What Does All This (Data, Standards etc..)
Have To Do With
Using IT In The Educational Setting?

Sometimes it is easy to jump into a topic of interest (for us technology and technology use in the classroom/educational arena) and want to immediately start investigating how to utilize technology in the classroom. However, as some of you have started to notice, unless we understand the context (the playing field) in which we must operate – the content will be pretty meaningless.

1. There is a method to the madness—a reason behind each and every activity that we do in this course. In class you will ***utilize*** a variety of technology skills and applications to examine what the educational system is expecting teachers, and students (as well as the general workforce) to know and utilize. For some, much of this will be a review (how to search materials, how to use a chat room, how to create a word table, how to upload and download a document, how to correctly save a document, how to attach a document, etc…) for some it highlights the fact that on-line courses are not as time efficient as one first has a vision of — in addition, the need for "good" technology equipment and connections are a must. Always keep in mind these items as we proceed through the course—i.e., if you were a student in middle or high school, how would these constraints affect you? If you are trying to learn a new skill on your own (for work advancement) would you be able to access the resources available? It might sound great for the state to decide that Advanced Placement (AP) courses for students or professional development (PD) for teachers will be done online — but is this realistic given your experience so far? It might be easy to say teachers should use technology in "such and such a manner", but understanding more fully what the requirements are, both technical and content limitations put a glitch in the creativity. Remember, WebCT is supported by the University Office of Information Technology (OIT), and the software is updated in a timely manner. Would this be the case in all public schools?

2. The current state of affairs and knowledge related to workforce skills (no matter what your occupation or area of interest) is such that "continued professional development", "on the job training", "career advancement training", or what ever the terminology you want to call it demands that the current and future workforce must be able to "*learn to be lifelong learners*". If a new task or piece of software needs to be learned there should not be down time waiting for someone to come in and train you—you are expected to figure it out on your own, and in a timely fashion. As the knowledge base for teachers expands, teachers should be able to research and find current information on their own—not complain that the "textbooks" are too old, yet continue to use them—not wait for an in-service or graduate course to train them. It is this "new" (or not so new) way of thinking, learning and teaching where technology enables "learning" to be a seamless adventure. However,

having a vast amount of resources and given more creative solutions and possibilities to “prove achievement” or “gain in knowledge” can be overwhelming to some. Statistically the freshman drop out rate on campus has been as high as ~60%. Two of the main reasons students indicate failure are: lack of time management skills, and lack of self directed organizational skills—they complain that they never had to do anything on their own before—they only do XYZ if they are told that XYZ is to be done. I hope this helps explain the reason behind some of this course design: assigning a list of readings to *choose from* rather than a “standard set” of resources, and why I list possibilities of papers, projects or activities that you might choose to consider rather than a set cookie cutter project.

3. No matter what educational lens you are exploring: K-12 education, teaching teachers of K-12, training an existing work staff, faculty PD, providing PD for employees or co-workers, or providing information resources for the general population—I hope the first several weeks of this course will sharpen your understanding that current initiatives (no matter what the arena) are driven by political and economical drivers. These drivers can proceed forward with enough data to back their viewpoint, and in return usually seek to measure if stakeholders are “following” by creating standards and policies. In the education world, you might have a great idea as to how to educate your classroom—but if the student **data** indicate they can not pass the chosen assessment (measuring **curriculum standards**) your efforts will be fruitless. In business, you might have a great idea of a new product, but if there is no current market for the product your efforts will not bring about the monetary rewards you might be after. Remember the market is driven by the economic and political agendas (in 2003-04 home land security, defense contracts, standards assessments and workforce certificates).

This weeks and next weeks “context” will explore:

- What the state and national agenda seeks from teachers, students and administrators in terms of technology and content standards (what each teacher is expected to have ALL students master before they leave his/her classroom)—and what undergraduate programs are being asked to address
- Data available and how that data is collected related to “measuring” if students have “mastered” and “which school/school district” has a better record of meeting these goals (scary thought that data related to individual teachers may soon start to take place).