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Developing a Course for the International Cyber University of Health within the Asia-Pacific Academic Consortium for Public Health

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to present our experience of developing an International Child Health course for the International Cyber University of Health within the Asia-Pacific Academic Consortium for Public Health (ICUH within APACPH) and to review the current International Child Health (ICH) cyber course. Evaluation about the survey of the ICH course showed that 2 out of 6 students thought the lecture notes were not explanatory enough and 4 students did not use the site for writing their report, mail and questions. It is necessary to improve the course contents and to train the participants in the use of the function site in web class. *Ryukyu Med. J., 24(3,4) 177~180, 2005*

Key words: Cyber University, Asia-Pacific Academic Consortium for Public Health, International Child Health, Supercourse

INTRODUCTION

The recent advancement in information technology (IT) and globalization has changed the method of education. New educational approaches such as e-learning/web based training are being applied to education in the health sector both at the graduate and undergraduate levels throughout the world. There are no country boundaries in e-learning and web based classes. For example, Pan-Pacific Education and Communication Experiments by Satellite (PEACESAT) has supported tele-education in the Pan-Pacific region since the 1980's¹⁾. University of Hawaii provides Public health education programs to remote Islands of the region in cooperation with PEACESAT. The "Supercourse" which started in 1997²⁾, is the most developed web-based public health teaching project in terms of lectures. More than 2000 lectures are provided by lecturers via the net³⁾.

The ICUH within APACPH was launched at Yonsen University, Korea in May, 2004⁴⁾. APACPH is a well known consortium for public health that

consists of 57 universities and institutions from 17 countries in the Asia-Pacific region⁵⁾. Yonsen University is one of the Korean member institutions of the consortium that has developed a sophisticated infrastructure for a flexible learning system. The mission of the ICUH was to promote the education of health professionals in the Asia Pacific region by providing flexible learning courses. The author of this article is a faculty member of the ICUH within APACPH. The course of "ICH" was provided by the author as one of three non-credit free courses in the spring semester of 2004. Although the course was offered on a trial basis, 16 students registered for the class. Ten students attended the class and six students responded to a survey on the performance of the course. The purpose of this paper is to present an instructor's experience of developing a web based course and the common problems associated with operating the cyber class. Furthermore, in this paper, the current ICH related lectures of the "Supercourse" are reviewed.

DEVELOPING A COURSE FOR THE ICUH WITHIN APACPH

There are two reasons why the ICUH within APACPH was established as a useful teaching project. One reason is that the Asia-Pacific region is quite wide and has many remote areas. Another reason is that there are many health workers who need further training. A flexible learning system is important for them. According to a recent survey of Public Health faculties in the Asia Pacific region, only 23 % of the faculties in member institutions have master or doctorate degree courses⁶⁾. With the development of the course, the ICUH within APACPH will be able to provide a flexible learning approach that will meet those students' and health professionals' needs.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COURSE

The implementation of the course had the following 4 stages: preparing the course materials, recruiting students, operating the web class and evaluating the course.

1 . Preparing course materials: October, 2003-May, 2004

The course was prepared based on the syllabus during October, 2003-May, 2004. It contained materials that covered a 10 week study period. Course objectives, lecture methods, evaluation criteria, evaluation method, evaluation scale, reference sources and weekly lecture plans were described. Lecture files of the 10 weeks course (Introduction to ICH, Growth and development, Nutrition, Infant and child morbidity and mortality, Diarrheal diseases and rehydration, Communicable diseases and their control, Adolescent health, Psychosocial problems, Child health in Japan, Child health in Asia-Pacific countries) were also made by the author and other colleagues of the ICUH. These course materials were sent to the ICUH by e-mail.

2 . Recruiting students: March-May, 2004

The students were recruited from each member institution of APACPH and information of the course was posted on the ICUH within APACPH Web site. The students with relatively high TOEFL scores (higher than 550) were recruited, because the course was available only in English in 2004. Although 16 students registered for the ICH course, only 10 actually participated in the class. The

students who attended the class were 6 Koreans, 2 Japanese, one Chinese and one Malaysian.

3 . Operating the web base class: May10-August 15, 2004

The lecture files were provided according to a weekly lecture plan. Also on the main web site were a Bulletin board with a discussion room & message, a Chart room, a Report room, a Quiz room, a Question area and an Assignment area. The instructor could know which students looked at the related-site through statistics of the student site. The discussion room was the most popular site for both the instructor and students. However, it was not easy to communicate with each student properly using the web site. According to the statistics of the class administration, 10 out of the 16 registered students accessed the lecture files. Most of them had good communications with the instructor through the different areas of the Bulletin board. The number of participants who used each cyber function site and their average hit are shown in Table 1. In attempting to communicate with the students, trial and error was a common procedure. Therefore, the management of the web class by the instructor was very hard work.

