

Adopting Third-Party Content for Online Courses in Higher Education: Conversations with the Field

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I. Background and Overview

Over the past two years, the Monterey Institute for Technology and Education (www.montereyinstitute.org) has been researching selected aspects of online education in higher education. The research has led to two documents.

The first paper, Online Education in Community Colleges: Conversations with the Field (2006), was a broad brush look at trends in online education, attitudes and practices in online teaching, methods of online course development, and several other topics. Fifty-three educators were interviewed for the study, mostly distance learning managers from a variety of types and sizes of community colleges throughout the country. In addition, interviews were held with a dozen online education “thought leaders,” as well as a number of seasoned instructional designers. No faculty were interviewed for this initial paper.¹

In early 2007 a second paper was completed. How Community College Faculty View Online Education: Conversations with the Field, was developed from fifty interviews with community college faculty and online administrator,; again from a diverse selection of community colleges. This paper concentrated on how faculty develop and teach online courses, and attitudes about online education.

Among other findings, these two studies suggested that faculty create online courses from precursor classroom-based courses, and that online education was technological evolution (rather than revolution) in higher education. Content seemed to come from a variety of sources: textbooks, associated media from publishers, and locally gathered materials. What was clear, however, is that faculty treasure the ability to design their own courses, even in the face of having access to effective and expansive preproduced online courses, whose use would save both and money.

This final “Conversations with the Field” paper examines the latter statement in detail and answers the following question in detail: “When given access to very well-developed online courses, how will faculty use the courses, if at all?”

This series is called “Conversations with the Field,” and it is exactly that. The majority of data has come from lengthy open-ended interviews with online learning practitioners. Although each interviewee was asked similar questions, discussions were broad and fluid, often wandering into new areas. With both papers I amalgamated responses into general themes and findings, hoping to identify consistencies. The results have been

¹ Both of these papers are available at the Monterey Institute for Technology and Education website, www.MontereyInstitute.org, or directly from the author, Robert Threlkeld at threlkeldr@gmail.com.

filtered through my twenty-five years of managing and evaluating online learning program in higher education.

II. The Study

Faculty rarely design online courses from scratch using original material. While there is often a quality of art in designing a good course, it is rarely original art. Online course design is a clever assembly of content provided by others along with learning processes conceived or located by the faculty designer. More like a collage than a painting.

Particularly in community colleges, all this happens within a context of defined limits: a textbook, course objectives, and state-mandated student outcomes. Faculty who design online courses are most akin to chefs who, within constraints, refashion recipes given the limitations of food and cooking to create something of their own; something that will be appreciated by patrons or in our case, students.

Let us imagine that a group of chefs were given a recipe from which to cook a meal. How would they react? How would they make it their own creation? This is what this paper is about. But instead of chefs, think online faculty and instead of a meal, think an online course.

In the fall of 2006, a number of institutions and organizations became members in a cooperative organization, the National Repository for Online Courses (NROC). NROC is a project of the Monterey Institute for Technology and Education which is largely funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. By joining the NROC community, members gained access to a series of carefully developed, media rich General Education courses. Although the courses were capable of being broken apart into smaller learning objects, they were complete in themselves. Within a structure correlated to popular textbooks, they included lectures and text, professional media, simulations, discussion items and reading assignments, assessments, and ancillary material. Each course was the outcome a cooperative design effort involving many professionals at a cost of several hundred thousand dollars.

In late 2006, once they had signed a contract, each institution in this new NROC cooperative was given unlimited access to more than two dozen courses for use in whatever way they saw fit. While NROC provided other ancillary services, organizations joined the cooperative to get use of the courses, and to obtain very high-quality content which would augment their own online materials.

NROC provided the courses on disks and assisted each organization in mounting the course content on their servers. By January, 2007, content was theoretically available to be used in online courses

In the initial months of this study, NROC distributed complete courses to the colleges and universities. While these could be broken apart into learning objects, each member organization got the complete courses as a unit. Early in 2007, NROC realized that the content might be more useful in a more granular format and created a novel web structure called "Hippocampus" (www.hippocampus.org). On this site faculty (or designers) can comb through all the NROC content in smaller discrete learning objects, see how they correlate with popular textbooks, and add the objects directly to online

courses. In essence, NROC has broken out the content for the faculty members, saving local staff from performing that task.

