



# **CONNECTIONS**

## **THE UNIVERSITY OF ATLANTA'S ALUMNI GAZETTE**

### **JUNE 2008**

THE UNIVERSITY OF ATLANTA – WHERE NEW INTELLECTUAL JOURNEYS BEGIN

#### **CONNECTIONS: THE UNIVERSITY OF ATLANTA'S ALUMNI GAZETTE**

The University of Atlanta is pleased to publish the second number of the institution's Alumni Gazette, which will appear twice yearly, with special issues or updates at quarterly intervals. The first issue of January 2006 was, in fact, but a preliminary glimpse; it was, above all else, a precursor, a harbinger. In fact, while the Gazette is still in its early form, we are heartened to have had enthusiastic feedback from so many. A few thoughts about the title: Connections – the online workings --links and communications-- that technology fosters; Connections – the rapport that should obtain between learner and instructor, between student and University so as to maximize the educational experience; Connections – the lifelong bond that conjoins graduates and their alma mater. In all of these senses and others, Connections seeks to transgress boundaries and to cultivate union.



#### **THE UNIVERSITY OF ATLANTA ESTABLISHES NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL**

The University of Atlanta recently established a National Advisory Council comprised of thirty-five distinguished scholars, field specialists, acclaimed practitioners and consultants, whose authoritative command and expertise ensure curricular distinction in all degree programs offered by the institution. The Council is chaired by the University Provost & Chief Operating Officer. Members of the Council provide external guidance and counsel so as to strengthen the foundations upon which decision-making processes are conducted. In each of several subsequent issues of the Gazette, we will profile in brief the background of two or three Council members.



#### **TWO RECENT UNIVERSITY OF ATLANTA GRADUATES RECEIVE SPECIAL KUDOS FOR WINNING THESES**

**ANDREW S. SMITH (Master's Degree, 2007)**

Thesis title: Implementation of RFID in Thailand: Keys toward a Competitive Edge

**SANDEEP JAGGER (Master's Degree, 2007)**

Thesis title: The Adverse Effects of Outsourcing to India

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[WWW.UOFA.EDU](http://WWW.UOFA.EDU)

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## THE UNIVERSITY OF ATLANTA'S FIRST INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM: ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING (OCTOBER 2008)

The University of Atlanta's First International Symposium will explore recent advances, enhanced strategies and altered paradigms within the rapidly evolving realm of online teaching and learning. Sessions will focus on the embrace of challenge via the implementation of innovative models. The deadline for abstracts and proposals (forums, special sessions, presentations, panels) is 1 April 2008. Selected papers will be published in journal format. Address all symposium-related inquiries via email to the Office of the University Provost at: Provost@uofa.edu. Consult, too, ConferenceAlerts.com and AllConferences.com, or visit the link on the University's website at www.uofa.edu. Scholars, educators, students, online specialists, friends of online learning and teaching are all cordially invited to participate and/or to attend. Special sessions will be devoted to graduate student presentations. A detailed prospectus with Symposium/Conference details and a formal Call for papers is to be issued in October 2007.

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## FOCUS ON ONE OF U OF A'S FINEST: DR. CARLOS A. VALERO, VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Dr. Carlos A. Valero, Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Atlanta since the institution was launched, adheres to what is now termed a "constructivist" view of teaching and learning. In this optic, Dr. Valero believes; that Learning must involve motivation; that Learning is an active process; that Learning is tactile and kinesthetic; that Learning is a social activity; that Learning does not occur in one sitting; that Learning must be authentic; and, not least of all, that Learning must be student-centered. In his interactions with U of A students, Dr. Valero manifests a balanced inter-weave of high standards and empathy, of rigor and compassion, whereby he fosters and facilitates each student's own discoveries. He derives his inspirations from many sources, but often cites two celebrated lines in intellectual history: "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand" (Confucius); and "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world" (Albert Einstein). Dr. Valero holds a BBA degree from the University of Zulia (Venezuela), an MBA from Oklahoma City University, and the degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The author of several acclaimed books and of numerous articles, chapters, and essays, Dr. Valero embraces the hybrid scholar-teacher paradigms so sought after in higher education. His consummate expertise in online learning and in curriculum development are surely pre-eminent among the many talents he brings to the Vice Presidency and to the Division of Academic Affairs at U of A.

[Note: Look for the "focus" profile of Glenda V. Jemison, Vice President for Student Services, in the next issue of CONNECTIONS.]

