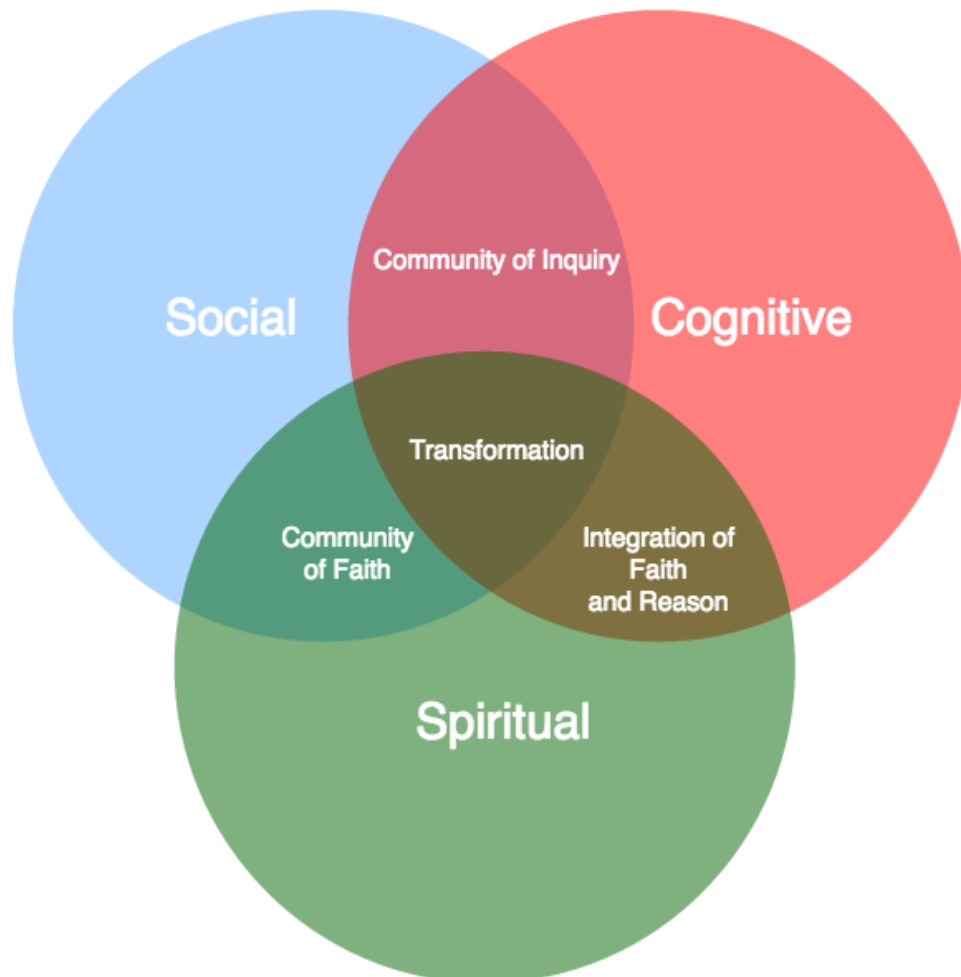


TWU Online Business Model

TWU Online has been envisioned as an extension of the campus-based experience which goes beyond a simple transactional experience and results in the deep transformation of TWU students throughout their time with us.

The notion of a transformational learning experience is not unique to TWU, but, unlike many public institutions in Canada and the US, we are intentional about integrating our Christian faith into our teaching and learning practice.

In an effort to more clearly define what the idea of a transformational learning experience means for TWU Online, we propose the following model in figure 1.



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Figure 1. Transformational Learning Model

Transformational Learning at TWU

The three main components of the model represent the three primary influences on TWU students.

Social Influences

The TWU experience is overtly and intentionally community-focused. We support and encourage the development of deep community in myriad ways, from encouraging first and second-year students to live on campus, to Orientation Week, daily chapels, service opportunities, small class sizes, and more recently, our emphasis on inquiry-based learning in our core courses.

The TWU Student Life staff and leadership do excellent work in promoting a positive and welcoming environment for a wide variety of students from many different walks of life.

The emphasis on community at TWU should not be seen as primarily a function of helping our students meet other people who are like them, but as a point of leverage in supporting the other two influences in the model. Both spiritual health and cognitive skills are best developed in the context of a caring community.

