

## Learners' and teachers' perspectives on language online<sup>1</sup>

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This article examines the student and instructor satisfaction with the Language Online courses at Carnegie Mellon University from 2000–2002. These courses were designed with a hybrid format, including reduced face-to-face contact and online delivery of course materials. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from students and instructors using surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Quantitative data from students indicates a trend of increasing satisfaction with the online courses compared with offline (traditional) courses. Qualitative data were analyzed using QSR NVivo software. Student themes centered on reactions to the reduced schedule of classes and the technology used in course delivery. For instructors, recurring themes included the need for training, control of course materials, and connections with students. The results provide valuable insight for a course format increasingly utilized in university-level language learning.

**Keywords:** online courses; computer-assisted language instruction; computer-mediated communication; assessment; online learning; qualitative analysis; learners' perspectives

### Introduction

The advent of the Internet has significantly contributed to the boom in educational technology and rapid growth of online education in recent years (Carnevale, 2004), and language instruction is no exception. Godwin-Jones (2003) claims that the Internet has enabled delivery of language instruction with lower cost, thus providing more opportunities for educational institutions to deliver courses online.

Whether or not such innovations have successfully met the developers' expectations is particularly critical. Carnevale (2004), for instance, reported that e-learning or online learning has failed to match these expectations. Zemsky and Massy (2004) evaluated current e-learning situations for 15 months at six institutions in North America, including interviews and observations with faculty members, staff members, and students. Zemsky said in an interview that 'e-learning is a real revolution. It will just happen more slowly, more painfully. And the challenge now is for advocates to deliver more and promise less,' (cited in Carnevale, 2004), concluding that the reality did not meet such expectations as increasing profits, revolutionizing teaching methods, or increasing self-paced learning. However, others have more positive views toward the development of online education. In the same report, Carnevale (2004) included a comment made by the associate provost and

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dean of extended education at Boston University that some institutions have incorporated lessons learned from the past failures and are ‘experiencing considerable success.’

### Literature review

When evaluating the effects of instructional technology (IT) upon the curriculum, Burston (2003) argues for the need to measure more aspects than immediate learning. In particular, he recommends the use of qualitative assessments of the effects of technology:

Qualitative assessments of the effects of IT upon student attitudes towards language study, motivation to learn, and changes in learning strategies are also important factors to be considered. Likewise, student expectations about what and how they will learn merits evaluation, as the degree of pedagogical disorientation and reorientation that can be engendered by the integration of IT into the curriculum. The same can be said about the effects upon ethnographic aspects of the learning environment such as staff-student and student-student relationships and interactions. (p. 224)

In addition, Burston (2003) emphasizes the importance of investigating the effects of IT on instructors such as teacher beliefs about their new roles, their expectation of students, and their need for professional development.

In the past decade, researchers have increasingly used qualitative methodologies in L2 education and applied linguistics (e.g., *TESOL Quarterly* special issue, fall 1995). The reasons for selecting qualitative research methods over quantitative methods include providing the actual scientific explanations of facts, answering micro sociological questions, and dealing with complex issues (Flick, 2002) such as in a language learning context. Warshauer (2000) argues that language learning is just such a complex social and cultural phenomenon; therefore, short-term quantitative studies are not sufficient to account for such a complex context. The use of qualitative methods help us to make an in-depth investigation on why IT works or does not work, and how it affects both students’ language learning processes and teachers’ instructional processes.

Qualitative methods have been frequently used to evaluate distance education, CALL, and computer-mediated-communication (CMC). Sampson (2003), for instance, conducted qualitative assessment on the Master of Education distance course offered by British University in order to identify key issues related to satisfaction with course materials and student support. Lee (2004) investigated learners’ perspectives on networked collaborative interaction between native speakers and non-native speakers of Spanish by triangulating multiple qualitative data: online discussion logs, end-of-semester surveys, and final oral interviews. Meskill, Mossop, DiAngelo & Pasquale (2002) collected interview data and daily reflective journals from expert teachers and novice teachers about their experiences and beliefs concerning technology use for comparison and contrast. The most comprehensive qualitative study can be found in Warshauer (1999, 2000), where he conducted a two-year ethnographical study of L2 instruction using CMC in five different contexts in Hawaii. Warshauer provides rich contextual descriptions, which reveal experiences and perceptions of students and teachers about the use of technology in their L2 teaching and learning.

Most published literature on online language courses largely focus on the development processes (e.g., Corda & Stel, 2004; Zhang, 2002), and have not focused principally on evaluation. Therefore, the following section reviews some empirical studies which used qualitative methods to evaluate distance language courses that had online components.

