

SIDEBARS:  
CASE STUDY OF AN ONLINE COMMUNITY APPROACH  
TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By D. Glenn Millar

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The undersigned certify that they have read and recommend to the Athabasca University Governing Council for acceptance a thesis SideBars: Case Study of an Online Community Approach to Professional Development by D. Glenn Millar in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF DISTANCE EDUCATION.



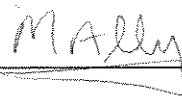
Susan Moisey, Ph. D.

Supervisor



Griff Richards, Ph. D.

Committee Member



Mohamed Ally, Ph. D.

Committee Member

April, 2004

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“Each man at any given moment and at a minimum price, could identify himself to a computer with his address and telephone number, indicating the book, article, film or recording on which he seeks a partner for discussion. Within days he could receive by mail the list of others who had recently taken the same initiative.”

Ivan Illich (1970, p. 19)

## ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web has dramatically increased the need for educational practitioners to upgrade their skills and knowledge through professional development activity. This study explores the effectiveness of *SideBars*, an online learning community at the British Columbia Institute of Technology, in helping educators to upgrade their professional practice in online and distributed learning. Using evaluative case study within an action research framework, the study found that a majority of the users had minimal interest in a communal experience with *SideBars* but valued it as a reliable source of information. While low participation proved to be a formidable obstacle to communal learning, a smaller group of users, referred to as “contributors,” showed evidence of mutual engagement by virtue of their willingness to contribute to the learning of the group as a whole. The study concluded that design strategies aimed at encouraging the activity of contributors may be effective for building community online.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The rapid growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web has dramatically changed the way higher education is delivered in North America. Only a decade ago, distance education offerings with a computer mediated communication (CMC) component, were relatively rare. Today, they are ubiquitous. We are fast approaching the point where most institutions of higher learning in the industrialized world will offer at least some of their programming in a distributed learning format (Moore & Tait, 2002), if we have not reached it already. As Postman (1998) chides us to remember, technological advances do not come without a corresponding cost in the form of problems and dislocations in practice. The Internet is certainly no exception to this rule, and in the field of education, teachers' competence with both the pedagogical and technical aspects of online and distributed learning looms large as an associated problem.

Like faculty members at many North American institutions of higher learning, instructors at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) are being asked to take on new roles as facilitators, moderators, and developers of online learning. In most cases, instructors are assuming these new and often radically different roles without the benefit of formal training in distance or distributed learning. Based on a survey of 557 American post-secondary institutions, Cooley and Johnson (2001, p. 35) of the U.S.-based Teaching, Learning and Technology Group found that professional development of faculty is the "single most important" information technology challenge facing higher education today. In Canada, Roberts and Associates (1999) have published similar results and have recommended faculty development initiatives that:



- use new learning technologies as a delivery method so that new methods are modeled as well as described,
- are personally relevant, immediately applicable to specific work situations and discipline specific,
- provide a flexible learning system that is sensitive to the time constraints faced by faculty,
- provide content that focuses on digital learning technologies.

The logistical factors driving the move toward distributed forms of learning for students—the need for greater flexibility, and the need to increase access by overcoming the barriers of time and space—also apply to faculty in terms of professional development. Like their students, many faculty members are short of time, separated from colleagues by geography and jurisdictional boundaries, and reluctant to attend professional development programs that involve high expense both in terms of money and time.

There are also compelling pedagogical and organizational reasons for seeking new models of professional development that are better aligned with the communal nature of the social structures that thrive within our information-age institutions (Wenger, 1998). Many in education, as well as in other fields of endeavour, are recognizing the value of building organizational structures based on community models. In the corporate world, organizations like AOL, Amazon.com, and e-Bay are building bonds of loyalty with their customers by paying attention to community values. The executive floor is also awakening to the fact that true productivity depends on the communal structures that

thrive in their organizations despite the published organizational chart and the official reporting structure. Advocates of community approaches like Howard Rheingold (1993) and Etienne Wenger (1998) have become some of the most sought after organizational consultants in North America. And in the field of education, the idea of “learning communities” is seen by many as a possible way out of the malaise that saps the quality from our educational institutions and the love of learning from our students (Creating, 2000).

### Professional Development at BCIT

BCIT’s mission is to “build pathways for career success in the global marketplace through teaching excellence and applied education and research” (Hobson, 2003).

Positioning itself as Canada’s preeminent polytechnic institution, BCIT delivers full-time and part-time courses of study leading to certificates, diplomas, and degrees in the trades and technologies. The Institute also conducts applied research, technology transfer activities, and corporate and industry training and upgrading.

In 2002, BCIT had an enrollment of 16,000 full-time students and 33,000 part-time students (BCIT Facts, 2003, Quick Facts). It employed 888 full-time instructors, including 663 technology instructors and 225 trades instructors. There were also 637 part-time instructors employed in 2003, although many of these were actually full-time day-school instructors taking on extra teaching assignments in the evening. Trades and technology instructors belong to different unions, and are treated differently in terms of leaves of absence and training allowances. As with many North American institutions of higher learning, the Institute has experienced a significant trend toward distance and distributed course offerings over the last decade. During the 1995-96 school year, BCIT

had a part-time enrolment of 1,698 in both online and paper-based distance delivery courses. By the 2002-03 school year, that total had increased to 5,740—an increase of 238% (BCIT Facts, 2003, p.3-2).

While BCIT enjoys an excellent reputation among employers, students, and the general public, the quality of instruction at the Institute has recently emerged as an area of concern. Two reports conducted last year, the *BCIT Perception Survey* by Ipsos Reid and the provincially-sponsored *BC College and Institute Student Outcomes Report*, both indicated that students' perceptions of teaching quality are a potential weakness at BCIT. In an otherwise strong endorsement of the Institute, Ipsos Reid categorized perceptions of teaching quality as a "critical weakness" Thom (2002, p.2). Thom also reported that data gathered for the *2002 BC College and Institute Student Outcomes Report* showed "instructional quality" was regarded by students as "lower" in technology programs and "much lower" in trades programs than comparable programs at other institutions.

Because of BCIT's long-standing practice of hiring instructors primarily for their technical expertise, and only secondarily for their teaching expertise, the provision of in-house instructional skills training has become an important objective for BCIT. To this end, a comprehensive set of professional development programs aimed specifically at helping instructors to develop their instructional skills has been developed. These programs are as follows:

- Workshops on a wide variety of instructional topics are available through BCIT's Learning Resources Unit (LRU). Recently, a number of workshops dealing with educational technology and distributed forms of delivery have been amalgamated under the Teaching with e-Educational Technology

(TWEET) program and a certificate is awarded to instructors who complete all of the workshops in the series.

- Consultation has been available to BCIT faculty since the inception of the LRU in 1988. It consists of informal drop-in sessions in which instructors discuss problems with Instructional Development Consultants (IDCs) or the more formal Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF) sessions in which an IDC facilitates a feedback session with a group of students and reports back to the instructor.
- Instructional grants of two types are offered. Instructional Enhancement Grants of up to \$10,000 are available on a competitive basis for teaching staff to develop an idea or product to enhance teaching and learning at BCIT. Special Grants of up to \$1,000 are available to departments for workshop or training events to meet a special need not addressed by regular BCIT workshops or by workshops presented at the Institute's annual Professional Development Day.
- Resource materials such as newsletters, job aids and journal subscriptions are available to faculty through the LRU.
- Peer coaching in which experienced teachers acted as coaches and mentors for novice teachers was practiced successfully at BCIT in the past, but has faded in recent years.

Despite the wide array of professional development opportunities available, Thom (2002) reports that attendance at many professional development events has been

traditionally low and that many instructors have not completed even fundamental instructional training. Even though it would mean a pay incentive, 40% of BCIT trades instructors have not completed the Provincial Instructor Diploma Program.

### SideBars: An Online Learning Community Approach to Professional Development

*SideBars* (Welcome, n.d.) is a professional development initiative of the LRU aimed specifically at assisting BCIT staff to upgrade their skills and knowledge in online and distributed learning. Its origin can be traced to a 20-minute brainstorming session that took place during an LRU staff retreat at BCIT's Wood Lot Property in September, 2001. The objective of the session, the last item on the day-long agenda, was to generate ideas about how the LRU could provide leadership to the Institute in facilitating professional development in distributed and online learning. While no specific suggestions were made at the meeting, there was a general consensus that the primary objective of any professional development initiative that might be undertaken should be to help staff keep up with two complementary tracks—research on evolving educational trends and developments in educational technologies. Further, it was thought that each track needed to be addressed simultaneously.

Discussion about a strategy for achieving the objectives articulated at the Wood Lot began to coalesce around an electronic magazine (e-zine) in the days and weeks following the retreat. The main impetus for these discussions came from three individuals—Dave Smulders, Maggie Beers and the researcher—who eventually became the initial co-editors of *SideBars*. However, they also involved many members of the LRU as documented in an article in the *SideBars* archive (Millar, 2003).

The basic concept that guided the initial design of *SideBars* was to create a forum around the topic of online and distributed learning that would be open to both internal and external members of the educational community. The intension was to provide information about new developments in distributed and online learning at BCIT as well as information about new research and development in the field through links to web resources. The external community, it was hoped, would reciprocate by providing information about distributed learning at their home institutions. In this way, *SideBars* would function as an open learning system with the e-zine at its core. Not only would the e-zine provide a source of new information, but it would also act as a repository of resources on distributed and online learning and as a focal point for the exchange of ideas.

The first issue of *SideBars* was published in January of 2002. Like subsequent issues, the articles and web resources were organized in four categories, each incorporating the word “side.” The titles of the first two categories, *Inside Out* and *Outside In*, suggest *SideBars*’ objective of providing a focal point for exchanges between the internal and external communities. The four categories are:

- *Inside Out* includes articles written primarily by BCIT staff or about BCIT events and projects and are stored on BCIT’s server.
- *Outside In* includes web resources and articles from the external educational community and are stored on external servers.
- *On the Side* includes information and links to useful resources such as reviews, guidelines, websites and free software and are stored either on BCIT’s server or an external server.

- *Off Side* includes links to material of a humorous nature and are stored either on BCIT's server or an external server.

Each issue of *SideBars* focuses on a particular theme. Examples of themes covered include learning objects, educational gaming and learning management systems. The dozen or so items that make up each issue are all related to the theme in some way—with the exception of the *On the Side* items which may be about anything. Each of the four main categories that comprise each issue provides access to one or more articles or web resources consisting of a brief summary and a link to the full article.

In August of 2003, an asynchronous bulletin board was added to *SideBars*. For the first time, subscribers had access to an unfiltered channel of communication connecting them to other subscribers. Previously, subscribers could only communicate with the *SideBars* editors via e-mail. There was no means for subscribers to post messages to the entire community or to communicate directly with other subscribers. With the implementation of the bulletin board, subscribers were able to comment on content they had read, discuss it with other readers and raise discussion topics of their own.

The bulletin board, a password-protected Lotus Notes® database, is open to all *SideBars* subscribers and provides discussion topics in the following eight categories:

- A. The Sider House Rules: Disclaimer and rules of conduct
- B. Take Sides: Join a Discussion Group. Listings are by issue date and topic.
- C. Coming Soon on SideBars.
- D. Having Problems? Get help form other members of the community.

E. Whatever. Use this space to launch a discussion of your own.

F. SideBars Suggestion Box.

G. Tips and Troubles. How to use the bulletin board.

H. Research Project.

To encourage use of the bulletin board, links to discussion topics were included in each of the issues of *SideBars* published after its implementation. Starting with the September 2003 issue, links to discussion topics related to the theme of the issue were included under the heading *Takes Sides* on the *SideBars* contents page. The theme of the September issue, for example, was learning management systems and it included a link to a discussion called “Learning Management Systems: The good, the bad and the ugly.”

*SideBars*, which is available free to anyone with an interest in distributed learning, has steadily increased its subscriber base since the first issue was published in January of 2003. Starting from an initial subscriber list of 24, *SideBars* currently has 532 subscribers of which slightly less than half are presumed to be BCIT staff members based on email addresses. The others are members of the external community and are primarily educators from other institutions in Canada and the United States. Members from other continents as well as from business and government are also represented. Figure 1 shows *SideBars*' subscription history for the year 2003.



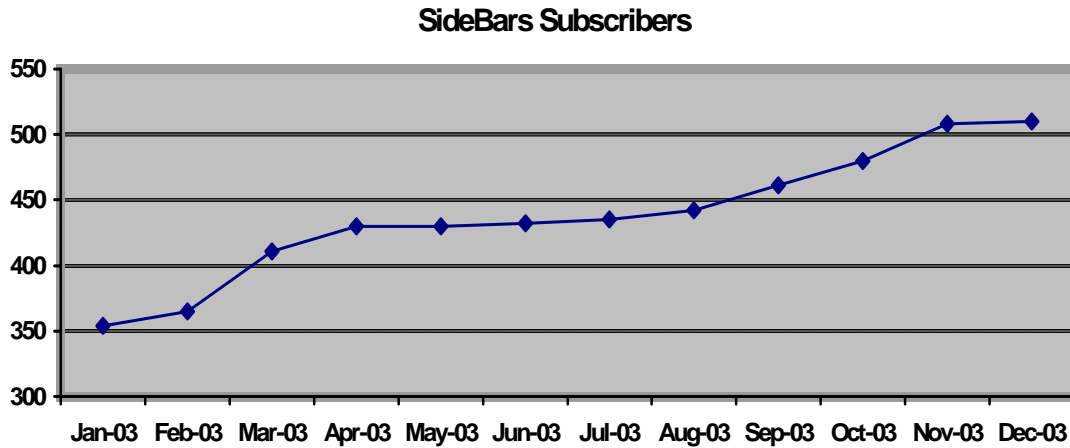


Figure 1. SideBars subscriptions for 2003.

Promotion of the e-zine has occurred through word of mouth and through references and links on the World Wide Web. Members can subscribe or unsubscribe to *SideBars* using an automated subscription system maintained with majordomo software. Since membership is entirely optional, the population can be characterized as a moderately motivated group actively seeking professional development and contact with educators.

In theory, *SideBars* has the potential to provide a rich professional development experience for both internal and external subscribers. Because membership is freely available to all interested parties and since members are free to come and go as they please, the *SideBars* community should be composed of a motivated group of individuals who will come with an expectation of personal benefit. The ongoing nature of *SideBars* provides the time needed for online relationships to grow and mature. The e-zine, which provides regular pulses of information, lends a measure of cohesiveness and direction to the group. Finally, the opportunity for discussion provides a potential for sharing ideas and information.

This study will evaluate *SideBars*' effectiveness as an environment for professional development at BCIT and the extent to which it operates as a learning community. Employing a case study approach, it will attempt to discover its strengths and weaknesses as a professional development environment and suggest ways that it could be improved to better fulfill its objective of assisting BCIT staff to upgrade their skills and knowledge in online and distributed learning. The study is limited to the period from September 2001 to January 2003 and seeks to address the following specific research questions:

- R.Q. 1 How effective is *SideBars* as an environment for professional development?
- R.Q. 2 What evidence is there that *SideBars* operates as a learning community?
- R.Q. 3 Why do some instructors choose not to participate?
- R.Q. 4 How could *SideBars* be improved to better fulfill its objective of supporting professional development at BCIT?

#### Definition of Terms

*SideBars*: *Sidebars* is an on-line, open-access learning community built around a free e-zine, that provides professional development opportunities for BCIT staff as well as members of the external educational community.

Professional Development: Professional development is the complete spectrum of learning activities that people engage in for the purpose of improving their job performance or advancing their career.

Subscribers: Subscribers are people who have registered themselves with *SibeBars* and are considered to be members of the *SideBars* community.

Internal Subscriber: An internal subscriber is a subscriber who is also a staff member of BCIT.

External Subscriber: An external subscriber is a subscriber who is not a staff member of BCIT.

Lurking: Lurking refers to an instance in which a subscriber accessed the *SideBars* bulletin board to read messages posted by others, but did not post any of their own.

Learning Community: Learning communities are groups of mutually engaged people who share an interest in a particular topic and interact with each other on an ongoing basis in order to learn more about it.

Distributed Learning: Distributed learning is a blended approach that combines traditional classroom delivery with the CMC delivery methods used in distance education.

### Organization of the Thesis

The remainder of this thesis consists of four additional chapters. The second chapter is a literature review of the theoretical foundations of participatory learning and community-based approaches to learning. It also provides a survey of instances in which online learning communities have been used for professional development purposes. Chapter III deals with the research method used including a discussion of the design, instruments and data collection procedures. Chapter IV reports the results and discusses their implications, and Chapter V offers conclusions and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### Introduction

This review of literature examines the concept of community from the viewpoint of systems and learning. It links the concept of participatory learning to the advocacy of communities as a powerful, if not essential, support system for learning in the Information Age, especially in a professional development context. It offers support for the notion that the sociability and cohesiveness of community experience is possible in an online context and, finally, it provides some examples of attempts to use online learning communities to support professional development.

#### Community as a System for the Information Age

Communities are messy, chaotic things that live and grow, often in surprising and unpredictable ways. Komito (as cited in Hill, 2002, p. 69) described them as “a mixed bag of possible options whose meanings and concreteness are always being negotiated by individuals, in the context of changing external constraints.” Like amoeba, their boundaries are constantly in flux—reaching out in one direction to embrace some new source of nourishment, while simultaneously retreating from another. Their substance ebbs and flows through them democratically—new members join when they see value and old members depart when they don’t. They belong to no one, and yet they belong to everyone. They grow or decline depending on changes taking place in the larger systems in which they operate. As a result, they are highly flexible and acutely sensitive to

change. In short, they are the ideal organizational structure for the fast-paced, chaotic and exquisitely complex nature of modern life.

Banathy (1995, p.53) said that we are “captives of a vanished world” because we persist in attempting to solve the problems of the Information Age with an Industrial Age mindset. Such attempts are doomed to fail because life in the Information Age is too complex to be managed and too dynamic to be designed. To build effective social systems, we need to abandon the hard systems approaches of the Industrial Age and embrace the soft systems approaches of the Information Age.

Hard systems are the indispensable methods and processes depicted by flow charts and algorithms that we use to mine and process our minerals, manufacture our commodities, or run our computer programs. They serve us very well when applied in the predictable physical realm. However, unlike pumps and valves, computer circuits and front-end loaders, human beings cannot be dependably controlled. As a result, our attempts to apply hard systems design to social problems have usually ended in dismal failure.

Soft systems approaches recognize the need for flexibility and sensitivity to the changes occurring all around them. In addition to the shared knowledge that holds a system together, this invariably involves a process of discussion and negotiation. In other words, it operates like a community. The shared knowledge of the community provides an aspect of homeostasis, which lends cohesiveness and helps to hold the community together, while the process of discussion provides an aspect of morphogenesis that allows the community to change and grow. According to Littlejohn (1997), these two elements are essential ingredients of a viable social system in the Information Age.