This paper is a description of how each organization introduced faculty to courses and their content and how specific faculty chose to work with the material. The research for this paper, gathered largely from interviews and site visits, was undertaken to study how content, packaged in complete courses, gets to faculty and how decisions are made to use all, part, or none of the content.

The organizations and institutions selected for participation in this study were:

- Colorado Community College Online
- St. Petersburg College
- The University of Texas TeleCampus
- Chattanooga State Technical Vocational College
- Iowa Community College Online Consortium

In the following pages, I will briefly describe the institution and organizations above, the ways in which the courses were presented to faculty, how faculty worked with the content over a several month period. Readers will be presented with views of faculty and administrators over a several month period. As in previous papers in this series, themes and conclusions will be offered in the final section. By the end of the paper, readers should have a better picture of the role of third-party content in online teaching and how faculty personalize and take ownership of the their online courses.

Colorado Community Colleges Online(CCCO)

CCCO is a consortia program offering online courses for Colorado's community college system. The Colorado Community Colleges Online is comprised of the 13 member colleges in the Colorado Community Colleges, Dawson Community College, Northwest Missouri State University, and Pickens Tech. The organization develops and teaches online courses throughout the state, using member colleges as the outlet for students. CCCOnline is largely funded by course fee revenues. The organization has a central location in the Denver Metro area.

Through CCCO students can earn fully accredited Associate of Arts Degrees, Associate of Applied Science Degrees and Certificates, in various disciplines. Colorado Community Colleges are accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

For this paper, Marge Vorndam, Environmental Science faculty member, and Lisa Cheney-Steen, Co-Executive Director for Learning Technology, were interviewed.

Winter, 2007 When interviewed In the winter of 2007 after several months of membership in NROC, Lisa Cheney-Steen, said that her organization wasn't doing "a particularly good job," in getting the content out to her faculty. Although she has given the courses to her instructional designers and offered them to her faculty, Cheney-Steen doesn't expect much usage.

She and her organization had decided to use the NROC material when their courses undergo a redesign process. In the case of CCCO, the organization, not the faculty member, decides which courses are taught online and then designs the courses

themselves, using various faculty members to teach them. The design process is done under contract. CCCO is now seeking grant funding to redesign several courses and expects to make greater use of the NROC courses at that time. Without outside funding, Cheney-Steen believes she has funds for redesigning 2-4 courses a year.

At the point CCCO staff were interviewed (February, 2007) only one faculty member was using the NROC content (described below) with a second faculty member reviewing the US History course for inclusion in a course.

Marge Vorndam is currently teaching ENV 101-Environmental Science, using the NROC course. Vorndam, who is largely retired, has an extensive background in natural history, soil conservation, and natural resource work, in both the private and public sectors. In addition, she is very technically skilled, having served as both an online trainer and instructional designer for CCCO.

Of all the faculty interviewed for this paper, Vorndam makes the most complete use of the NROC content. She has adopted almost the complete course. However, since the labs in the course are almost all simulations, she chose to develop six labs herself. Each of these requires students to perform some activity outside the class, then report back to the class. For example, she has a student wrap a T-shirt around the exhaust of their car to analyze particulate matter emissions. In addition, because of her students' backgrounds, she modified the discussion questions.

Happily working in the CCCO environment, she is very comfortable teaching courses which have been centrally developed. It makes sense to her to use content which has been professionally designed and arranged in a course format. She believes her own strongest skill is "facilitation," working with students and making learning relevant.

Fall, 2007 Several months later, Lisa Cheney-Steen, CCCO administrator, noted that a second faculty member had adopted the the NROC content, a history teacher who asked to teach for the organization. The entire course was adopted by the faculty member. No particular problems were noted.

CCCO did not receive the hoped-for funding from the Hewlett Foundation, and therefore was not making greater use of the new content by extensively revising existing courses.

