

# Highlights from Alternative Methods of Presenting Content in the Online Classroom

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# The Innovator and His Accomplice (The Presenters)

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Doug Peterson has sixteen years of experience teaching at the college-level. Doug has a BS in Natural Sciences from Shimer College, and a MLS from Bradley University. He also has completed the ION Master's In Online Teaching Certification, and a variety of coursework and certifications in the computer science field. Doug also was the founder and president of the OIC Group, Incorporated, a highly successful custom software and web design/hosting company in Peoria. He uses Blackboard and a variety of enhancements to teach both face-to-face and web-based courses in programming, office suites, and operating systems.

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Patrice Hess is the Director of Organizational Learning at Illinois Central College in East Peoria, Illinois. Patrice is resident in ICC's Teaching and Learning Center and has primary responsibility for faculty and staff development aligned with the college's strategic initiatives. She also coordinates programs for instructional technology integration in classroom teaching and distance learning programs in online, hybrid, two-way interactive and telecourse delivery modes. Patrice has presented for local, regional and national conferences including the League for Innovation and Blackboard Users' Conference. Patrice is currently working on her EdD in Curriculum and Instruction and holds an MS in Instructional Technology and a BS in Speech and Theatre Education.

# PowerPoint

- Traditional PowerPoint – slides, text and images
- Audio-Enhanced PowerPoint – slides, text and images with audio overlays either recorded directly into PowerPoint or recorded into a sound recording program and then imported into or linked to PowerPoint
- Audio can be set to play automatically or played when clicked by the user
- Microphone/audio quality can be an issue; use a headset microphone in a quiet environment
- Perfect audio can take forever to capture; plan ahead and maybe rehearse but don't waste an incredible amount of time rerecording to remove the um's and ah's; you don't get to edit what you say in the classroom!

Most of us have used PowerPoint to create classroom visual enhancements, or have received PowerPoint presentations from publishers. Of course, if we had a dime for every bad PowerPoint we have ever had to watch, where the designer places way too much content on a slide, we would all be rich. One way to prevent this, and still get more than just "high-point" content delivered, is to add short recorded audio clips of you lecturing to intermittent slides. The old saying, "a picture is worth a thousand words" is fine, but on the other hand, you can usually explain quite a bit more content in a shorter period than you should or could squeeze onto a slide.

Again, we believe some audio adds a personal touch to the presentation, especially if it from the instructor. Even just a little introduction or overview to the PowerPoint, while the first slide is showing is an excellent enhancement. This is a very inexpensive, a microphone, and the software is a low-tech way to bring a little more technology to your teaching. You could even take the publishers PowerPoint presentations and put your own "spin" on them. A slightly less personal touch would be to add audio clips; music clips, historical lectures, etcetera. Of course, if you would want to step it up another notch you could move to using video clips, which are done pretty much in the same manner as inserting audio.

There are only a few pitfalls that we see in adding multimedia to your PowerPoint slides:

- The files grow large with the type and number of additions
- Don't make the presentation too aural or too visual, use a good balance.

Note: As far as we know, OpenOffice's Impress, does not allow for direct recording into slides as PowerPoint does. However, you can use Audacity, or any other sound recorder, and insert the sound file onto the slide.

IOC Community Example File: <http://faculty.icc.edu/phess/Portfolio%20How-To%20with%20Audio.ppt>