Throughout history, the size of our communities has been limited by the reach of our communications systems. The first cohesive groups were quite small because they depended on face-to-face communications. But the advent of printing and electronic media has allowed communities to expand. Not only have we overcome the barrier of space, but we have overcome the barrier of time as well. Today, with the Internet, the potential for communities that span the globe are well within our reach.

Despite the increased size and sophistication of modern day communities, our expectations of them are essentially the same as those that first brought small bands of prehistoric people together. Smith (2001) identifies tolerance, reciprocity and trust as the most commonly cited qualities that we have come to expect from our experience of community. Tolerance, in this context, is an openness to others and a willingness to listen and learn from them; reciprocity is the belief that our contributions to the community will eventually be reciprocated in some way, and trust is the confidence that the individuals and institutions within the community will act according to the rules as they are understood by the membership. While we behave cooperatively, even altruistically, to maintain our standing within the community, Smith maintains that our reason for being there is self-interest. Like our forefathers who joined the hunt for a share of the meat or banded together for protection against mutual enemies, our participation depends on our belief that we will share in the collective goods of the community.

The collective goods that accrue from our association in modern communities, especially those of a professional nature, are in the form of what Putnam (2000) calls “social capital.” Putnam defines social capital as the sum of the connections among individuals, and the quality of the social networks to which they belong. Like physical

capital and human capital, Putnam attaches a value to social capital that can materially affect the performance of individuals and groups. The phrase “it’s not what you know, but who you know” has taken on a whole new meaning in the Information Age. Our ability to perform depends as much on the quality of our associations with others as it does on the quality of our knowledge.

### Community in Education

The theoretical roots of community in formal education can be traced to John Dewey and Alexander Meiklejohn (Gabelnick et. al., 1990). Both Dewey and Meiklejohn sought an alternative to the prevalent style of education during the 1920s in the United States. Referred to by some as “mechanized education,” it emerged during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was designed to prepare a largely agrarian populace for work in the factories. Both Meiklejohn and Dewey were critical of the educational style of the day, but each took a different tack.

#### Alexander Meiklejohn

Meiklejohn’s major criticism was the lack of integration between disciplines. As with much formal education today, school days were divided into periods, and programs were divided into courses with little or no integration of knowledge. Meiklejohn’s solution was to eliminate the course as the basic building block of education and to instead organize learning around themes. Although essentially a futurist, he developed a landmark program in the study of democracy based on the classic great books.

Meiklejohn’s experiment provided the foundation for a style of education that is based on integrated learning rather than on the course, which is largely seen as an

administrative convenience primarily of benefit to the institution. Examples include the integrated studies programs at the University of Wisconsin, Joseph Trussman's experiment at Berkeley, Evergreen College in Washington State, and integrated studies programs at the University of Washington. Trades apprenticeship programs at BCIT and other colleges and institutions in Canada also fall into this tradition.

### John Dewey

John Dewey's criticism of the educational style of his day was that it was too regimented and didactic and that it failed to engage learners. He advocated for a "student-centred" approach in which students had the latitude to take charge of their own learning. Educational concepts such as "student-centred learning," "progressive education," and "shared inquiry" have their basis in the ideas of John Dewey.

Advocates of the learning community movement often link the ideas of John Dewey with those of Paulo Freire (1970) and Ivan Illich (1971). Freire saw true learning as a process of transformation or awakening in which learners would come to realize that they were oppressed. He referred to mainstream education as "banking education" in which knowledge was deposited into the minds of the oppressed by members of the ruling class. Illich, on the other hand, saw the institutionalization of learning as the major downfall of education and just about every other field of human endeavour. For Illich, the process of institutionalization was basically the usurpation of power by experts and professionals. The real purpose of the institution inevitably becomes its own survival, and at that point, it begins to contribute to the opposite of its original intent. Hospitals make us sicker instead of better. The legal process persecutes the marginalized segments of society instead of dispensing justice, and schools make us dumber instead of smarter.



### Student Centred Approach

In terms of educational practice, the ideas of Dewey and Meiklejohn laid the theoretical foundation for a more participatory, student-centred approach to education. Their ideas have found expression in the emergence of a range of new learning theories such as equilibration (Piaget, 1973), zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1986), situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and constructivism (Jonassen, 1991). A common theme in all of these theories is the idea that the interaction of an individual learner with a group of people with similar interests or learning objectives is a key step in the learning process of the individual. Learning is more effective when learners have access to a community that provides a forum for reflection and negotiation of meaning and a real world context for learning.

Wenger (2002) describes “communities of practice” as a specialized class of learning community and sees them as the key organizational structure for corporations in the Information-Age. Communities of practice act as both a repository of shared knowledge and a fertile environment for new learning and discovery. Wenger (1998) refers to the shared knowledge of the community as “reification” and the process of interaction and membership in the practice of the community as “participation.” These two processes feed from one another to advance the knowledge of the group as a whole. Participation in the community leads to consensus on certain issues or points which are then reduced to a knowledge artifact such as a book, a definition, a mathematical formula, a procedural manual, a computer program, a mission statement, or a list of values. The reified knowledge artifact stimulates and facilitates further discussion, which leads to further creation of knowledge artifacts.

The Internet has made it possible to vastly extend the reach of communities by overcoming barriers imposed by geography, time, and money. The phrase “online community” has become part of common usage and a host of new forms of association based on CMC have begun to flourish. Many of these, including e-mail, intranets, synchronous and asynchronous discussion forums, listservs, e-zines, and weblogs or *blogs*, show promise for community building at a distance. The belief that a strong sense of community can only be achieved in traditional face-to-face classrooms has been seriously challenged (Rovai, 2002), and community approaches are becoming much more common in the design of virtual learning environments. There is also growing support in the literature for the use of online community approaches for professional development purposes as the examples described in the next section attest.

### Online Community Approaches to Professional Development

#### Cité du Multimédia, Montreal

In a 15-month study of workers employed primarily in the Cité du Multimédia in Montreal, Tremblay (2001) found that e-mail and intranets were the most common methods of information exchange among workers involved in online networking for professional development purposes. Although a major goal of her research was to discover how specialized software packages were being used to facilitate communities of practice, Tremblay found few instances of this except in large firms that employed a full-time person to coordinate the community. Informal networks using commonly available software were far more common.

During the study, Tremblay conducted 60 in-depth interviews with 48 workers and 12 managers from 18 firms involved in Montreal's multimedia industry. She concluded that the idea of sharing and collaboration had become part of normal practice in the cultural climate of that industry. Workers and managers alike saw the frequent exchange of ideas and information as beneficial or even essential to the conduct of multimedia project work. While almost everyone agreed that the sharing of knowledge within firms was beneficial and posed no risk, some also felt that knowledge could be shared across corporate boundaries with mutual benefit and without risk.

“Our interviewees are ready to share information, often without expecting anything in return, although they consider that everyone—or almost [everyone]—shares, and that you always end up gaining something in terms of learning” (Tremblay, 2001, p. 11).

#### Coventry University Diploma in Management, United Kingdom

Bird (2001) reported encouraging results from action research that explored the effectiveness of an online community of practice modeled on the theories advanced by Lave and Wenger (1991). The study focused on students enrolled in the Postgraduate Diploma in Management at Coventry University in the United Kingdom, a work-based program that brings together students employed at different firms to study management principles and concepts. While students in the postgraduate diploma program study independently, they contribute to one another's learning by interacting through a virtual learning environment that provides CMC tools such as chat and an asynchronous bulletin board. Students also attend monthly meetings on specific learning sets and integrate their coursework with authentic problems and situations from their workplaces.

Qualitative data was collected by conducting a content analysis of transcripts from asynchronous discussions on the online bulletin board and by conducting in-depth interviews with students. Bird found that students in the program did indeed form a community of practice as defined by Lave and Wenger<sup>1</sup>, and that the formation of the community of practice depended on the following six factors:

1. Social interaction between the learners on the course.
2. Social interaction with mentors and some expert colleagues at work.
3. Contact with tutors and university academics.
4. Engagement with academic literature/resources.
5. Collaboration with other learners.
6. Exposure to how other managerial experts operate. (Bird, 2001, p. 97)

#### The StageStruck Learning Community, Australia

Stuckey, Hedberg and Lockyer (2001) used an online community approach to promote professional development around a CD-ROM resource called StageStruck among K-12 teachers in Australia. Produced by Wollongong University and the National Institute for Dramatic Art (NIDA), StageStruck is an internationally acclaimed teaching tool that provides resources for both teachers and students in the performing arts. Despite

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<sup>1</sup> According to Bird (2001), Lave and Wenger define community of practice as a group of practitioners who jointly hold a socially constructed view of the meaning of their subject knowledge and what it takes to be an expert in the field.

the free distribution of StageStruck to every school in Australia, Stuckey et al. found that few teachers had used it and many were unaware of it. The StageStruck Learning Community was launched as a way of promoting the CD-ROM resource and of providing a vehicle for professional development among Australian K-12 teachers in the performing arts.

While results from the StageStruck Learning Community are still preliminary, Stuckey et al. al. have concluded that an online learning community is the most effective design model for their purposes. Further, they said it was evident from their experience with the StageStruck group that the development of online community followed four distinct and necessary stages:

- Decide on the professional development needs and goals of the teachers.
- Design and build a website architecture to support the needs and goals.
- Establish a network of people as members in the interest group.
- Build up the trust and ownership of the members as a community (Stuckey et. al., 2001, p. 1834).

#### The Inquiry Learning Forum, Indiana

Barab, Makinster, Moore, and Cunningham reported on their efforts with the Inquiry Learning Forum (ILF), a web-based professional development system “based on ‘learning’ and ‘community’ models rather than ‘instructional’ models of professional development” (2001, p. 72). The ILF is an Indiana-based learning community that brings together K-12 math and science teachers to improve their use of inquiry learning in the classroom. The project is hosted by the Centre for Learning and Technology at Indiana State University and is the subject of a multi-year study. While the focus of the project is

on math and science teachers located in the state of Indiana, any K-12 teacher or pre-service university student is welcome to join free of charge.

At the heart of the group's website is a series of video vignettes that the developers refer to as classrooms. Based on the metaphor of a class visit, community members can see what others are doing to promote inquiry learning in their classrooms. However, the intent of the video vignettes is not to provide examples of best practice, but to provide a starting point for discussion about inquiry learning. To facilitate discussion, each classroom also provides a text-based interview with the teacher describing their objectives and strategies for the video segment presented in their classroom and an ongoing asynchronous discussion board for commentary by visitors to the class.

In the initial stages of the ILF project, the researchers were primarily concerned with usability issues surrounding the design of the website and the interface with users. However, as the project progressed, it became clear to the researchers that social issues were also critically important to the overall effectiveness of the professional development experience. Barab et. al. (2001, p. 93) coined the term “sociotechnical interaction network” to describe the complex interplay that occurred between people and between people and machines.

While Barab et. al. remain enthusiastic about the potential of the ILF for professional development purposes, initial results have been somewhat disappointing. Seven months after implementation, traffic on the classroom discussion boards remained low and the researchers were concerned that the critical mass needed for community development might not be achieved. Two major challenges faced by the researchers were

to get teachers to visit the site on their own time and to honestly critique the methods of other teachers when they did visit.

### CIT Infobits. North Carolina

Electronic newsletters or e-zines devoted to educational issues, with similar formats and distribution methods as *SideBars*, are becoming more common on the Internet (Kotlas, 2003). One of the longest running e-zines in the educational technology field is *CIT Infobits* (formerly *IAT Infobits*), which has been published by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill since July 1993. Each month selected universal resource locators (URLs) related to instructional technology are published with brief notes describing the resource and are disseminated by e-mail to subscribers. The e-zine's ability to attract and retain subscribers is one measure of its success. As of January 13, 2003, a total of 6,562 educators and others were subscribed to *Infobits*. The majority of these were located in the United States (3,209). Other English-speaking countries, such as Canada (438), Australia (238), and the United Kingdom (161), were also well represented. In all, *Infobits* has subscribers from 69 countries located on every continent of the globe.

The link between community and learning has long been recognized. What is new, is that the advent of the Internet and CMC have created new opportunities for community building in cyberspace that we have only just begun to explore. The potential for professional development based on communities of professional colleagues, ironically the original intent of the Internet, appears to be a promising direction for this line of endeavour.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether *SideBars* could provide an effective environment for professional development at BCIT and the extent to which it could operate as a learning community. The study, which was limited to the period from September 2001 to December 2003, sought to address the following specific research questions:

- R.Q. 1 How effective is *SideBars* as an environment for professional development at BCIT?
- R.Q. 2 What evidence is there that *SideBars* operates as a learning community?
- R.Q. 3 Why do some instructors choose not to participate?
- R.Q. 4 How could *SideBars* be improved to better fulfill its objective of supporting professional development at BCIT?

#### Research Design

The study was conducted using an evaluative case study approach within an action research framework.

For Brooks and Watkins (1994), action research is a possible solution to what is regarded by many as the incapacity of traditional research methods to address the problems of our increasingly complex and diverse modern world. While traditional methods seek to inform practice through research, action research seeks to combine these two goals by bridging the gap between research and practice. The origin of the method is usually credited to Argyris (1983) who combined social systems theory and intervention in a method he called “action science.” As defined by Dick (n.d., p. 4), action research is



a methodology that has the “dual aims of action and research.” The “action” part of the method takes the form of change to an organization, community or program, while the “research” part of action research manifests itself as an increased understanding of the problem or situation under study on the part of the researcher, participants, or both. At the core of the method is an iterative process that Dick calls the action research cycle. It consists of the three main steps of intend, act and review. Intend refers to the planning or design that occurs before the action, act refers to the action itself, and review refers to the evaluation that occurs after the action has been implemented.

In this context, the introduction and study of *SideBars* itself is action research. It is an attempt to introduce a new model or method of professional development at BCIT that diverges significantly from what has been tried before. In fact, it might be argued that *SideBars* is currently on its second iteration of Dick’s action research cycle. The action of the first cycle might be identified as the original design of *SideBars* as an e-zine, and the action of the second cycle as the attempt to recreate *SideBars* as a learning community.

The current study is an evaluation of *SideBars*, or what Dick would call “review” in the action research cycle. While it fits easily within the overall framework of action research, it also conforms with traditional case study methodology when taken on its own. Case study is, in fact, often used in the evaluation phase of action research (Dick, n.d.).

Creswell (1994, p. 12) describes case study as a research methodology “in which the researcher explores a single entity or phenomenon bounded by time and activity and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a

sustained period of time.” In this study, *SideBars* is the single entity under study, and it is bounded by the time period from its original conception in September 2001 to the completion of data collection in January 2004.

As Bogdan and Biklen (1998) point out, a criticism frequently leveled at case study, and many other qualitative research methods, is the difficulty with generalization beyond the specific entity being studied. While the further development of *SideBars* itself is a primary concern of this study, it is recognized that the findings may also be of use in other settings. As such, the findings and conclusions are presented using “fuzzy generalization” as advocated by Bassey (1999).

#### Data Collection

Data collection methods included the following:

- A general survey of BCIT instructors and staff was conducted to obtain an overview of the practice of professional development at BCIT.
- A specific survey of *SideBars* subscribers was conducted to find out how subscribers use *SideBars*, and whether or not it helped them in their practice.
- A focus group was conducted with seven BCIT staff members selected to represent various professional development constituencies as revealed during earlier stages of the study. A summary of the focus group discussion was then posted on the *SideBars* discussion board and the general subscriber group was invited to comment.

- Activity on the *SideBars* bulletin board was observed and a quantitative analysis of the discussion transcripts and user activity log was conducted to gauge the level of participation for both lurkers and posters.

### Instrumentation

Two questionnaires were prepared as part of the study: a general survey of BCIT staff and a survey of *SideBars* subscribers. Copies of each of the survey instruments as well as the survey announcements are provided in Appendices A and B.

The researcher consulted True (1989) for advice on drafting survey questions. A variety of question types, including closed single-choice, closed multiple-choice, ranking questions using rank ordering, ranking questions using Likert scales, and open-ended questions, were used depending on the type of information sought. The first part of each of the survey instruments was designed to serve a sorting function and asked basic demographic and factual information such as gender, years of experience, occupation, and so on. The second part of the survey instruments explored participants' perceptions about professional development and *SideBars*. This design allowed the researcher to check whether perceptions were the same for different groups. Some questions were also repeated in each of the surveys to explore similarities and differences between the two groups.

Both survey instruments were created in an online format using EZSurvey® software and stored on a BCIT server with a linked database. In the case of the subscriber group, an online survey was the only practical alternative since e-mail addresses were the only contact information available to the researcher.

Once draft copies of the survey instruments were prepared and loaded on the server, a test group was assembled to try the surveys. This yielded numerous comments regarding the clarity, coding and grammar of the survey questions. On the basis of this input, the survey instruments were revised and re-loaded on the server.

### Procedure and Data Collection

The study involved two surveys, a focus group, and a quantitative analysis of data related to activity on the *SideBars* bulletin board. The procedures by which these were administered are described below.

#### General Survey of BCIT Staff

A general survey of BCIT staff members was conducted between December 3<sup>rd</sup> and December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003 to obtain an overview of the practice of professional development at the Institute. An All-Notes e-mail containing a hyperlink to the survey was sent to the 2,225<sup>2</sup> BCIT staff members who were registered Lotus Notes Users on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003 (Dufficy, Personal Communication, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2004) inviting them to participate. Copies of the invitation and the survey instrument with compiled results are provided in Appendix A.

To encourage participation, and to provide an additional means of checking the data for duplicate records, a prize draw consisting of a \$50 dinner-out coupon was offered. To qualify for the prize, participants were required to fill-in their name and e-

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<sup>2</sup> An All-Notes e-mail is a feature of BCIT's internal mail system that allows distribution of electronic mail to all current employees of the Institute. The 2,225 staff members to which the e-mail was sent represent a close approximation of the total staff complement. There may have been a small percentage of newly hired employees who were on yet set-up on the internal mail system on December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

mail address or telephone local. If they preferred to remain anonymous, participants also had the option of omitting their name from the prize draw.

By December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003, 246 responses had been received and the raw data were retrieved from the server and captured in an MS Access™ database. An analysis file was created from the raw data table and reviewed for duplicate records and other problems. A total of six records were deleted from the analysis file at this time. Two of the deleted records were system records generated automatically by the EZSurvey® software program, three were duplicate submissions that occurred as a result of input errors, and one was a second submission from a respondent who had already completed the survey on an earlier date. The remaining 240 records from the analysis file were imported into SPSS™ 12.0 for further processing. The sample (n=240) represents 10.8% of the total BCIT staff complement of 2,225, which is adequate for the purposes of this study based on a 6% margin of error and a 95% level of confidence.