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## OF THE VIRTUES OF EBRARY: LIBRARY RESOURCES AT THE FINGERTIPS OF ALL U OF A STUDENTS

One of the many learning features provided by the University of Atlanta's Online Library is a form of significant, complementary instruction. Online tutorials provide students with the coaching and guidance they need to use not only the resources of e-global library, but also the broader resources of their information universe. For example, e-global library offers tutorials on using libraries, using the Internet for research, doing business research on the Internet, and writing research papers (with special emphasis on properly using Internet-based resources). Unlike on-campus academic librarians, these tutorials are available to students 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and can be accessed from the students' homes, offices, or anywhere else the students have Internet connectivity.

**GUEST COLUMN: THE WONDERS OF ONLINE LEARNING: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS BY DR. M.J. MURATORE, INTERIM DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY OF ATLANTA**

On line learning has transformed the educational landscape by making a college degree not only more affordable but accessible to virtually anyone with access to a computer and with the desire to take an intellectual leap forward. The advantages of e-learning are substantial: flexible scheduling, broad selection of interesting courses, ready availability for classroom “spots,” prompt faculty feedback to inquiries, and of course, the opportunity to set one’s own learning pace. On-line courses have opened the door of higher education to whole new segments of the population: full time and part time employees; professionals with familial obligations; those between jobs hoping to increase their marketability and professional satisfaction; retirees who quest expanded learning; and those who, for the reasons cited and others, are most at comfort with a learning process which does not require fixed hours, journeys from home, time constraints and other strictures. With all the advantages inherent to the on-line learning experience, and these are many, it is easy overlook some of the potential (but easily remedied) set-backs these very advantages can create. The good news follows: with but a little foresight and planning, all such minor obstacles can be easily overcome, ensuring optimal success in earning an on-line degree and yielding the limitless rewards that will derive therefrom.

The open-ended nature of the e-learning experience is one of its most obvious attributes. Students can work when, where, and how often they choose: they can set their own schedules and fit (or retrofit) their studies within the complexities of life. But this lack of pressure can sometimes turn out to be too much of a good thing. It has been noted that we would accomplish nothing if we believed we had all the time in the world to do so. This maxim applies to on-line learning as well. The problem with deferring coursework is not merely the temporal delay it causes. Allowing too much time to elapse between e-learning sessions blocks intellectual efficiency as well. This results from the mechanisms by which the mind acquires and processes knowledge. Most coursework will be structured in a progressive manner (sometimes in a cumulative mode): that is to say, new knowledge will be built upon previous information. Consequently, if on-line students do not steadily and regularly engage with their coursework, they will be required to use up precious time re-familiarizing themselves with previous material, perhaps even re-learning concepts they had previously covered and mastered. This tends to hamper forward progress, and increase frustration.

The best way to ensure you retain a solid grasp of the material is to establish and maintain a steady schedule for working on your assignments. No matter how extensive your commitments, you need to consider the educational enterprise as one more essential component of your daily/weekly routine, as one that will, ultimately, change your life. It is extremely beneficial to set aside a specific time-slot in the day for working on coursework, just as one would schedule time at the gym, or at the hairdressers, at the supermarket or on a to-be-mowed lawn. Useful caveat: the amount of time is less important than self-disciplined regularity and an attentive focus. For this reason, if at all possible, it is best to try to do a little bit daily, rather than grandiose amounts once in a while. For students who can only get to their courses once or twice a week, it helps to jot down essential information that can easily be lost or forgotten on a simple stack of index cards. The portable stack of information allows the student to review material whenever the opportunity arises: when stuck in traffic, during commercials of your favorite soap opera, in the doctor’s waiting room. Just remember to bring them along with you for just such occasions.

As indicated above, e-learning’s most attractive feature is that it can be done at home. However, if your home life is chaotic, or if you have trouble concentrating on our work with the television and the refrigerator so nearby, you might try finding a quiet spot away from home to work on your courses. A half-hour stop at an internet coffee shop or the public library on the way to or home from work, for example, can dramatically sharpen focus and serve to regularize the e-learning routine. If you prefer to work at home, try to find a quiet area where distractions (television, phone calls, requests from family members) are generally limited, even for a brief, set amount of time. What is most important is that you find an arrangement that works for you. If you have to

make an extra trip to get started on your work or if your space is out of the way, you are likely not going to go there, surely not easily or regularly.