4 . Evaluating the course: August-September, 2004

The evaluation of the ICH course by registered students was carried out through an online survey regarding the performance of course. The questionnaire consisted of 37 questions evaluating the appropriateness of the course content, and the system characteristics. Six students, two Japanese and four from other countries, responded to the survey. The results of the survey questionnaire regarding the course content and the cyber function sites are shown in Table 2. Although the class was carried out according to the syllabus, the references and explanations in the lectures contents were not sufficient for some students. Visiting the Discussion room after a lecture was beneficial only for one student. Regarding the cyber function sites, two out of the 6 students did not use the personal information site. Three students answered that there were difficulties in using the Bulletin board. Also four out of the 6 students did not use Report room, Mail box or Questions area.

The evaluation of the ICH course by the students suggests that the traditional university pedagogy seems to be insufficient for cyber classes. The lecture method must be discussed in order to

Table 1 Participants of the International Child Health course

	Number of participants	Number of accesses mean \pm S.D.
Lectures	10	6.2 \pm 3.8
Bulletin Board		
Discussion Room-Views	8	27.0 \pm 39.2
Discussion Room- Message	4	8.0 \pm 5.5
Assignments	3	9.7 \pm 0.6

Table 2 Evaluation of the lecture and the cyber function site

Question	Agree	Average	Disagree	Never used	Total
Evaluation of the lecture					
1. The class was carried out according to the syllabus.	6	0	0	—	6
2. The references from the lecture helped with your study contents.	3	2	1	—	6
3. There were sufficient explanations in the lecture.	3	1	2	—	6
4. Discussion room was beneficial after the lecture*.	1	0	2	—	3
Evaluation of the cyber function site					
1. It was easy to input my personal information on this site.	4	0	0	2	6
2. It was easy to register for the classes on this site.	4	0	0	2	6
3. There was no difficulties in using the Bulletin board.	3	0	0	3	6
4. There were no difficulties in using the Report Room.	2	0	0	4	6
5. It is easy to use the Mail Box.	2	0	0	4	6
6. The questions area was useful	2	0	0	4	6

* Question to students who participated in Discussion Room

improve the quality of education. For example most instructors of cyber classes make curriculum development by introducing new educational approaches such as problem-based learning⁷⁾. With regard to system characteristics, as aforementioned, using the Bulletin board was difficult for the instructor. Therefore it is necessary to train both instructors and students in the use of computers in health education.

Thus the main problems of operating the web class seem to be the content of the ICH course materials and the operation of the cyber function site by the instructor. The author has to revise the references and the course content in response to the students' evaluation. In developing the ICUH within APACPH, it may be necessary to establish a faculty of web classes for all the instructors in the participating institutions.

CURRENT INTERNATIONAL CHILD HEALTH RELATED LECTURES IN THE SUPERCOURSE

There are 103 lectures in the category of

“Family, Children and Women's Health” in the “Supercourse of Epidemiology, the Internet and Global Health”. Sixty-two of them are child health related lectures. These lectures are shown, by areas in Table 3. Forty-one lectures (66 %) are provided only in English and 14 lectures (23 %) are provided also in Spanish. Several lectures are provided also with Russian, Turkish and Arabic versions. The lectures cover areas of child health such as infant and child morbidity and mortality, growth and development, nutrition, child health in developing countries, communicable diseases and non-communicable diseases and adolescent health. These lectures are made by Power Point and are able to hyperlink to referral web sources. Basically these lectures have been provided for lecturers. Therefore the Supercourse is very helpful for the faculty members of ICUH who were making their course materials. Actually the ICUH instructor would be presenting related supercourse lectures by hyperlink from the second year.

Table 3 Child health related lectures in the "Supercourse"

Area/Language	English only	Spanish version	Others
Child health overview	2	2	0
Growth and development	5	0	0
Nutrition	4	0	0
Infant and child morbidity and mortality	6	2	2
Communicable and non-communicable diseases	3	2	0
Adolescent health	3	2	2
Psychosocial problems	2	0	0
Child health in developing countries	4	6	1
Others	12	0	1
Total	41	14	6

CREDIT EXCHANGES AMONG THE APACPH MEMBER INSTITUTIONS

The ICUH within APACPH is useful for teaching graduate students of each member institution and young professionals of Asia-Pacific region. Credit exchanges among the APACPH member institutions are necessary to provide more opportunities and choices for students to take courses from other universities and to utilize or share strengths of each university. Considering the Graduate School of Health Sciences, University of the Ryukyus for example, there are several students from remote areas (including Sakishima Islands) which are far from main land of Okinawa. Another recent characteristic of our graduate school is the increasing number of working students. More than half the students of our school are working in the community or hospital. They come to the school after their work. The ICUH within APACPH will be able to provide them core courses in health sciences through the web. A flexible learning/ distance learning approach by ICUH within APACPH will meet these students' needs. In order to make use of the courses of ICUH within APACPH for students of member institutions, a credit exchange programme between member institutions and the ICUH within APACPH will be necessary in the future.

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