### Qualitative assessments of online language courses

Strambi & Bouvet (2003) reported the results of preliminary evaluations of distance courses in Italian and French for beginners. The study used semi-directed interviews to collect qualitative data from four students at the end of the first semester, eliciting their comments regarding authenticity, relevance, and usefulness. Despite some technical difficulties, students' comments showed a preference for and satisfaction with the CD-ROM-based distance courses, which the authors found encouraging. The article noted the importance of instructor variables on learners' positive attitudes, as they 'largely depend on the instructors' efforts to establish positive relationships with their students to provide a high degree of flexibility and support' (p. 96).

Hampel & Hauck (2004) reported on the distance German course delivered solely online for the first time by the Open University, UK. The study evaluated both student and tutor experiences, focusing on activities using *Lyceum* (an Internet-based audio-graphic conferencing system), and student support. The results based on the first implementation showed that students valued the high degree of interaction with fellow students. Tutors evaluated the tasks very positively, as they were well planned, suitable, and learner-centered. As for student support, students felt comfortable working with *Lyceum* thanks to the informative introduction.

Chen, Belkada & Okamoto (2004) reported on the effectiveness of the Web-based course called 'Academic English'. The study investigated the effects of two types of treatments: an intra-personal treatment which consisted of a note-taking task and a dictation task, and an inter-personal treatment which consisted of an information gap task. An attitude questionnaire was collected every time students finished a session to see if there were any changes over time. Responses on the attitude questionnaires were generally positive. More positive comments on the effectiveness of communication and instructional treatments were found when students were able to manipulate the learning content. The study, therefore, concludes that 'self-initiated clarification attempts and self-negotiated comprehensible output involved in the learner-content interaction should be encouraged as one of the preferred instructional strategies in a CALL environment' (p. 47).

### Evaluation of the hybrid online language courses

The biggest inherent drawback of online courses is often reported to be less interaction between teachers and students (Hampel & Hauck, 2004; Strambi & Bouvet, 2003; Trotter, 2002). As a result, instructors tend to rely on students' self-motivation and responsibility (Gilbert, 2001). An interesting consensus of experienced online course designers and teachers is that 'properly designed' hybrid courses consisting of in-class time and online time provide the most beneficial results (Presby, 2001), combining the advantages of both types of instruction delivery. Such hybrid online courses are purportedly able to provide more guidance, and help students stay focused on their learning, rather than fully depending on students' self-motivation. However, there are few empirical studies to date which have assessed the effectiveness of hybrid online language courses.

One recent study (Scida & Saury, 2006) reported the effectiveness of hybrid Spanish courses with *Mallard*, a web-based course management tool. The results of surveys in the pilot year and the following years showed a positive impact of technology on student learning and classroom practice. *Mallard* was found effective as it encouraged students to voluntarily practice linguistic components on their own, allowing TAs to spend in-class time on more communicative activities. As a result, it increased students' confidence in

using Spanish (e.g., new vocabulary) during the in-class activities. Similarly, this type of hybrid online course was found successful in Bañados (2006) to deliver Communicative English courses in Chile. This study reported students' improvement in language skills and high satisfaction with the program.

### *Hybrid courses at Carnegie Mellon University*

The Language Online (LOL) courses, which consist of both online components and face-to-face components, have been offered at Carnegie Mellon University since 2000. These courses were designed to avoid the constraints of time and space associated with traditional instruction, making it possible for students with schedule conflicts to take introductory foreign language courses. Therefore, LOL students were typically also taking regular courses on campus, unlike many students in other online courses or web-based distance courses. The results of the initial assessment of Elementary French I Online, which was the first hybrid online course offered, were reported in Chenoweth & Murday (2003). The study assessed the first LOL course by comparing students' language gains, satisfaction, and time spent for the courses between the LOL group and a conventional (offline) group. The results showed students' language gains were comparable between the two groups. Second, several types of qualitative data were collected to assess students' satisfaction. Data included focus group interviews (with students, the teaching assistant, and teachers), videotaped class, some activity logs (e.g., chat sessions, bulletin board postings) and course evaluations. It was found that students were generally positive, but they showed some frustration with the grading of the tests and online practice exercises. Additionally, LOL students expressed concerns about their progress in oral skills despite the fact that quantitative results showed no significant differences in oral skills between the two groups. Qualitative assessment revealed student attitudes that learning outcomes data per se did not detect.

Subsequently, a longitudinal assessment of diverse LOL courses was conducted based on multiple data collected from spring 2000–spring 2002. This study addressed the following research questions:

- (1) Are there differences for the students between the two course formats in terms of gains in language skills?
- (2) Are there differences for the students between the two course formats in terms of satisfaction?
- (3) Are there differences for the instructors between the two course formats in terms of satisfaction?