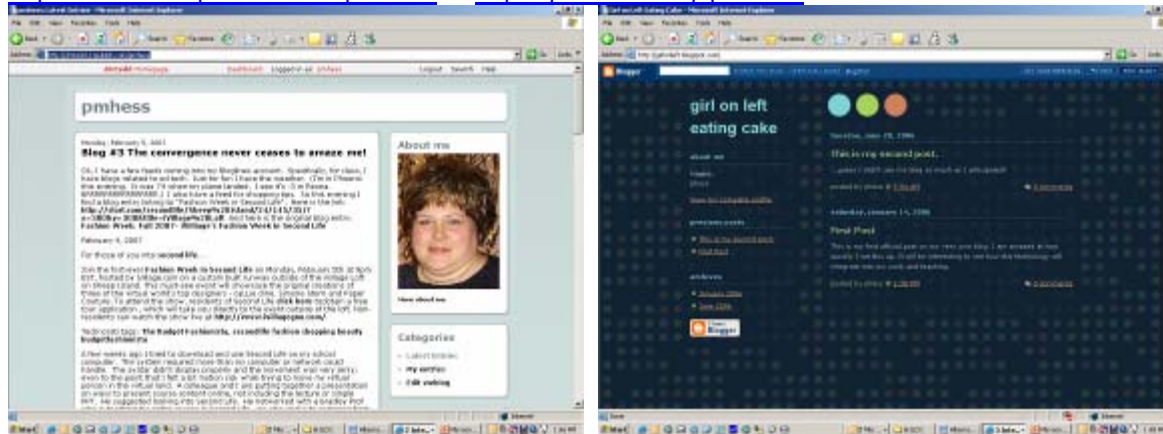
# Blogs and Groups

- 21Publish -- <http://www.21publish.com/>
- Bloglines -- <http://www.bloglines.com/>
- Blogger -- <http://www.blogger.com>

<http://www.douglaspeterson.com/blogcast>



<http://drctedd.21publish.com/pmhess> or <http://girlonleft.blogspot.com>



Yahoo Groups -- [http://us.rd.yahoo.com/evt=42879/\\*http://groups.yahoo.com/group/iccmpsc124group](http://us.rd.yahoo.com/evt=42879/*http://groups.yahoo.com/group/iccmpsc124group)

- \* You choose when and how to stay in touch
- \* Swap photos, files, polls, calendars, links, and more with members
- \* Quickly scan new postings and browse detailed message archives
- \* Plus enjoy many more ways to show and tell - 24/7

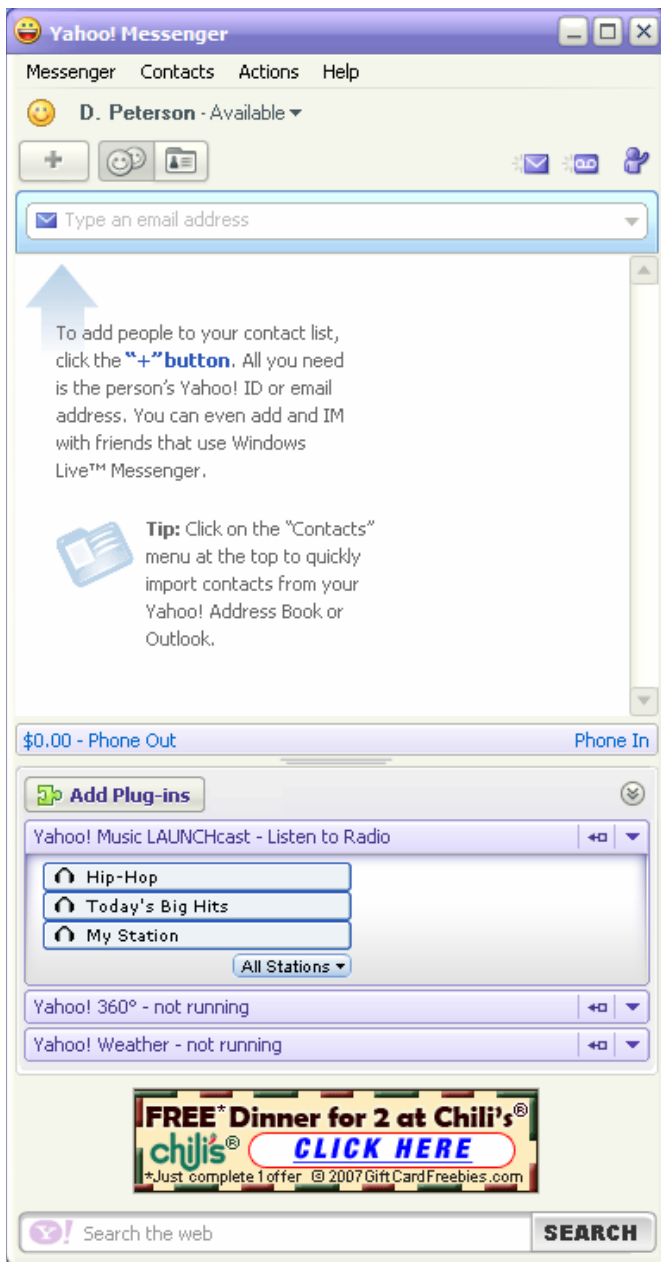
Blogs have become a popular asynchronous form of staying current with local, regional and even national issues. Unlike the few mainstream media outlets, bloggers are found by the multitudes covering topics that range from the mundane to the spectacular. Popular blogs develop followings of bloggers that have the daily entries fed to them via RSS, Really Simple Syndication, aggregators. So why not start a blog for your class? There is no reason not to. Storage space on the Internet for your blog and your student's blogs is free; may have controlled access not only to post, add content, but even the right to read the blog.