Even though the open-ended nature of e-learning is one of its most compelling attributes, most students will benefit from establishing a plausible endpoint for both the course in general, and for individual lessons in particular. This allows the student to make measurable, regular progress, thereby maintaining enthusiasm and motivation. The first lesson is critical in establishing a workable timeline, though students should remember to allow a bit more time for subsequent chapters as the complexity of materials or assignments tends to increase. Building in a few extra days also allows for those unanticipated delays and postponements that are an inevitable part of the educational process. Once a target date for completion has been established, every effort should be made to adhere to it. If the schedule is unworkable, create another with more realistic completion dates.

Maintaining a self-paced schedule is easier if students take the time to celebrate each major milestone of progress! As you complete a lesson or a major project, applaud yourself with some well-earned pampering: a night out with your friends, a day away from coursework, even something as small as a trip to McDonald's. But do reward yourself for a job well-done. Your decision to invest in yourself by enrolling in an on-line program is nothing short of life-altering, and these occasional rewards underscore the significance and the importance of the undertaking at hand. And by all means, plan something truly memorable for the day you finally receive your degree; and keep a picture or symbol of that final prize firmly attached to your computer!

Finally, remember that progress begets more progress. It is difficult to remain motivated in the early stages when you have so little to show for your effort. But every inch of forward progress moves you closer to your goal. If you do have set backs, long periods of inactivity, or monetary/familial difficulties requiring a temporary delay, do not allow these temporary setbacks to jeopardize your long-term goal. Make contact with an advisor or faculty member as soon as possible to find an optimal solution. And always remember that success in almost any endeavor depends more on perseverance than any other quality. For those who doubt the wisdom of that affirmation, just ask the fleet-footed hare how he lost his race to the inherently slower, but more self-disciplined tortoise. In life, slow and steady is often the best strategy for achieving success. But whether you race or lumber toward the finish line of your e-learning degree program, be assured that the final reward will taste just as sweet.



## PEER MENTORING PROGRAM ESTABLISHED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ATLANTA

After careful strategic planning, the University of Atlanta has implemented an experimental program, on a limited basis, whereby carefully-screened advanced students and recent graduates can, if they so apply, serve as peer mentors to current students. Early reports indicate that this additional resource provides rewarding experiences for mentors and mentees alike. It is not the function of peer mentors to supersede or replace the university's official instructional corps: the faculty member remains the ultimate authority, content expert and performance evaluator. Rather, peer involvement provides one more means of support by which students engaged in a given learning experience can exchange perspectives, seek additional feedback and sustain communication with those who have shared in like experiences. The mentoring program functions simultaneously as a network-building instrument. The University looks forward to the expansion and enhancement of this valuable initiative.



## GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR MAXIMIZING SUCCESS IN COURSES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ATLANTA

Every course at the University of Atlanta is under-girded by a syllabus that is at once comprehensive and self-sustaining: it not only lays the foundations for the specific course content and requirements, but, too, it suggests educational tools, accessible resources and learning

mechanisms. As such, the guidelines and recommendations set forth in these “study guidelines” are intended merely to complement the extensive information provided in the corresponding syllabus. These “strategies” are, in fact, relevant to all online learning experiences and will, we hope, enhance your course experience.

Perhaps the key element in maximizing course success is to take full advantage of a broad array of learning features (some, at least, if not all): primary and secondary materials, online library resources, specialized sites (as noted in your course outline), dedicated chats, threaded discussions, message boards, access to peers, student-instructor exchanges, sustained contact with academic and student service administrators.

