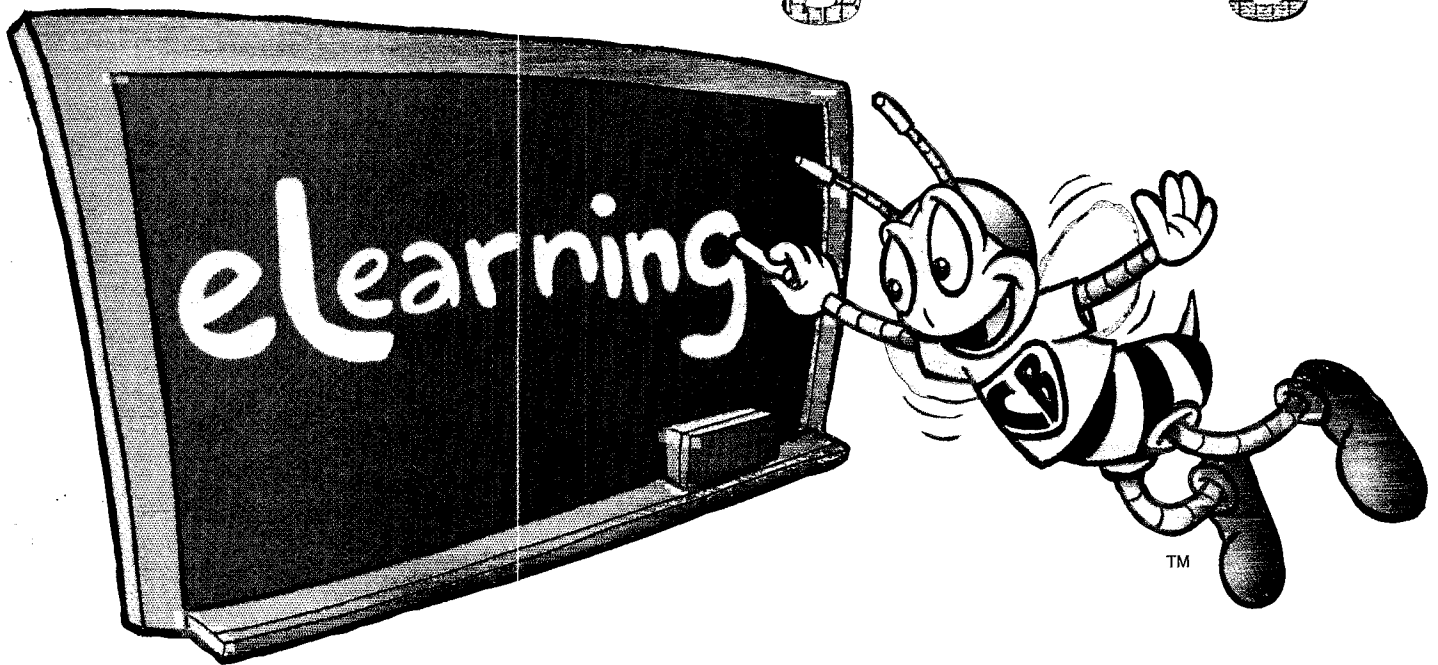# CyberBee

by Linda C. Joseph ⁙ Columbus Public Schools • Library of Congress
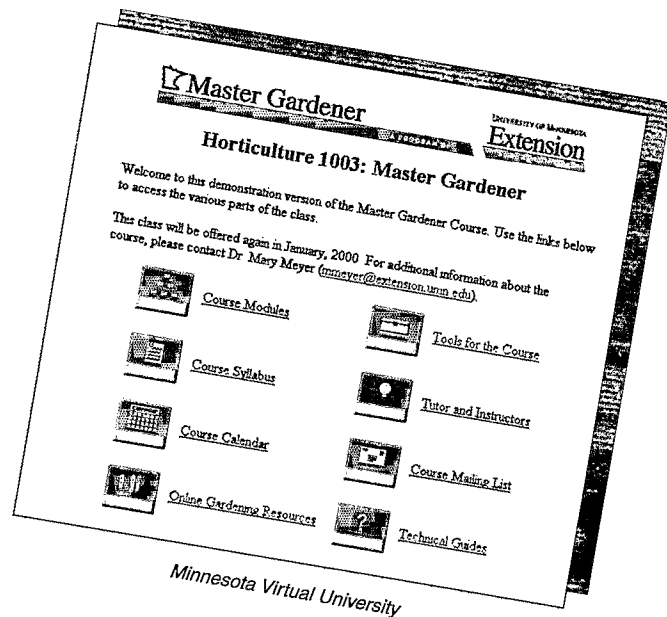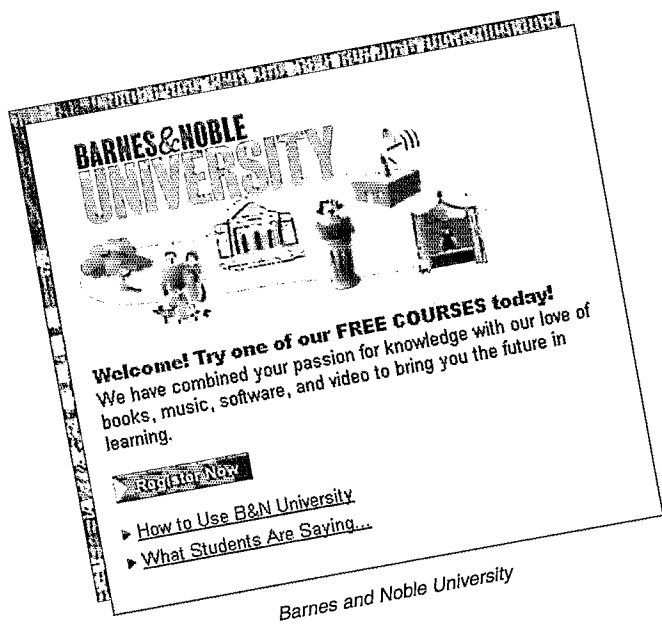
eLearning in the Digital Age

[Editor's note: URLs mentioned in this article appear in the chart that follows on page 37.]

With the advent of technological advances, distance education is experiencing a renaissance in delivering curriculum via two-way audio and video and the Web. Virtual classrooms are popping up at educational institutions across the U.S. and around the world. The concept of a virtual learning space allows the individual the flexibility to take a course anytime, anywhere; to interact with professors and other students in small learning communities; and to choose from a wide range of course offerings. This trend is now filtering down to K-12 schools. This idea is particularly attractive to students in remote areas who would not otherwise be able to take certain courses because there are not enough students or a qualified teacher is unavailable. It is also an innovative way to provide professional development or continuing education to K-12 teachers.

There are thousands of educational Web sites that contain all sorts of bells and whistles impersonating instructional destinations or claiming to be virtual

Barnes and Noble University

Minnesota Virtual University

classrooms. However, once you arrive, you find that there is little instructional value. To be instructional, a site needs to have all of the components that are found in any standard learning environment, including content and management. Content needs to include more than posting a lesson and having an assignment e-mailed to the teacher. It requires careful planning with objectives, outcomes, organization, appropriate material, and a delivery system that is effective and easy to use. System management includes all of the design elements combined with the delivery system. In most cases content, assignments, discussion, communication, and administration are delivered over the Web. Learners are expected to be self-motivated and share a responsibility for their learning.

When this type of organizational structure is followed, the Web can be transformed into a bona fide interactive learning environment. To this end there are several Web sites that can serve as models when designing Web-based learning spaces.

Virtual Classrooms

CalState Teach

California State University offers a teacher certification program to applicants who have a bachelor's degree and have passed the California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST). The program is specifically beneficial to those who have emergency teaching certificates and want to gain full certification. With that in mind, coursework is designed around classroom experiences. The Web site engages students through discussions with their peers and professors and links to resources. In addition to the Web site, students meet several times for Saturday seminars. A multimedia slide show presents an in-depth overview of the program.