### Survey of SideBars Subscribers

A survey of the *SideBars* subscribers was conducted to obtain a detailed quantitative profile of the subscriber group and to gather information about the effectiveness of *SideBars* for professional development purposes. A separate distribution list was created for the survey in Lotus Notes® using a copy of the *SideBars* majordomo subscriber list. The names and e-mail addresses of the three *SideBars* editors, including two addresses for the principal researcher, were omitted from the list used to send out the invitations to participate in the survey.

A total of 509 invitations requesting subscribers' participation in the survey were sent out on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The invitation included the offer of a prize draw for a \$50

(Cdn) Amazon.Com gift certificate. Of the 509 invitations sent, 19 failed to be delivered and were returned by the Internet service provider (ISP) to which they were addressed. In most cases, the message was not delivered because the ISP had no record of the recipient's e-mail address. In other cases, messages were returned because the recipient's mailbox was full. In addition to the undelivered messages, five addresses returned "out-of-office" messages, and may not have been read by the intended recipients during the time the survey was active.

A total of 66 replies were received as of January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004. To solicit further responses, a follow-up e-mail was sent out on that date. A second Lotus Notes® distribution list was created for this purpose. The second list included the same names from the first list, but omitted 44 subscribers who had replied to the first request and who had provided a name and e-mail address for the prize draw. The second request returned 15 "undelivered" messages and five "out-of-office" messages. In most cases, the returned messages were from the same addresses as for the first mail-out.

By January 22, 2004, an additional 44 replies were received bringing the total number of responses to 110. Five of the 110 replies were deleted upon examination. One was a test reply from the administrator who hosted the survey, three were duplicate records, and one contained no data. The remaining 105 replies, which represent 20.6% of the total population of 509, comprise the sample for this survey. Based on a 7.2% margin of error and a 90% level of confidence, the sample size (n=105) is considered adequate for the purposes of this study. Copies of the announcement, follow-up announcement and the survey instrument itself with results are provided in Appendix B.

### Focus Group

A focus group was held on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003 to gather information about *SideBars*' appropriateness as an intervention for professional development at BCIT and to solicit suggestions for improvements. The researcher selected participants for the focus group by choosing names from the *SideBars* distribution list that were familiar to him and sorting them into the following five categories: management, support staff, technology instructors, trades instructors, and part-time instructors. A sixth category was comprised of non-subscribers. The researcher then contacted representatives from each of the categories by telephone and invited them to attend the session until at least one from each group accepted. During these telephone conversations, the researcher explained the purpose of the focus group and assured participants that their names would be kept confidential and would not be published in any summary of the session. This information was reiterated in an e-mail confirmation sent to the group a few days prior to the session (see Appendix C).

The participants represented a broad cross-section of the BCIT community and included two BCIT managers, one support staff person, and four instructors. The instructors were from the programs of nursing, environmental engineering, electrical-electronics, and part-time studies (computer systems). A representative from the school of trades had also confirmed that he would attend the session, but had to cancel at the last moment. Two of the participants were men and five were women. All but one were *SideBars* subscribers, and of the six subscribers, three had visited the online discussion board at least once. Four of the participants were quite experienced with online learning and had completed, or nearly completed, graduate studies at a distance.

The session took place in at BCIT (Learning Resources Unit) and was scheduled for one hour during the noon break. Several of the participants had to return to work at one o'clock. However, most stayed longer and the session continued until shortly before two o'clock.

The researcher and a co-editor of *SideBars* facilitated the session. The researcher started the session with a short PowerPoint® presentation that described the operation and goals of *SideBars*, and then turned over the session to the second facilitator to moderate the discussion. The researcher focused on note taking and follow-up questions during the balance of the session.

The participants were asked to address two main questions during the discussion portion of the session:

1. How well suited is the *SideBars* model for professional development to the culture of BCIT?
2. How could *SideBars* be improved to better address professional development at BCIT?

Following the focus group session, the researcher prepared a summary of the discussion from his notes and sent it to the second facilitator for review. The researcher then revised the summary to incorporate the comments of the second facilitator. The revised summary was posted on the *SideBars* discussion board with an invitation to the subscriber group to comment; however, no notes were posted. For a copy of the focus group summary, see Appendix C.



### Observation and Analysis of Bulletin Board Transcripts

The *SideBars* discussion board was opened to traffic from the general subscriber list in late August 2003. Subscribers were advised of the availability of the bulletin board in an e-mail announcement on August 25<sup>th</sup>, and cautioned that it would be subject to observation for research purposes from September 1<sup>st</sup> to November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003. During the first few weeks of operation, it became apparent that there was a technical problem with the Lotus Notes® database that prevented some users from accessing the bulletin board. It is likely that this problem precluded some participants from engaging in the discussion and less data was collected as a result.

Access to the bulletin board was provided through a permanent hyperlink that appeared on the *SideBars* homepage as well as on the menu bar of the contents and article pages of the e-zine. In addition to these permanent links, access was provided through links that appeared in the e-zine to promote specific discussions related to the theme of the edition in which they appeared. Both types of hyperlinks—the permanent links and the discussion-specific links—connected subscribers to a consent page that described the research project and asked them to confirm their consent by clicking a second link that connected them to the bulletin board login page.

To access the bulletin board, subscribers were required to input a user name and password. BCIT staff members used their normal Lotus Notes® user name and password, while external subscribers used a login based on the e-mail address they used to subscribe to *SideBars*. Their user name included everything to the left of the “@” symbol in their e-mail address and their password was their complete e-mail address. Messages posted on the *SideBars* bulletin board were identified by the user name of each participant. In the

case of internal users, user names included the notation “/BCIT” immediately after the name. For example, the researcher’s user name was “Glenn Millar/BCIT.” For external users, this notation was omitted. This feature was used to differentiate internal subscribers from external subscribers in the discussion transcripts.

During the observation period, posted messages were limited to four of the eight discussion categories as follows:

- A. The Sider House Rules: Disclaimer and Rules of Conduct.
- B. Take Sides. Join a Discussion Group. Listings are by Issue Date and Topic.
- G. Tips and Troubles. How to Use the Bulletin Board.
- H. Research Project.

The bulk of the posting activity occurred in Category B, which consisted of two moderated discussions related to specific issues of *SideBars* published during the observation period. The first discussion, entitled “Learning Management Systems: The Good and Bad and the Ugly,” was linked to the September issue of the e-zine while the second discussion, entitled “Panel Discussion on Online Discussion,” was linked to the November issue.

Preparations for each of these two discussions were quite different. For the first discussion, nothing was done other than to post the title of the discussion on the bulletin board and create a link to it from the September issue of *Sidebars*. For the second discussion, the researcher recruited five colleagues to act as panelists. The discussion started one week prior to the publication of the November *SideBars* so that subscribers

who followed the “Take Sides” link from the e-zine found a discussion that was already underway.

In addition to routinely monitoring the site to interact with visitors and moderate discussions, the researcher collected data that reflected activity on the bulletin board from two different sources—the discussion transcript itself and a log of user activity data generated by Lotus Notes. These two documents were then combined to produce an overall summary of activity on the bulletin board during the observation period.

### Discussion Transcripts

The discussion transcript included all of the postings made by both internal and external subscribers in all four of the categories in which messages were posted during the observation period. The transcript was compiled by copying and pasting individual messages from the bulletin board into a text file. The text file was then edited to remove extraneous information and finally it was converted to an MS Word table that preserved the information listed below. Each posting was also numbered sequentially for tracking purposes.

- name of the participant
- date of posting
- time of posting
- subject or title given to the posting by the participant, if any
- subject that the posting responded to, if any
- discussion category of the posting

### User Activity Log

Data were also collected from a user activity log that is automatically generated by Lotus Notes® for each database on the BCIT system. The advantage of the user activity log was that it not only recorded posting activity on the *SideBars* discussion board, but “lurking” activity as well.

For each action performed on the bulletin board by a subscriber, a record was generated in the user activity log. Each record had five fields: the subscriber’s name, the date, the time, a.m. or p.m., and a cryptic description of the activity. The description field consisted of the word “read” or “write” and the number of times the activity was performed. Unfortunately, it was not useful for research purposes because the terms “read” and “write” referred to many different types of activity. For example, the word “write” might mean that a subscriber posted a message or that they printed one posted by someone else. The word “read” might mean that a subscriber opened a message to read it or that they switched from one discussion category to another.

Because different subscriber actions resulted in the generation of a new record in the User Activity Log, it was likely for subscribers to generate multiple records during the same session. However, since the research focus was at the session level, the user file was edited to remove records recorded as separate sessions on the activity log but which were probably part of the same session. Activities by the same user on the same date recorded less than an hour apart were counted as a single session. The record with the earliest time in the session was retained, and the others were deleted. Using this procedure, the User Activity Log was reduced from 419 records to 129 records. A sequential ID number was added to the original file and this number was carried forward

to the edited file to facilitate tracking. The records in the edited list were then numbered sequentially from 1 to 129.

#### Participant Activity Summary

The discussion transcript and user activity log were then copied into the same MS Word file and the participant names for both files were replaced with numbers using the search and replace function in MS Word. The researcher was identified as participant 001, the second participant on the posting list was identified as 002 and so on until all names had been replaced with numbers. As each name was replaced, a record was made in a separate document to identify the participant number as either an internal or external subscriber and as a member of the panel on online discussion or not.

When all the participant names had been replaced, both the discussion transcript and the user activity log were re-sorted by participant number. The two files were then compared, and each of the postings from the discussion transcript was linked to a particular session on the user activity log by matching the time, date and participant number. The sessions that were not matched to one or more postings were assumed to be instances of lurking activity. From this information, it was possible to compile a table summarizing the number of postings and lurking sessions made by each participant. Additional fields were then added to the summary to indicate whether the participant was an internal or external subscriber, a panelist or non-panelist and the total and average number of words posted. These tables were imported into an Excel® spread sheet by participant and into SPSS data sheets both by posting and by session to compile a quantitative profile of activity on the bulletin board. Copies of the discussion transcript, edited user activity log and the participant activity summary are provided in Appendix E.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings obtained from the general survey of BCIT staff, the survey of the *SideBars* subscriber group, the results from the focus group session and the observation and analysis of the *SideBars* bulletin board. The specific research questions addressed in this study were as follows:

- R.Q. 1 How effective is *SideBars* as an environment for professional development at BCIT?
- R.Q. 2 What evidence is there that *SideBars* operates as a learning community?
- R.Q. 3 Why do some instructors choose not to participate?
- R.Q. 4 How could *SideBars* be improved to better fulfill its objective of supporting professional development at BCIT?

#### General Survey of BCIT Staff

The purpose of the general survey of BCIT staff was to determine the overall level of interest in professional development at BCIT and to quantify preferences concerning professional development goals and alternate methods of attaining them. It was assumed that a higher frequency of preferences for certain attributes, for example, non-credit versus credit courses, would suggest a favourable climate for *SideBars* as an environment for professional development.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a total of 240 valid responses were obtained in the survey representing a response rate of 10.8%. While the sample (n=240) is considered adequate for the purposes of this study, a number of anomalies in the

survey data suggest that the results should be viewed with some caution. It is evident from a comparison of the survey respondents to known proportions of various segments of the BCIT population (Facts & Figures, 2003) that some groups were significantly over or under represented (see Figure 2). Despite the fact that more men than women are employed full-time at BCIT, many more women than men responded to the survey. Part-time instructors were also under represented. While they comprise more than 30% of the total staff complement, only 3.8% of the respondents were from this group.

	Survey Results (%)	BCIT Facts & Figures 2003 (%)	Differential (%)
Male <sup>3</sup>	39.2	56.0	-16.8
Female <sup>3</sup>	60.0	44.0	+16.0
BCGEU Support	28.8	20.6	+8.2
BCGEU Instructors	11.3	10.7	+0.6
FSA Instructors and Staff	42.9	31.6	+11.3
Part-Time Instructors	3.8	30.3	-26.5
Management	12.1	6.6	+5.5

Figure 2. Comparison of survey results to known proportions of the BCIT population.

The data were also skewed significantly toward employees who are relatively new to the Institute. Almost half (43.8%) reported that they had been working at the Institute for between one and five years. While the ages of respondents for the complete data set were distributed fairly evenly across the range, most of the new employees (74.3%) were concentrated in the two lower age ratings of 26 to 35 years and 36 to 45 years.

<sup>3</sup> The percentage for BCIT Facts & Figures 2003 reflects full-time employees only. Part-time instructors are not included.

### Importance of Professional Development

The importance of professional development was rated very highly by survey respondents. Question 8 (see Figure 3) asked respondents to rate the importance of professional development to them personally at the present time in their careers using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The mean response was 4.24 and none of the 240 survey respondents chose the lowest rating of “1.”

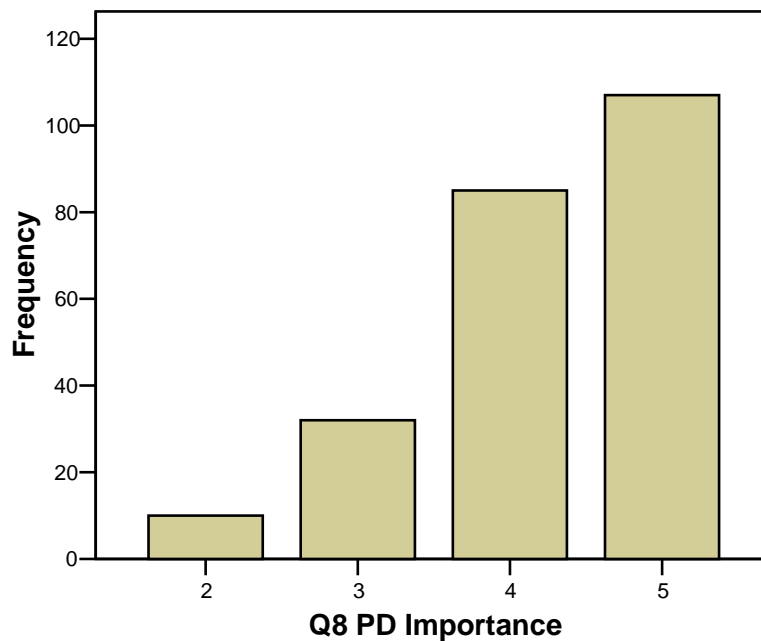


Figure 3. Importance of professional development.

New employees, those who had been working at BCIT for one to five years, especially valued professional development, and the high proportion of them in the survey respondent group may have pushed the mean response higher (see Figure 4).



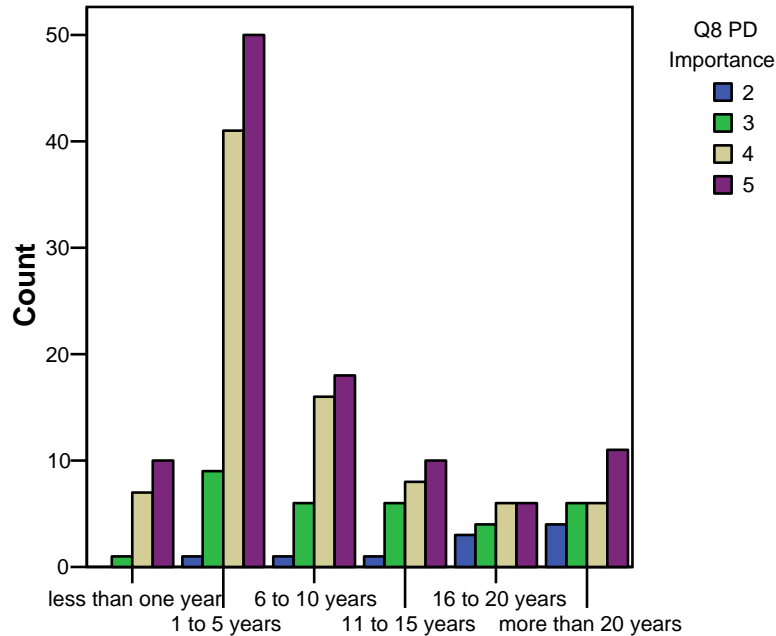


Figure 4. Importance of professional development by time at BCIT.

Professional development was generally rated highly across all length-of-service categories and occupations. It was most frequently rated highest by all length-of-service groupings, except the 16 to 20-year grouping. The highest rating of “5” was the most frequent rating for all occupational groupings except the management group, in which the most frequent rating was the second highest rating of “4.”

#### Primary Motivation for Professional Development

Overall, the most important motivation for participating in professional development for the survey respondents was to “stay current in (their) field.” Progressing in one’s career was the second most important motivation, and improved job performance was third (see Figure 5). The frequency of the remaining four motivations was significantly lower.

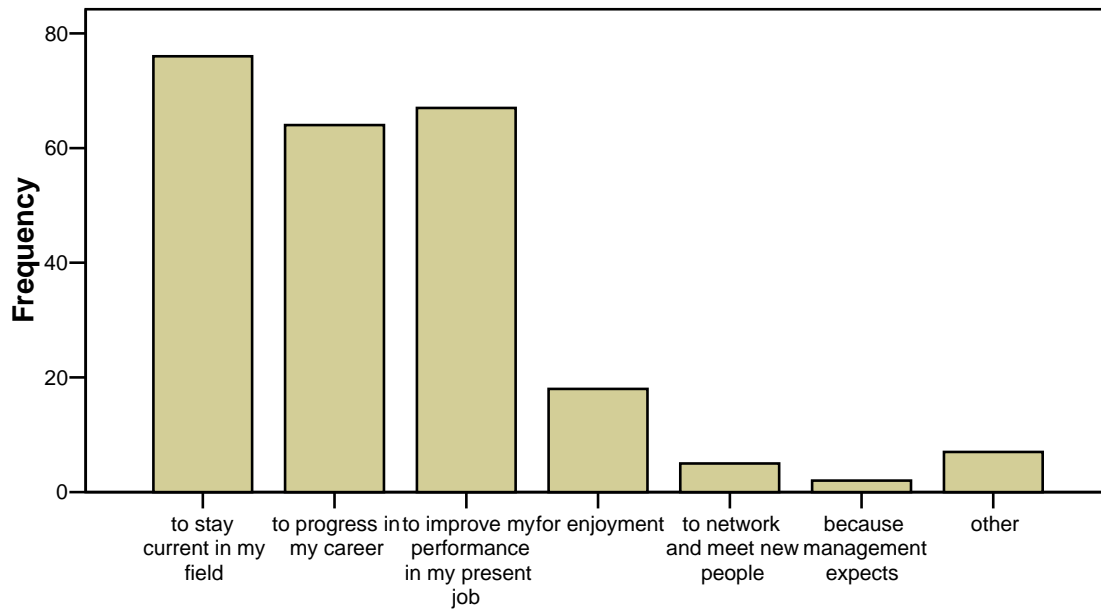


Figure 5. Primary motivation for participating in professional development.

As might be expected, these results were not evenly distributed across all age groups. Younger employees were far more likely to be most interested in career development, while staying current in one's field was more likely to be important for older staff members. A similar pattern was evident when motivation was viewed according to length of service. Those with five or less years of service were more likely to be motivated by career progression, while "staying current" was more likely to be the primary goal of those with more than five years of service.

