored each of the six streams listed in this text. A book report was required at the end of the CHM303. Students reported that they gained significant personal and spiritual insights from completing the reading and interacting with others about the content of the text. While these positive outcomes allowed the class to be considered a success, there were also areas of improvement.

These three courses were experimental and left several areas for improvement including: the length of the sequence of courses, the administrative details of the courses, and the credit hours in relationship to the work involved in the course. As the courses progressed, it became obvious that the original vision of maintaining a cohort model throughout an entire year was not going to work. The course presented the material in a sequential manner. For example, a CHM303 required a pretest and a post test was supposed to be have been administered in CHM305. The final course CHM305 did not have enough students enrolled to administer the posttest. This prevented the students from completing the course series which were independent of one another. Another area

for improvement was the administrative details of the course. The course guidelines ensured that students would not gain academic or spiritual benefit from entering the sequence of courses in the middle of the program. This prevented students from entering the sequence of courses during CHM304 or CHM 305. As the number of original students decreased, the viability of the course also decreased. The original intent of the Director of Online Education was to have this sequence of courses become part of the required course of study for all online students. Unfortunately, the school replaced the Director of Online Education at the end of CHM303 and the new Director of Online Education did not believe that this course would be a good fit as a required course. The final area of improvement was the amount of work required for a 14-week, one unit course. In order to cover the material adequately, too much work was required for the course. This was a disincentive for the students. Section seven will address these areas of improvement.

Conclusion

This sequence of courses on spiritual formation in an online environment demonstrated that significant spiritual formation is possible in an online environment. Students testified that they received benefit from the study and interaction. The course content provided new insights for them and they developed a sense of community within the course setting; however, several aspects of the course need improvement. Section six will present the project specifications including cost, number of students, workload,

number of credits, and course content, structure, educational aspects, and administrative aspects.

SECTION 6

PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS

Every effective online course must include clear specifications. The sections CHM303, 304, and 305 each met Christian College's required specifications.¹ Section six presents the project specifications including cost, number of students, workload, number of credits, course content and structure, educational aspects, and administrative aspects.

Costs and Enrollment

Costs and minimum enrollment standards for online classes vary greatly among schools. Some schools offer a class with a minimum of two students to interact in the discussion boards, and other schools cancel classes with fewer than six students. Christian College charges each online student \$400 per unit to take classes and normally cancels a class with fewer than six students. The administration made an exception because of CHM 303-305's cohort structure; however, when the enrollment dropped to two students, the course was no longer economically viable. In addition to costs and enrollment, the facilitator must consider the academic workload and number of credits.

¹ Names of institutions and individuals have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Work Load and Number of Credits

A normal five-week undergraduate class at Christian College is worth three units. The CHM 303-305 sequence is an accelerated program and students have significant learning in a condensed period. This number of credit hours usually requires 10 to 15 hours of effort from the students per week. Requirements include reading the text, posting initial answers to discussion questions, posting substantive responses to fellow students' and the instructor's work, researching and writing essays, and additional learning activities. Since the workload for each class in the sequence extended over 14 weeks, 3 times as long as normal, the number of hours required for completing the work had to be divided by 3 as well. I expected each student to spend three to five hours per week in class, and this presented a unique challenge. In order to meet this challenge, I limited discussions to one thread, reading to 50 pages per week, and gave multiple weeks for research and essay writing.

Course Content and Course Structure

The course content for CHM 303-305 focused on the six streams of spiritual formation from the text *Streams of Living Water* by Richard Foster. Christian College's Curriculum Committee members were required that the material be historically grounded, theologically correct, and practically applicable. After reviewing several possible texts, committee members agreed that Foster's text met the three criteria. With the text selected, the course's structure was determined, which involved a question of educational philosophy. I considered if a cohort model with an extended time of interaction would

increase the students' educational and spiritual benefits. I presented research on cohorts, conducted personal conversations with faculty members, and considered the school's history. Christian College had never used a cohort model in the past, and given the class's experimental nature; I introduced a cohort into the process and extended the courses over 12 months. This decision affected the course load and number of credits. Furthermore, I structured the course as pass/fail as opposed to a graded course to allow students to express themselves more freely in class discussions. Section five demonstrated the course structure with examples of screen shots. In addition to the course content and structure, I addressed academic and administrative issues.

Academic and Administrative Issues

The Curriculum Committee addressed a number of critical issues before approving CHM303-305 including the use of videos, real-time chats, journals, pre/post tests, outside websites, and quizzes. Christian College's Curriculum Committee encourages the use of videos in online courses, and facilitators often use videos to introduce each unit or a specific topic. In a standard five-week course, this requires the production of five videos. For the 14-week courses in CHM303-305, I determined the requisite number of videos was too labor intensive.

Christian College courses do not use real time chats on a regular basis. I attempted a real time chat, but discovered that the underlying technology in eCollege did not function correctly. Christian College courses often require written journals, and the process of journaling is encouraged as a spiritual formation technique. The Curriculum

Committed approved the use of weekly journals, and the students reported benefits from journaling and the insights they gleaned from others.