Class.com

The University of Nebraska administers Class.com for profit. The concept of a Web-based classroom evolved from their high school correspondence program started in 1929.

The program is fully accredited by the Nebraska Department of Education and by the North Central Association Commission on Schools. Students may take a single course and apply it to their local high schools or enroll in a full diploma program. Courses are designed to take advantage of the latest communication and multimedia technologies. School districts and state organizations have the option of offering courses locally.

Home Education Network

Register online and select from certified and technical training programs that are offered throughout the community and online. The Home Education Network utilizes the Blackboard software for online course delivery.

Minnesota Virtual University

Comprehensive information about higher education and lifelong learning opportunities is provided through the Minnesota Virtual University. A wide range of education providers, from higher education to private industry, sponsor courses based on traditional in-class lectures and courses offered via the Internet. View the demo version of Horticulture 1003: Master Gardener to understand how the online courses are constructed.

Technology Leadership Network

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is offering educators, administrators, and school board members online technology courses through its ITTE: Education Technology Programs Department. The courses are focused on staff development strategies and on measuring the impact technology has on student achievement.

Setting up a Virtual Classroom for Professional Development

With teachers' busy days, there does not seem to be enough time for organizing the kinds of sustained professional development activities that are needed. Offering

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Components of a Web-Based Course

Registration
Depending on how you set up your Web-based class, you may or may not be able to offer online registration. This requires a database and programming script.

Syllabus
The syllabus includes information about the instructor, the description of the course or workshop, the objectives, grading scale, and materials.

Schedule or Calendar
The schedule is the timeline for when each lesson should begin and end and when the assignment is due.

Sessions or Modules of Course Material
The sessions or modules include the content that is being taught. It may be a lecture or a combination of lecture and multimedia.

Assignments
Assignments can be posted on the Web using an interactive database or forum software. They can also be e-mailed as an attachment.

Resources
Resources are links to Web sites that are referenced in the lessons.

Forum or Chat
The forum or chat area is the communication command center. Students can introduce themselves, topics can be discussed, and collaboration on group projects can take shape in real time.

Instructor Contact (E-mail)
E-mail is an ideal way to privately communicate with the instructor.

Evaluation Center
Surveys, evaluations, and grades can be posted in this area.

Technical Help
Information about the kind of computer and software that are needed is generally posted in this area along with any step-by-step instructions.

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workshops online for college or continuing education credits is an option.

How do I set up a Web-based professional development workshop for my teachers? Actually, it is quite easy if you do not need to house the site on your school server and do not need your own logo. Several software companies offer free service and course hosting. You organize your content and the software companies handle the delivery system. Take Blackboard and Internet Classroom Assistant for a spin and decide if one of them meets your needs.

On the other hand, if you're a pioneer looking for adventure and want your own customized graphics, you may want to cobble together a virtual classroom. In this case you would create your own Web pages and find software that handles the interactive functions such as communication. There are a lot of freebies for setting up discussion forums or chat rooms. Some are Web-based, while others are scripts that require some technical expertise. If you choose scripts, you will want to contact your Webmaster or Internet Service Provider for assistance.

Ready-Made Classrooms
Blackboard
If you can type you can use this tool. Simply fill in some preliminary information about your course and select a color scheme. Then, work through all of the control panel selections to set up announcements, forums, course content, assignments, registration features, and more. This is a very slick and easy-to-use interface.

Nicenet's Internet Classroom Assistant
Nicenet is an organization of Internet professionals who donate their time to provide services for the Internet com-

munity. Internet Classroom Assistant offers conferencing, personal messaging, document sharing, scheduling, and resource linking to the learning environment. Teachers can set up a class in minutes. Although there are not as many features in this program as there are in Blackboard, it is very easy to use.

Forum Software
Advertising on each page is the trade-off for obtaining ezBoard and World Crossing for free. These Web-based bulletin boards are easy to manage and are loaded with features that may not be available in scripts.

ezBoard
With ezBoard you can pick your own forum styles, such as tree or flat style, add colors, images, and themes, insert your personal photo and icon, and create your custom signature. International versions are available in Spanish and German. A profanity filter is also included to block out unwanted messages.