Spiritual Influences

As a distinctly Christian community, TWU is also deeply concerned about the spiritual health of our students, faculty, and staff. Building on the natural results of living in a community, we support students on their spiritual journeys.

TWU is a place where the spiritual heritage of some students is given traction as they take ownership over their parents' beliefs and practices. Other students are challenged in their faith as they encounter questions and challenges that they may not have had opportunity to explore. Still others take their first faltering steps of faith through the influence of their friends and TWU staff and faculty.

Whatever the student's context and background, TWU is a place to become more deeply committed to a spiritual journey.

Cognitive Influences

Similar to universities of all types, TWU is a place to grow intellectually and to develop high level cognitive skills. TWU must be a community committed to the pursuit of knowledge, both through the generation of new knowledge through scholarly research and through the sharing of knowledge through the mutual processes of teaching and learning.

We know that learning is fundamentally a social process that necessarily involves the sharing of information and experiences followed by the reflective process of making meaning from that information and based on those experiences. Because TWU is already intentionally community focused, we have created an ideal environment for students to explore and make meaningful the universe and their place in it.

Intersecting Influences

These three influences and how they intersect with each other are what we propose constitute the transformative learning experience at TWU.

Community of Faith

At the intersection of social and spiritual influences is the notion that TWU is a community of faith. We know that our Christian faith has always been focused on community.

Integration of Faith and Reason

At the intersection of spiritual and cognitive influences is the process of integrating one's spiritual heritage and practice with what one is learning or has learned about the nature of the universe. From the earliest days of Trinity Junior College, our leadership has recognized the truth that 'If Jesus really is Lord, then there is no secular.'

Learning to recognize the fingerprints of God in the universe and to understand the nature of Christianity as a comprehensive worldview is at the core of the task we set before students.

Community of Inquiry

The intersection of social and cognitive influences can be modeled as a community of inquiry (CoI). The idea of a CoI grew out of the long history of pedagogies based on social constructivism, or the idea that students learn best in a relational community. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) describe a CoI as a model that shows how learning in community occurs between the interactions of three elements, cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence.

As seen in figure 2, the first element of the model is cognitive presence, which is defined as the ability for students to "construct meaning through sustained communication" (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 89), more commonly understood as critical thinking. Social presence is the next element and is described as "the ability of participants in the Community of Inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as "real people." "(Garrison et al., 2000, p. 89). Teaching presence is traditionally within the purview of the instructor and consists of three distinct roles: the design of the

learning environment, including selecting and organizing content, and setting the learning activities and methods of assessment; and the facilitation of discourse during the course; and adding subject matter expertise through direct instruction (Anderson, 2008). Teaching presence involves the instructor (or students) guiding the social and cognitive processes in the learning environment in order to realize the learning outcomes.