There were also significant differences in the motivations of respondents depending on occupational groupings (see Figure 6). Almost half of support staff respondents (47.8%) chose "progressing in (their) career" as their prime motivation, while "improving performance in (their) present job" was most important for trades instructors (48.1%). For all other occupational categories, "staying current" was most important.

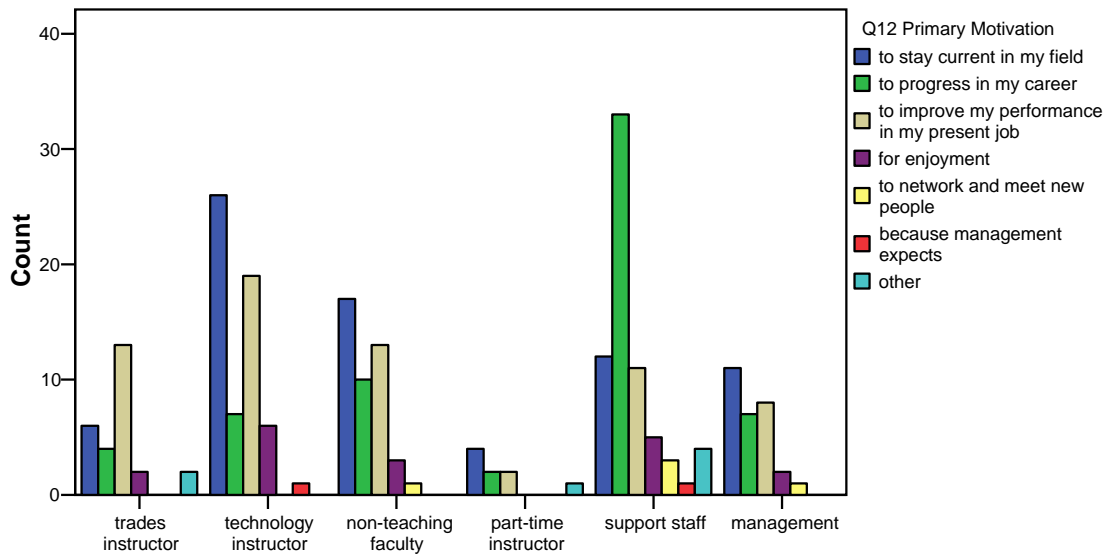


Figure 6. Primary motivation by occupation.

### Obstacles to Professional Development

Question 14 asked respondents to rank the three factors that had discouraged or prevented them from pursuing their professional development goals while employed at BCIT. Lack of time was the most frequently cited barrier to professional development activities (90.4%) and it was also ranked most frequently as the greatest barrier (62.9%). Lack of funding was the second most frequently cited barrier (66.6%) as well as the most common second choice in the ranking (33.3%). Lack of recognition or reward (52.5%) was the third most frequently cited barrier and the most common third choice in the ranking (20.0%).

Lack of funding was more of an issue for support staff and part-time instructors than it was for other occupational groups. While an average of 24.8% of all occupational groupings ranked lack of funding as the greatest barrier to professional development activities, the corresponding percentages for support staff and part-time instructors were

35.8% and 42.9% respectively. This disparity is probably a reflection of the differences in financial support available for professional development at BCIT. Different provisions for professional development are offered to BCIT staff depending on whether they belong to the management group, FSA instructors, BCGEU instructors, BCGEU support staff or part-time instructors.

### Acceptance of Non-Course-Based Methods of Professional Development

Respondents showed a reasonable level of acceptance for the non-course based attributes of instructional delivery that are consistent with the online community approach envisioned with *SideBars*.

The BCIT staff members surveyed indicated they were open to combining several different methods to pursue their professional development goals. A total of 216 respondents (90%) indicated they tended to combine several different methods rather than using only one. While both for-credit and non-credit course-based options such as workshops and structured courses were among the most frequently used methods, independent study including journal reading, web resources, and discussing issues with colleagues was the most popular method of professional development cited by respondents. Most said they participated in course-based methods, such as credit courses, workshops or conferences, two to three times a year. However, the majority participated in non-course-based professional development activities at least once or twice a week, and 30% participated in these activities on a daily basis.

The majority of respondents also indicated that they had a reasonably high level of comfort with computer technology, which suggests they would also have reasonable tolerance for professional development approaches that depend on CMC methods.

Slightly more than half of the respondents (52.9%) rated their computer skills as high, while 41.3% rated them as medium. Only 5.4% said their computer skills were low and that they found it a chore to learn new software or figure out how to navigate new websites. While fewer than half of the respondents had taken an online course, 83.8% had engaged in web surfing as a professional development activity and 63.8% had subscribed to an electronic newsletter. They were less likely to have engaged in more recent developments in web-based activities such as listservs (35.4%), news aggregators (12.0%), and weblogs or “blogs” (2.5%).

In terms of content, however, *SideBars* may be less appropriate for the professional development goals of most respondents. While *SideBars* focuses on pedagogy in the context of distributed learning and educational technology, respondents chose credit courses leading to a credential (30.8%), leadership or management training (21.7%), and technical upgrading (20.4%) as the three content areas that would be most beneficial to them in achieving their professional development goals. Educational technology and pedagogical training were only chosen by 10.8% and 5.4% of respondents, respectively, as most beneficial to their goals. Unfortunately, the wording of the question forced respondents to choose a single content area and did not allow respondents to indicate their second or third choice as a beneficial content area. As a secondary method of professional development after for-credit courses, *SideBars* would probably be well suited to fulfilling secondary professional development objectives if pedagogy and educational technology is important to staff as a second or third choice.

### BCIT Staff Perceptions of SideBars

Only 18.3% of the survey respondents were subscribers to *SideBars*. This result was distributed fairly evenly across the sample with members of the management group, trades instructors, and those with more than 20 years of service somewhat more likely to be subscribers than other than other groupings. In addition to those who received the e-zine directly through a subscription, 7.1% said that they accessed the *SideBars* website when they saw an announcement about the publication of a new issue of the e-zine on the BCIT intranet.

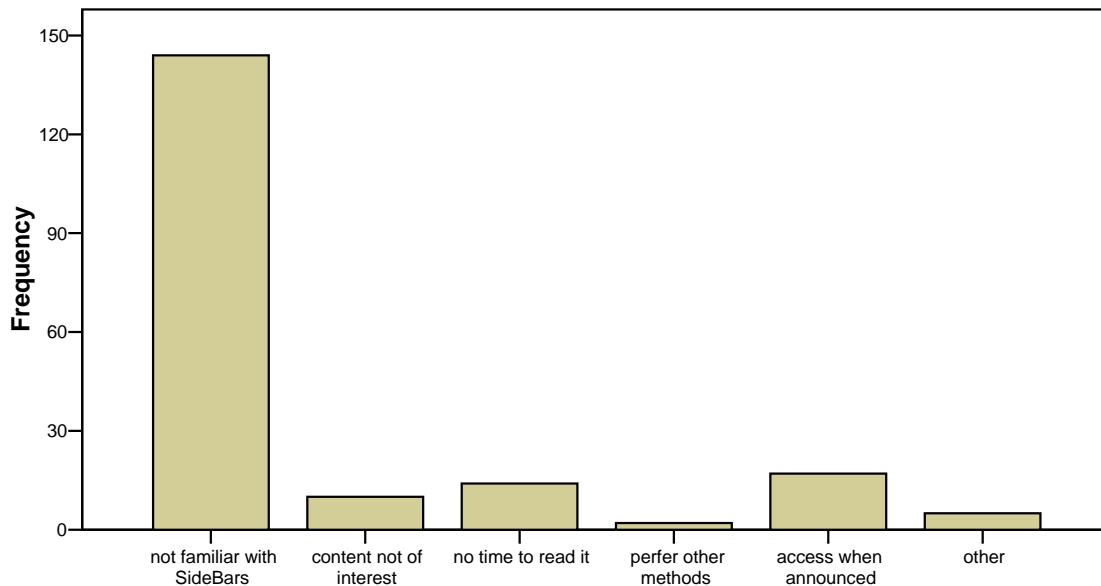


Figure 7. Reasons for not subscribing to *SideBars*.

By far, the most common reason cited by respondents for not subscribing was a lack of awareness. As shown in Figure 7, 75.0% of the non-subscriber group was not familiar with *SideBars*. Both the subscriber group (57.1%) and the non-subscriber group (12.4%) were most likely to choose the term “electronic magazine” as the best descriptor for *SideBars*. Based on a percentage of cases, the subscriber group was more likely to see

SideBars as a “learning community,” while the non-subscriber group was more likely to see it as a “resource database” (see Figure 8).

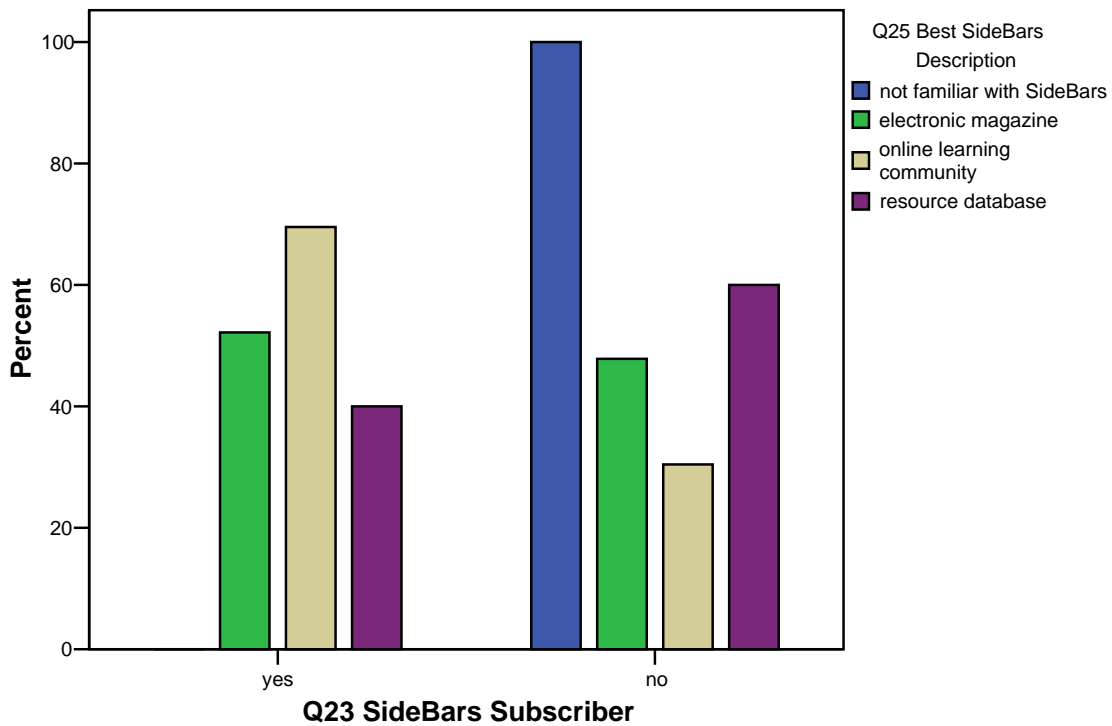


Figure 8. Best descriptor of SideBars as a percentage of cases.

### Survey of SideBars Subscribers

The purpose of surveying SideBars subscribers was twofold: to obtain a detailed quantitative profile of the subscriber group, and to gather information about how subscribers’ benefit from SideBars and their opinions about how it could be further developed. As mentioned in the previous chapter, 105 valid replies representing a response rate of 20.6% were received for the subscriber survey. Based on a 7.2% margin of error and a 90% level of confidence, the sample size (n=105) is considered adequate for the purposes of this study.

### Profile of SideBars Survey Respondents

Almost two-thirds (65.7%) of the survey respondents were from the external *SideBars* community, which was a larger proportion of external subscribers than in the general population on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The proportion of external subscribers on that date was estimated at 52.8% according to a count of non-BCIT e-mail addresses in the distribution list used to send out the survey invitations. Some BCIT staff members may have confused the *SideBars* survey invitation with a follow-up from the previous survey on professional development and this may partially account for the lower response rate from internal subscribers. Shortly after the invitation to participate in the *SideBars* survey was sent out, the researcher was contacted by two respondents who were unsure whether they should respond. There may well have been others who assumed the invitation was a follow-up to the previous survey.

The sample was fairly evenly distributed between genders, with 47.6% of the responses from men and 52.4% from women. A somewhat higher percentage of the female respondents were from the external group. Almost half of the survey respondents (45.7%) were aged 46 to 55 years, and almost two-thirds were 46 years or older. As shown in Figure 9, this age distribution was about the same for both the internal and external groups.



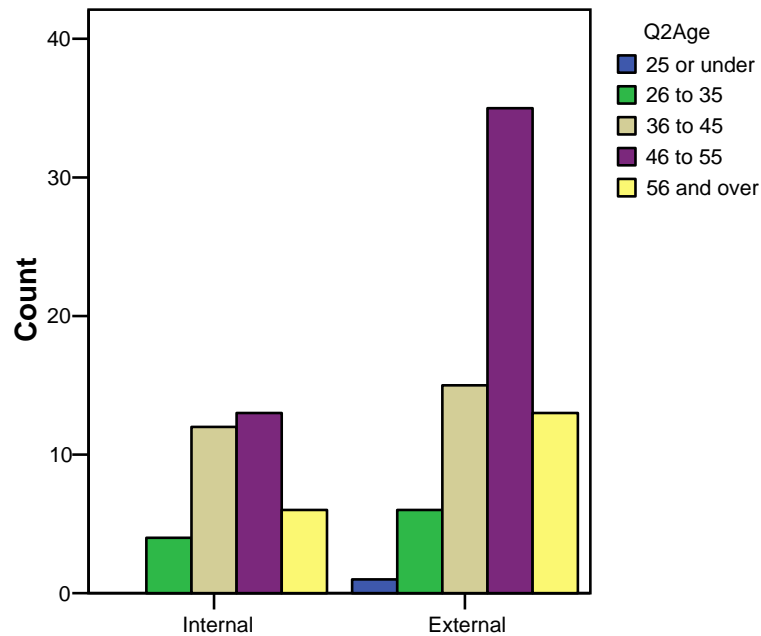


Figure 9. Age distribution of *SideBars* survey respondents.

More than half of the respondents (50.5%) had a master's degree, while 29.5% had bachelor's degrees and 9.5% had doctoral degrees. Educational attainment for the *SideBars* subscribers was generally higher than for the respondents to the general survey on professional development at BCIT. While a master's degree was the modal educational attainment for both the internal and external segments of the *SideBars* subscriber group (see Figure 10), a bachelor's degree was most common for the respondents to the BCIT survey. The *SideBars* subscriber group placed a slightly higher value on professional development than the BCIT group, giving it a mean rating of 4.38 on a five-point Likert scale as opposed to 4.24. The *SideBars* group also rated their technology skills somewhat higher than the BCIT group and were far more likely to report having taken an online course (74.3%) than the BCIT group (42.9%).

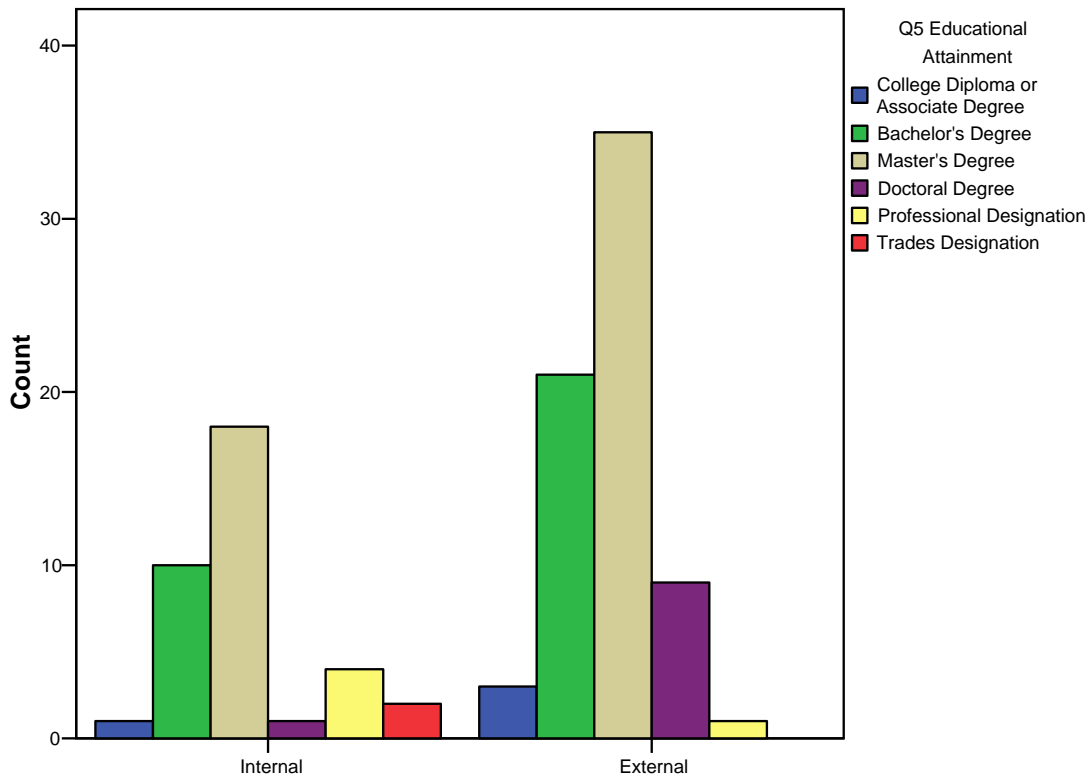


Figure 10. Educational attainment by internal and external subscribers.

As shown in Figure 11, most of the survey respondents were located in Canada, and British Columbia (BC) was by far their most common home province. In fact, respondents from BC accounted for 56% of the total sample. Other Provinces and Territories represented included Ontario, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Alberta, Quebec, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. The two most common locations cited outside of Canada were the United States and Europe. American respondents represented the states of Texas, California, Indiana, Minnesota, Maryland, North Carolina, and New York, while European respondents cited Switzerland, England, Russia, and Iceland as their home countries. Other home countries identified by respondents included Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates and Australia.

