

Online Courses Have Three Critical Components (and Learning Management Systems Are Not One of Them)

Michael Simonson

It is happening again. Vendors—and some well-meaning educational administrators—are talking about the power of course/learning management

systems and claiming that the technology used to deliver online courses has an impact on student achievement.

How many times have we heard the phrase “put your course in Blackboard, or convert your courses to Canvas,” implying that this will make it a better course? The idea seems to be that putting something into an online learning management system makes an online course a good one.

Some may remember the statements of several decades ago about putting a course “on film,” “on video,” or even “on the computer” to make them relevant or effective or improved. As Clark (1983) so famously noted, “media are mere vehicles that deliver instruction but do not influence student achievement any more than the truck that delivers our groceries causes changes in our nutrition” (p. 446).

Let’s be clear. There are really only three critical components of an online course—or any course, for that matter: content, design, and instruction. The learning man-

... continues on page 63



Michael Simonson, Editor, *Distance Learning*, and Program Professor, Programs in Instructional Technology and Distance Education, Fischler School of Education, Nova Southeastern University, 3301 College Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314. Telephone: (954) 262-8563. E-mail: simsmich@nsu.nova.edu