Online and Remote Learning in the Graduate School of Law, Nagoya University: The Importance of Design, Accessibility, Reliability, and Need (DARN)

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ABSTRACT

The trend toward digital or virtual learning platforms has been increasing over the last two decades, and the recent pandemic has only further compelled educators and students to shift into such settings, but not without a lot of concerns. This paper aims to describe and recommend ways to lessen some of the frustrations that faculty and students may find with such learning platforms. While initial investments in time, money, and resources can be high, the long terms results show sustainable progress in meeting the needs of students. As such, the paper describes the online and remote learning approaches to improve the overall coherency of academic writing in the Graduate School of Law at Nagoya University. The paper addresses the problem of improving class interaction such venues because this remains one of the complaints aimed at remote learning. Rather than simply being a showcase, the paper suggests ways to mitigate the lack of social-interaction by considering the purpose of the design, accessibility, reliability, and the needs of the students (DARN) to ensure that the remote experience is as effective as the face-to-face classroom experience.

Keywords: Online learning, remote learning, academic writing, graduate students, interaction

As the COVID-19 pandemic drags on, it is beginning to feel more like a long epoch of frustration rather than a short-lived flu bug. In education, students, parents, and teachers have had to grapple with how to maintain a "normal" pace of formal learning while dealing with the intricacies of remote study. For many educators, the initial task of integrating content and pedagogy with technology can be daunting and incredibly frustrating. Even when a course is designed well, technological issues emerge, outcomes may not be immediately apparent, and there is little recognition or reward for the effort. As such, both faculty and students are feeling anxious about the process of learning.

In this sense, the pandemic has compelled educators to reluctantly shuttle into the geeky galaxy of telecommunications, computers, and cybernetics as a matter of necessity. Despite the irritation and grievances that some faculty and students have about remote learning, what would schooling look like today without such advances in technology? Imagine living in a different calamitous period without having access to the Internet. For example, during the Black Plague of the 14th century, students and faculty of higher education fled into the countryside where they continued their studies in isolation, cowering under a blanket of incense, and reading books by candlelight.[2]

Given all the modernity enjoyed today, the above comparison may seem extreme from a historical perspective, but how different would it be without all the advances in telecommunications? Sure, students would

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[2] Genevieve Carlton, (2020, April 6), "Higher education and pandemics: A history of universities and viral outbreaks," *Best Colleges*. https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/higher-education-and-pandemics

still have electricity, gasoline-powered vehicles, improved mailing services, and stronger pharmaceuticals, yet these things mean less to learning when a student is unable to meet with peers and teachers or visit the library. In this sense, the limitations of the pandemic and loss of such technology would be just as isolating, and in turn, just as devastating to the long-term quality of education as felt during the Black Plague in which the learning community evaporated.[3]

Recently, educators have gained much insight into the importance of the learning community, especially in very diverse environments found at many college campuses. As such, the present situation offers college educators the chance to shift into their instinctive drive to help enable students and keep them out of the dark. While remote learning may have its weaknesses, it still affords more light than simply expecting students to stay home and read a text. Thus, educators should technology as an advantage and a way to open educational opportunities so that there are more ways for students to participate in learning, particularly at research institutes such as Nagoya University.

Before the pandemic, the academic writing program in the Graduate School of Law (GSL) at Nagoya University began implementing various forms of digital learning platforms to enhance the learning options of its learners. At present, nearly 85% of the GSL candidates in the Master's and Doctoral programs consist of students from abroad (mostly from Southeast Asia and China) seeking a degree in either English or Japanese. In addition, in 2014, GSL partnered with the Asia Satellite Campuses Institute (ASCI) to provide long-distance learning options for those unable to come to Japan. As such, technology and innovative teaching approaches have become crucial to meeting the demands of such a wide student base. This paper describes and recommends that the elements of design, accessibility, reliability, and need (or the acronym DARN) can stitch together a sustainable use of remote learning as in the case of the ESL writing program in the Graduate School of Law, Nagoya University.

About remote learning

In its broadest sense, remote or digital learning occurs when an educator and student use some form of technological platform to share in the learning process because time and space separate such venues. Generally viewed as digital or e-learning, this experience can take place via the internet, live webinars, or some form of developed software program. Remote learning does require both the teacher and student to shift their perceptions in how the educational institute might deliver the learning package. The key to successful delivery, however, is dependent on maintaining interaction between students, faculty, and the course material.[4]

Whether such delivery involves some form of an online management system, educational software, or Zoom meetings, both educator and learner will need to take a different approach to time management, communication, and technology compared to the typical face-to-face classroom experience. The time element depends not simply on whether the class is synchronous or asynchronous but on a different amount of commitment to participating in the platform by both learner and instructor. Communication requires more care to reduce misunderstandings. And, both teacher and student may need to overcome any anxieties about using technology.