Ever thought about having a student keep a journal? The blog could serve as a type of electronic journal. The great thing about the blog is that it is a "living" document. It can track the course of the student through the time they spend engaged in the course, and possibly even on past its end.

A social learning atmosphere is many times elusive in an online course, or where face-to-face contact time is limited. What better way to provide a place where interaction between students may take place than with providing a blog, where students can post thoughts and constructive criticisms. Creative use of the blog could afford a place for the student show mastery of knowledge of a topic through high-level evaluation.

# Instant Messaging

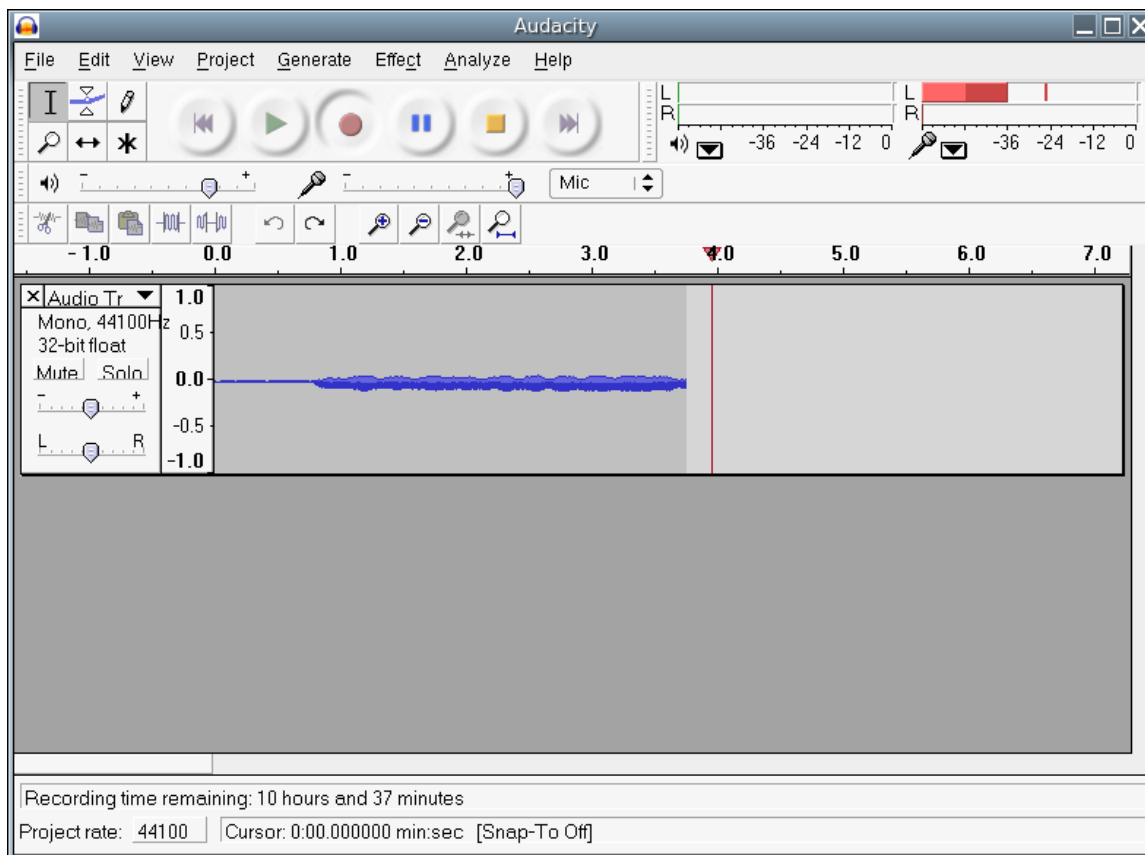
Another “hot” technology that students are very familiar with is Instant Messaging (IM). This technology is free for the taking, easy to use and setup even for non-technical persons, and could provide a great way to establish a “course community” by providing synchronous interaction. We know that many of the course delivery systems provide “chat” areas; however, a good many students probably already have accounts to ICQ, AOL, MSN, and Yahoo instant messaging. Also, they leave these IM systems running all the time, versus the relatively sparse times they are logged into the course delivery system. Many students are already familiar with the interface and workings of the IM system, so there is little or no learning curve. We can see how students could easily “meet” to discuss course topics, provide peer assistance, and socialize outside the course.



