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Florida International University

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SHORT PIECES

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

MERI-JANE ROCHELSON

Having participated in a university-wide initiative to learn and use WebCT, I began using it in my Honors classes last spring. This is my second year with the platform, and I'm finding it an excellent adjunct to classroom work. I use WebCT primarily to communicate with students and to post assignments and relevant websites. Students have sent me drafts of papers via the system, and I have sent back my comments in the same way. Of course, all of these exchanges may be done through regular e-mail and communications programs and more ordinary course websites; although I've been pleased with WebCT, I'm not touting it *per se*. But I am delighted with what it has enabled me to do.

To give one example, in my Honors course on "Aesthetics, Values, and Authority" we start out with a philosophy text called *Puzzles about Art* (Margaret P. Battin et al., St. Martin's, 1989), which presents "hard cases" in aesthetics. The puzzle cases are drawn from all areas of the arts and refer to numerous examples of artworks, many of which are not reproduced as visuals. This year, using WebCT, I was able to link my students to a picture of Claes Oldenburg's *Floor Burger*—a giant soft sculpture of a hamburger, with bun and pickle, that was highly controversial when first exhibited—so that they could really see what the fuss was all about. Similarly, when a puzzle case interrogated the aesthetic status of paintings by ducks or monkeys, I was able to link all of us to a website with images of chimpanzee art, available not only for display but as notecards. Once my students became accustomed to viewing the sites I had posted, they began sending me relevant sites they had found so that I could post them to the class. The text of an NPR program on *Hamlet* performed in a prison, the elaborate landscaping that replaced *Tilted Arc* in the New York City federal building plaza, and an account from a Chilean newspaper on the 4,000 people who accepted photographer Spencer Tunick's invitation to pose nude in a Santiago park all found their way to my course website via students who had discovered them on the internet.

When asked about the value of WebCT, most of my students praised the interactivity it allows. Some additionally mentioned the effective use other professors had made of the quiz-taking and grade-posting functions. I don't give quizzes in Honors, and I've shied away from posting other grades electronically. But I was hesitant about other functions of WebCT to begin with, as well. Now that I have seen how this internet platform expands student involvement and truly broadens both the space of the classroom and the content of the course, I may try some of its additional functions in a future semester.

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