#### **APPROACHES TO THE COURSE**

- Before engaging in the course, read and re-read with particular care the official syllabus, designed to lead you smoothly, progressively and successfully through each stage of the course. Consider the syllabus as a map, a “triptik” of sorts, which charts each step to follow. If heeded, this document will prove to be a pillar, a much-valued asset.
- Read each segment of the text and correlative materials **ACTIVELY**, not passively. (While “passive reading” fulfills many functions in our daily lives – perusing a magazine, skimming a newspaper, moving through a novel, glancing at a document in order to find a particular element or two -- “active reading” denotes a process of intense concentration, focused attention, assimilation of material, synthesis and contextualization of content.) In every one of its facets, academic pursuits must be active, never passive.
- Whenever and whatever you read as part of the course, highlight important sections and/or synthesize in written form the points you deem most essential. The ability to identify and underscore the most vital issues in a text, a document, an article is one that should be progressively developed and honed. Such ability is ultimately crucial to student success.
- Take the opportunity at the conclusion of each section, sub-section, major topic or chapter to engage in a process of self-verification. Each time you encounter application exercises, review or discussion questions, problems and/or other such mechanisms of recapitulation (and you will find them in all of primary materials assigned), seize the opportunity to evaluate your own mastery of the material.
- Similarly, at the end of each segment, chapter or major topic, seek out, from sources suggested in the syllabus, two or three articles or corresponding works that complement and enhance your understanding of the relevant issues. Seek alternate perspectives or alternate modes of presentation. E-brary is, among many others, an excellent repository of information to which you have access 24/7. Profit from these riches.
- In the course of each chapter (or major topic), and surely at the conclusion of each, engage in regular dialogue – be it with peers, your instructor or others trained or experienced in that area. Seek out opportunities within the course technology to share your thoughts or conclusions with others (peer mentors, peer students, instructor, administrators, etc.). Offer insights and request feedback in return. Engage!
- Each time a question arises, make contact with the instructor or another designated individual linked to the university. Your questions or concerns are important and you should surely seek responses and feedback. An online environment presents numerous paths for interactive learning. Follow some of these paths!

#### **ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS AND OTHER SUBMISSIONS**

- Approach each assignment or submission with focused attention and with seriousness of purpose. Verify that you understand clearly the specified requirements. Confirm that what you are preparing to submit responds with precision, clarity and exactness to the questions or problems, as presented.
- Do not digress. More often than not, digressions detract from coherence and are likely to diminish the quality of an essay or an examination answer. Again, focus in – making broader remarks only when they clearly shed light on the issues.
- Be exacting. In other words, while thinking critically, verify that your responses reflect solid knowledge of the material studied. Patently, a grade will be based on the organic intersection of two basic types of presentation: critical thinking (focused on the topic) enhanced by facts, citations,

- or proofs derived from the materials studied. That combination is synergistic (that is, produces a total effect much larger than the simple sum of its parts).
- Refer to additional resources selectively: It is surely impressive to allude to what others (beyond the course materials) have brought to light on the topic. However, to do so well, be certain that you do not lose focus that you do not digress and that such references are tightly and neatly incorporated within the context of your essays or responses. Use additional resources as enhancements, not as substitutions.
  - Be at all times aware of, and sensitive to, the need for proper and complete documentation. Make sure that sources are cited, the quotations and the ideas of others are properly indicated via standard means of reference. If you are uncertain as to what must be cited, consult one of many works on documentation and/or pose the question to the instructor who will respond with specificity. Make the work you submit your own.
  - Finally, what you submit bespeaks who you are, what you have learned and where you are headed. Take pride in your own work. To that end, make certain that language usage is correct, that punctuation is accurate, that the work is void of technical flaws, that responses flow, transitions are in place and that the text is easily read and followed. Ask two or three other (qualified) readers to assist in proofing your work: evaluate their suggestions and incorporate those that seem to make sense. In sum: language is power and presentation is a reflection of the person presenting: make sure you can be proud of what you submit.

Now, with these suggestions in mind, return to the course syllabus and proceed along the lines detailed.

Each course is an exciting excursion into an area of inquiry. Enjoy the experience!



## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES: ONLINE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Members of the University of Atlanta Faculty, Administration and National Advisory Council have recommended the following resources as particularly useful:

- Yukiko Inoue, *Online Education for Lifelong Learning* (2007, ISBN: 978-1-59904-319-7)
- Elisabeth Korsgaard Sorensen, *Enhancing Learning Through Technology* (2006, ISBN: 1-591-40-971-3)
- Badrul H. Khan, *Flexible Learning in an Information Society* (2007, ISBN: 1-59904-325-4)
- Gottschalk, T.H. *Strategies for Learning at a Distance*. [online]. Available at: <http://www.uidaho.edu/evo/dis8.asp>. (July, 12th, 2001).
- *Tips for Successful Online Learning* [online]. Available at: <http://elearn.wvu.edu/students/current/tipsForSuccess.html>



## THE EDITORS OF CONNECTIONS INVITE CONTRIBUTIONS

The Editors of CONNECTIONS invite a broad spectrum of potential contributions for Vol. 2, no. 1 to be published in January 2007. We seek useful perspectives on online education; studies or commentaries relevant to the professional curricular areas offered by the University of Atlanta; student or graduate success stories; information on helpful books or resources; keys to successful online studies; student or faculty achievements; and more. Address all proposed contributions to: Provost@UofA.edu.