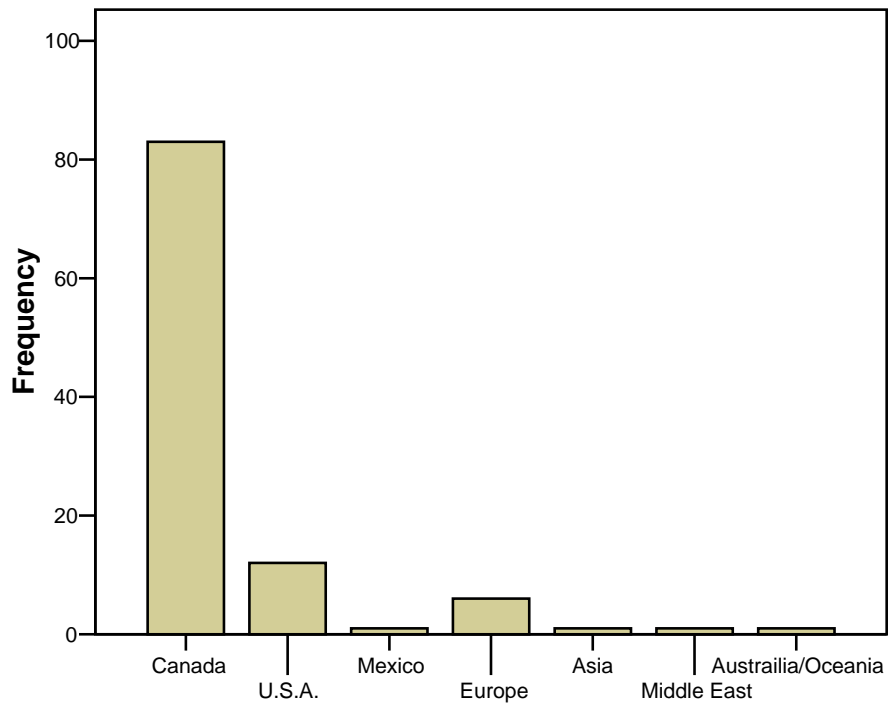


Figure 11. Locations of *SideBars* survey respondents.

While those identifying themselves as faculty members were the single largest occupational grouping for both the internal and external groups, educators actually comprised slightly less than half the sample (see Figure 12). Those who identified themselves as managers, support staff, corporate trainers, software developers, consultants and being involved in other occupations represented 54.2% of the respondents. Significant occupations identified among those who selected “other” as their occupation included students (2.9%), government employees (1.9%) and librarians (1.9%).

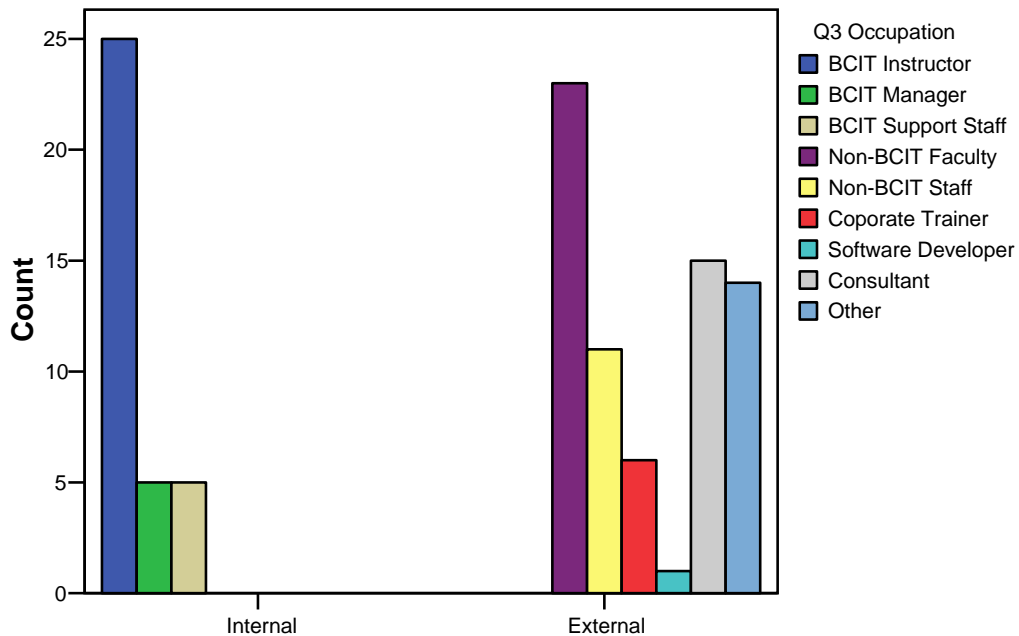


Figure 12. Occupations of *SideBars* survey group by internal and external.

### Subscribers' Perceptions of the Benefits of SideBars

The subscriber group placed moderate value on *SideBars* as a means of achieving their professional goals (see Figure 13). As with the BCIT survey group, the most important goals for the subscriber group were to stay current their field (35.2%), progress in their career (26.7%) or improve performance in their current jobs (26.9%). On a five-point Likert scale, the subscriber group gave *SideBars* a mean rating of 2.93 for its value in helping them achieve their professional development goals.

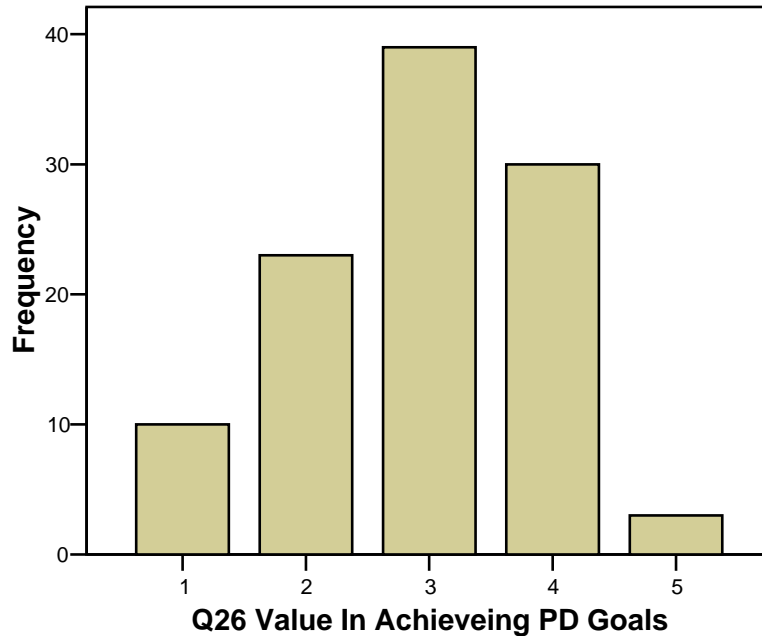


Figure 13. Value of *SideBars* in helping subscribers to achieve professional development goals.

The survey results suggest that subscribers derive the greatest benefit from *SideBars* in its role as an e-zine and as a reference source on the topic of distributed learning. Most subscribers (78.1%) indicated that they read one or more articles when the e-zine arrived in their mail. No one said they deleted it without at least reading the summaries, and 22.8% said they read most or all of the articles.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents said they had found articles or web resources that helped them in their professional practice several times and 87% said they had found a useful resource at least once. A follow-up question yielded numerous comments that reinforced *SideBars*' value to subscribers as a reference source on distributed learning. Some of the typical comments are shown below, and a complete list of comments made by internal and external subscribers is provided in Appendices 7 and 8.

Internal Subscribers:

- “Provided insight into emerging technologies or practices.”
- “Referenced SideBars in an article on usability and learning.”
- “Information on elearning, constructivist learning used for consulting project.”

External Subscribers:

- “Provides a forum for the latest news.”
- “Keeps me updated.”
- “Assisted in research & literature reviews; forwarded articles to colleagues.”
- “General knowledge that I hadn’t heard previously.”

Most respondents (77.4%) said they visited the *SideBars* website periodically to access the *SideBars* archives. Data on server traffic (See Figure 14) supports this finding. As shown in Figure 14, increases in server hits correlate with specific events, such as the publication of a new issue of the e-zine on October 31<sup>st</sup> or the mention of a *SideBars* article in the September issue of CIT Infobits. However, a minimum level of traffic is maintained between such events.

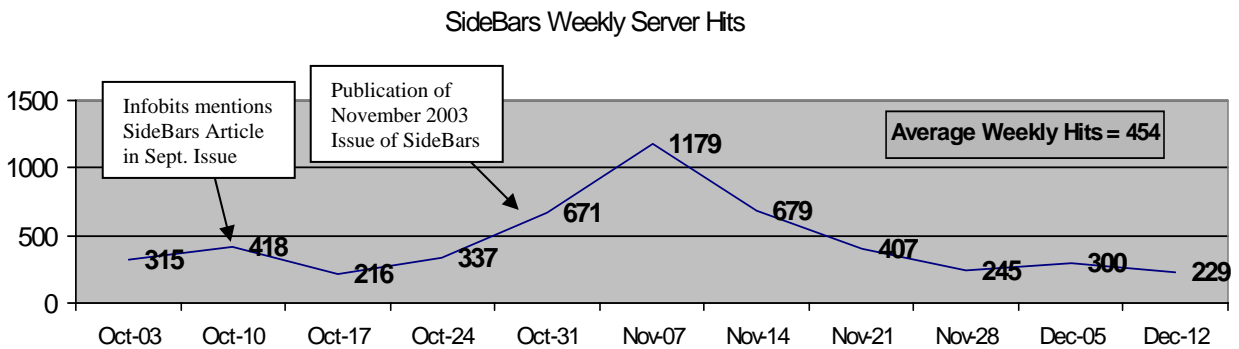


Figure 14. Data on server traffic.

The use of *SideBars* as a forum for the exchange of ideas and information was less important for the respondent group than its use as a reference source. Only 8.7% of the respondent group indicated that they had used the *SideBars* bulletin board, and they ranked it the least useful of all of *SideBars* features with a mean rating of 1.91 on a four-point scale. This compared to 2.93 for links to web resources and 2.74 for BCIT in-house articles (see Figure 15).

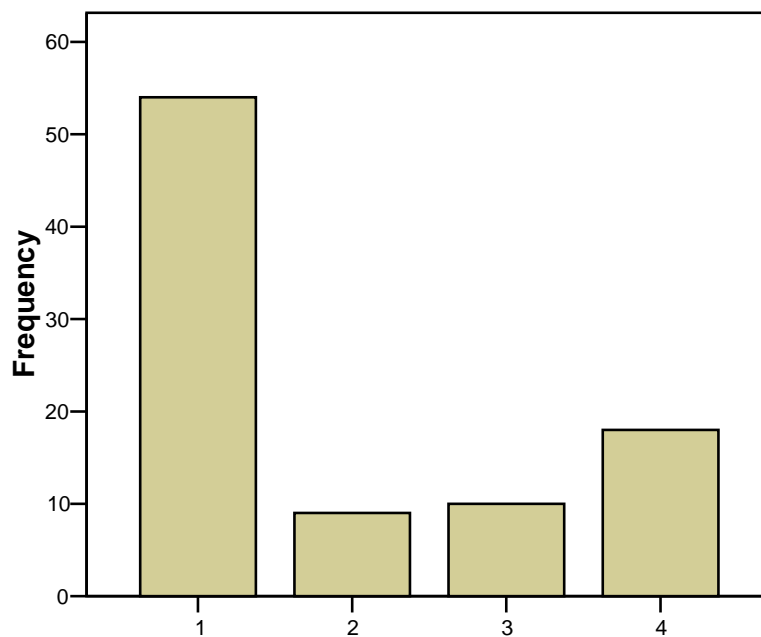


Figure 15. Ranking of *SideBars* bulletin board (where “4” is “most useful” and “1” is least useful).

The most frequent reason given for not using the *SideBars* bulletin board (33.3%) was that respondents were not aware of it (see Figure 16). The fact that interaction was not a high priority for the subscriber group may have been a factor in this lack of awareness. Lack of time was the most common reason for non-participation cited by the 27.6% of respondents who selected “other” as their response to Question 20, which dealt with respondents’ reasons for not using the bulletin board. Examination of the follow-up

responses showed that 18 of the 24 respondents who offered follow-up explanations mentioned “lack of time” or “too busy” as their reason for not participating.

The lack of a perceived benefit (19.0%) was also significant, and while only 4.8% chose “technical difficulties” in response to Question 20, it too may be considered significant since it represents more than half of those who attempted to use the bulletin board. E-mail messages received from one subscriber complaining about difficulties with the bulletin board indicated that some subscribers experienced frustration with it. As mentioned above in Chapter III on methodology, technical problems precluded some subscribers from using the bulletin board.

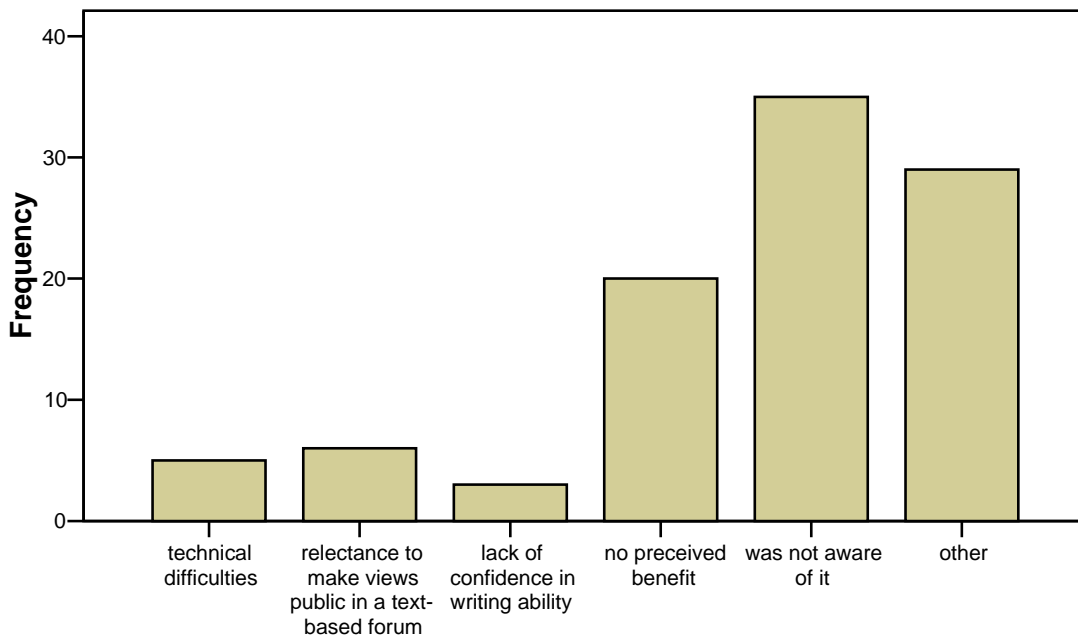


Figure 16. Reasons for not using *SideBars* bulletin board.

The ability to interact with other *SideBars* subscribers was not rated as particularly important by subscribers. On a five-point Likert scale, the mean rating of the desirability of interacting with other *SideBars* subscribers was 1.99. While both the



internal and external groups rated interaction as a low priority, the external group rated it somewhat higher than the internal group (see Figure 17).

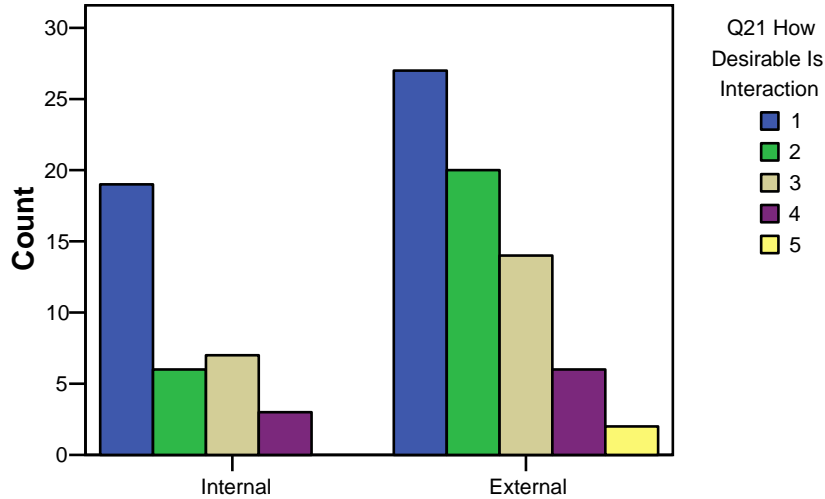


Figure 17. Desirability of interaction by internal and external.

Given that subscribers valued *SideBars* most highly as a resource on distributed learning, it is not surprising that most respondents felt it was best described as an “electronic magazine.” While the external group was somewhat more likely to view *SideBars* as a “learning community,” the dominant view for both groups was to see it as an electronic magazine (see Figure 18).

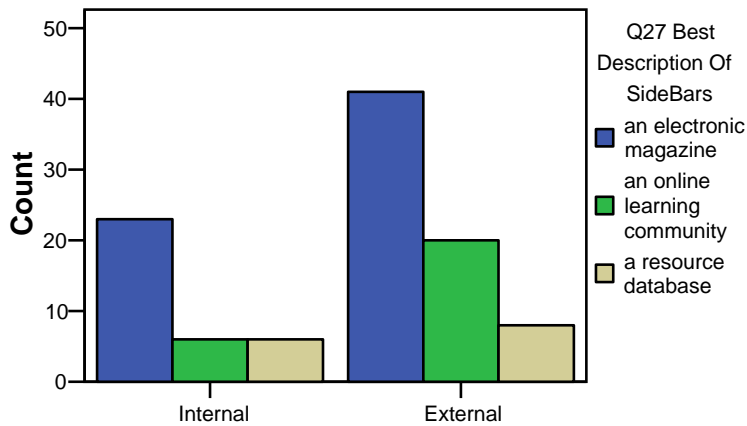


Figure 18. Best descriptor of *SideBars*.

### Subscribers' Suggestions for Further Development

Respondents to the subscriber survey were asked for specific recommendations about the content of the e-zine and about the best way to establish a channel for communication between subscribers. They were also invited in a final open-ended question to make any suggestions that they felt would increase the value of *SideBars* to them personally.

One question related to the content of *SideBars* asked respondents to rate how well they thought the e-zine was balanced between its two major themes of educational technology and pedagogy as it relates to online learning. Respondents indicated that they thought the balance of the content was about right, giving it a mean rating of 2.93 on a five-point Likert scale where “1” was “pedagogy” and “5” was “educational technology” (see Figure 19).

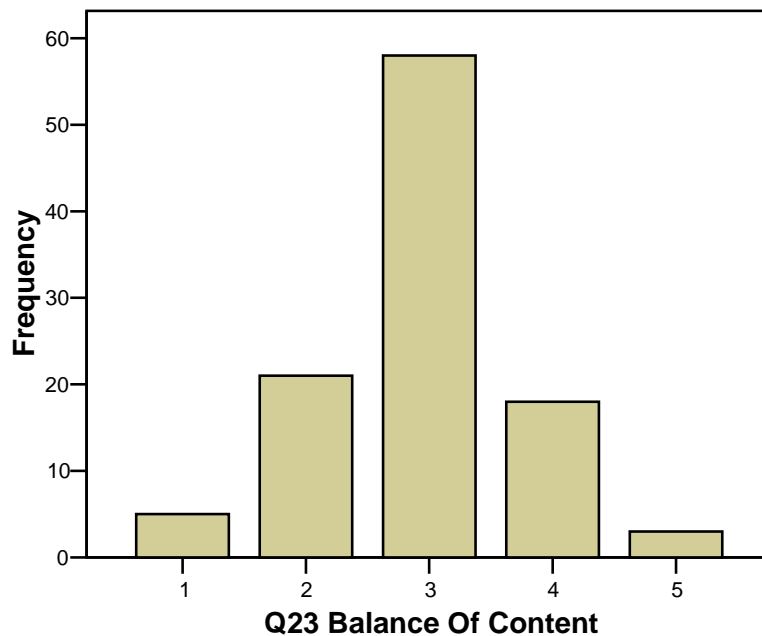


Figure 19. Content balance (where “1” is pedagogy and “5” is educational technology).