The first part of our study (Chenoweth, Ushida & Murday, 2006) focused on the first research question concerning linguistic gains, and reported students' language gains to evaluate the online language courses. We concluded that the Carnegie Mellon University Language Online courses have been successful because student performance was comparable in the online and offline courses, and teachers have not noticed problems with online students' abilities in subsequent semesters. In this article, we focus on the second and third research questions concerning students' and instructors' satisfaction, and report a qualitative assessment of hybrid online language courses providing a more detailed discussion of student and teacher attitudes and experiences.

## Methodology

In the following section, we describe the nature of the Language Online courses at Carnegie Mellon and the data collection methods.

### *The courses in brief*

Carnegie Mellon University has been delivering 'Language Online' (LOL) courses, Elementary and Intermediate levels of French and Spanish classes online, since spring 2000. In all of the Language Online courses the same basic framework was used. Each class meets face-to-face for one hour one evening per week. In addition, students are also required to meet with their instructor or a language assistant face-to-face for 20–30 minutes each week. Students are also required to participate weekly in an online chat session, with pairs of students or small groups participating, sometimes with the language assistant as well. All course materials are provided online, with self-check exercises and written assignments to be turned in via email or posted to the course bulletin board. The quizzes, chat, and bulletin board are managed through WebCT; in addition, most sections make use of the WebCT email and calendar functions as well. The courses are more fully described in Chenoweth & Murday (2003).

The conventional Elementary (offline) courses meet four days per week and the Intermediate offline courses meet three days per week, for 50 minutes each session. These classes typically require students to buy a textbook and there are frequent homework assignments, although there are no regularly scheduled meetings outside of class with the instructor, language assistant or classmates<sup>2</sup>. The syllabus for the online and offline courses is essentially the same; however, teachers wanted some freedom in designing their courses, so they were given control of the topics which made up the cultural component of their courses.

### *Data collection*

In addition to background information and various quantitative measures of language gain (including grammar and vocabulary, as well as both oral and written comprehension and production), various students were interviewed individually or in small groups during each semester from spring 2000 to spring 2002<sup>3</sup>. Students from both online and offline sections participated in discussions, as well as with some students who had taken more than one course in the sequence of either French or Spanish. In addition, the instructors of the online sections were interviewed each semester, as were most of the language assistants. Appendix A includes some of the questions that were asked: these questions were used as a guideline and were adapted as the interview progressed. For most online sections we were able to interview students at mid-semester as well as after the courses were completed. Offline students were typically only interviewed at the end of the semester. Additional qualitative data collected include two separate course evaluations filled out by students. One was the university's official faculty course evaluations and the other a modified version of the Modern Languages department's supplemental course evaluations (see Appendices B and C).

Qualitative data were then transcribed into text files and analyzed using QSR NVivo<sup>TM</sup> software, a qualitative data analysis package that assists in the identification and connection of recurring themes.

In addition to these qualitative data, the quantitative data found in the university's Faculty Course Evaluation (FCE) were analyzed in order to compare overall satisfaction between the two course formats. Questions 3–13 (see Appendix B), which use a five-point Likert scale, were averaged for each section and compared using t-tests between formats.

### Comparative results

The t-test results from the university FCE data show a trend towards increased satisfaction over time by the online students compared to the offline students over time (see Figure 1). In the initial semesters as the online courses were taught for the first time, there was no statistical difference in satisfaction between the two course formats<sup>4</sup>. The only exception was the very first semester, in which Elementary French I was being piloted: in this semester, the offline students had significantly higher satisfaction ( $p < 0.01$ ).

By the fall of 2001, one section of Elementary Spanish I and Intermediate French I showed no statistical difference in satisfaction when compared to their traditional counterparts. The remaining four online sections all showed higher satisfaction ( $p < 0.05$ ). The online sections of Elementary II and Intermediate II offered in the spring of 2002 showed equal or greater satisfaction compared with the offline sections. The only exception was one of two offline sections of Elementary French II, which had higher satisfaction ( $p < 0.01$ )<sup>5</sup>.

Due to the general trend of increasing satisfaction among the online sections, we have focused on the recurring themes in the qualitative data for these sections in order to capture the issues that may have initially caused frustration among students, many of which were addressed in subsequent semesters.