Marge Vorndam, the experienced online instructor in environmental science completed her course. As noted above, she had already had access to the course prior to 2007 and was quite pleased with the material. Marge works as an instructional designer for CCCO, and creates and revises other courses, as well.

St. Petersburg College

St. Petersburg College is in St. Petersburg, Florida. It is a multicampus, two-year/four-year public institution with 10 learning sites countywide. Interviews from St. Petersburg staff and administrators have been included in all three of the "Conversations with the Field" papers, because the College has an exemplary distance education program. Online learning at "St. Pete" is well-funded, well-supported, and well understood.

Lynda Womer, Associate Provost, runs the "e-campus" which she described in an email: "eCampus, was developed as an "administrative umbrella" to house the college's online

classes. It was formed in 1999, when our online program began to take off due to our receiving a large federal grant. The “one stop shop” concept was developed for ease of navigation for our new online students....This fall term, our distant learning online program, eCampus recorded over 20,000 student enrollments in 692 sections of 364 different courses, with 28 full degree program and certificates awarded online. We have close to 300 fulltime and adjunct faculty teaching online classes for eCampus. “

For this paper, two faculty were followed, Heather Roberson and Earl Fratus, both faculty who teach American Government online. In addition, Alan Shapiro, instructional technologist, and Associate Provost Womer were interviewed several times. In addition, a visit was conducted to this college for on-site interviews.

Winter, 2007 As with Marge Vorndam from CCC Online, Heather Roberson had used the NROC content prior to 2007. She had been asked to pilot test the American Government course earlier in the year. Heather adopted the entire course, then added instructor notes, web assignments, and her own assessments. She commented that “there isn’t enough sharing of content among the campus faculty. Everybody is too busy.” Heather uses a textbook and added a bit of new content to the end of the course to comply with St. Petersburg curriculum requirements.

Roberson noted that is important for her to design the courses that she teaches. “My course is my baby,” she said.

Earl Fratus, Roberson’s colleague from a different campus, also teaches American Government. Fratus, who was extremely busy working on college-wide accreditation during 2007, is responsible for developing and overseeing the American Government “Signature” course. Signature courses are St. Pete’s effort to standardize online instruction. One faculty member in a discipline designs a particular online course and then part-time faculty are required to use it, free to make some additions but no changes to the the content or structure. Signature courses, as one administrator noted, “should keep us from reinventing the wheel every time somebody new teaches the course.”

At the point of the initial interviews in Winter, 2007, Fratus was refining the Signature American Government, for which he received a stipend. Heather Roberson offered the NROC content to him, and Alan Shapiro, instructional technologist, also met with Fratus about the NROC content.

Once the College joined the NROC Consortium and was given unlimited access to the NROC content, Shapiro and other instructional technologists were tasked with introducing the content to faculty. Shapiro, like other support staff I interviewed for this paper, was busy helping to implement a revised learning management system. He felt that faculty would not adopt entire third-party courses (this was the original model for the NROC courses), but needed information broken into learning objects. And, according to Shapiro, the process needed to be simple: “If it isn’t easy, faculty won’t use it.”

Fall, 2007 When classes began in September, 2007, Earl Fratus had completed his Signature American Government course. After reviewing the NROC content, he chose to use much of his own material from previous iterations of his online course. He had been using digitized content from an older telecourse for visual material. During the summer, through a campus librarian, he became aware of downloadable media from a commercial source. Fratus reviewed the video, selected pieces he wanted, and the

College purchased the material for use in his course. Fratus chose not to use anything out of the NROC American Government course.

Heather Roberson was continuing to use the NROC course. She may ultimately drop the use of a textbook, realizing all the content necessary was available in the media. She has now incorporated the NROC information as a requirement in all of her classes, both live and online. She also ran a training session for other American Government faculty about her course and the NROC content.

Lynda Womer, looking back over the past several months, wondered how best to diffuse the NROC content more broadly. The College had joined the NROC Consortium, but seemed to be making little use of the content. She, along with other administrators in this project, had high hopes for Hippocampus, described at the beginning of this paper.