Respondents were also asked if they thought the content of the e-zine should be broadened to cover all aspects of pedagogy and not focus solely on online delivery. This question was added to the survey following the focus group as a result of a suggestion made to broaden the focus by one of the focus group participants. However, this suggestion was not well supported by the survey respondents who preferred to keep the narrower focus by a margin of almost three to one (72.1%). This proportion applied for both the internal (71.4%) and external groups (72.5%).

In the question related to providing a channel for subscriber-to-subscriber communication, respondents were asked to rate their preference for giving everyone posting rights (in effect turning *SideBars* into a listserv), providing a separate listserv, providing an improved asynchronous bulletin board, a combination of the listserv and bulletin board, a combination of the separate listserv and bulletin board or some other suggestion of their own.

As shown in Figure 20, the two most popular options were the improved bulletin board and the separate listserv. Each of these options was supported by 31.7% of the respondents, with the internal group favouring an improved bulletin board (33.3%) and the external group favouring a separate listserv (36.8%).

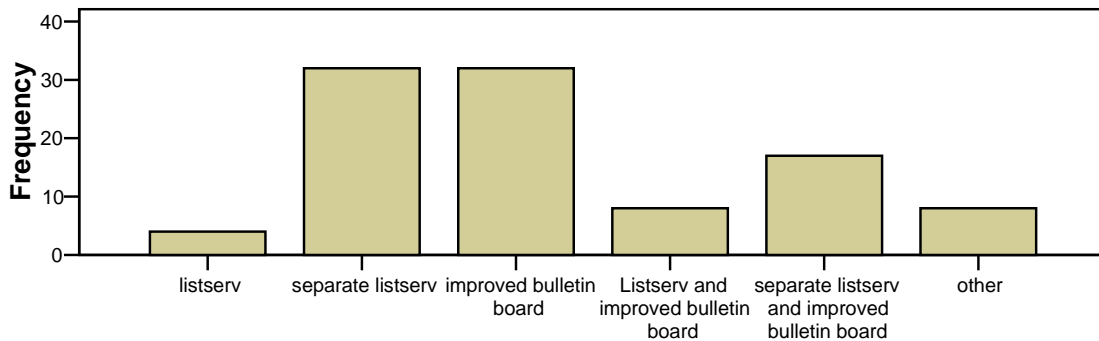


Figure 20. Subscribers' preferred method of communication.

While the suggestions for other methods of communication provided some intriguing ideas—including one suggestion to integrate *SideBars* with ETUG<sup>4</sup>—there were none that were common to more than one respondent.

A total of 41 respondents offered suggestions in response to the final open-ended question. These suggestions, a copy of which is provided in Appendix B, were re-grouped into the following six categories:

- More succinct, reader-friendly presentation (10)
- More resources on pedagogy (6)
- More resources on educational technology (2)
- Improve communication/work toward online community (6)
- No opinion/O.K. as is (12)
- Miscellaneous (5)

### Focus Group Results

The focus group participants were asked to address the following two questions:

1. How well suited is the *SideBars* model for professional development to the culture of BCIT?
2. How could *SideBars* be improved to better address professional development at BCIT?

The focus group members were generally supportive of the concept of *SideBars* and most thought it was well suited to BCIT culture. Several relevant observations and suggestions were offered by the group and these have been summarized in the points listed below. A complete summary of the focus group session is provided in Appendix C.

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<sup>4</sup> ETUG is a listserv sponsored by The Centre for Curriculum Transfer and Technology (C2T2).

- Online discussions offer the potential for enriched learning in a professional development context at BCIT, especially if sharing of best practices were the focus of the exchange. However, because of the voluntary nature of the activity, it might not attract sufficient participation.
- The *SideBars* model is an effective vehicle for teaching people about distributed learning because it uses distributed learning as the delivery method and it offers a safe environment to try new things.
- The *SideBars* model has potential for bringing together isolated groups at BCIT, such as part-time instructors.
- An effort should be made to make part-time instructors more aware of *SideBars*. Program administrators could help with this goal.
- Some people have a well-entrenched fear of posting that undermines the effectiveness of discussion boards. This fear may be related to having possibly contentious comments published where they can be read by anyone, including management. Anonymous posting might reduce the fear factor, but would open discussion boards to other abuses, such as flaming, and make discussion boards more difficult to moderate.
- *SideBars* might be viewed by some staff members as a way to promote online learning at BCIT and this might not be welcomed by all.
- Poor navigation on the Lotus Notes® database used to host the *SideBars* bulletin board probably discourages use.

### Activity on SideBars Bulletin Board

Only a small percentage of the subscriber group participated on the *SideBars* bulletin board during the three-month observation period. Between September 1<sup>st</sup> and November 28<sup>th</sup> 2003, a total of 39 subscribers, or about 8% of the subscriber group, visited the bulletin board at least once. During that time, 62 messages totaling 5,248 words were posted. There were also 90 sessions of lurking in which subscribers visited the bulletin board but did not post a message. This finding is consistent with discussion forums in other online learning communities operating outside the realm of formal education. Moore and Barab (2002) reported low participation rates for a community of practice in a professional development context as did Moisey (2003) in a community-based context. A summary of the activity is shown in Figure 21.

Total Participants	39
Participants who posted	11
Lurkers	28
Total number of postings	62
Total words posted	5,248
Average words posted	84.65
Total number of lurking sessions	90

Figure 21. Summary of *SideBars* bulletin board activity.

#### Participants

The participant group can be described in terms of two overlapping groups, each of which may be further sub-divided into five categories. The first main group is based on participants' status, or non-status, as BCIT employees and is composed of two distinct sub groups called internals and externals. The second group is divided into three distinct groups or types of visitors based on participants' behaviour on the bulletin board. These

three sub-groups are referred to as panelists, posters, and lurkers. The definitions and membership of each of the five groups is shown in Figure 22.

<b>Group 1</b>		Fre	%
Internals	BCIT staff members who visited the bulletin board at least once during the observation period.	31	79.5
Externals	Non-BCIT staff members who visited the bulletin board at least once during the observation period.	8	20.5
<b>Group 2</b>			
Panelists	Five internals and one external who were actively recruited by the researcher to take part in a discussion on online moderation hosted in conjunction with the November issue of SideBars. The researcher was also a member of this group.	6	15.4
Posters	Non-panelists who posted at least one message on the bulletin board during the observation period.	5	12.8
Lurkers	Internals and externals who visited the bulletin board at least once during the observation period but did not post a message.	28	71.8

Figure 22. Bulletin board participant groups.

As shown in Figure 23, lurkers formed the largest proportion of both the internal and external groups followed by the panelists and posters. However, in terms of combined posting and lurking activity, the panelists were the most active group accounting for more than 60% of the 129 sessions that took place during the observation period.

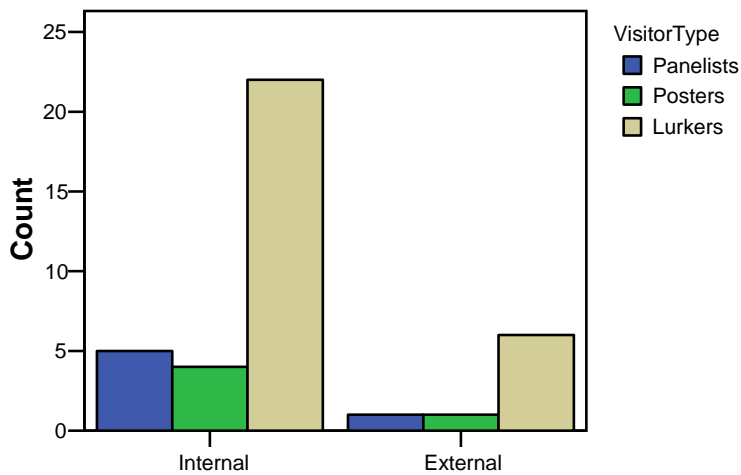


Figure 23. Visitor type by internal and external.

In terms of subscribers' level of acceptance of *SideBars* as a method of professional development, especially in its capacity as a forum for the exchange of ideas, participation by the posters and lurkers was considered more significant than participation by the panelists. The rationale for this supposition is that the participation by posters and lurkers was entirely optional, while the panelists were actively recruited by the researcher. Posters also showed a deeper level of commitment than lurkers since they made a contribution by posting a message.

### Postings

The majority of the messages posted on the bulletin board—91.9% of the total postings—were made by panelists. As shown in Figure 24, most of this posting activity (79%) was confined to the panel discussion on online moderation. However, some panelists did explore other discussion categories and posted messages in those as well. Posters made only 8.1% of the postings and confined their comments to discussion #1 on learning management systems, discussion #2 on online moderation, and tips and troubles which offered help with bulletin board navigation. By definition, lurkers posted no messages.

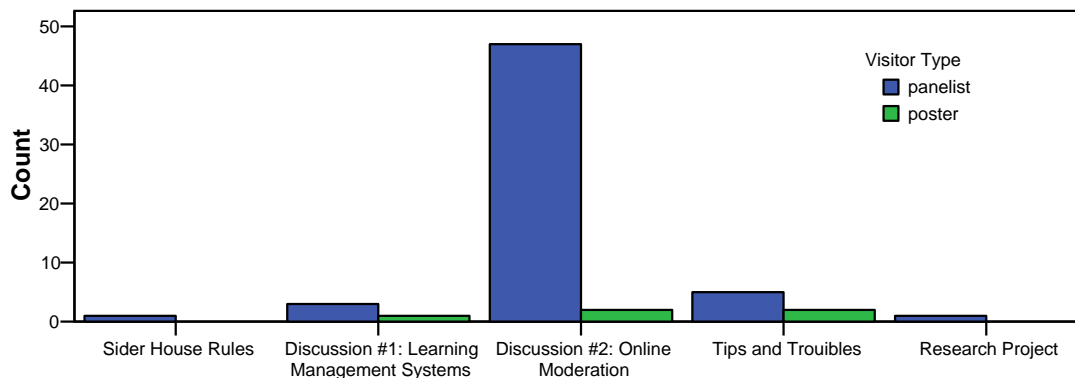


Figure 24. Posting activity by visitor type and discussion.



The mean number of postings across all groups was 1.59, and ranged from a minimum of zero (0) to a maximum of 18, with a standard deviation of 4.06 (Figure 25). Of the 39 subscribers who visited during the observation period, 28 did not post any messages and six posted at least one. The majority of the postings were made by a small group comprised of five of the six panelists who posted six or more messages with the greatest number of messages (18) being posted by the researcher.

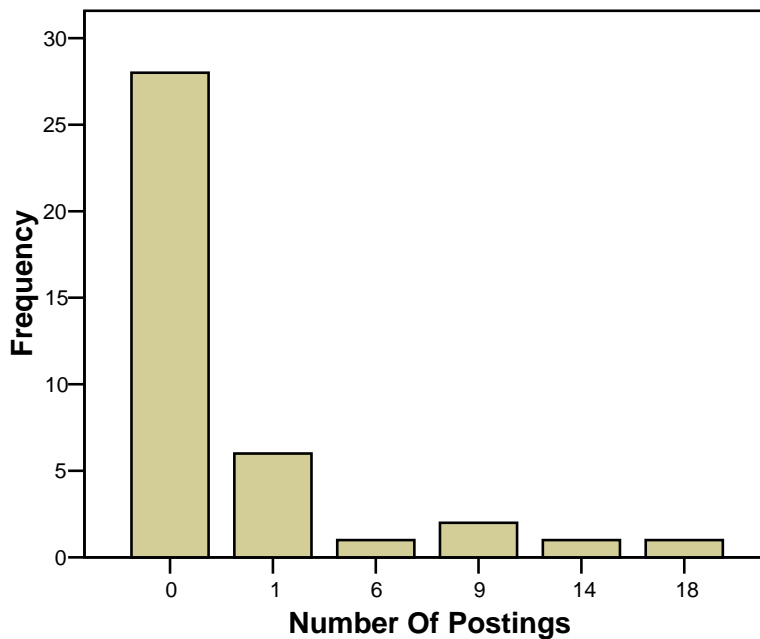


Figure 25. Frequency of the number of postings.

### Lurking

The mean number of lurking sessions across all groups was 2.31 and ranged from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 30 with a standard deviation of 4.68 (see Figure 26). The modal number of lurking sessions was 1, with 23 of the participants (59%) engaging in a single session of lurking. Six of the participants (15.4%) lurked on two occasions, three participants (7.7%) lurked on three or four occasions, one participant (2.6%) lurked

on five occasions, and the researcher (2.6%) lurked on 30 occasions. There were also two participants (5.1%) who did not engage in any lurking and posted at least one message during each of their visits to the bulletin board.

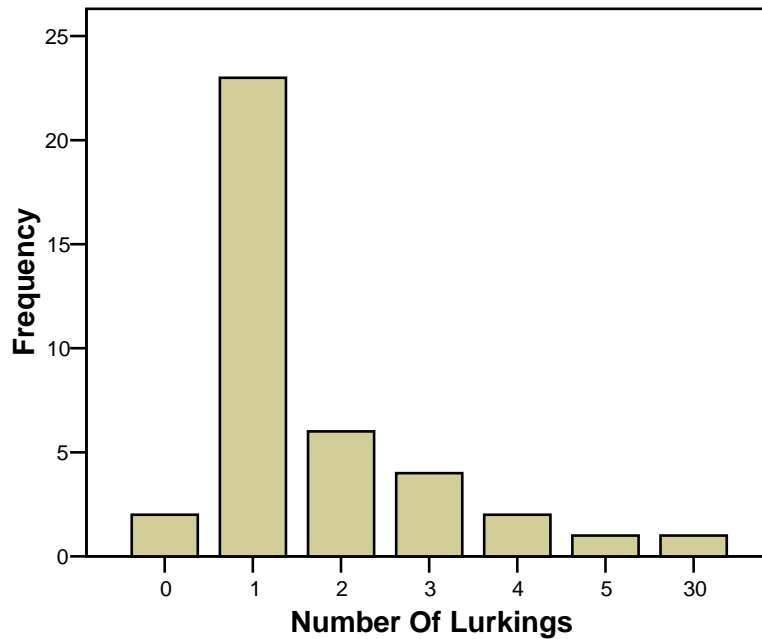


Figure 26. Lurking sessions on the *SideBars* bulletin board.

Technically, the panelists were the most prolific lurkers. However, when the 30 lurking sessions engaged in by the researcher were treated separately (see Figure 27), the lurkers emerged as the largest group for this activity. Most of the lurkers (75%) visited the bulletin board on a single occasion and did not return a second time. Six of the lurkers (21.4%) returned for one additional visit, and one (3.6%) returned on two more occasions. Posters and panelists were more likely to return frequently to engage in lurking. One poster returned to the bulletin board on four occasions after the initial lurking session while two of the panelists returned on two and three occasions after the initial session.

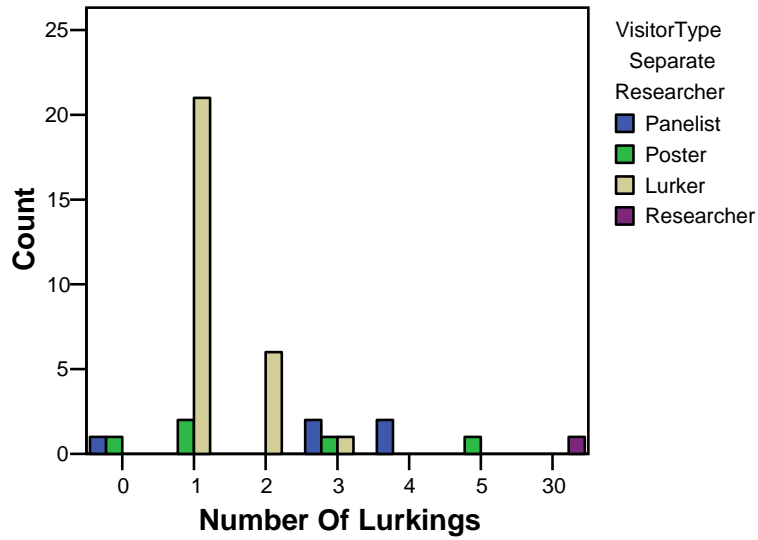


Figure 27. Number of lurking sessions by visitor type.

With the lurker group, most of the lurking activity occurred during first four weeks of the observation period. It is likely this was in response to the announcement advising subscribers about the availability of the bulletin board. For the panelists, and somewhat less so for the posters, lurking activity coincided with the panel discussion on online moderation, which took place during weeks and 9 and 10 of the observation period in conjunction with the November issue of *SideBars* (see Figure 28).

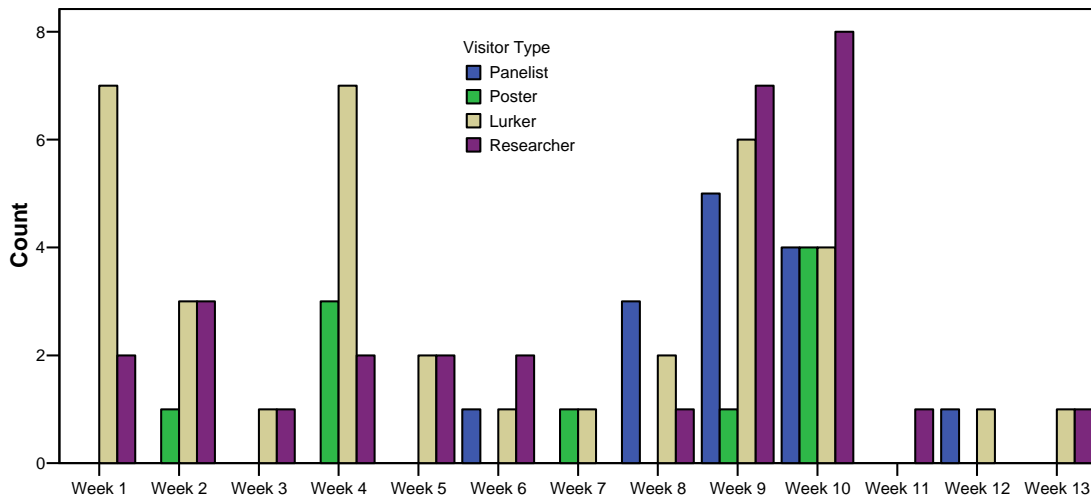


Figure 28. Lurking activity by week number.