### Students: recurring themes

#### *Reduced class schedule*

Many of the recurring themes from the student data relate to the reduced schedule of the LOL sections. For most students, this was a key reason for their choice to take the online language class; without the reduced schedule, they would not have been able to take a language course. Although these students found meeting as a class once per week to be advantageous, this reduction of in-class time also caused some anxiety for students. There was a widely-held perception that 'online' would mean 'at your own pace'. Thus some students were surprised at how much work was actually required on a weekly basis. An Intermediate Spanish I student commented: 'I didn't realize that we would be meeting so much during the week. I felt one hour classroom time meant that everything would be self-paced.'

Others, on the other hand, found the reduced schedule itself challenging. As one online French Elementary I student explained:

[The opportunity to take French online] was great for me; however, comparing it to my experiences with my other [traditional] language classes, I really benefited a lot from having constant interaction with a human and listening to someone speak and being able to ask questions as I have them.

An online Elementary French II student also remarked that she would forget questions she had wanted to ask by the next weekly class meeting. Students who had taken language courses in the past were accustomed to having regular, even required, opportunities to



	S00 p value	F00 p value	S01 p value	F01 p value	S02 p value
Elem. French I	0.00002** (offline)	n/d		0.026586* (online) 0.000582** (online)	
Elem. French II			0.81907		0.063201 0.000049** (offline)
Elem. Spanish I		n/d		0.796912 0.000000** (online)	
Elem. Spanish II			0.160411 0.067295		
Int. French I				0.755376	
Int. French II					0.102801
Int. Spanish I				0.011052* (online)	
Int. Spanish II					0.000000** (online) 0.020859* (online)
* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; n/d = no data available					
The course in parentheses showed higher overall satisfaction.					

Figure 1. FCE comparison t-test results.

address their concerns by way of frequent class meetings; they were also accustomed to repeated exposure to the target language that involved little more effort on their part than simply showing up for class. An Intermediate French I student found she relied more on her dictionary; she missed having the instructor explain words and concepts in class using the target language.

The two activities that students were required to complete on a weekly basis, the face-to-face meetings with the instructor or language assistant (or small groups of peers) and

the synchronous chat sessions, were the source of much commentary. Although these requirements were published in several places (e.g., the course catalog, the syllabus), they typically caught students off guard. Of the two, the chat sessions elicited the strongest reactions.

Chat session participation was set at one hour per week initially, and students in the Elementary level online courses in particular had a very difficult time maintaining interest. Students admitted in interviews that they habitually multitasked, engaging in activities both on and off the computer while supposedly chatting. One Elementary Spanish II online student explained:

As soon as I would write my message and press enter, that bought me 10 minutes where I could just do whatever. Then 10 minutes later I would pop [the chat window] up and go, 'Oh lo siento' [oh I'm sorry] or something, I would just [type] something then press enter, then all of a sudden, it wasn't worth it.

Although many students were satisfied to participate at a minimum level of effort, this sporadic participation was in part due to students' frustrations that they did not have the language level yet to maintain an interesting conversation.

Some students found chatting online to be anxiety provoking. One Intermediate Spanish student felt uncomfortable participating in debate-style conversations, as he found them to be too confrontational. Other students found it difficult to respond in a timely fashion, which then made them uncomfortable participating at all. As one Elementary French II student explained: 'When it was a lot of people I generally ... would get left behind, and when I finally would say something it would be out of context'.

The key to successful chat sessions for many students was the need for guidance from the TA (who often moderated). Many who mentioned dissatisfaction with chat sessions attended by three or four other students were quite pleased with shorter, individual chats with the TA. While a few students mentioned frustration with chat sessions that went off the assigned topic, in general students who liked chatting often mentioned enjoying the more casual nature of the interaction.

The reduced schedule of the online sections also created mixed reactions among students in terms of their ability to stay motivated and keep up with the course materials. Many students appreciated the ability to work at their own pace from week to week, and even found that the format encouraged further individual exploration of the material. The ability to study at different times of day, and to choose to spend more or less time on specific sections of the modules based on personal progress, was greatly appreciated.

However, many commented on the need for increased self discipline as a result of this freedom. Students seemed to recognize that their progress was greatly dependent on the effort they were willing to expend. An Elementary French I student observed of her classmates that 'those who came regularly and worked, learned'. This self discipline was not easy for some students who were more accustomed to language courses with three or four face-to-face class meetings per week.

The perception of many students was that the online format was more likely to attract students who were 'busy', that is, who had so many commitments that fitting a traditional course in their schedule would be impossible. That same busyness, however, made keeping up with the online course more difficult. One Elementary Spanish I student confessed:



Sometimes I just don't have time to study and I wouldn't look at [the material] at all until two days before [class] ... you don't have the structure to sit down, so you wait until the last minute. I guess it's all a matter of discipline.