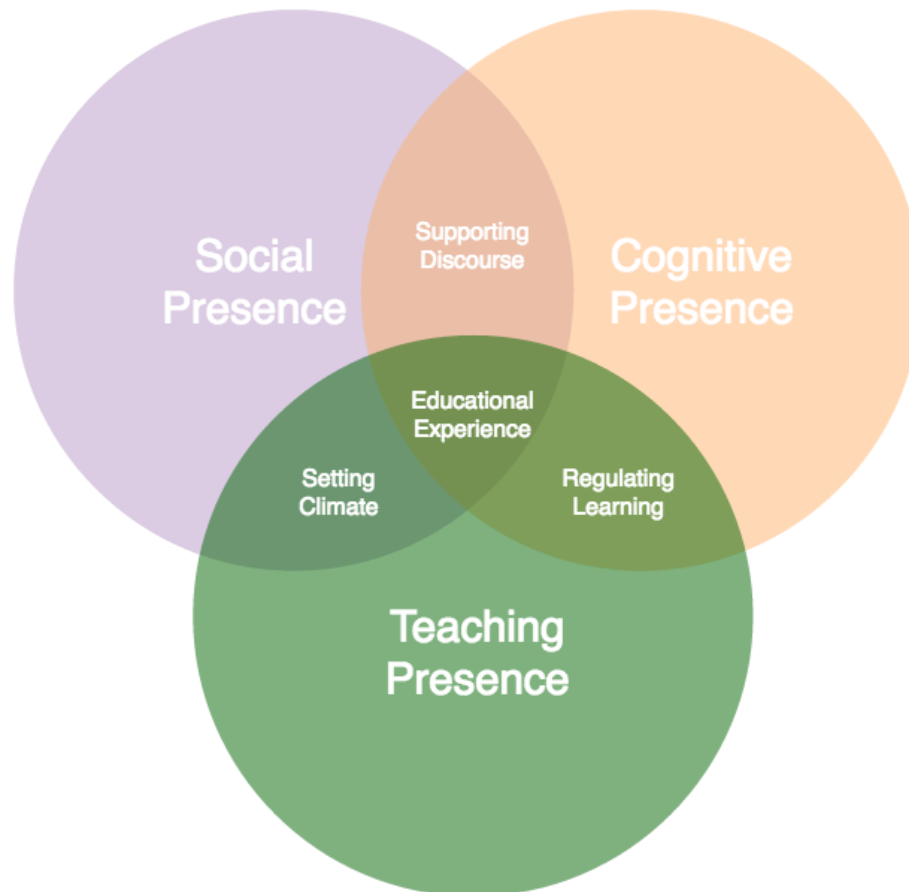


Figure 2. Community of Inquiry (Garrison et al., 2000).

Interaction

A further defining characteristic of effective learning environments, including those at TWU, is that they encourage high levels of interaction. It is through interaction in small groups of trusted peers and instructors that students are able to construct meaning from learning activities and experiences.

Anderson (2003) provides a rationale for the idea that there are different modes of interaction in distance learning environments, and I used his model to provide a refined version characteristic of cooperative learning environments (Madland, 2014).

My model (figure 3) shows the three primary agents in learning environments: students, their peers, and teachers. Students interact with their teacher and with their peers through the vehicle of learning activities and in the context of the content. Further, students reflectively interact with their own previous ideas as they try to construct meaning from new knowledge gained through the learning activities.

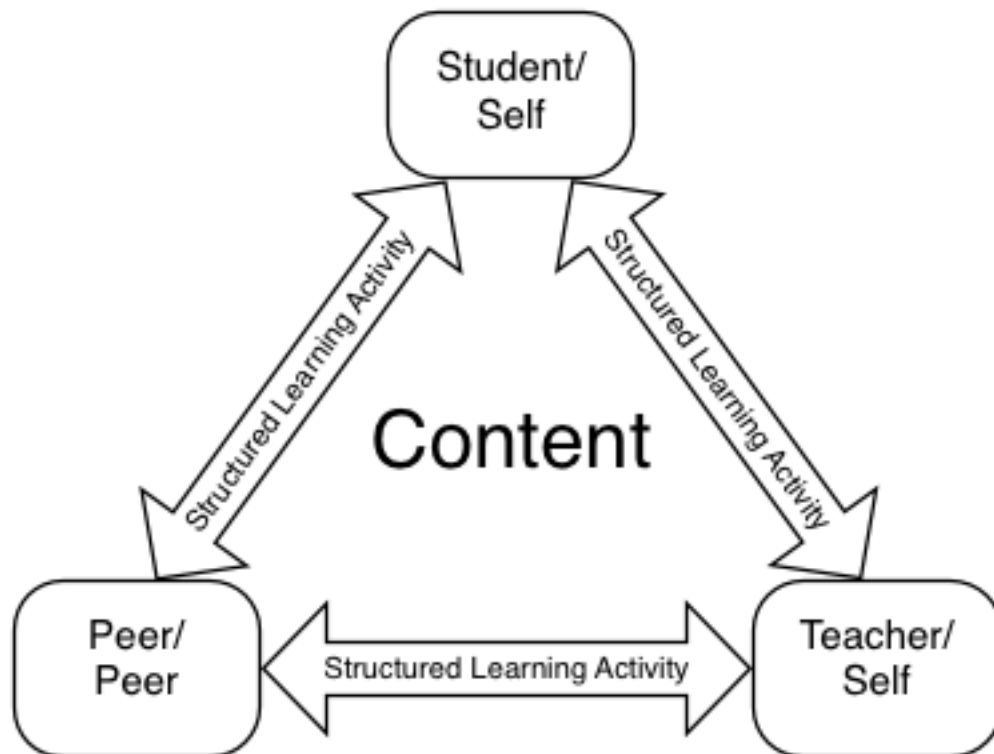


Figure 3. Structured Student Interactions (Madland, 2014)

In this model of interaction, there are various degrees that interaction can be scaled. At one end of the continuum, student/self interaction is infinitely scalable, but this mode of interaction does not necessarily lead to deep learning communities. Content itself is almost infinitely scalable. The cost of making a copy of a digital artifact decreases exponentially as more copies are made. Student/peer interaction is also very scalable and relatively cheap. This mode of interaction is what allowed the MOOC phenomenon to briefly flourish, but it leads to concerns about diminishing the role of faculty in distance learning environments and the consequent decreases in cognitive presence. Finally, on the other end of the continuum is student/teacher interaction, which is most highly associated with the attainment of learning outcomes (Bloom, 1984), but is the least scalable of all the modes of interaction.