### Other Indicators of Community Formation

Since *SideBars* began publishing in January 2002, there have been many instances of participation by both subscribers and non-subscribers that indicate the formation of community. This participation has taken the form of contributions of articles and interviews, the creation of hyperlinks to *SideBars* on the websites and blogs of organizations and individuals, and correspondence in the form of e-mail.

#### Articles and Interviews

Since January 2002, there have been 16 articles contributed to *SideBars* from authors other than the three editors. Most of these articles were written by internal BCIT subscribers, although some, Kane (2003), Doherty (2003), Byrne and Waddell (2003), have been contributed by external subscribers. In most cases, the impetus for the articles came from *SideBars* editorial staff who asked the contributors to write the articles in connection with a particular theme. In some cases, however, Hendry (2002), Doherty (2003) and Byrne and Waddell (2003), the articles originated with the authors who not only contributed their time and effort in writing them, but the original idea as well.

Some members of the external educational community (Smulders, 2002a); (Smulders, Millar, & Beers, 2003); (Fahy, Smulders, & Millar, 2003) also participated by taking part in a periodic *SideBars* feature called “My Dinner With....” Styled after the critically acclaimed film, *My Dinner with Andre*, the feature consists of an e-mail interview in which a series of questions are sent to an expert on a particular topic and the questions and responses are published as an article.

## Links

During its first two years of publication, *SideBars* has attracted a considerable amount of attention from the web and blogging communities. This attention has been manifested in the form of hyperlinks that bring a steady stream of visitors to the *SideBars* website each month. A selection of websites or blogs that have included links to the *SideBars* website or to articles in the *SideBars* archives are listed below. (Copies of the complete citations and web references are provided in Appendix E)

- CIT Infobits
- Centre for Teaching and Learning, Dalhousie University
- Technology4Teachers.Com
- Stephen's Web
- EdTechPost
- Human Performance Centre HPC Spider
- e-Learning Centre
- Florida Community College at Jacksonville
- The EduResources Portal
- BellaOnline: The voice of women
- CQU Teaching and Learning Portal, Central Queensland University

## Correspondence

*SideBars* has received a large volume of correspondence, usually in the form of e-mail messages, during its first two years of publication. Periodically, a selection of these letters is published in the e-zine (We've Got Mail, 2004) (Smulders, 2002b).

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

This chapter discusses the conclusions and recommendations arising from this study. They are presented here in terms of *SideBars*' effectiveness as a professional development environment, the extent to which it operates as a learning community, reasons for non-participation, and recommendations for how *SideBars* might be improved. Some directions for further study and action on this topic are also offered.

#### Effectiveness as an Environment for Professional Development

Because of its flexibility, its ongoing nature, and its asynchronous approach to delivery, *SideBars* seems well suited to the BCIT environment, especially as a secondary source of professional development. It uses technology with which staff is already familiar and it offers the potential for overcoming their primary obstacle to the pursuit of professional development—their perennial lack of time. Both internal and external subscribers view *SideBars* as a credible source of information about distributed learning and value it as a method of keeping up to date.

While it is doubtful that *SideBars* could fulfill a role as the sole or primary method of professional development for BCIT staff, it is well positioned as a secondary method, especially for instructional staff. The subject matter offered by *SideBars*—educational technology and pedagogy as it relates to online learning—is not the highest priority for most BCIT staff members. More important are credit courses leading to a credential, management and leadership training, and upgrading in subjects taught or

principal areas of specialization. However, as most staff engage in several methods of professional development, *SideBars* is likely to be an attractive alternative for learning about educational technology and pedagogy because of its low demands on time and commitment.

Because of its ability to act as a forum and to facilitate the exchange of ideas and information, *SideBars* has the potential to address specific gaps in the array of professional development initiatives offered by BCIT. For example, *SideBars* offers the opportunity to share best practices and to directly target problems encountered by staff in their daily work. It also offers the potential for serving isolated groups such as part-time instructors. To fully realize this potential, however, the level of participation needs to be significantly increased. For *SideBars* to work effectively as a forum for the exchange of ideas and information, a greater number of subscribers need to be involved in making contributions to the group.

It is clear that a wide differential exists in the level of involvement of individual *SideBars* users. The level ranges from casual one-time visits to the *SideBars* website to valuable contributions of articles, ideas, and postings. Three distinct groups are discernable in regards to *SideBars*: non-subscribers, readers, and contributors.

### Non-Subscribers

Non-subscribers visit the *SideBars* website as a result of following hyperlinks from other websites or by accessing material from the *SideBars* archives as a result of web searches. Their primary expectation of *SideBars* is as a source of reference information; they have little interest in a communal experience.

### Readers

Readers have chosen to subscribe to *SideBars* in order to receive regular installments of the e-zine; they probably comprise the largest group of users. Included in this group are the lurkers who visit the discussion board, but post no messages of their own. They value *SideBars* as a way of keeping up with new developments in distributed learning and they trust the *SideBars* editorial staff to select information that is useful and relevant. However, their interest in interacting with other subscribers or of making useful contributions is minimal.

### Contributors

Contributors are subscribers who have made some sort of useful contribution, such as an article or a posting on the discussion board. They have the greatest stake in *SideBars* as a learning community since they have some level of trust that their contributions will be reciprocated to their benefit at some point in the future.

### Krathwohl's taxonomy

A parallel can be drawn between the behaviour of non-subscribers, readers, and contributors in their relationship with *SideBars* and the taxonomy of educational objectives in the affective domain developed by Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964). The taxonomy, which consists of five levels of increasing involvement or commitment towards a particular phenomenon or stimuli, provides a theoretical explanation for the behaviour of the various groups discerned in this study. While it is not clear whether individuals followed a progression of ever increasing involvement, or whether their level of involvement fluctuated over time, the pattern of behaviour is similar to the receiving,



responding, valuing, organization and characterization levels identified by Krathwohl et al.

### SideBars as a Learning Community

The operational test of “learning community” used in this study is that of ongoing mutual engagement for the purpose of learning.

It is clear that the majority of *SideBars* subscribers are no more mutually engaged with one another than they are with other subscribers to their local newspaper or with other members of the viewing audience of one of their favourite television programs. This finding is supported both by the subscriber survey, in which 61% said they thought *SideBars* was best described as “an electronic magazine,” and by the low rate of participation on the *SideBars* bulletin board.

However, there is a percentage of the subscriber group that does show evidence of mutual engagement for the purpose of learning. The evidence of this mutual involvement is in the form of contributions of articles and postings, e-mail correspondence, and the inclusion of hyperlinks to *SideBars* on external websites and blogs. The case for mutual involvement is also supported by the 24.8% of the subscriber group who thought *SideBars* was best described as “an online learning community.” Whether or not the mutual involvement observed in *SideBars* will be “ongoing” remains an open question. The current study was too short to provide an answer.

### Choosing Not to Participate

Despite the best efforts of the *SideBars* editors to raise awareness, it is clear that many BCIT staff members have still not heard about *SideBars*. This lack of awareness is the primary reason reported for not subscribing to the e-zine. While it is probable that lack of awareness is at least partially linked to lack of interest, it seems appropriate to explore new methods of promotion. One avenue that appears to hold promise is to use personal contact with BCIT staff members to recruit volunteers for specific events, such as the panel discussion hosted in conjunction with the November 2003 issue of *SideBars*. An effort should also be made to reach groups that appear to have been missed by past promotion efforts. BCIT part-time instructors appear to be prime candidates in this regard.

### Recommendations for Improvement

The recommendations for the improvement of *SideBars* that arise from this study are as follows:

1. Provide an improved asynchronous discussion board that can be accessed by all subscribers.
2. Investigate the utility of an optional listserv for *SideBars*.
3. Explore new methods of promoting *SideBars* to increase the level of awareness, especially among low participation groups such as part-time instructors.
4. Initiate more special events, such as the November 2003 panel discussion, aimed at increasing subscribers' level of involvement with *SideBars*.

### Suggestions for Further Study and Action

While it is clear that contributors constitute a small percentage of the overall *SideBars* community, it is also evident that they contribute to an enriched experience for community as a whole. An important strategy in the building of online community may be to emphasize support for contributors. This support could take the form of design decisions, the provision of technology, encouragement, personal contact, and any other resources at the disposal of those responsible for the community.

For *SideBars*, lack of participation and a low rate of contribution from subscribers appears to be a major obstacle in the formation of a vibrant online community. An avenue that may help in increasing participation and the number of participants who actively contribute to the community is to use personal contact to recruit volunteers for specific events.

In this study, three groups—non-subscribers, readers, and contributors—were clearly discernable in terms of their relationship with *SideBars*. A fruitful area for further research in the area of online learning communities might be to explore, through in-depth interviews, the commonalities and differences between and among these three groups. In other words, how do non-subscribers, readers, and contributors differ from each other in terms of their relationship with the online community, and what do they have in common with other members of their own group?

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## APPENDIX A: BCIT GENERAL PD SURVEY

### Survey Announcement

From: BCIT Notes Users/BCIT  
To: BCIT Notes Users/BCIT@BCITMAIN  
bcc: Glenn Millar/BCIT  
Date: Wednesday, December 03, 2003 03:59PM  
Subject: ALL Notes Request - Thesis Survey

----- Forwarded by BCIT Notes Users/BCIT on 03-12-03 03:58 PM -----

Hello,

If you are a current employee of BCIT, I would like you to participate in a survey I am conducting on professional development at the Institute. Its purpose is to gather information about the perceptions of staff and faculty on this important issue. I will be using the information as part of my thesis for a Master of Distance Education (MDE) degree, which I am currently completing at Athabasca University.

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential. It will not be possible for me to identify individual respondents unless you choose to reveal your name by entering for the prize draw (\$50 dinner-out gift certificate). The survey includes 25 questions, and I estimate that it will take you about 15 minutes to complete. If you are interested in seeing the results of the survey, please send an email to [gmillar@bcit.ca](mailto:gmillar@bcit.ca)

To complete the survey, click this link: <http://www.bcit.ca/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/irp/pdsurvey.cgi>

Best regards,

Glenn Millar

## A Survey on Professional Development at BCIT

The following survey is intended for completion by current employees of BCIT. Its purpose is to gather information about perceptions related to professional development at the Institute. The information will be used by Glenn Millar, an employee of BCIT, as part of his master's thesis in distance education at Athabasca University. Participation is entirely optional. Your responses will be kept completely confidential and your identity will not be known to the researcher unless you choose to reveal your name by entering for the prize draw.

Unless instructed otherwise, please select only one response to each question and please submit only one copy of the survey.

### Part A: General Information

1. Your gender is:	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
• male.....	94	39.2
• female.....	144	60.0
• missing.....	2	0.8
2. Your age is:		
• 25 or under .....	5	2.1
• 26 to 35 .....	56	23.3
• 36 to 45 .....	68	28.3
• 46 to 55 .....	82	34.2
• 56 and over.....	28	11.7
• missing.....	1	0.4
3. Your primary occupation at BCIT is:		
• trades instructor (BCGEU) .....	27	11.3
• technology instructor (FSA) .....	59	24.6
• non-teaching faculty (FSA i.e., CR, LRU) .....	44	18.3
• part-time instructor (FSA or BCGEU).....	9	3.8
• support staff (BCGEU) .....	69	28.8
• management .....	29	12.1
• missing.....	3	1.3

4. How long have you worked at BCIT?		
• less than one year .....	18	7.5
• 1 to 5 years .....	105	43.8
• 6 to 10 years .....	43	17.9
• 11 to 15 years .....	25	10.4
• 16 to 20 years .....	19	7.9
• more than 20 years .....	27	11.3
• missing .....	3	1.3
5. How many years of work experience did you have prior to joining BCIT?		
• less than one year .....	5	2.1
• 1 to 5 years .....	57	23.8
• 6 to 10 years .....	45	18.8
• 11 to 15 years .....	46	19.2
• 16 to 20 years .....	31	12.9
• more than 20 years .....	55	22.9
• missing .....	1	0.4
6. What is your highest level of educational attainment?		
• high school or less.....	5	2.1
• some post-secondary education .....	18	7.5
• graduation from a college certificate program.....	13	5.4
• college diploma or associate degree .....	52	21.7
• bachelor's degree.....	73	30.4
• master's degree .....	47	19.6
• doctoral degree.....	9	3.8
• professional designation (e.g., doctor, lawyer, accountant etc.).....	16	6.7
• trades designation (e.g. electrician, plumber, carpenter) .....	7	2.9
7. How would you rate your computer technology skills?		
• low. (It's a chore for me to learn new software or figure out how to navigate new websites.) .....	13	5.4
• medium. (I can usually learn to use new systems without much trouble.) .....	99	41.3
• high. (I feel very comfortable using computers and I learn new systems easily.) .....	127	52.9
• missing .....	1	0.4

## Part B: General Professional Development

8. Using a rating scale in which "5" means "very important" and "1" means "not important," rate the importance of professional development to you at this point in your career.

• 1.....	0	0.0
• 2.....	10	4.2
• 3.....	32	13.3
• 4.....	85	35.4
• 5.....	107	44.6
• missing .....	6	2.5
• mean (average).....		4.24

9. Outside of your normal workday, how much time do you devote to professional development?

• None.....	23	9.6
• one hour per week.....	53	22.1
• two to four hours per week .....	96	40.0
• five to seven hours per week.....	34	14.2
• eight hours or more per week .....	33	13.8
• missing .....	1	0.4

10. How often do you take part in professional development activities that involve taking a course, attending a workshop or going to a conference?

• Never.....	3	1.3
• once a year .....	42	17.5
• two or three times a year.....	117	48.8
• four to six times a year.....	43	17.9
• more than six times a year .....	33	13.8
• missing .....	2	0.8

11. How often do you participate in professional development activities that DO NOT involve attendance at an event or formal registration in a course; i.e., reading journal articles, surfing the web or discussing issues with colleagues.

• Never.....	9	3.8
• once or twice a month.....	70	29.2
• once or twice a week.....	89	37.1
• daily .....	72	30.0

12. What is your primary motivation for participating in professional development?

• to stay current my field .....	76	31.7
• to progress in my career .....	64	26.7
• to improve my performance in my present job .....	67	27.9
• for enjoyment .....	18	7.5
• to network and meet new people .....	5	2.1
• because management expects it .....	2	0.8
• other .....	7	2.9
• missing .....	1	0.4

13. Which of the following content areas do you feel would be most beneficial to you in achieving your professional development goals?

• credit courses leading to a credential .....	74	30.8
• technical upgrading in the subject that I teach or my primary area of expertise .....	49	20.4
• pedagogical training (how to teach).....	12	5.0
• educational technology (specialized training in software and other tools) .....	26	10.8
• leadership or management training.....	52	21.7
• personal productivity tools.....	13	5.4
• other .....	12	5.0
• missing .....	2	0.8

14. In order of greatest (1) to least importance (3), rank the top three factors that have prevented or discouraged you from pursuing your professional development objectives while employed at BCIT? (Note: results show the most frequent first, second and third rankings. Percentages are based on the total sample of 240).

• lack of time or too many other obligations .....	1 <sup>st</sup> Choice	151	62.9
• lack of funding for tuition, registration or leaves of absence .....	2 <sup>nd</sup> Choice	80	33.3
• lack of management support			
• lack of recognition or reward for professional development .....	3 <sup>rd</sup> Choice	48	20.0
• lack of motivation			

15. Are there any additional factors not listed in Question 14 that have hindered your professional development activities, or do you have any additional comments related to this question.

16. Do you tend to favour one method of professional development or do you combine several different methods?

• tend to use only one .....	21	8.8
• combine several different methods .....	216	90.0
• missing .....	3	1.3

17. Which of the following methods of professional development have you used? Check all that apply.

• have not participated in professional development.....	1	0.4
• credit courses leading to a credential.....	157	65.4
• non-credit courses and workshops.....	204	85.0
• national or international conferences.....	137	57.1
• in-house professional development offered by BCIT.....	188	78.3
• independent study (e.g. reading journals, using web resources, discussing issues with colleagues).....	213	88.8
• other.....	31	12.9

18. Which of the following of BCIT's in-house professional development offerings have you used? Check all that apply.

• have not used in-house programs.....	19	7.9
• personal productivity, wellness or software training offered through Human Resources.....	119	49.6
• instructional skills workshop.....	88	36.7
• TWEET workshop.....	25	10.4
• attendance or participation at PD Day.....	186	77.5
• consultation with an instructional development consultant (IDC) at the LRU.....	36	15.0
• instructional grant (Instructional Enhancement Grant or Special Grant).....	11	4.6
• instructional job aid from the LRU.....	21	8.8
• peer coaching.....	56	23.3
• other.....	22	9.2

19. Were you satisfied with your BCIT in-house professional development experience?

• have not used in-house programs.....	27	11.3
• yes.....	180	75.0
• no.....	28	11.7
• missing.....	5	2.1

### Part C: Online Professional Development

20. Have you ever taken an online course?

• Yes.....	103	42.9
• No.....	135	56.3
• missing.....	2	0.8

21. If you answered "no" to the previous question, what is your main reason for choosing not to take an online course?

• too impersonal.....	16	6.7
• quality is not as good as face-to-face courses.....	26	10.8
• computer technology too difficult to learn .....	0	0
• too much writing with online learning.....	1	0.4
• no real benefit for taking an online course .....	11	4.6
• other .....	81	33.8
• missing .....	105	43.8

22. Which of the following web-based professional development methods do you use?

Check all that apply.

• web surfing.....	201	83.8
• electronic newsletters.....	153	63.8
• listserves.....	85	35.4
• news reader software .....	31	12.9
• blogging .....	6	2.5

23. Are you a subscriber to SideBars?

• yes .....	44	18.3
• no.....	190	79.2
• missing .....	7	2.9

24. If you are not a SideBars subscriber, please explain why you have chosen not to subscribe.

• I'm not familiar with SideBars .....	144	60.0
• the content is not of interest to me.....	10	4.2
• I don't have time to read it .....	14	5.8
• I prefer other methods to learn about distributed learning .....	2	0.8
• I don't subscribe, but I access the ezine when new issues are announced on the BCIT intranet.....	17	7.1
• other .....	5	2.1
• missing .....	48	20.0

25. Which of the following statements do you think best describes SideBars?

• I'm not familiar with SideBars .....	148	61.7
• an electronic magazine.....	46	19.2
• an online learning community .....	23	9.6
• a resource database .....	5	2.1
• missing .....	18	7.5

Do you have any comments you would like to add about how professional development could be better supported at BCIT?



To be included in the prize draw, please provide your name and email address or your telephone local.

Thank you for participating in this survey. Please watch the BCIT announcements for a summary of the results. To contact Glenn Millar, call (604) 451-6996 or send an e-mail to [gmillar@bcit.ca](mailto:gmillar@bcit.ca).