# Audio

First, we would like to address software that can enhance your current CMS. Probably the easiest way to do that is to add audio to your current offering. Audio in our mind serves a couple of purposes; it provides a personal touch to your offering, it allows you provide content that would take many pages of reading by students, and it provides input to the aural learner. In our personal experiences, audio can be added to Blackboard very easily, and to most other CMSs. Audio can enter your course as either an enhancement to your presentation software, such as Microsoft's PowerPoint or OpenOffice's Impress. The sound recording tool in PowerPoint, however, is very minimalist to say the least. So we recommend the use of an outside audio recording program, such as Audacity.

Audacity is free, open source software for recording and editing sounds. It is available for Mac OS X, Microsoft Windows, GNU/Linux, and other operating systems. This is a full featured editing package and like we stated it is free for the downloading. We currently use it to produce everything from small sound clips to full lectures. A list of all the features provided can be found at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/about/features>, but for those of us that are not audiophiles suffice it to say, it is easy to use and create .wav and .mp3 files. There is a small learning curve for novices, for example hitting Stop during a recording session requires you to start a new track, versus hitting Pause and resuming where you left off. We recommend long lectures be cut into parts to keep the file size down for embedding, packaging, and downloading purposes. In our experience under 10 minutes and 10 Mb make for nice size installments.



The interface is easy enough for beginners while providing tools for the more experienced. The buttons are similar to using most tape recorders, slide controls for both volume of speakers and microphone, left and right channel indicators, and a metered representation of your input. We really like this last feature. Once you become familiar with Audacity, you can almost tell what you are saying by looking at the visual of the recording. This allows you to edit the recording more easily, and removing the “umms” and even editing down to a part of a word becomes a snap. Also, we tend to just keep right on recording more that we did when we first started using Audacity. It is easy to just reiterate a part of the lecture that was not quite right, and then come back and remove the previous version after you complete the entire recording.

Exporting to the format you want is easy. However, prior to saving for conversion to the format of choice, we recommend that you test your clip to make sure it is loud enough. Making the file louder is as easy as selecting the entire clip and clicking on Amplify in the Tools menu. There you find a slider control to increase the file volume to your liking. There is also a compression tool to decrease the size of the file, and in our experience it is seamless and done by just clicking the Compression button in Tools. When you save there is a data file created with a .au extension, which we have never even used except to provide a unique file name for saving. Once we save the .au file, we usually export to an mp3 format.