Alan Shapiro was also somewhat frustrated. "Nine months later, except for one faculty, we really haven't pushed this as much as we should," he said. Again, the issue related to time. Faculty were busy and support staff were busy. "If we have to show faculty, it takes time." The College has been busily creating its own learning object repository (LOR) in which faculty create their own media using Camtasia. These objects are stored by the College, but there is virtually no sharing between faculty members.

University of Texas TeleCampus

The University of Texas (UT) TeleCampus is a unit of the University of Texas System and works with all University of Texas institutions. While the TeleCampus itself does not offer instruction, credit, or degrees, it facilitates online learning throughout the system. Since its founding in 1998, the TeleCampus has assisted in the development and delivery of hundreds of courses to more than 56,000 students. The organization's principle mechanism is the provision of funding, quality control, and support for local campuses to create and teach online courses using generally standardized models.

The TeleCampus represents a very effective system level staff unit. It has strong support at the highest level of the UT System, has a knowledgeable and experienced staff, and generates much of its own funding.

For this paper, Darcy Hardy, Director of the TeleCampus, and Michael Anderson, Assistant Director for Course Development were interviewed throughout the year. Faculty members were Rebekah Nix and Jennifer McCloud.

Of all the organizations contacted for this paper, the UT TeleCampus used the most systematic, vigorous, and organized approach to disseminating the NROC courses. In late Fall, 2006, the organization sent out a Call for Participation to all TeleCampus faculty from member campuses inviting "Use of Third Party (NROC) Content." Faculty were asked to either incorporate NROC content into existing online courses or to create new courses using the material. Although six projects were possible, the TeleCampus selected only three for experimentation this initial year. Faculty were provided \$1,500 for their participation, and their local campus distance learning office was given another \$1,000. For this paper Rebekah Nix from UT Dallas was interviewed throughout the year.

The TeleCampus also utilized the NROC content in a more ambitious cooperative program. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board offered competitive funding for a “Course Redesign Project,” in which institutions would receive support to design courses to increase student learning and reduce instructional costs. The TeleCampus chose to use the NROC content to create a team-designed calculus course. The TeleCampus enlisted three local campuses (UT Brownsville, UT Permian Basin, and UT Tyler) to do the design work. Funding was administered through the TeleCampus and distributed to the participating institutions. For this paper, Jennifer McLoud was from UT Tyler was interviewed.

Winter, 2007 Both the calculus team and the other individual faculty members met in Austin in two separate meeting during early winter, 2007. The NROC content was presented to each group and the TeleCampus explained each of the projects. Faculty members asked a variety of questions and were given help and assistance from TeleCampus staff. Each was given a timeline and schedule to complete their work.

Darcy Hardy, director of the TeleCampus, initiated the collaborative work with NROC. She believed strongly in the quality of the content, particularly when compared to the costs of creating similar content within the UT system. She felt that money and support were essential to getting faculty to adopt the material and that the best way to present new course content would be through departments, seeding individual faculty with stipends and allowing other faculty to observe their colleagues. Michael Anderson, assistant director, strongly supported the quality of the content, and was excited about the application of reusable learning objects within TeleCampus courses.

Summer, 2007 Six months after its inauguration, the calculus project was behind schedule. The team had met twice in Austin over the period, and then worked individually on their campuses. Each of the three calculus faculty members had reviewed the content, eliminated content which had no application for any of their campuses, and reassembled what was left. As is common with four-year institutions, each campus had its own syllabus, content, and objectives for their course, and each would use the final calculus course its own way.

Much of the faculty time was spent in creating new assessments for the course. The NROC content did not provide adequate assessment for the project and the outcomes required by the Texas funding agency.

Jennifer McLoud, the calculus team member from UT Tyler, was interviewed in late June, 2007. She had been recruited by the university administration through her local math department. She noted that she was not a fan of the “Math Emporium,” an approach to math education which makes heavy use of computing technology and tutorial labs instead of classroom-based sessions. McLoud believes that math, particularly calculus, requires a live instructor to explain difficult concepts. She also noted that there was some difficulty in getting all the faculty on the team to work cooperatively.