One Intermediate French I student found that her other coursework got done first, explaining, 'A lot of times I would end up doing other work, and then procrastinating, and then end up doing most of the module at the [last minute]'.

Another recurring theme to student comments that also relates to the courses' reduced weekly schedules was confusion with regards to what assignments were graded and mandatory, and when they were due. One Elementary French I student found the lack of due dates provoked a great deal of anxiety, particularly towards the end of the semester:

Well, basically my big thing [was] deadlines and not knowing when I needed to have things done. That's kind of scary now at the end of the semester ... And I'm pretty tired. And then I have to come here and I had no clue that there were four extra assignments that I didn't even know about.

An Elementary Spanish I student echoed this anxiety, saying: 'In the organization, with the assignments, I never know what to hand in. It's really not organized, because I'll email [the instructor], and she won't know. So I can't organize my life because I don't know when things are due.' While it was expected that students would thrive to some degree on the freedom to complete their work at any point during the week, a surprising number seemed to crave structure in terms of assignments and due dates.

During the focus groups, both Elementary French I and Elementary Spanish I students mentioned a desire for a more clear and all-inclusive list of graded assignments that could be consulted. One Elementary French I student stated: 'I think it would have been easier to have some kind of syllabus ... like these are the ten [bulletin board] assignments you're going to have, these are the ten essays you're going to have.' Elementary Spanish I students echoed this request, asking for an explicit list of assignments to be emailed, movies to be watched, recordings to be handed in, etc. As one student pointed out, having an explicit list, particularly one that includes the grades earned for each assignment, 'helps you know where you stand'.

### *Technology-related issues*

Perhaps not surprisingly, the intensive use of technology in the Language Online courses was a frequent source of comment by students. While some of these comments relate to unfamiliarity with the use of web-based course materials, Carnegie Mellon University students are in general well known for their comfort with technology. Indeed, frustration with technical glitches was heightened for some students precisely because they were accustomed to working with technology on a daily basis.

Many found the perceived rigidity of the computer interface for practice exercises or tests exasperating. Most exercises and tests are designed to only recognize answers that are spelled correctly, including accented characters. However, many students disagreed with the right-or-wrong response to their answers when their only error was related to accents. This was particularly aggravating for those students who had trouble typing accents to begin with.

Several students commented on their disappointment that a portion of their studying time was spent in resolving technical issues. This was not necessarily what students anticipated when signing up for the online section. One Elementary Spanish I student commented:

I feel like in a regular class we'd be working on Spanish, and working around [problems]. For example, I have to make my [audio] recording five times, and it's not because the Spanish is wrong, it's because the recorder [malfunctions]. If I was in class I could just say it once.

Another student at the same level echoed this concern: 'The fact that we're having technical problems makes it even worse because you're not in touch with the language, you're diddling around with this browser that doesn't work, so you're really distanced from the language.' There was a sense for several students that the time spent learning how to use the online system was time lost, time that could have been used to learn the language. In addition, occasional problems with the technology, such as pages that did not load correctly or network interruptions, would lead some students to skip over material.

One aspect that came as a surprise from Carnegie Mellon University students, generally known for their affinity for technology, was a desire for something tangible to learn from. Some of this desire stemmed from students' desire to review the materials when a computer was not accessible.

In addition to finding it more inconvenient to not have a textbook for portability reasons, one Elementary Spanish II student felt that with a book, more exercises would be available; an Intermediate Spanish I student bought a verb book for extra practice. Another student, from Elementary French I, felt she learned more by writing the material down and thus took copious notes:

I write it down. I write it all down, because even using the computer, looking at it, it's hard to study when it's on the computer . . . . It's easier to remember that way, because then when I'm not at the computer I can look back . . . . I can also organize it when I write it down.

This student's comments reflect a difficulty some students reported in learning by 'staring at a computer screen'. This difficulty may stem in part from simple eyestrain, as well as a preference for more tactile experiences such as writing notes by hand.

The question of organization came up for several students when they wished to look up a specific item, versus working through the material sequentially. Some students had trouble remembering in what section they had seen a critical piece of information. The website's materials were presented non-linearly, which was both a strength and a weakness in many students' eyes: while it allowed for more free exploration, it made it difficult for some students to recall what areas they had already seen or find information again that they wanted to confirm. Despite these frustrations, students appreciated the advantages that the web-based interface afforded, such as the ability to listen to target language sound clips repeatedly and to access translations (through text roll-overs) when needed.