Remote learning has advantages and disadvantages relative to the traditional classroom experience. The advantages include ease of access from a distance, flexibility, more personalized learning, and can be more appealing to less confident students. This latter point is particularly relevant to ESL students in a writing course.[5] Moreover, a report by the *World Economic Forum* found that students retain more with such a

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[3] William J Courtenay, (1980), "The effect of the black death on English higher education," *Speculum*, *55*(4), 696-714.

[4] Scott Warnock, (2009), *Teaching Writing Online: How & Why*, Urbana, Ill: NCTE, p 11.

[5] Nagaletchimee Annamalai, (2018), "A case study of online interactions among ESL students to complete their narrative writing task." *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Technology*, *6*(1), 1-17. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1165482.pdf

learning experience.[6] The disadvantages can encompass technological issues (everything from internet access to lack of knowledge), a feeling of loss of peer interaction, and accountability (from less focus to alleged cheating). Furthermore, *Education Week* indicated that for less motivated learners or underachievers, this form of an educational experience only precipitated a further decline in learning.[7]

While no educational approach is perfect, the relevant point is that each classroom experience should improve within its potential parameters. The key, then, to improved remote delivery of the learning experience, is mitigating the disadvantages. The challenge that an educator confronts is understanding how to design a course within the parameters of what digital instruction can offer to their learners (the need) while reducing the weakest aspects in such learning. The problems can represent a real challenge to the success of a course design, but they are not insurmountable.

Since 2012, the GSL academic writing program has employed various e-learning platforms to open up and enable student learning. The GSL program has conducted such classes as hybrids (mixing online and traditional classroom experience), using pre-packaged software programs that are managed and accessible through the Internet, synchronous and asynchronous long-distance classes, and Zoom webinars. To accentuate the positive aspects of such an approach, and reduce the negative, the program tweaked classes by focusing on design, accessibility, reliability, and need (both student and faculty).

How the DARN thing started

DARN should not be thought of as an expletive for the frustration that students feel and faculty may feel

with remote learning in the present crisis, but rather as an action verb used to denote the need to stitch together certain realities. In this case, the image is of re-embroidering of the educational experience. While the acronym DARN is new and part of the GSL reality, the essentials within the model are not. The threads within the concept evolved out of what has been occurring in the West concerning the improvement of academic writing and online learning.

In early 2011, several academic associations in the United States suggested ways to improve postsecondary writing.[8] The consensus was that in addition to improving knowledge in rhetoric, critical thinking, and writing conventions, students in higher education needed to become proficient in composing in multiple environments (traditional and digital). Following this, the *Conference on College Composition and Communication* (CCCC) recommended some best practices for online writing courses based on extensive research. The CCCC researched and developed 15 principles to assist and guide educators with specific ways to develop online writing instruction (CCCC, 2013).[9]

While these guidelines were aimed primarily at L1 writing in the US, these recommendations also spoke to the concerns that many GSL faculty had with the writing needs of their graduate students. Before 2012, much of the writing instruction and student work in the GSL had focused on prescribed ways to fix their reports on some vague aspect of law. The results over the previous years had been unimpressive and faculty wanted a change. Therefore, the needs of the GSL department combined with changes in writing theory and advances in technology necessitated the DARN approach.

The problems in the GSL were threefold and involved misunderstandings and gaps in expectations about the purpose of research in higher education, lan-

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[6] Cathy Li and Farah Lalani, (2020, April 29), "The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever. This is how." World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/

[7] Susanna Loeb, (March 20, 2020), "How Effective Is Online Learning? What the Research Does and Doesn't Tell Us." *Education Week*. https://www.edweek.org/technology/opinion-how-effective-is-online-learning-what-the-research-does-and-doesnt-tell-us/2020/03

[8] Councils of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers, National Writing Project, (2011, January), *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*. https://www.wpacouncil.org

[9] Conference on College Composition and Communication, (2013, March), "A position statement of principles and examples of effective practices for online writing instruction (OWI)," *CCCC Position Statement*. https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/owiprinciples

guage proficiency, and a lack of computer skills (some students had never used such technology for writing). In terms of the fundamentals of research, students confused the general search for information with a search for knowledge, which included a host of problems associated with the improper use of sources. Thus, not only did learners enter with many language needs, but some struggled with the basic aspects of using a computer (an English keyboard can be tricky if a learner has never used one before).