Discus
Discus is a collection of integrated CGI scripts that runs on UNIX and Windows 95/98/NT Web servers. Messages are stored on the same page, making the discussions linear versus threaded. Discus is available in several languages.

vBulletin
vBulletin is scripted in the PHP language and uses the MySQL database for storing and retrieving information. A "lite" version is available for free. A Web server that can run PHP version 3.0.9 or higher and a MySQL database version 3.22 or higher are required.

Virtual Classrooms

CalState Teach
http://www.calstateteach.net/

Class.com
http://www.class.com/

Home Education Network
http://www.unex.ucla.edu/

Minnesota Virtual University
http://www.mnvu.org/

Technology Leadership network
http://www.nsba.org/itte/onlinecourse.html

Ready-Made Classrooms

Blackboard
http://www.blackboard.net/

Nicenet's Internet Classroom Assistant
http://www.nicenet.org/

Forum Software

ezBoard
http://www.ezboard.com/

Discus
http://www.discusware.com/discus/home/

vBulletin
http://vBulletin.com/

World Crossing, Puente Mundial
http://www.worldcrossing.com/

Educommerce

Barnes and Noble University
http://www.barnesandnobleuniversity.com/

Powered
http://www.powered.com/

World Crossing, Puente Mundial

World Crossing and the Spanish language edition Puente Mundial are based on the Web Crossing conferencing software. No technical knowledge is required because the forum is hosted on the World Crossing site. Features include instant setup, chat rooms, customization, threaded messages or linear conversations, and unlimited messages and participants.

Future of eLearning

What does the future hold for this method of learning? For now courses and content via the Internet are in vogue and gaining in popularity. However, a new group of entrepreneurs has appeared on the horizon. "Educommerce"

> **Barnes and Noble University was launched in June 2000.**

is their business. It is based on the theory that if you allow individuals to learn about topics of interest, or skills related to your business in an educational context, they will be more likely to pick your company for purchases. These new players in the continuing education space may muddy the waters as they entice individuals to take free courses while selling products or marketing information in the background.

Educommerce

Powered

Powered offers non-accredited online courses. Its target audience ranges from adult learners to high school students. The company began as NotHarvard.com in 1999 based on the Educommerce theory. In the past 2 years Powered has built several impressive "universities."

Barnes and Noble University

Barnes and Noble University was launched in June 2000. A diverse range of courses is available in many subject areas. Here's a sampling of classes: Teaching Children Literature Using Harry Potter; Italian for Travelers; All Aboard: The Railroad in American History; and Beginning Flash 5 Web Animation. As with any course, you will need to purchase a book. Of course that is made easy with a "buy now" link at Barnes and Noble.

Be sure to visit the *MULTIMEDIA SCHOOLS* home page [http://www.infotoday.com/MMSchools] with active links to all of the Web sites mentioned in this article. Then fly over to CyberBee [http://www.cyberbee.com] for more curriculum ideas, research tools, and activities to use with your students and staff.
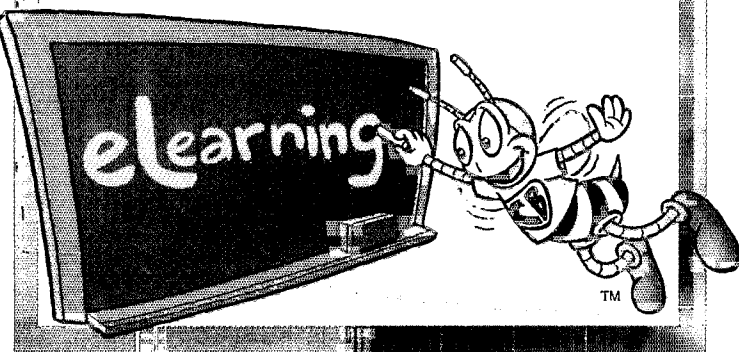
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SOURCE: Multimedia Schools 8 no3 My/Je 2001
WN: 0112105894006