### ***Teachers: recurring themes***

As the vast majority of online instructors were experienced with both online and traditional formats, interviews conducted with the online instructors focused on a comparison of their own experience with teaching in both formats.

### *Importance of training*

From the instructors' perspective, the most critical aspect of teaching a hybrid online language course was training. The very technology that made the online classes possible, including the web-based materials and the course management software, could complicate the lives of the instructors if and when there were technical glitches. More importantly, instructors are the students' first line of contact: if they run into a problem, they contact their instructor first.

A strong sense of community developed among the instructors of the language online courses. They often consulted one another for tips and suggestions: 'We would write each other and kind of support each other because we were both struggling .... And if people are not that comfortable with computers to start with ... it's a big difference.' In addition, several of the instructors were involved with the creation and development of the online materials, which provided useful insight; other developers regularly made themselves available for assistance.

This collaboration became all the more critical as the instructors realized that managing an online class is quite different from managing a traditional class. The reduced class schedule meant that teachers relied on email to communicate with their students. Initially, the email system from within the course management software (WebCT) was used as the primary mode of communication, but many instructors began using the campus email system as well, after realizing many students were not remembering to check their class accounts for messages. Even resorting to the more widely used campus email did not always work: one instructor felt that she had a few students who would 'hide' from her by never answering messages. As email is a central part of student life at Carnegie Mellon, it was hard to believe students' lack of response was not intentional.

The instructors also noticed that the reduced schedule made it difficult for students to keep up with their work, and they struggled to find ways to make students accountable for their own progress. Without having their expectations made clear from the start, many students would get behind on their work, which made the instructor's job that much harder. As another instructor points out, 'Now we need to know how [to make] students realize that it is a different experience than a regular course.'

### *Control of materials*

As with any program under development, there were issues related to teaching while materials were still being added and edited. Although those instructors who also participated in the creation and design of materials were able to spend some time addressing occasional glitches, those who were not a part of the design team would sometimes have difficulties planning for the long term. A number of instructors reported feeling barely one or two steps ahead of their students. As the courses were put in place and taught for a second or third time, this became less of an issue.

Interestingly, the connection between developers and instructors would sometimes make it difficult for instructors to pick and choose what to assign – a problem rarely found when using a textbook created by a group of unknown authors. One instructor specifically mentioned feeling bad not using certain web materials for her class precisely because she knew how much of her colleagues' time and effort had gone into its creation. However, this hesitancy to cut any page made by the team could cause instructors to feel they did not have control over the materials to be used in their classes.

*Connection with students*

With the reduced schedule of the hybrid classes, it would be understandable if instructors had difficulties getting to know their students. However, the opposite seemed to be the case, thanks in no small part to the individual face-to-face meetings that were a required part of the hybrid courses. While these face-to-face meetings were primarily intended to provide students with an opportunity to practice conversation skills in the target language, with specific tasks assigned for each meeting, instructors found that this time was invaluable in keeping up with each student's progress.

Many times students would arrive at their appointments unprepared; others would glance at the topic to be discussed, but would not have studied the underlying grammatical structure or vocabulary to be practiced. The instructors and language assistants generally chose to adjust in those cases, and would use the time to practice previously covered material, or have free discussions with students in the target language.

The unexpected aspect of these face-to-face meetings was the chance that instructors had to follow students' progress on a more individual basis. In addition to providing an opportunity for more focused feedback and instruction, instructors could follow each student's progress and make a more personal connection. Those students who needed additional time with a concept were given the chance for extra help; those who were more advanced were able to engage in more complex discussions than they would have in class. A number of instructors felt that this opportunity was so beneficial that they considered importing the requirement for occasional individual meetings to their traditional classes. As one explains,

I was writing everything they did wrong, or writing words that they didn't know, and then giving it back to them, ... [or] more general things, like 'you tend to avoid using the past tense,' and I found that really worked, because I have seen progress in my students. I think if I had this opportunity with an offline course, it would be great, because they get one to one conversation.

**Discussion**

Despite technological glitches and some difficulty adjusting to the hybrid format for both students and instructors, overall the hybrid format was considered to be a success. As discussed in our previous article (Chenoweth, Ushida, & Murday, 2006), the quantitative analysis of language gain showed that hybrid students generally performed at the same level as their traditional counterparts. In addition, instructors report that students who have taken one or more hybrid courses are no less prepared for advanced classes. The purpose of the design and implementation of the hybrid language courses was to provide opportunities for language learning to those who would otherwise be unable to take the course due to the intense (3–4 days per week) schedule of traditional sections. Overall, the benefits of providing language courses to students who might not otherwise be able to take them have thus far outweighed the problems encountered during implementation.