In short, then, the academic program in the GSL began stitching together hybrid and remote writing courses that were accessible, reliable, and met the needs of the student and faculty. Figure I below presents a conceptual idea of the DARN model as an interdependent series of cogs that stitch together remote learning and the needs of the faculty, students, and the environment, reliability and classroom expectations, technology and accessibility, as well as pedagogy and design. As this involved a time-action process, this paper describes the formulation of DARN in reverse of the letters in the acronym, commencing with the needs (n) of the students and faculty.

Stitching together a remote writing program based on learning needs

Before designing a new set of courses, curricula, or programs regarding something as fundamental as writing, the needs of the student and faculty should be assessed. In general, GSL faculty had become frustrated by continued problems with the research level and writing coherency of the learners in the program. Table I below presents an assessment of the most basic problem encountered with student writing back in 2011. The table shows the results from 27 theses and dissertations in 2011 evaluated by independent readers that the GSL hired to assess student work externally.

Ideally, a thesis or dissertation in law should be contributing to new knowledge by analyzing a problem in law and not regurgitating old information.[10] The purpose of such research should include a discourse that is exploratory, referential, or persuasive. However, as the table shows, the external readers found that it was hard to discern the purpose or direction of such work (67% unsure). And, when they could, the theses appeared primarily as an expository type report (19%). Given the importance of written communication in law, such results were inexcusable for a major research institute,
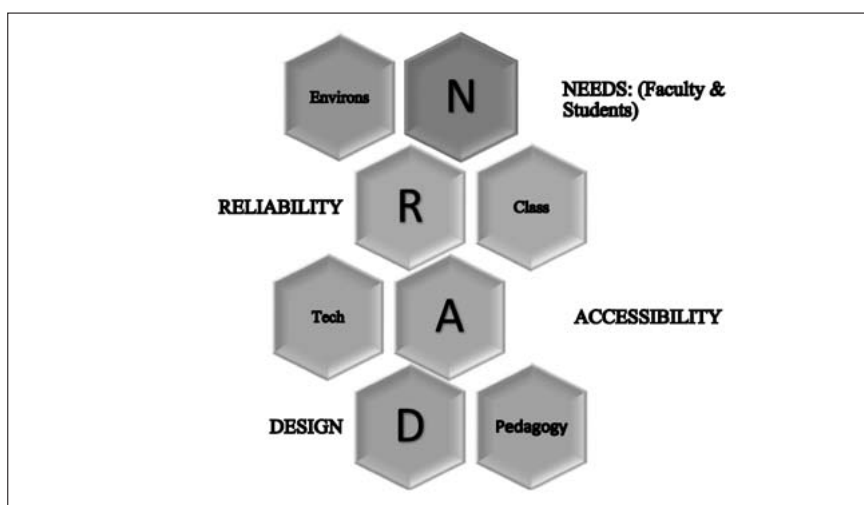

Figure I.　The DARN Approach　　　　　　　　　**(Source: Author)**

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[10]　Roger J. Morris, (2011), *The 'New Contribution to Knowledge': A Guide for Research Postgraduate Students of Law*. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong. https://hub.hku.hk/bitstream/10722/134610/2/ content.pdf?accept=1

Table I. Evaluations of GSL thesis and dissertations by external readers, 2011

(Year) number of theses/type	*Unsure*	*Report*	*Exploratory*	*Referential*	*Persuasive*
2011 (n=27)	18 (67%)	5 (19%)	1 (4%)	0	1 (4%)

especially given the technological advances that could help mitigate some of these problems.

The situation in GSL is rather unique in that students arrive highly motivated with a lot of background expertise in their field, but are restricted by language and research skills. In general class surveys, 95% of these students admitted to not having much or little prior English writing experience, and 70% had little or no confidence that they could conduct advanced research in their language. Furthermore, while a majority of students felt confident about basic computer skills, 65% admitted that they could not format a paper (paginate, set margins, page-break, etc.) nor conduct in-depth research via the Internet.

Of course, many of such problems are not unique to Nagoya University and have been reported in research about L2 learners attending Western institutes of higher education.[11] However, in terms of an English track program, the learning environment that students face in attending a Japanese university is altogether different than the experience that one of their counterparts might be exposed to in the West. While more study is needed in this area, students attending an English track program could fall behind in terms of research writing compared to their compatriots who pursue an education in a country where English is the primary language.