Hardy and Anderson were also interviewed during this period. Anderson noted that as is frequently the case in a team project, some members did much more work than others. Since there was no designated team leader and all decisions were collaborative, the design process was lengthy. “There is a difference between a group collaboratively building a brick wall,” he noted, “and collaboratively building each brick.”

Hardy too was frustrated with the slow progress. One of the difficulties in the collaborative course was that two campuses allow students to use calculators in the class and a third does not. She said the calculus proposal was rushed in late 2006 and that in the future she would be certain that faculty knew what was required of them.

Rebekah Nix represents one of the faculty who received a grant to use NROC content to modify her course. Nix is a senior lecturer in the university's teacher development center. She teaches educational technology and science education courses at UT Dallas. She received her doctorate online from Curtin University in Australia. She has developed text-less courses for online delivery. She won the online teaching award from the US Distance Learning Association in 2007.

Nix received funding to utilize the NROC environmental science content for an earth sciences course for teachers. During the summer, 2007, she planned to extract a number of simulations and video interviews from the NROC content to add to her course.

Fall, 2007 The calculus faculty completed their cooperative course and began delivery in September, 2007. Jennifer McLoud was teaching both live and online sections with tutorials using the new content, because of evaluation requirements from the grant. She continued to be frustrated, particularly because she couldn't make changes to the media content. There were, in fact, errors in calculus course but the content itself could not be corrected. The final course product was a set of the NROC modules, teacher notes, and assessments. Each of the three campuses adapted the three elements to their local campus, with individual syllabi and assignments.

In September, Rebekah Nix described herself as "deep into NROC." Since her course was not slated to be delivered until January, 2008, she was about on schedule. She used a number of video modules, including one in a borax mine. She also included material from others sources, developing video overlays of maps of geology and parks. Nix's course was being carefully designed by a faculty member who was taking time and energy to create a good course; one which found elements of the NROC material to be very useful.

Both UT TeleCampus administrators, Hardy and Anderson, were reasonably satisfied with both the group and individual projects using the NROC content. Aside from some bumps, courses were on schedule. When asked about what he would recommend for getting faculty to utilize third-party content, Anderson just chuckled.

"There are two points when faculty are especially receptive to new content. One is when they are creating new courses, and another when someone is pressuring them for course revisions, perhaps from bad student evaluations," he added.

Chattanooga State Technical Vocational College

Chattanooga State Technical Vocational College is a member of the Tennessee State University and Community College System. The online portion of the college is located in the Center for Distributed Education. CDE is an exemplary organization which is well-staffed and well-supported. The College president, James Catanzaro, produced an

online “Religions of the World” course, which has since become one of the NROC courses.

Judy Lowe, director of CDE, and Bay Bertani, online coordinator, were interviewed for this paper. Faculty members interviewed were Kathy Long, Richard Clements, and Roy Sofield. The latter were interviewed once during a site visit, and Ms. Long was interviewed several times throughout 2007.

Winter, 2007 In December, 2006, the CDE began introducing the NROC content to faculty at the college. The director held a variety of meetings with faculty who might have an interest in the various content areas. Kathy Long, who had been using the NROC history course during the semester, demonstrated how she used the course materials. Lowe was somewhat frustrated by having difficulty getting the courses loaded onto her local servers. In addition, she and her staff were consumed with implementing a new course management system. Both she and Ray Bertani appeared to be spread very thin among many duties, and content introduction was just one of them.

The college was in the process of creating a new environmental science course. Two faculty, Richard Clements and Roy Sofield, were involved in the process. Both were reluctant to adopt large amounts of external content, relying mostly on what they had used in the past in the classroom. They clearly wanted their own courses, and Sofield remarked “I am my course,” during the interview. Subsequently, Sofield created a new course without utilizing any of the NROC environmental science information. Therefore, neither faculty member was interviewed again.

On the other hand, Kathy Long, instructor in US history, adopted both semesters of NROC’s US history course. She has been teaching community college history for nearly two decades, including fifteen years of distance learning, and seven years of online instruction. The NROC courses form the structure for her courses, into which she inserts her own extensive teacher notes and assessments. The notes, gleaned from several textbooks, form the local content core of the courses. She, like Rebekah Nix at UT Dallas, does not require a textbook. All the required content is available online. She states that she has gotten great help and support in her efforts from the CDE.