The results of the qualitative data were used as formative feedback as the Language Online program expanded, providing a basis for improvements and adjustments. One example is the interactive workplan, a web-based interface that instructors could create for each semester, which was added after the first year. This allowed students to link directly to the sections they were required to study before class, and identify precisely which assignments were due on what date. Other instructors chose to provide even more

guidance for work completion, utilizing the WebCT calendar function to suggest mid-week deadlines for certain module elements.

Another example is administration of the chat sessions: first year (particularly first semester) instructors began assigning task-based chat sessions that allowed students to work in pairs for much shorter periods of time than the original 60 minutes. Some instructors chose to allow students to chat in pairs or small groups on their own, whereas others required the language assistant to attend. Some language assistants held weekly 'virtual office hours' during which any student could log in for synchronous chat assignments or to ask questions. This adjustment of the chat requirements was particularly helpful at the lower levels and reduced the tendency of students to multitask while purportedly practicing the language.

It is interesting to note that the two most critical elements of the creation of the language online courses, the reduced schedule and the web-based technology, are the source of both powerful positives and negatives in terms of overall satisfaction. Students often reported needing additional motivation and self-regulation to maintain their focus and not fall behind in their work as a result of the reduced class schedule. The students whose expectations were not met, whether for more contact, or more flexibility, were frustrated with their experience. The importance of setting realistic student expectations became clear over the course of the study, precisely as Burston (2003) suggested.

The hybrid format of the course had decided advantages over purely online (i.e., distance) courses in terms of interaction between students and instructors, a repeated concern the literature on online learning (see Hampel & Hauck, 2004; Strambi & Bouvet, 2003; Trotter, 2002). Instructors of the LOL classes felt they got to know their online students even better than students in their traditional classes, despite generally having similar class sizes. In addition, most students mentioned the importance of their instructor in their own experience; the student evaluations for most online courses contained repeated praise for their instructors, even in cases where the same students were frustrated with other aspects of the course.

The very technology that allowed for the hybrid courses to be created was also a source of positive and negative reactions. When depending on technology for the delivery of learning materials, inevitable glitches are much more likely to create frustration and impatience. This may have been the source of the desire for tangible materials, such as a book or a workbook, expressed by many students. This is particularly notable given that Carnegie Mellon students have a reputation for unusually high comfort with technology; at schools with a student population that is less universally tech-savvy, this finding should be taken under particular consideration. The success of technology-driven learning materials may depend as much on the human element as on the sophistication of the technology employed. Only with proper training and guidance for both students and instructors will online language learning succeed.

## Notes

1. This study was supported, in part, by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to Christopher M. Jones and G. Richard Tucker of the Department of Modern Languages at Carnegie Mellon University.
2. Although some offline courses, particularly at the Intermediate level, made use of a writing assistant (typically an upper-division undergraduate native speaker or language major), students in these courses typically met with their writing assistant no more than once or twice during in the entire semester.

3. For more details of the quantitative results, see Chenoweth, Ushida & Murday (2006).
4. Unfortunately, no FCE data were available for the fall of 2000.
5. No FCE data were available for Elementary Spanish II for the spring of 2002.

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## Appendix A: Sample interview questions

Initial mid-semester interview questions (online students):

- What's your impression of this experience so far?
- What is your course load like?
- Looking at the CIL study pie chart of the daily schedule of an average CMU student, how accurate do you think it is?
- How accurate are the estimates for how long you spend on each aspect of the course (studying alone, working in groups, etc)?
- What do you like about French/Spanish online? What do you dislike about it?
- What would you change if you could?
- Is the amount of work for this class similar to that of an offline course?
- What else do you do besides what's assigned for class to learn French/Spanish?
- Are your goals being met? Have your goals changed since the beginning of the semester?
- What do you find difficult about taking this course online? What do you find easier?
- What do you think the advantages are of taking this course online?

Initial end-of-semester interview questions (online students):

- What do you like about French/Spanish online? What do you dislike about it?
- What would you change if you could?
- Is the amount of work for this class similar to that of an offline course?
- What else do you do besides what's assigned for class to learn French/Spanish?
- What were your impressions of the chat sessions? What were the most memorable sessions about (the best topics)?
- bulletin board: did you only post, or did you also read it?
- Were there problems that came up when you were meeting with partners?
- Did you have problems connecting with the technology?
- How did the transitions work between the instructor, the TA, the substitute instructor? Any other comments about working with each of them?
- Were your goals met? Did your goals change since the beginning of the semester?
- Did your feelings about French/Spanish change over the semester? Your feelings about the course?
- What do you find difficult about taking this course online? What do you find easier?
- What do you think the advantages are of taking this course online? Disadvantages?