The Christian College administrators encourage the use of pre/post-tests. Section 5 discussed the pre/post tests for CHM303-3005. The students completed the pretest, but not the post-test. Christian College's Curriculum Committee members believe outside websites are integral to promoting a positive educational experience, and they view the Internet as a repository for additional resources, course materials, and contemporary applications. I encouraged CHM303-305 students to use outside web sites to support their learning and add to class content. Christian College instructors do not use content quizzes in online settings and prefer to evaluate students through application projects or research papers.

Conclusion

Many individuals helped shape these online spiritual formation courses. The Dean of Online Education, the Curriculum Committee, and the Vice-President of Academics enhanced the courses' academic and administrative viability. In conjunction with the Dean of Online Education, I proposed the original idea. After we determined the initial proposal we sent it to the Curriculum Committee for approval, and the Curriculum Committee sent the proposal back for further revision. After I made revisions, the Vice-President of Academics reviewed and approved the courses. This team effort produced a viable set of courses. Students reported that they gained insight into their process of

spiritual formation, shared their lives in an online community, and gained greater appreciation for the historical understandings of spiritual formation.

SECTION 7

POSTSCRIPT

I presented the three courses CHM303-305 at Christian College with high expectations and thorough preparation. Section five demonstrated that there were areas of success and areas for improvement in the course design and implementation. I am thankful to Christian College¹ for allowing me to develop, design, and present a series of online courses in spiritual formation. Without the freedom to be creative and Christian College's support, this project would not have been possible. Section seven suggests possible revisions to this project to increase effectiveness and explores the future of online education and spiritual formation.

Possible Revisions

I suggest three major structural revisions to improve this sequence of courses including: changing from a 14-week to a 5-week structure, reducing from 3 to 2 courses with the second course repeatable for credit, eliminating the cohort aspect, and presenting the post test earlier in the sequence. The educational benefit of allowing more time for community building in an extended period appears to have been offset by the higher attrition rate in a longer course. In this instance, there was a 33% attrition rate from CHM303 to CHM304 and a 66% attrition rate from CHM303 to CHM 305. This is not

¹ Names of institutions and individuals have been changed to protect confidentiality.

sustainable, and by conforming to Christian College's five-week course structure, the students will be more familiar with the flow and structure and have less opportunity to withdraw.

In addition, reducing the sequence of courses from three to two allows sufficient time for the students to form a community but not so much time to perceive the process as too drawn out. Those students who wish to continue the process of spiritual formation could repeat the second course for credit. The cohort model for this series of courses would have to be eliminated if it is reduced to two five-week courses, and these courses would be open to all students. This would help reduce the attrition rate for the second course. Finally, the post-test would be presented at the end of the first five-week course. This would give the students an opportunity to take both the pre and post tests. Other schools are currently implementing these changes.

Future Possibilities

Since completing this project, I have worked with three other schools to develop online spiritual formation courses. GC Christian College implemented an eight-week online course in spiritual formation. The content covered approximately the same material dealing with issues of spiritual disciplines, self-awareness, servanthood, and accountability. This course received positive feedback, and students reported that it to be of the best classes that they have taken.

OC Christian College implemented two 2-week classes. Each course is worth one credit, and the courses run between terms. The content and format is similar to CHM303-

305, and the students engage in discussion, personal reflection, spiritual retreats, and journaling.

IW Christian College has taken a unique approach to spiritual formation. Rather than offering one or two courses in spiritual formation, this school offers four mandatory one-unit courses in a two-year program. The courses are each two weeks in length and address the same content as the other courses; however, the schedule for these courses allows the cohort to experience the accountability and content in an ongoing basis. With the implementation of new technology, many possible techniques are available to supplement the online students' educational experience.

One experimental idea within other contexts uses Second Life as a teaching tool. Second Life is a MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game), and a school can purchase space on the Second Life server and create an island. This island can contain science labs, meeting halls, video displays, PowerPoint presentations, self-guided studies, interactive models, and many other innovative technologies. Exclusively those with the password can access the island. The creation of a virtual college campus is possible using life like buildings, grounds, and personnel. Students can visit this island to read lectures, watch videos, or interact with professors and fellow students in real time. Avatars allow a virtual representation of each individual. Each person has the option of creating an avatar of his or her own design. This program allows user to hold entire worship services in a Second Life complete with live singing, a live sermon, and real time prayer responses. Virtual communion can served and an individual can make virtual confession to a spiritual director. The program for using Second Life is a free download

and as computers develop greater capacity, more students can run this program without experiencing significant slowdown. This type of virtual experience may be the next big innovation in online education.

Conclusion

I will continue to work in the field of spiritual formation and online education, and I am currently revising an online spiritual formation course for OC Christian College. I am convinced that spiritual formation can take place in an online environment. Many students who have completed this type of course report that they have gained spiritual benefit from the course content and experienced significant social and emotional benefit from the course interaction.

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