Fall, 2007 In September, 2007, Judy Lowe was still having difficulties accessing course content in a usable fashion. She believed that the material needed to be easy for faculty to access and felt positive about NROC’s Hippocampus which provides the content in object form. She noted, “if it’s not made so faculty can put it into the course themselves, it’s just not functional for us.” Chattanooga State’s political science department had recently adopted the content, so there was some growth of usage on the campus. Ray Bertani, the online coordinator felt the lack of greater usage had to do with faculty time: “It comes down to faculty who have the time to integrate this outside of other duties will use it; others say this looks really nice but I don’t have the time.”

Kathy Long was continuing to use the NROC content for her US history courses. She too noted that political science was now using the material. Again as in the spring, she credited the college’s high interest and support for using technology as an important factor for her. She also appreciated that the campus provides financial support for online development. “When they put money out there, we go. We go to the money,” she said.

Iowa Community College Online Consortium

The Iowa Community College Online Consortium is a voluntary partnership between seven Community Colleges: Eastern Iowa Community College District, Iowa Lakes Community College, Iowa Western Community College, Northwest Iowa Community College, Southeastern Community College, Southwestern Community College, and Western Iowa Tech Community College. The Consortium's director says, "Our mission is simply to provide quality online courses supported by comprehensive student services."

The consortium was established in 1999 from a \$114,000 grant and has grown steadily in both enrollments and services since that time. In fiscal year 2006 the consortium offered more than 900 online sections, a near 50% increase of the previous year. Total enrollment for the year was 18,632 enrollments, compared to 14,664 in FY2005.

Winter, 2007 When ICCOC became a member of the NROC consortium, Steve Rheinschmidt, the organization's director, advertised the available content to the member colleges and faculty through a newsletter, e-mails, and linking the announcement to faculty websites. At the end of January, 2007, one faculty member, Joe Britan, had adopted the NROC content.

Joe Britan is a part-time instructor who was recruited to teach American government by the ICCOC staff. He retired after a twenty-seven year career in the Air Force. Britan has built his course from the ground up, using a textbook and materials he located on the internet. He believes his strongest skills are staying in close contact with students and keeping the course interesting. Britan offers the NROC content as supplemental material and there is no requirement for students to use it during the course. He found the material to be well-produced and valuable.

Fall, 2007 In a September interview, ICCOC director, Steve Rheinschmidt, said that Joe Britan remained the only NROC content user. e-College, the consortium's course management system provider, has introduced a learning object repository which should allow storage of the NROC content in a structure which is readily available to faculty. Once this is available, Rheinschmidt will again e-mail faculty and present the NROC content at in-service events.

III. Conclusions

Each of these institutions and consortia are different in many ways, serving different education levels, having differing amounts of funding, having different missions and constituencies. Given that, are there themes or emerging truisms arising from this research? Yes, perhaps.

1. Usage and diffusion of the content were low. This is clearly the most obvious finding from this several month study. By September, 2007, only a handful of faculty among the organizations studied were using the third-party content in their courses. Among five organizations serving thousands of students, less than a dozen faculty had adopted the NROC content.