Anderson (2003) argues that the different modes of interaction can be considered to be roughly equivalent to each other in a distance learning environment. He says

Deep and meaningful formal learning is supported as long as one of the three forms of interaction (student–teacher; student-student; student-content) is at a high level. The other two may be offered at minimal levels, or even eliminated, without degrading the educational experience.

High levels of more than one of these three modes will likely provide a more satisfying educational experience, though these experiences may not be as cost or time effective as less interactive learning sequences. (Anderson, 2003, p. 4)

I would argue that Anderson's equivalency theorem, as it is stated, may be true for traditional transactional models of distance education, but, in alignment with his second paragraph, higher levels of more than one of the three modes of interaction will likely be necessary to provide a transformational learning experience for TWU Online students.

Implications

The models shown above necessarily influence how TWU Online is structured. There are implications for how TWU Online is staffed, how we provide support for designing learning activities, how we structure online programs, how we design our courses, and what infrastructure is needed to support the whole enterprise.

Staffing

If a transformational learning environment is the ultimate end of TWU Online, then staffing decisions must be made in light of all three influences (social, spiritual, and cognitive) in the Transformational Learning Model. Since we cannot duplicate the Student Life and Chaplaincy departments from on campus, these departments must have a supporting role in TWU Online to collaboratively support remote students.

Also, since a transformational learning environment will require high levels of interaction between students and faculty, only one of which is scalable, we will need to amplify and supplement the work of our faculty with the creation of a new job category of 'Course Facilitator'. The primary role of the course facilitator will be to manage the facilitation of discourse while the instructor of record is responsible for the design of the learning environment. The facilitator and instructor will share responsibilities around adding subject matter expertise through direct instruction.

Instructional Design

Designing digital learning environments for remote students is very different from designing traditional learning environments for on-site students. The most significant difference, of course, is that the students are not present in a room to receive logistical information or direct

instruction from an instructor. This means that everything in the digital learning environment, down to the smallest and most detailed instructions, must be carefully planned, organized, and presented in a format that is both native to the web and also accessible. Another significant difference is that learning in a web-based digital environment creates affordances that are difficult to replicate on-site.

Consequently, it is critical that our faculty have the close support and guidance of qualified and experienced instructional designers to guide them through the details of designing effective learning activities for digital learning environments.

Course and Program Design

One of the persistent difficulties with distance learning is the problem of isolation. Students and faculty who are both geographically and temporally remote from each other often feel that they are alone in their work. Clearly, this feeling of isolation is antithetical to the development of deep learning communities. Therefore, it is important that we structure our programs to increase opportunities for interaction.

Further, it is important to note that adult learners engage in distance learning for a variety of reasons. Some are geographically remote and can't leave their home communities in order to participate while others are local to TWU, but have time conflicts, and still others are able to participate on-site, but have variable schedules. In order to enable access for each of these people, we need to be intentional about creating multiple access points without sacrificing community building opportunities.

The model that we propose is a Multi-Access Community Model (figure 4).

The cohort model is the best way to ensure that a community of inquiry is sustained not only throughout a particular course, but throughout an entire program, thereby decreasing feelings of isolation and increasing student persistence.

The multi-access model allows for significant flexibility in how students engage with the community. {Irvine et al., 2013, #58226} note that the multi-access model is critical in promoting student agency, or the ability to make significant decisions about how and when they will engage in the community rather than having those choices removed and modes of interaction mandated.

Students have the opportunity to choose to attend classes on-site in Langley at their regularly scheduled time, or they can connect to the regularly scheduled class from a distance (maybe their home, or at TWU Richmond or Bellingham), or they can engage with a recording (either text-based or video) of the class time at a time that is convenient for them. The final category of participants are 'open' participants who are unregistered at TWU but would like to follow along with the course and participate for their own personal interest.