The most obvious difference is that students here in Japan will be immersed in Japanese and not English.[12] Combined with less classroom participation and writing expectations relative to what a faculty might expect in a Western college, this adds to a lessening of the practical writing experience. The second difference is that they will confront obstacles in communicating with faculty and staff who either may not communicate in English well or have difficulty in interpreting each other's form of the language.[13] Finally, though changing, the number of services available to L2 students in many Japanese colleges, whether socio-economic, in counseling, or language assistance, remains underdeveloped.[14]

Addressing much of the above issues would require institutional change as well as time and resources. However, in keeping with the growing needs of incoming students from abroad, and the MIRAI 2020 initiatives, the GSL began plotting a course that involved opening the learning silo with the application of advancing computer software used in learning.[15] Essentially, GSL needed to create a program that improved the coherency of student writing, advance the general skills and habits of such learners with working in multiple platforms, and satisfied the expectations of the faculty that they were contributing more to advanced research.

The GSL department reconstructed three academ-

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[11] Julie M. Spanbauer, (2007), "Lost in translation in the law school classroom: Assessing required in LL.M. Programs for International Students." *International Journal of Legal Information*, *35*(3), 429-433.

[12] See for comparison the online English Program developed for L2 Students at Western Michigan University, The Center for English Language and Culture for International Students (CELCIS) at https://wmich.edu/celcis or the Centre for English Language Education (CELE) at Nottingham University at https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/cele/

[13] Jean-Marc Dewaele, (2019), "The effect of classroom emotions, attitude towards English and teacher behavior on willingness to communicate among English foreign language learners," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *38*(4): 525. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X19864996

[14] Kiyomi Horiuchi, (2020), 学士課程における英語プログラムの組織モデルの類型化と日本的特性―同型化理論から見る「学部併設型」集中傾向の外部環境要因 利用統計を見る [Typification of the institutional model and isomorphic pattern of English-taught programs in Japan: Exploring external factors for the predominance of "faculty add-on" model], 北九州市立大学国際論集 [University of Kitakyushu International Papers], (18), 29-42. https://kitakyu.repo.nii.ac.jp

[15] Seiichi Matsuo, (2013), "Nagoya University Mirai 2020." Nagoya University Matsuo initiatives for reform, autonomy and innovation 2020. http://en.nagoyau.ac.jp/about_nu/upload_images/matsuo_plan.pdf

ic writing courses to cater to the needs of the Master's students and two courses that focused on the Doctoral candidates. The Master's courses integrated a genre and content-based writing pedagogy with research and sourcing software (such as *Zotero* and *Juris.m*), corrective writing software (such as *Write-click* and *Grammarly*), and a pre-packaged writing program offered through *Pearson Education* called *MYLAB WRITING*.[16] The courses for the doctoral students included various combinations of long-distance and face-to-face instruction.

In conjunction with the three credit classes for the Master's degree, the GSL introduced a standardized set of guidelines that represented a practical set of conventions and expectations that faculty, students, and external readers. These guidelines are available on the GSL webpage and include an actual thesis as a model. Following a diagnostic stage, the GSL program introduces Master's students to the fundamentals of web-based legal research as well as how to build a personal library of resources with computer software programs such as *Juris-M*.[17] In the second and third courses, students participate in a hybrid class (online and face-to-face instruction) to help improve the coherency of their theses as well as enable them with learning how to write more advanced research papers through multiple platforms. Of course, with Covid-19, these courses went completely remote.

Meeting the needs of the doctoral students has been a little more complex because the cohorts are smaller, they need more individualized attention, and a growing number are participating through the long-distance ASCI program. Because the courses for the Master's program are popular, some of the Doctoral candidates attend as non-credit students, though in general, instructors have conducted such classes remotely via synchronous and asynchronous instruction. Such courses are less structured and based on the most

immediate needs of the learner and can involve research design, content development, or writing issues.[18]

Stitching reliability into a remote writing program

Regardless of what form of remote learning is being employed in the design of a class (hybrid, online, webinar), reliability refers to how well the course is constructed in meeting similar expectations (if not more) found in a traditional classroom. Typical online courses tend to be asynchronous as they are available or accessible 24/7 while remote learning using platforms such as Zoom is often more synchronous, but there is no reason that mixing cannot occur. In fact, mixing these may be one way to offset some of the criticism of digital learning.[19]

As mentioned above, some of the major criticisms revolve around student feelings of isolation, that interaction is lacking, or there is a loss of a sense of community. For example, because many online classes are asynchronous, a student may feel as if they are responding to a robot or an empty room. As another example, if a teacher conducts a large class via Zoom-style seminars, the lecturer and other students may never see or hear from all the participants in the class as they have control over mute and video buttons. Unmuted large classes can result in interruptions from background noise which at times necessitates a silencing of the classroom environment.

