

Montgomery County Community College ADVANTAGE

No. 4

Published by the Students of Montgomery County College • Blue Bell, Pennsylvania

Week of February 21, 2000

Online classes: A teacher's perspective

By Jarrett Renshaw
Editor-in-Chief

Not only do students learn while taking online classes, so do teachers. MCCC has been expanding their online class schedule every year and every year there are new students taking on the challenge of the course, as are the teachers. In these days, where computers change the way we do things, they are putting the teacher into a situation where now they become students again, students of online teaching.

Dr. Fay Stokes, a professor of psychology at MCCC, has been teaching Psychology 101 online for three years now and claims that "the technology was the first obstacle that I had to hurdle". Technology changes from year to year, and so must the format for the class.

"Every semester is a learning

process for me", says Stokes "I am always looking for new ways to make the student think more critically in this format."

The teacher is forced once again to become the student of something that is foreign to them, something called distance learning. New issues present themselves, for example, how do I present the material, how do I make it understandable in the given format. The constant tinkering of how to present the class makes the process evolutionary.

One major obstacle is the fact that there is no direct response to the questions that a student may have. It may be a day or two before students get their question answered. Because of this, a professor may spend many days or weeks preparing a single presentation for his or her students that will be clear and understandable to the majority.

Stokes comments, "In class I can see the student's reaction to the topics being discussed and I get a feel for the understanding of the material". As in the classroom, students can dictate the pace of the class, in online classes students understanding of the material is harder to measure.

Because of the nature of online courses, students must become more independent and must do more research of their own questions. Teachers of online courses depend on this independence for the class to be a success.

"Students must be willing to think critically, and during the semester students are required to post Internet sites that may answer some of the questions that they may have", says Stokes. These Internet sites serve as another resource for the students, the Internet can serve almost the same purpose as a textbook.

There are some drawbacks to online courses, and the major one is student interaction. John Hernan, professor of English at MCCC, says, "The human element is one that is missed in online classes". Hernan teaches American Literature I and II online and has been teaching it for about 3 years. When asked about what are some of the disadvantages of the online class, Hernan responded, "Student interaction is essential and a fun part of education and many times this can not exist in an online class".

English courses, by nature, are more subjective than other courses, because of this opinions are a major part of any English class. English students are encouraged to take a stance on interpreting the material presented. Once they form an opinion, they must support it. A major obstacle in teaching an English class is

getting equal participation that exists in the classroom.

"I have taught online classes where there was much discussion, and ones where there was little discussion", comments Hernan, "as a teacher, it is much more rewarding to see students interact."

Both teachers indicate that they require the same output from students, if there are three tests in the classroom then there are three tests in their online class. Both teachers also warned students that online course may not be something for every student, Hernan comments, "the student must possess desire and self paced instruction habits".

In today's world, you can attend University of California and never step foot in California, both teachers warn one thing, "Do not ever forget the human element of education."

February appropriate for Black History Month

By Tiffany Wright
Staff Writer

February is the most appropriate month to celebrate African American History because it is saturated with historical significant events.

Such milestones include the birth, deaths, and accomplishments of prominent black leaders such as Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, and El Hajj Malik El Shabbazz, better known as Malcolm X.

These leaders are African American heroes because they passionately and steadfastly embraced the principles that American democracy is supposed to represent such as freedom and equality for all Americans. The latter they fought for

and achieved by making it possible for African Americans to have the abundance of privileges they were once denied. This simultaneously helped to improve conditions for other minorities and oppressed groups.

One can see their commitment to improving the historically oppressive conditions of African Americans by examining their lives and achievements.

Frederick Douglass, an author, orator, social reformer, and one of the most famous and influential African American leaders of the 19th century was born in February 1818.

Douglass recounted his dreadful experiences in the institution of slavery in 1845 when he wrote *The Narrative of the Life of Fred-*

erick Douglass, an American Slave. He revised his *Narrative* in 1855 when he wrote *My Bondage and My Freedom*. He further modified his *Narrative* in 1881 when he wrote his last autobiography entitled *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*.