Questions for online instructors:

- How are you adjusting to giving a course online? How's it going?
- Do you feel bound to the material, or are you able to do what you want to do in class?
- How do you think the students are doing so far?
- Do you have a sense of how much time students are spending on this, and what they're spending the bulk of their time on?
- What do you usually do in class on [Mondays]?

- What would you modify?
- On [Thursdays] when you meet with some of the students individually, what do you usually spend the 20 minutes doing?
- Was there anything else that you'd like to mention about the class, at this point?
- How do you deal with the TA? Do you meet with her on a regular basis, or how do you work her involvement?

**Appendix B: Carnegie Mellon University faculty course evaluation sample**

**FACULTY COURSE EVALUATION  
Instructor/Course Survey Form**

Course: 11111M L1	Semester: S03
Instructor: EINSTEINE, ALBERT	Enrollment: 12

**EVALUATION QUESTIONS**

1. What is your class? (Use numeric codes below) <b>Freshman = 1, Sophomore = 2, Junior = 3, Senior = 4, 5th Year Senior = 5, Master = 10, Doctoral = 20</b>	<input type="text"/>
2. On average, how many hours did you spend each week working on this course outside of class (on homework, papers, studying, projects, etc.)? <b>Ratings for questions 3 to 13 below: (poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (excellent) Only a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 is acceptable for questions 3 to 13.</b>	<input type="text"/>
3. Did the instructor state clearly the goals of the course?	<input type="text"/>
4. Was the course well planned?	<input type="text"/>
5. Did the instructor state clearly the criteria for grading?	<input type="text"/>
6. Did the instructor provide adequate feedback concerning performance?	<input type="text"/>
7. Did the instructor respond to questions adequately?	<input type="text"/>
8. Did the instructor show concern for the needs of individual students?	<input type="text"/>
9. Did the instructor communicate clearly & effectively?	<input type="text"/>
10. Did the instructor present material and activities at an appropriate level of difficulty?	<input type="text"/>
11. Did the instructor stimulate critical and creative thinking about the subject?	<input type="text"/>
12. Overall, how would you rate this instructor's teaching?	<input type="text"/>
13. What was the overall quality of this course?	<input type="text"/>

## EVALUATION COMMENTS

## Appendix C: Modern Language Department supplemental faculty course evaluation

## FCE Supplemental Questions spring 2003

Please respond *anonymously*. These questionnaires are to be returned in the envelope provided to: Nancy Monda, Administrative Assistant, Dept. of Modern Languages, BH160. They will not be reviewed by faculty until after grades have been submitted.

Course No. \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

1. What was your **major purpose** in taking this course? Did you accomplish that goal? To what do you attribute your success or failure to achieve your goal(s)?
2. What did you like or dislike about the **materials** used in this course?  
(You may wish to comment on factors such as multi-media materials, web-based exercises, texts/ and other reading material, out-of-class assignments and activities, etc.,)
3. Which aspects of the **course** did you like or dislike?  
(You may wish to comment on such factors as interacting with materials, with other students, with the instructor, and with native speakers.)
4. Please comment on **aspects of the course related to the instructor**. (You may wish to comment on factors such as subject-matter knowledge, organizational ability, clarity in delivering instruction, use of classroom time, treatment of students, responsiveness to students' concerns, etc.)
5. Has this course had an impact on your interest in language, language learning, or cultural studies? If so, please describe as explicitly as possible some of the ways in which this course has affected you.
6. Please comment on your interaction with the **native informant or assistant** to the instructor.
7. Please comment on your interactions with **other students** outside of class meetings (i.e., through e-mail, b-board, chat interaction)
8. In terms of your **overall satisfaction**, how does this course compare with other language courses you may have taken?
9. Did this course **change or affect your study habits**? For example, did you study more, more often, more regularly, or less so than for your other courses?
10. Would you **recommend** this course to a friend?
11. Are you **planning to take the next course** in this sequence?  
If yes, are you planning to take in this same format? Why or why not?  
If you are not planning to take the next course, why not?
12. Please rate the **overall quality of this course**, including the material or the content, independent of the instructor's teaching.

(Excellent)    5    4    3    2    1    (Poor)

13. Please rate the **overall quality of the instructor's teaching** regardless whether or not you liked the content of the course.

(Excellent)    5    4    3    2    1    (Poor)

14. The **technology** used in this class allowed me to participate more fully than I would have done normally:

(Strongly agree)    5    4    3    2    1    (Strongly disagree)

Any other comments:

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