The key to improving this situation is to build a sense of "presence and interaction" in the online and remote learning experience. Presence is about humanizing. And, it includes a sense of warmth that a student has with the instructor's commitment to the class as a whole, not just that the course requires an occasional click of a button. Interaction refers not simply to the instructor-student relationship, but the student-student,

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[16] Pearson Education, (n.d.) *My Lab Writing Global*. https://pearsonmylabmastering.com

[17] Frank Bennett, (2019), *Juris-m*. https://juris-m.readthedocs.io/en/latest/

[18] Viviana Cortes, (2019), "Considering the importance of L2 learners' writing needs," *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *46*, 1-2.

[19] Tamar Lewin, (2013), "Professors at San Jose State criticize online courses," *The New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/03/education

student-technology, and student-content relationships as well. While class size will determine an instructor's options in terms of how much interaction goes on in a digital class, there are still things an instructor can do to give a more warm touch to what should be a caring situation.

Perhaps the most pre-imminent expert in this area of instructional design would be Beth Hewett who addressed several ways to improve presence and interaction in either a synchronous or asynchronous manner.[20] From Hewett's suggestions, the GSL writing courses incorporated various short video supplements to the syllabus that the student could easily access via the course management system (CANVAS, Blackboard, etc). The instructor should make such videos (not a robot) to instill a sense of self into the course (that is, an instructor is a real person) as well as to establish rapport with students. Such videos can take time to first learn and make, but once done the instructor can easily store and tweak in the future. These videos would introduce the instructor, explain the course objectives, and provide essential writing tips. Group projects, peer review, and learner oral presentations can add to the sense of community as well.

While the Pearson software handled much of the grammar-related issues (computer corrected), the instructors have designed the courses to address more substantive issues that would go into a thesis or dissertation such as how to write the abstract. Essentially, the students are working on the micro-level aspects of writing out of class and the process of research writing in class. Moreover, the course provided individualized and group conferencing periods to let the students "speak" about their concerns or any questions they had about the material. The classes included the use of rubrics, peer review, and the use of the "break-out rooms" in Zoom to facilitate group learning, which often entailed analyzing strong and weak writing that existed in the legal field (for example, comparing elements in two different actual abstracts).

While many other ideas can be used to improve presence and interaction in online or remote learning, the key point is that by enhancing these aspects of design, the likelihood that the reliability of the class will function as well as (or better than) a traditional classroom increases. For instructors who are less confident about their design or technological skills, *YouTube* provides a multitude of hints and suggestions on ways to construct presence and interaction into such learning platforms. In short, no matter how clumsy the first effort at such design, most students will see that the instructor cares about their learning success.

Rather than seeing the online and remote class as a vending machine that dispenses a learning pill, the students take on a more experiential role in cooking up their educational needs, which in this case involves improving writing skills. Faculty and student response have been favorable with the improvements. In 2021, general classroom surveys for the GSL online and remote classes were highly positive with a 59% preference relative to a traditional class format. In general, the main issue for some students was the loss of social interaction with peers.

Stitching accessibility into a remote classroom experience

In general, accessibility refers to ensuring a positive interaction between the learner and technology. While GSL students are required to have access to the internet before entering the program, some of these issues can be compounded by different computer operating systems and learning from a distance outside of Japan (China, for example, has restrictions on *YouTube* and *Google* access). Therefore, the instructor should avoid technologies or software programs that would be inaccessible or difficult to access for such students, which includes learners with disabilities.

However, access does not simply entail being able to connect to the program but may involve learning

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[20] Beth Hewett, (2015), *Reading to Learn and Writing to Teach: Literacy Strategies for Online Writing Instruction*, New York: Bedford St. Martin, pp 233-241.

how to operate some features of the technology as well. Some of the false assumptions in higher education have been that young students today are digital natives, can easily access much of today's cyber world, and have few anxieties about such technologies.[21] Such false assumptions by instructors can lead to failure at the start resulting in ineffective learning outcomes. As such, the instructor may also need to ensure that students have some confidence with the use of the tools that they will use in the class.