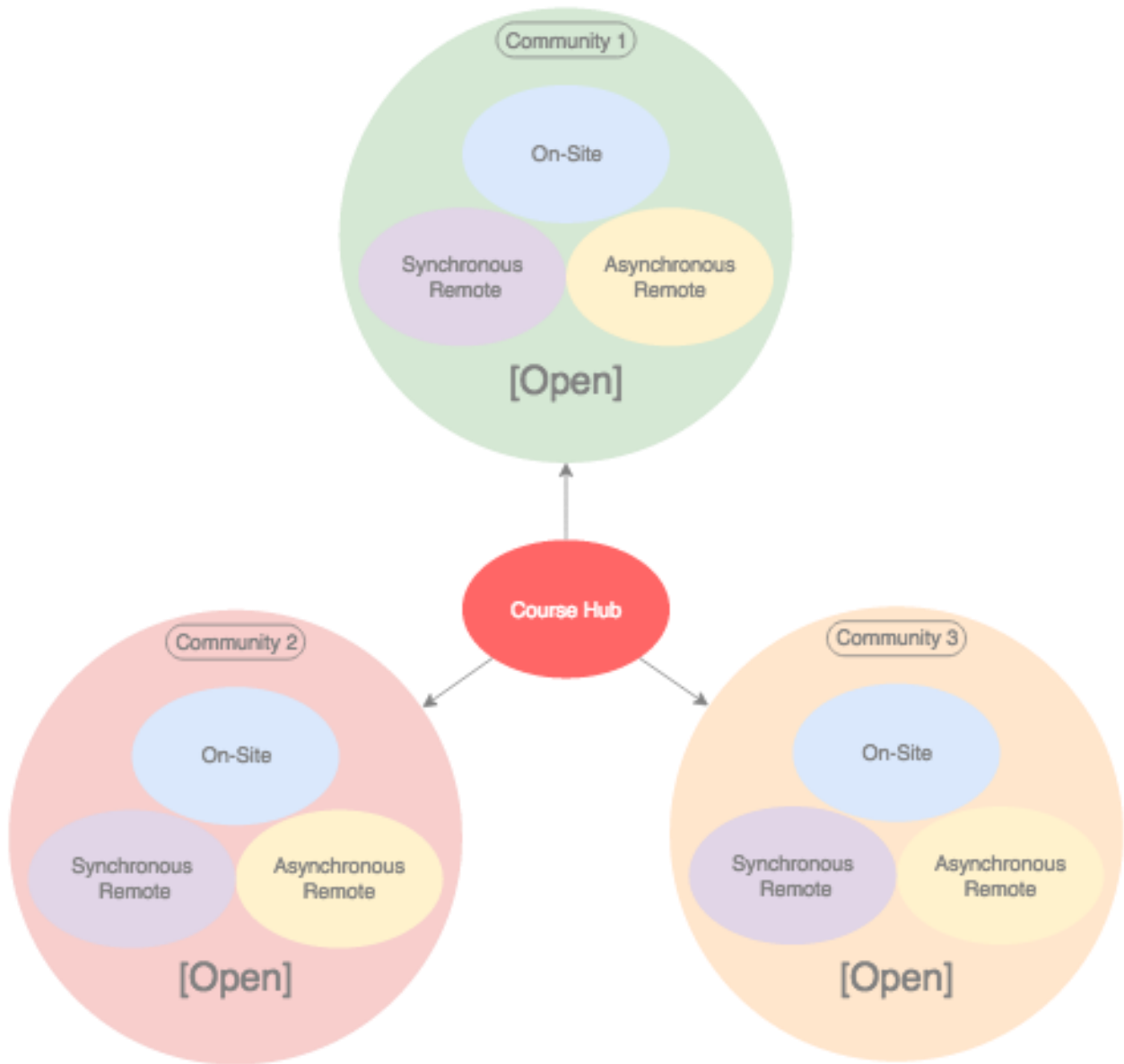


Figure 4. Multi-Access Community Model

Allowing open participation may seem counter-intuitive if it is our goal to generate revenue, however, with an appropriate faculty model and flexible infrastructure, allowing open participation will increase the visibility of TWU programs and degrees and very likely present a significantly lowered barrier to prospective students registering for a degree program, but it will not increase faculty workload.

Infrastructure

- Community building

- Scalable
- accessible

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