According to Wikipedia, “MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3, more commonly referred to as MP3, is a popular digital audio encoding and lossy compression format and algorithm, designed to greatly reduce the amount of data required to represent audio, yet still sound like a faithful reproduction of the original uncompressed audio to most listeners.” Exporting to mp3 format allows users to play the recordings on mp3 players, including but not limited to iPods, and most CD players once burned to disk. If you however, are looking to embed audio in your PowerPoint or Impress presentations, you possibly may want to save the file as WAV audio format. The major difference is that WAV files are not lossy, in other words they are higher quality, but larger per recorded minute than MP3s. So for short snippets, you could choose WAV, but for lecture purposes, we recommend the MP3 format.

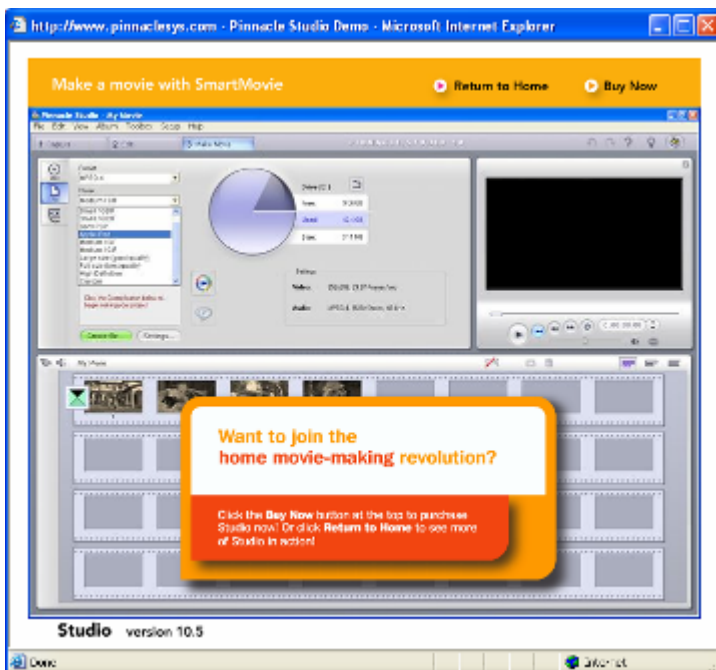
# Video

Let us take some time and look at video. We felt that many of the people that would be looking at this paper and presentation might not have access to full video production studios. We also felt that many might not feel they were ready to expend organizational dollars required for a high-quality media production. So what we did is provided a "poor man's" way of enhancing your instruction via video.

The only hardware we needed for our production was a regular video camera; in fact ours in an older model Canon, a tripod, and software to burn the output to a CD or DVD. We did not worry specifically about lighting, or even positioning of the camera for the sample video. Surprisingly the video came out very good, and we feel that with only a minor amount of preparation, better lighting specifically, it would have been good enough for all of our current needs.