At present, the market provides many software programs that can enhance the online and remote learning experience. Such software can be divided into learning programs (*Pearson Education*), corrective (*Grammarly*, *Juris-M*), video development and editing (*Camtasia* and *Videopad*), presentation (*PowerPoint* and *Piktochart*), and interactive (*Genially* or *Mentimeter*). While many are not free, they do sometimes offer limited free usage and are worth investigating for instructional purposes for many disciplines (not just for writing instruction). From the instructor's side, each has a learning curve but once the individual becomes familiar with such tools they add to the overall quality of the remote experience. In the case of GSL writing program, instructors did not introduce or develop them at once but tinkered with them to fit into the course design.

In some form or another, GSL writing instructors used the software mentioned to enhance the online, distance, or remote classes provided through the writing program. Other instructors should take a gradual approach to learning and using such software products. Except for the *Pearson* product and *Juris-M*, students need not be involved with what goes on under the hood of such software. The *Pearson* product, for example, acts as a review lab book in addressing many of the remedial writing issues that students need to work on to improve their skills and habits, which has the added benefit of acting as a general textbook. The *Juris-M* software is a resource and citation management system that allows students to store research for future use.

Since students in the GSL program use these tools are to complete their course work some training is required so that they can access and understand the basic functions of the program. Such training can take 30-60 minutes and is a necessary preventive measure to reduce future problems. The instructor could combine this learning period with evaluating student abilities with using other keyboard skills necessary to format the writing of a paper. In addition to the training, the GSL program provides students with pre-saved tutorial videos in the main course management system that they can review on their own. And, if all else fails, the student can contact the instructor.

Though things are changing rapidly, not all software is compatible with all the browsers, devices (PC, iPad, or smartphone), or operating systems. If used, then, the course designer should test them to make sure that students can access the programs through multiple devices and by all students. Fortunately, much of the recent software programs now have built-in testing systems that allow the designer to tweak a tool to the need, for example, adding closed-captioning, enhanced sound, limiting access, or adding a hyperlink (go to insert in Word). If such software does not have a built-in testing system then many of the designer can test them in the "classrooms" section of *google docs* (go to slides section).

Finally, while there are excellent writing software programs (*Scribner* and *Libre*) that have better functions and easier management systems than *Word*, such software requires more tech learning. If the student is not savvy with *Word*, then it is unlikely they will easily absorb the learning of such software. More importantly, such software generally does not cross over between different operating systems (*Mac* to *Word PC* or USA *Dell* versus Japanese *Fujitsu*) even when placed into a word file document (though it helps). Since most of the institutional requirements expect everything to be in *Word*, then it would be best to reduce additional struggles that

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[21] Jenny Abamu, (June 20, 2017), "Student voice: Students say that they are not as tech-savvy as educators assume," *Edsurge*. https://www.edsurge.com/news/2017-06-20-students-say-they-are-not-as-tech-savvy-as-educators-assume

students may have with learning such technology.

Stitching design into the remote learning experience

In terms of design, the model must weave together pedagogy and content with this technology, which will differ according to the learning situation. As such, this design thread should address the skills, habits, and motivations of the learners, which suggests that the pedagogy and content will be highly dependent on the aims of the class or course. That is, the pedagogical approach can help justify what goes into the content of a course. In this instance, the GSL writing program endeavored to avoid some of the ideological conflicts in academic circles over writing theory by taking a more pragmatic approach to meeting the communicative needs of ESL faculty and students.[22] Specifically, this entailed moving unskilled L2 writing students from different levels of incoherency to a level where meaning could be shared with a L2 reader (their faculty). For GSL students, this has required a balance between prescriptive (micro) and descriptive (macro) approaches to writing instruction.

In general, the teaching of English as a second language in most Asian countries continues to aim at testing strategies, while L2 learners in the West attend classes designed around communication.[23] This pedagogical divide is even more problematic when it comes to designing writing courses where the debate has widened over how much of the teaching approach should be prescriptive or descriptive; that is, how much of the instruction should devote attention to the form or process of writing. When it comes to compositional or writing theory for L1 students, the pedagogy has moved dramatically away from prescription to more descriptive teaching approaches.

