I have been teaching online classes through the use of the Blackboard Educational Software Program for about 7 years. My course, “Mass Media Ethics,” is a core curriculum elective designed for undergraduate majors in all of our mass communications concentrations. Incidentally, the book I use is Media Ethics Issues and Cases authored by my friends, Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins, and I highly recommend it for this course.

Apparently, however, I have been teaching the class online in a much different fashion than my fellow faculty. My students “meet” at a specific day and time every week within a virtual classroom to discuss the issues and their assignments just as with a face-to-face class. In other words, Blackboard is not used simply as a book or discussion board where students come and go as they please without direct interaction with an instructor. In my mind, that procedure is not teaching. Although we are bound by text-based comments, my students and I enjoy lively and thoughtful discussions that are highly engaging and often, entertaining. I also find that our discussions rival those from a face-to-face class probably because online students have the luxury of usually being on a computer in the comfort of their own homes and have time to think of salient topics and interactions than students sitting on uncomfortable desks avoiding your eyes so as not to be called upon to join in on the discussion.

I plan to teach my visual communication course there in the fall.

I expect it will not be easy to convert my experience in brick and mortar classrooms and then with the Blackboard Educationally-Based Software Program to a meaningful teaching experience within a social community that is more known for its well—socializing and gambling opportunities. Nevertheless, the possibility of adding a more complete visual experience to an online teaching environment is something that we should all try.

If you have (or plan to get) an SL account, send me your SL name and I will give you details on how to join in the fun.

In This Issue

One of my favorite activities when I attend an AEJMC Conference is to get the hell out of the hotel and enjoy the day by exploring the host city. Since last summer’s convention was in San Francisco, there was much urban hiking to be had. But it didn’t take long to walk over to the Museum of Modern Art and discover a photorealist artist, Zak Smith, worth your attention. In “Girls in the Naked Girls Business,” Smith combines a photographer’s eye, a painter’s use of color, and an animator’s sense of wonder to bring life to the portrait genre.

Another joy I’ve discovered with this editor position is introducing...
My Second Life avatar, “drles Loon,” hovers high above the virtual visual communications classroom. Ringed by a wide assortment of coniferous trees, the area designed for the course includes two projector screens (one for showing video clips and the other for slides) as well as comfortable rugs and three tiers of simple “plastic” chairs floating in space (because you can) for students to sit. After each class, students and guests are welcomed to come to the “VISCOM Shack” through the woods from the course site to enjoy a snack, a refreshing beverage, and engage in conversations concerned with the meaning of visual communications and online teaching.
artists that might not be familiar to the reader. Paul Bibbo, a photographer and painter I’ve long admired, is a New York artist who’s range of topics and media can be both whimsical and disturbing. The series included in this issue, “How I Learned to Drive,” reminds me of Duane Michaels. However, Bibbo collects photographs over many years and then constructs meaningful associations between them with his captions. In that way, there is truly a semiotic dance between words and images that gives insight to viewers and him as well.

Please visit the “Portfolio Showcase” section of the journal’s website to see color versions of the printed works along with other pieces from the artist.

Three traditional research papers are included in this issue. I always felt that Julianne was a master in these commentaries at providing a linking concept between the various and eclectic works within the pages you were lucky enough to be holding when she was editor. But for me, maybe I’m not that deep. I will say this: These three studies offer something for everyone. Angela Mak’s surprisingly illuminating study concerned with cross-cultural sensitivities to advertisements for skin whitening products, Fred Vul-tee’s historical treatment of the meaning of editorial cartoons published before the United States entered World War II, and Mark Kelly’s geek-heavy (and I mean that as high praise since I am a proud geek!) experiment that compares watching television news in small, medium, and large screen sizes are studies that shows off the splendid diversity of our visual communications field.

Combine all the above with a thoughtful "By Design" commentary and a review of Cecelia Baldwin’s new scholarly textbook from Jean Trumbo; a thorough and insightful
review of Gerald Jones’ book concerned with the beginnings of the comic book in America by sure-to-be-a-viscom star, Aaron Ragan-Fore; and another intriguing list of “must-reads” compiled and annotated by Dennis Dunleavy, and I’d say you got your money’s worth yet again!

And in keeping with that theme: Please, please do try to sell our publication to your library personnel. We need all the paid subscriptions we can muster. If you need more information or help in that regard, do not hesitate to contact me.

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