Douglass wrote these books to rebuke slavery and rampant racism by emphasizing the horrors of slavery. His eloquently written *Narrative* is still today viewed as a literary masterpiece.

Douglass was also politically active in seeking an end to slavery and improving the conditions of African Americans. Douglass advised President Lincoln to recruit black troops in the army and treat them equitably during the Civil War.

His political pressure was among the factors that aided in Lincoln issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. Douglass was later appointed as the President of the Freedmen's Bank, US Marshall for the District of Columbia (1877-1881), Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia (1881-1886) and Charge D' Affaires for Santo Domingo and Minister to Haiti (1889-1891).

W.E.B. Du Bois kept Douglass' legacy alive as he also dedicated his life to bettering conditions for African Americans.

Du Bois was born in 1869 during the time of Douglass' prominence and the American Reconstruction Period. Du Bois attended Fisk University from 1885 to 1888, and he received his doctor-



Malcom X

ate in history from Harvard University in 1895.

Shortly after graduating from Harvard, he accepted a research

Continued on page 4

Where do we go from here? ACT 101 shows the way

By Michele M. Benincasa

Do you know what you're going to do after graduating from MCCC, or are you still undecided? Perhaps you plan to transfer. but you still haven't found the right school. Maybe you intend to enter the work force, but you haven't really decided what it is you want to do for the next twenty or thirty years.

What if you're taking classes but are still unsure about your major? Or you may be one of the lucky ones; you know exactly what you want to do and where you're going to do it.

No matter which category you're in, MCCC has the resources to get you where you're going or to help you figure out where that may be.

The ACT 101 program offers a wide variety of support services and cultural events, a special pre-college orientation, and a private lounge and study area to qualified

students. Students are entitled to the free services if they're attending college full or part-time, receiving financial aid (or have a family income below a certain level), are educationally underprepared, and are motivated to succeed. ACT offers such services as one-on-one tutoring, personal and career counseling, academic advising, and personal growth and study skills workshops.

Kaneisha Robinson, an ACT 101 counselor, describes her job as "helping students achieve their educational and personal goals through counseling, tutoring, referrals, and encouragement. We aid in clarifying different curriculum and familiarize students with the choices available to them and where they will lead them. If a student is unsure we offer career testing to let them see where their skills, strengths, and interests will best be suited."

Ellie Harty, Director of Advising

and ACT 101, further added that "at ACT students get to work closely with one staff member, which help students feel at home... knowing that they have someone to go to who is not a stranger. ACT 101 maintains an open door policy for our MCCC students."

Some students may not fit the criteria for ACT 101, but there's no need to worry because MCCC offers resources for every student. Whether you're in ACT or not, there are times when a student will need more detailed information, especially in regards to transfers, career choices, or job placement. In this case students are often referred to the Advising Center (Parkhouse, 182). This office contains general information designed to aide students define their main objectives. Assistant Director, Cindy Fricker, stated that "clarification is a large part of my job. Once a student knows what he/she wants this office suggests what

steps the student must take." Mrs. Fricker also pointed out the fact that the Advising Center was created to deal with the overflow of students from the Counseling Center (located in College Hall), and the two work very closely with one another. "I think of us as the generalists and the counseling center as the specialists."

Indeed, the Counseling and Career Services Office is often the most instrumental resource in helping students attain their desired goals, or to help them figure out what their goals are. The services offered in this office are numerous. They can assist in career decision making, appropriate transfer choice, personal counseling, academic issues (regular and problem), disability services, and job placement services.

Some of the resources that students may directly tap into are; directories listing colleges by majors, which also provide descrip-

tive information about the school; directories providing a wide range of scholarship information; tons of career information, including the Encyclopedia of Careers, the Occupational Outlook Handbook, and Locational Biographies, which give you an insiders point of view about many different occupations.

There are six full-time and three part-time counselors in these offices, some of whom work in specialized areas. Saul Finkle is the Director of Services For Students With

Disabilities, and he is "here to ensure that people with disabilities are not discriminated against, nor are they denied access to getting an education." There are also counselors who work specifically in the area of job placement. Joan Azarva is the Learning Strategist, and she also works with disabled students. Meryl Silver oversees the

Continued on page 6