The L2 writing instructor who leans solely on one form of language pedagogy (traditional, expressive, cognitive, discursive, cross-disciplinary, social constructivist, or interactionist) may be making a mistake.[24] The concern is not simply about a form of communication but culture and learning background. Certainly, the language gap represents a facet of the pedagogical issue that instructors should consider in the design of a writing course. More concretely, the issues of concern should include an understanding of their fluency (level of reading and writing), accuracy (level of mechanical usage), cultural knowledge (their own as well as the target language), and personal confidence.[25]

Given these factors, and the amplified nature of the task; that is, transforming inexperienced L2 writers into sophisticated researchers in less than two years, meant that the teaching content had to take a mixed approach. Essentially, the designed scaffold of the three main GSL writing courses focused on building up their cultural knowledge, fluency, accuracy, and confidence so that they could write a more coherent thesis or dissertation. Succinctly, the instructors design the courses to improve their understanding of how to conduct higher levels of research, improve the form (mechanics) of their writing, enhance the function of their study (meaning), and elaborate on their text by improving critical thinking skills.[26]

The typical GSL student will go through several stages in learning about academic writing and the technology employed serves as an immersive tool by which

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[22] There are many disputes about writing see Mckinley and Rose versus Stapleton as a more recent example. Jim McKinley and Heath Rose, (2018), "Conceptualizations of language errors, standards, norms and nativeness in English for research publication purposes: An analysis of journal submission guidelines," *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *42*, pp 1-11; Paul Stapleton, (2019), "Standards of English in academic writing: A response to McKinley and Rose," *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *44*, pp 110-113.

[23] Ryuko Kubota, (1998), "Ideologies of English in Japan," *World Englishes*, *17*(3): 298.

[24] Dana R. Ferris and John S. Hedgcock, (2014), *Teaching L2 Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice*, 3rd edition. New York: Routledge, pp 74-86.

[25] Dana Ferris, (2018), "Writing in second language," in Jonathan M. Newton et al, *Teaching English to Second Language Learners in Academic Contexts: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking*, New York: Routledge, pp 75-87.

[26] Inger Mewburn, Katherine Firth and Shaun Lehman, (2019), *How to Fix Your Academic Writing Trouble*, London: McGraw Hill, Open University Press, pp 12-18.

the learner is continuously communicating in the target language. The content focuses on research that those law and political science commonly investigate and in turn expressed in journal articles, theses, or dissertations. As such, these stages are meant to reflect a mixed pedagogical approach based on the immediate needs of the faculty and students to arrive at a shared understanding of the text. And, never does pen touch paper, as learners do everything digitally.

Since 2012, most GSL students (88%) have gone through the following stages. First, most students went through a diagnostic stage so that instructors could better assess each of their needs. Next, they took Academic Writing I (AWI) which helped them investigate a problem in their field, research it through various methods, and construct their own library of sources. Following AW I, most of the cohort attended two more courses (AW II & III) that worked in conjunction with the *Pearson* software and the faculty guidelines. The GSL designed these classes to assist students in improving the accuracy and coherency of their work through writing practice, which includes tasks such as reducing bias, summarizing, paraphrasing, reviewing and analyzing texts, developing an abstract as well as conducting a literature review. Since the onset of Covid-19, much of the classes and mentorship has been conducted via Zoom using the various tools mentioned above.

After completing the courses, most students have about six months to finish up the actual writing of their thesis or dissertation. Several months before submission, the students undergo two more stages that recently involved asynchronous conferencing and other computer technologies such as screen-casting and plagiarism checking software. First, the GSL program assigns a writing mentor to the student, who works on clarity issues but also on substantiating the value and progress of their work to date. The writing mentor will also work with the supervisor to check on their concerns about the student's writing progress. Second, the thesis or dissertation will undergo a quality check that includes an evaluation by an outside reader. While these last two stages are not a direct part of classroom design they have helped in the darning process by providing support to the students.

Results

One of the points of research practice in graduate school is to move students away from basic expository reports that are highly dependent on secondary sources.[27] Ideally, the caliber of such academic work should entail some form of discourse that employs more sophisticated methods to obtain evidence such as exploratory (problem or solution are unclear), referential (testing

Table II. Evaluations of GSL thesis and dissertations by external readers, 2012-2021