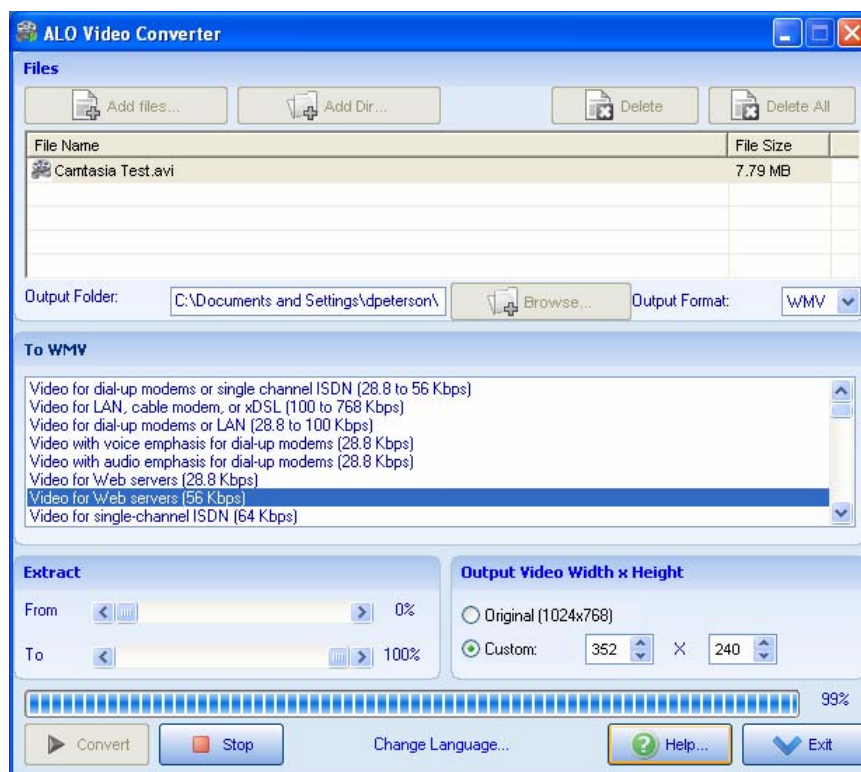
At first the camera output was burned at a very high quality resolution to a DVD, and took up over 1.4 gigabytes, which is really too much for many of our uses. There is software available that could compress and convert that number down to more acceptable levels.

Instead of doing the conversion from the high quality, we used Pinnacle Systems Studio software to just export our camera file to medium-quality .mpeg format, and this brought our uncompressed file size to approximately 370 megabytes. This was quite a savings in storage, and allowed burning to CD versus DVD. This being said, you need to know who your audience is when you decide what type of quality you need. If you are going to be sending the file over the Internet or streaming it to students, then you do not need real high quality, because they are not going to get that high of quality over the Internet, anyway. If you are going to burn the video to DVD and distribute the DVD, then I would suggest the highest quality you can get. Pinnacle even has a version of the software we used for Educators for under \$80. You can actually go to their site and try out the software in a simulation at : <http://www.pinnaclesys.com/PublicSite/us/Products/Education/Studio+Academic+Toolkit.htm>



The problem still is size. At 370 megabytes, the file is much too big for most uses except burning to CD or DVD. You have to think about compression if you want the students to be able to download it or for possible “streaming”. On demand streaming is where media content is accessible over the Internet at any time the user requests it. You can almost look at streaming as what the cable TV stations are doing now, where you can watch your favorite shows whenever you want. Similarly, in this case the user can click on the link to the video on a server and is presented with the “show”.

We were able to get our video converted and compressed into a Windows Media Video (.wmv) of 30 megabytes, and in MPEG down to about 64 megabytes. The software used was the ALOsoft’s Video Converter, which you can get as a freeware trial with less bells and whistles, or pay for \$19 for single use license. You can also get multi-use licenses; 2-5 licenses for \$17.00, scaled all the way down to \$9.00 for those of you who might just want to keep a 100 or so copies around. <http://www.alosoft.com/products.html>



In the end, as we mentioned in the video, the idea of presenting your class in video format is probably appealing to some, and it is possible if you wish to create a series of DVDs and distribute them. Otherwise, many of us would just like to enhance our offerings from time to time with a short clip of a special topic, or an introduction. For the second group, the method we used with a simple video camera, tripod, and computer, seems to be a cost effective answer.

**IOC Community Example Files (Posted at MySpace.com)**

<http://vids.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=vids.individual&videoid=1859926281>

# Camtasia

We looked into the use of screen capture software, specifically those products that allow you to create a short movie of your movements around the screen. This software is beneficial to learners because they can actually see what is required, prior to them trying it themselves. We used two different products to try this type of software, Camtasia, and !Quick Screen Capture, a similar product. We happen to have a license for Camtasia, and we downloaded a 15-use license for the !Quick software.

We originally recorded all the events of an approximate six minute "how-to" for logging into Blackboard here at Illinois Central College with video and audio. The file created was then saved into the default .avi format. Next, we packaged the file with a player and compressed the whole thing into an .exe file. The problem of size then became apparent. The packaged product was over 34Mb long, and surprisingly the original .avi file was not much smaller. Attempts at compressing it further did not produce any significant improvements. We then edited the file down to under 10Mb by limiting the recording to less than 2 minutes.