2. There are critical moments when faculty want, need, and are receptive to new course content. One of the least useful questions to pose to a faculty member is to ask when he or she revises courses. The answers almost always is, “all the time.” Michael Anderson from the UT TeleCampus may have been quite prescient when he remarked that faculty are most receptive at two points: when they are creating new courses or are under pressure to revise existing courses.
3. Most faculty teach with what they know; they use existing classroom materials. This is a clear theme which runs throughout the Conversation with the Field series of papers. When facing a new teaching technology, such as online learning, faculty simply adapt what has worked in the past to the new medium. Outlines become Powerpoints. Lecture notes are moved online. Movies and film strips become digitized media clips. The teaching doesn’t change much.
4. Many faculty distrust content that is not either produced or selected by themselves. Again as above, this finding has been constant among all three Conversations papers. Faculty want to select and create what they teach. Regardless of whether third-party content might be superior or clearer to students, many faculty are uncomfortable unless they have a major part in the creation of a course.
5. Those faculty who were using the content were experienced online instructors. Kathy Long from Chattanooga State had fifteen years in online learning. Heather Roberson from St. Pete has had years of online teaching experience. Rebekah Nix had developed several online courses and had just won an award for her online teaching. Perhaps experienced online teachers are simply more comfortable with using third-party content.
6. Active promotion of content, including instructor payment, is more successful than passive presentation. As an organization, the UT TeleCampus was clearly most successful in using the NROC content. The TeleCampus had a well developed process to financially support faculty and their institutions in experimenting with the content. The organization had a formal proposal process and guided faculty through a timeline of development. Staff from St. Petersburg college believed that they could have had greater penetration of the content if instructional designers had been able to meet with individual faculty to show how specific content could have been used in courses. It appears that a general announcement or group presentations have limited impact in promoting course adoption.
7. Faculty and staff have many demands on their time and improving/revising courses seems to be a lower priority than more immediate tasks. Throughout the interview process staff and administrators talked about the constraints of time as having an impact on introducing content to faculty. Faculty themselves often mentioned time as a limitation. Earl Fratus from St. Petersburg College was very involved in accreditation work, and had limited time to do much else, so when he created a course he went with what he had.
8. Content needs to be easily accessible by faculty without the need for assistance from staff. Again, interviewees mentioned how critical easy access by faculty is for content adoption. One reason that many faculty use Powerpoints and media from textbook publishers is because these aids are easy to find. Both faculty and staff said essentially the same thing: “if content isn’t easy to find and to insert in a course, faculty won’t use it.” Indeed, the Monterey Institute for Technology and Education is finding that its greatest content usage is from its Hippocampus site, where learning objects from the NROC content are easy to find and use, and are linked to many common textbooks.

9. Finally, perhaps content is not as important to faculty as one might suppose. From the beginning of the research that has led to the three “Conversations with the Field” papers, content has been an illusive topic. In the first paper content rarely arose as a topic. Faculty seem to assume content; that it often comes from a text. It has been rare to find faculty who create or assemble courses from the ground up. Most faculty are more concerned with the teaching process, working with students, and how content is presented in an understandable way. While faculty want to design their own courses, most may have less interest in the information than the educational experience itself.

IV. Interviewee Comments

As noted at the start of this paper, once a draft is completed the paper is sent to those who were interviewed for their comments and reflections. Most of those who responded were positive about the paper and generally agreed with the findings. One person took exception to her portrayal and that was corrected. Finally, I want to include part of the responses from two interviewees, Rebekah Nix (University of Texas, Dallas) and Marge Vorndam (Colorado Community Colleges Online), because they provided interesting perspectives about third-party content.

Rebekah Nix:

Third-party content is just what it sounds like: content generated by an outside provider. These folks are bridge builders. They know how to put things together to last and they create beautiful works, but without users to go from one side to the other even the most extravagant bridge is of little value. Lifelong learners manage to find their way through jungles, around monoliths, and across bridges. True educators simply direct them toward the ‘more scenic’ pathways and help to make their journeys more meaningful and memorable by shaping and sharing these experiences.

In my multi-faceted role as course designer, production team, and instructor, the NROC content items were of critical importance. The trade-off here was to shift the time and energy required to create content representations to figuring out how to appropriately incorporate available content representations within an existing (or proposed) framework. Compared to ‘traditional’ campus distance learning organizations, before this project I had to conjure up the electronic resources for myself. The money UT-TeleCampus put into the NROC membership covered that for me - and for anyone else who gets into this eventually.

Marge Vorndam:

The whole movement toward the type of offering that NROC is pioneering is still very new (1-2 years old?) and innovative. It will likely take some time to “get it out there” and proven to educators who might be resistant to adopting content not authored by themselves or to use methods that are unproven in their minds. Lisa is right that progress is slow, but this is an

evolution of sorts, after all. We're only about 10 years into DE as a teaching framework.