(Year) number of theses/type	Unsure	Report	Exploratory	Referential	Persuasive
2012 (n=22)	16 (73%)	5 (23%)	1 (4%)	0	0
2013 (n=18)	9 (50%)	5 (28%)	3 (17%)	0	1 (6%)
2014 (n=33)	12 (37%)	9 (28%)	7 (23%)	1 (3%)	3 (9%)
2015 (n=25)	7 (28%)	9 (36%)	6 (24%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)
2016 (n=25)	3 (12%)	10 (40%)	9 (36%)	1 (4%)	2 (8%)
2017 (n=27)	3 (12%)	12 (45%)	11 (41%)	1 (4%)	0
2018 (n=19)	3 (16%)	7 (37%)	6 (32%)	2 (11%)	1 (5%)
2019 (n=18)	2 (11%)	8 (44%)	4 (22%)	2 (11%)	3 (16%)
2020 (n=20)	0	9 (45%)	4 (20%)	2 (10%)	5 (25%)
2021 (n=18)	1 (5%)	6 (33%)	5 (28%)	1 (5%)	5 (28%)

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[27] John M. Swales and Christine B. Feak, (2012), *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essentials tasks and Skills*, 3rd edition, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp 4-8.

a hypothesis), or persuasive (an argument). The ultimate goal is to contribute to shared knowledge.[28] This is a huge challenge for L2 learners, who not only have language deficiencies but may not have a strong understanding or confidence in doing such levels of research writing. While it has taken time and effort, the darning procedure in the GSL program has seen positive results.

Table II above presents the evaluative results from the external readers of the GSL theses and dissertations between 2012 and 2021. As the table shows, the number of theses in which the external reader could not coherently decide on what was the actual purpose of the student discourse began to shift after two years into the initial stages of the new approach (from 73% unsure in 2012 to 37% unsure in 2014). Since each year the program commenced with a new cohort, the faculty could predict that many of the theses would be mired at the "report" level because learners entered different levels of cultural knowledge and understanding about research writing and different language issues.[29] Instruction focused on both language needs and shifting students away from report writing.

As the table also reveals, beginning in 2016 there was a shift toward the more advanced discourse that faculty would expect at this level of learning. External readers found that the theses were not only clearer but that they coherently expressed a purpose for the research study. While the percentage of evaluations that reported an "unsure" reading declined, the percent of the theses that the reader could indicate as some form of academic discourse climbed from 4% (1 exploratory) in 2012 to 63% (5 exploratory 1, referential, 5 persuasive) in 2021. While far from perfect, these results (along with favorable student surveys) indicate that the "darning" stitchery in the GSL program, which has included various forms of online and remote learning, has had a positive impact on the ESL student learning of academic writing.

Conclusion

While online and remote instruction can be "darn" frustrating, the present existence and advances in telecommunications, information technology, and the Internet necessitate its consideration in the delivery of learning. The fact remains, students will use and exploit the cyber world for information regardless of what the formal institutions of higher learning plan to do with this technology. The Internet can be misused for many reasons, and this alone calls for educators to be ahead of the curve in terms of such technology. As for online and remote learning, such platforms should be integrated but not replace the traditional face-to-face classroom setting.

This paper is not advocating that all classes switch to online or remote learning. There should be room for many venues of instruction in education, and clearly, some students still find that the traditional lecture-style class provides a better way to maintain social interaction with their peers. Student interaction is but one of the issues that will remain a concern with using online platforms. Each program or instructor will have to tackle this problem in different ways (this is also true of F2F class situation), but the market offers many software programs that can enhance the experience. This will be an evolving process in education.

The main aim of this paper was to describe and recommend ways in which the online and remote learning program in the Graduate School of Law has had some success in improving the interaction and learning of ESL students in the program. The DARN approach was developed primarily based on the recommendations for "good practices" from the CCCC. This approach designed online and remote courses that attempted to be accessible, reliable while meeting the immediate needs of the ESL students who have been taking on the enormous challenge of writing a coherent research study.

While more work is needed, the results from exter-

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[28] Ken Hyland, (2004), *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp 172-176.

[29] Ulla Connor, (2011), *Intercultural Rhetoric in the Writing Classroom*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp 20-29.

nal evaluations over the last ten years indicate that the effort to move away from prescriptive to more descriptive instruction is paying off. Online and remote delivery of such learning has helped by providing students with more time to practice and engage in this necessary learning skill. From the instructional side, such an effort is initially time-consuming, can be frustrating and costly (if purchasing software), but well worth the effort in the long run for the learning of certain academic skills, such as writing. In short, hopefully, this description of what was done in the GSL will encourage those instructors to look for ways to improve the design of their online or remote courses. For those seeking ways to improve the online or remote experience, the minimum recommendation to ensure success would be to properly integrate the design with the technology, ensure accessibility, enhance reliability, and consider the immediate needs of the students.

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