We then tried the same thing with "!Quick Screen Capture". However, we tested how large a file would be created just using video. Remarkably, a similar video production without sound still ran 15Mb.

Needless to say our hopes of using it to provide total lessons of instruction, or even partial multi-task presentations might be a problem do to size of files. If, however, you are producing a DVD or other type of product that can be delivered to the student where size of files does not matter, you should check screen capture video out. If pictures are worth a thousand words, then video is worth a million.



# Virtual Classrooms and Web Conferencing

We've used:

- Elluminate
- Skype

There are others we don't know much about:

- Horizon Wimba
- Linktivity
- Microsoft Office Groove 2007

## Elluminate

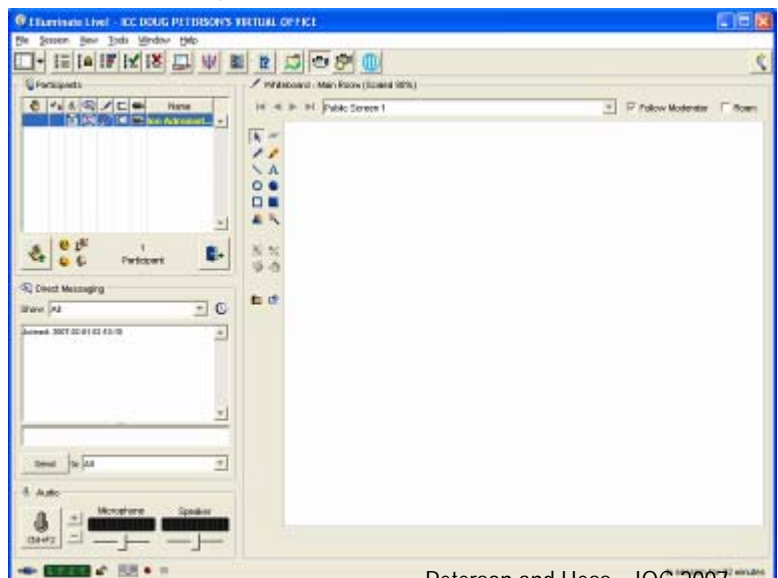
Elluminate Live by Elluminate, Inc. is described as a "live online collaboration environment" whose current education version is 7.0. This software in our mind is probably one of the best efforts at providing a format that is easy to use, and ready for "primetime".

We have used Elluminate both as students and as instructors, and found that as long as the number of students is not overwhelming, it is an excellent product to conduct class in. The interface, once learned, is fairly intuitive with everything from a variety of pointers, ability to vote with emoticons, icons with face or hand graphics, polling of attendees, live audio, text chat, video camera abilities, and a host of other features that we have not even got around to yet.

The moderator has control over the entire session, including allowing others to speak or not, see who is typing, decide what type of polling should take place (yes/no, abcd, abcde, etc.), show a graphing calculator, or produce a quiz. We especially like the "hand-raising" column, where when asking questions of the students they are ranked by who clicked first, second, third, etc. Another benefit of having the live audio is that if a student can at least navigate to the session, the instructor can give a "tour" of the features the student needs to be familiar with.

Students see a different interface than moderators, of course. They can however be allowed to draw on the whiteboard, speak, appear on camera, and basically interact much as they would in the classroom. Of course, having high-speed broadband to access the sessions does not hurt. Cost can be an issue for many administrations that will have to pay for per seat licenses for your class, IT staff, server space and bandwidth. Current pricing is per seat with 5-seats selling for \$180 per month, and 10-seats for \$330 per month (annual fees are based on 10 months, so you get 2-months "free" per se).

An interesting side note about Elluminate, Inc. is that they also provide online tutoring in about any subject or certification test according to their website.



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# Skype

- SkypeOut
- SkypeIn
- Video Calls
- Chat
- Conference Calls