### Comments by Respondents to BCIT Professional Development Survey

- increase funding for tuition and LOAs
- PD must be supported from the top level. To many employees feel they cannot take time to participate during the day.
- Encouragement to take courses, and during the day if possible.
- There should be more support for auxiliary staff
- provide time off to attend
- I think that offering free courses to staff is an excellent part of the benefit package.
- I recognize that PD is often driven by an individual's initiative. I know there is support by the administration for PD, they show that by providing for PD days for staff. Having said that, I think management could have a more proactive approach to supporting their current staff by providing longer term staff planning.
- This way departments can foster their junior staff. This way staff can focus their PD time.
- financial incentive for PTS instructors - we get paid the same no matter how much PD we do
- Instructors need more time - the workload is very heavy, and professional achievements often go unacknowledged.
- How about a single resource person/department designated to help with PD -- as a new employee, not sure what is available to me.
- better funding
- Offer additional sessions for technology workshops that easily get filled up.
- Fine as is.
- I feel I am supported VERY well in my PD activities
- Could be more offered online
- allow BCGEU support staff to have PD leave similar to FSA staff (presently we can only get it if an auxiliary can be hired during our absence. Some higher grade jobs require much training to do, and can't be filled by short-term auxiliaries off the street. This prevents us from taking a leave with pay.

- SideBars is a dull read, it also seems to be full of cliquey jargon.
- Active encouragement of research on different approaches to pedagogy would be interesting
- financially support distance courses; make on campus programs less difficult for employees to register and give more financial support in this area with less strings attached
- BCGEU needs additional funds for professional development - it runs out too quickly
- no
- Release time is needed ... we are the intellectual capital of the school ... if we go out-of-date, there goes BCIT's reputation, the ability to attract students and as a final result, our funding.
- I think it is supported exceptionally well within our faculty at least- I could not comment on the others but our faculty seems to put great importance on professional development
- Release time may be available in theory, but it never seems to be practical.
- Needs broader appeal for trades areas and technology courses(other than the dominating programs of business, marketing, broadcast ect... for which the LRU offerings seem to be bent towards)
- More support required for remote areas, up North
- Many of our department's courses need additional online support but and I have learned how to develop this content myself but there is no budget for this so I do it off the side of my desk.
- no
- more hours in the day
- Fee paying students bump BCIT staff if the class is full, and more often than not, we are bumped out at
- the last moment. It would be much better if we could have the course payed for by BCIT if the class is full, to guarantee a seat.
- Management can apply through the PD fund if it is above \$2000.00 - that discourages me to apply for smaller courses

- It's difficult to take time off for some development courses when workload is heavy and unpredictable. Also I have little knowledge about possible funding options.
- Have management more aware of options available for funding when a new employee applies. Have asked and been given the wrong information and have had applications rejected at the last moment because wrong information was given. Also, management (dept head) does not offer to new employees that they may be eligible for time off to do study
- I think BCIT should offer discounts for courses for support staff.
- It is fully supported by all staff and management, it doesn't get any better than that!
- I feel that Professional development is very important to me. Changes take place everyday in the professional word and how would you keep up to date without continued networking and education? I would consider this an essential part of every employee's mandate.
- No one has time to do my job, if I take educational leave. It is also difficult to find people to work here at BCIT, because they make equal or more money in their chosen field.
- No comment
- no
- 100% paid PD leave without limit :=} - seriously, I find BCIT's whole attitude towards PD to be very supportive.
- Additional funds for BCGEU staff. Frustrating for people like me who end up paying for their own courses and supplies, and take the course on their own time and are not being reimbursed in any way
- More short courses - a day or less in length
- The BCGEU Educational fund ran out this year 6 months before fiscal year end...this is a clear indication
- we need more funding for support staff so we can move into mmgt roles as the current mmgt team at bcit prepares to retire
- Overall, I believe professional development is very well supported in the faculty and management groups.
- The Institute could identify, value, and support/encourage Support Staff professional development.

- As a Information Technology Professional, I find the funds available to take courses is insufficient to cover the registration fees. I typically have to go to the US to take Data Warehouse design and Oracle database courses. I usually contribute a portion of my PD funds (note non faculty get significantly less PD Fund \$ than faculty). The result is that I can only get in depth technical training once every 3 years.
- This is not enough to keep up with my job duties.
- more for support staff
- There should be more professional development opportunities geared specifically towards support staff.
- Staff could be given a minimum number of PD hours per year. This isn't a problem for me as I have a great manager, but I have heard of some people getting little or no time to take workshops
- More involvement by LRU in the form of counselling to determine what kind of PD is best for the instructor.
- I would find the ability to participate in research activities very beneficial but for some reason I am finding it difficult to locate research partners or other faculty who are interested in this
- Be totally inclusive, complete closure of all BCIT so all staff may attend all day.
- BCIT has improved by giving auxiliary staff the opportunity to take part time courses
- Re: Ques 18, I haven't used some of these because I'm involved with delivering them - ISW, TWEET
- release time
- Currently the BCGEU PD fund has run out of funds. This should be better managed to last throughout the fiscal year.
- Finding balance between growing and maintaining!
- Doing a great job so far, just have not accessed as much as I want due to family constraints.
- Eliminate the 3 day time limit to register for courses
- Would like to see more on co-teaching. When a course or lab is shared between several instructors.

- Coming to terms with different styles, attitudes, ideas, troubleshooting.
- It's great that BCIT has the All Staff Professional Development Day. Some of us just are just too busy in the day-to-day work, BUT should really think about taking time for PD
- By bolstering funding as with raising tuition fees I am concerned that this will hinder my ability to further pursue my educational goals
- More emphasis on self growth/better leadership training for management and supervisory staff
- We need allocated time to attend
- The Tech Ctr's already doing a super job.
- I think that BCIT needs to encourage faculty to gain higher degrees - and compensate accordingly.
- No, I think they're pretty good about encouraging PD.
- Yes. I have several of them.
- I have been completely supported in my MSN studies, both by peers and through PD funds
- Enjoyed the survey, glad there is an interest in how we (employees) feel.
- More leave for development
- management recognition
- each manager should be soliciting employees to take them
- From a support staff point of view, it is a hassle getting approval from one of three committees
- invest in diagnostic tools for the trades e.g. pred/prev maint
- BCIT has to indicate what nature of PD is required. This would demonstrate a requirement for Professional Development, otherwise "PD simply becomes personal development.
- Offer more specific training to individual departments rather than general subjects.
- I would like to see (TWEET and others) workshops offered at times that I can use them; online for access anytime would be great.

- Team Teaching
- More funding needs to be available.
- Increase the pay differential for obtaining a degree to a much larger value, as do the schools and Universities. \$500 per year is \$7 per week after deductions, not a huge incentive!
- Part time instructors should have pro-rated PD\$ and access to education leave as the full time instructors. In my experience part time instructors tend to be more up to date with leading edge skills, as they are also currently working in the field, and not just sitting in their offices with no outside "real world contact with current industry.
- More quality in house courses
- More funding
- Some shorter PD events in between the all-day one
- Get rid of WebCT.
- more support and recognition from management
- I think there should be better tracking of resources spent and outcomes gained.
- Don't know much about it.
- stream line the funding process to make it MUCH easier to obtain funding
- Would like to see some paper based information in regards to programs offered. Not always the opportunity to go to electronic lists or forget to. Even an e-mail reminder to look at programs offered would be of help to me.
- reserve at least two Wednesday afternoons per month for PD time for all
- more realistic workload.
- Reduce workloads so that faculty have the time and energy to participate in professional development activities
- Not enough advanced level workshops at BCIT. Need to go external to find a more challenging
- experience.
- let LRU facilitate but not run PD activities; offer more time to do PD
- no

- BCIT has been very supportive with regard to my development work, my big problem is the amount of time I have to take courses like computer training, etc.
- more planned time
- I think it is well supported, the problem is, that as an instructor, I have very little time for pursuing PD activities. The trouble involved in obtaining a leave (long-lead time, replacement hiring) is discouraging.
- No.
- Provide tangible outcomes for Support Staff - recognition, certification, something!
- If the workloads weren't so crazy, we would have the time and energy to devote to more professional development.
- not really, compared with many places it's really very good the only comment I might have is more time to get away to PD events.
- I have lots of opportunities supported and encouraged by management and peers
- I think it is very well supported. Having worked in health care for almost 20 years., where there is little to no opportunity for professional development, BCIT is outstanding.
- support staff attendance in BCIT courses (with certainty of seats)
- N/A
- Management support, funding for leave of absence (at least final exams as I'm not entitled to flex
- schedule, which put me in the situation of taking vacation while preparing for an exam/working on a project)



## **APPENDIX B: SUBSCRIBER SURVEY**

### First Subscriber Survey Announcement

From: Glenn Millar/BCIT  
To: SideBarsSurveyGroup  
bcc: Glenn Millar/BCIT@BCITMAIN  
Date: Wednesday, January 07, 2004 03:22PM  
Subject: SideBars Survey

Dear SideBars Subscriber,

I am writing to request your participation in a survey that I am conducting on SideBars.

The survey will be used as part of my thesis on the use of online communities for professional development purposes and will partially fulfill the requirements for the Master of Distance Education (MDE) degree, which I am currently completing at Athabasca University.

The survey will also be used to plan improvements to SideBars and to help provide justification for its continued operation.

The survey includes 28 questions, and I estimate that it will take you about 15 minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept completely confidential, and I will not be able to identify individual respondents unless you choose to enter your name for the prize draw. The winner of the draw will receive a \$50 (Cdn) gift certificate from Amazon.com.

If you need to contact me for any reason, please call (604) 451-6996 or send an email to [gmillar@bcit.ca](mailto:gmillar@bcit.ca). To complete the survey now, please follow this link:

<http://www.bcit.ca/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/irp/sbsurvey.cgi>

Best regards,

Glenn Millar.

## Second Subscriber Survey Announcement

From: Glenn Millar/BCIT  
To: SideBarsSurveyGroup2  
Date: Thursday, January 15, 2004 12:57PM  
Subject: SideBars Survey

Dear SideBars Subscriber,

If you've already completed the SideBars survey, please disregard this note and accept my heart-felt thanks for your participation. Please do not complete the survey a second time.

If you have not yet completed the survey, there is still time to do it now. As I mentioned in my previous note, I am conducting this survey as part of my thesis on the use of online communities for professional development purposes. The survey will also be used to plan improvements to SideBars and to help provide justification for its continued operation. The survey includes 28 questions, and I estimate that it will take you about 15 minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept completely confidential, and I will not be able to identify individual respondents unless you choose to enter your name for the prize draw. The winner of the draw will receive a \$50 (Cdn) gift certificate from Amazon.com.

If you need to contact me for any reason, please call (604) 451-6996 or send an email to [gmillar@bcit.ca](mailto:gmillar@bcit.ca). To complete the survey now, please follow this link:<http://www.bcit.ca/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/irp/sbsurvey.cgi>

Best regards,  
Glenn Millar.

## Survey of Sidebars Subscribers

The following survey is intended for completion by SideBars subscribers to gather information about perceptions related to SideBars' effectiveness as a professional development environment. The information obtained will be used by Glenn Millar, a BCIT employee, as part of his thesis for a Master of Distance Education degree at Athabasca University. It will also be used to improve service to SideBars subscribers. Participation in this survey is entirely optional. Your responses will be kept completely confidential and your identity will not be known to the researcher unless you choose to enter your name for the prize draw.

Unless instructed otherwise, please select only one response to each question and please submit only one copy of the survey.

### Part A: General Information

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
1. Your gender is:		
• Male .....	50	47.6
• Female.....	55	52.4
2. Your age is:		
• 25 or under .....	1	1.0
• 26 to 35 .....	10	9.5
• 36 to 45 .....	27	25.7
• 46 to 55 .....	48	45.7
• 56 and over.....	19	18.1
3. Your occupation is:		
• BCIT Instructor.....	25	23.8
• BCIT manager.....	5	4.8
• BCIT support staff .....	4	3.8
• faculty member or instructor at an educational institution other than BCIT.....	23	21.9
• manager or support staff at an educational institution other than BCIT .....	11	10.5
• corporate trainer .....	6	5.7
• software developer .....	1	1.0
• consultant .....	15	14.3
• other .....	15	14.3

4. What is your geographical location?		
• Canada.....	84	80.0
• U.S.A.....	12	11.4
• Mexico .....	0	0.0
• Europe.....	6	5.7
• Asia .....	1	1.0
• Central and South America.....	0	0.0
• Middle East .....	1	1.0
• Australia/Oceania.....	1	1.0
• Africa .....	0	0.0
• Missing.....	1	1.0
5. What is your highest level of educational attainment?		
• high school or less.....	0	0.0
• some post-secondary education .....	0	0.0
• graduation from a college certificate program.....	0	0.0
• college diploma or associate degree .....	4	3.8
• bachelor's degree.....	31	29.5
• master's degree .....	53	50.5
• doctoral degree.....	10	9.5
• professional designation (doctor, lawyer, accountant etc.).....	5	4.8
• trades designation (plumber, electrician, carpenter etc.) .....	2	1.9
6. Using a rating scale in which "5" means "very important" and "1" means "not important," rate the importance of professional development to you at this point in your career.		
• 1.....	0	0.0
• 2.....	4	3.8
• 3.....	10	9.5
• 4.....	32	30.5
• 5.....	57	54.3
• mean (average).....		4.38
7. What is your primary motivation for participating in professional development?		
• to stay current my field .....	37	35.2
• to progress in my career.....	28	26.7
• to improve my performance in my present job.....	28	26.7
• for enjoyment .....	4	3.8
• to network and meet new people .....	4	3.8
• because management expects it .....	1	1.0
• other .....	3	2.9

8. In addition to SideBars, what other methods of professional development have you used? Check all that apply.

• credit courses .....	58	55.2
• non-credit courses and workshops .....	88	83.8
• national or international conferences .....	71	67.6
• independent study (e.g. journals, web resources, discuss issues with colleagues) .....	91	86.7
• web-based methods (e.g., newsletters, listserves, blogging) .....	86	81.9
• other .....	9	8.6

9. Do you subscribe to or frequent any of the following web resources or blogs? Check all that apply.

• Infobits .....	17	16.2
• Stephen's Web OLDaily .....	23	21.9
• News Scan Daily (Above the Fold) .....	2	1.9
• Elearningpost .....	26	24.8
• Etug .....	12	11.4
• Autoounfocus .....	2	1.9
• Seb's Open Research .....	5	4.8
• Brian Lamb .....	4	3.8
• STLHE-L .....	12	11.4
• Learning Circuits .....	22	21.0

10. How would you rate your computer technology skills?

• low. (It's a chore for me to learn new software or figure out how to navigate new websites.) .....	5	4.8
• medium. (I can usually learn to use new systems without much trouble.) .....	42	40.0
• high. (I feel very comfortable using computers and I learn new systems easily.) .....	57	54.3
• Missing .....	1	1.0

11. Have you ever taken an online course?

• Yes .....	78	74.3
• No .....	27	25.7

#### Part B: SideBars

12. What kind of computer and operating system do you normally use to access SideBars?

• PC with Windows XP .....	75	71.4
• PC with Windows 98 .....	14	13.3
• Macintosh .....	5	4.8
• Other .....	11	10.5

13. Which browser do you use to access SideBars?

• Explorer .....	81	77.1
• Netscape .....	18	17.1
• Mozilla .....	2	1.9
• Opera.....	0	0.0
• AOL .....	0	0.0
• Other .....	2	1.9
• Missing.....	2	1.9

14. Which email program do you use to receive editions of SideBars?

• Outlook Express.....	33	31.4
• Lotus Notes .....	35	33.3
• AOL .....	0	0.0
• Browser software (Explorer, Netscape, etc.) .....	12	11.4
• Other .....	25	23.8

15. When you receive the SideBars ezine, what do you usually do?

• delete it without reading it .....	0	0.0
• open it and delete it after scanning the summaries .....	22	21.0
• read at least one of the articles.....	34	32.4
• read two or more of the articles .....	24	22.9
• read most of the articles .....	20	19.0
• read all of the articles.....	4	3.8
• Missing.....	1	1.0

16. Please rank the following features of SideBars in order of most useful (4) to least useful (1).

• BCIT in-house articles (inside out)	1 <sup>st</sup> Rank	32.4%	mean = 2.74
• web resources (outside in)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Rank	31.4%	mean = 2.93
• resources and freebies (on the side)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Rank	41.9%	mean = 2.43
• discussion board (take sides)	4 <sup>th</sup> Rank	51.4%	mean = 1.91

17. How often do you visit the SideBars website and archive?

• Never.....	24	22.9
• once or twice a year .....	29	27.6
• 3 to 12 times a year .....	37	35.2
• once or twice a month.....	14	13.3
• several times a month.....	1	1.0

18. How many times have you found a resource or an article in SideBars that helped you in your professional practice?		
• Never.....	18	17.1
• Once .....	21	20.0
• several times .....	63	60.0
• many times .....	3	2.9
19. Have you used the SideBars bulletin board?		
• Yes .....	9	8.6
• No.....	96	91.4
20. If you answered "no" to the previous question, what was your reason for choosing not to use the SideBars bulletin board?		
• technical difficulties.....	5	4.8
• reluctance to make views public in a text-based forum.....	6	5.7
• lack of confidence in writing ability .....	3	2.9
• no perceived benefit.....	20	19.0
• was not aware of it .....	35	33.3
• other .....	29	27.5
• Missing.....	7	6.7
21. Rate how important or desirable is it for you to interact with other SideBars subscribers using a scale in which "5" means "very important" and "1" means "not important."		
• 1.....	46	43.8
• 2.....	26	24.8
• 3.....	21	20.0
• 4.....	9	8.6
• 5.....	2	1.9
• Missing.....	1	1.0
• mean (average).....		1.99
22. What do you feel would be the best method of allowing SideBars subscribers to communicate with each other?		
• give all SideBars subscribers posting rights to the ezine distribution list (in effect, turning it into a listserv).....	4	3.8
• provide a separate listserv so that subscribers can choose to receive the ezine alone or the ezine and the listserv .....	32	30.5
• provide an improved asynchronous bulletin board that can be accessed by all subscribers .....	32	30.5
• combine option 1 and 3 above .....	8	7.6
• combine option 2 and 3 above .....	17	16.2
• other .....	8	7.6
• Missing.....	4	3.8

23. The SideBars editors attempt to balance the content of the ezine between the two main themes of pedagogy and educational technology. Rate where you feel the balance should be using a scale in which pedagogy is "1" and educational technology is "5."

• 1.....	5	4.8
• 2.....	21	20.0
• 3.....	58	55.2
• 4.....	18	17.2
• 5.....	3	2.9
• Mean .....		2.93

24. Do you feel SideBars should stick to its current focus on online learning or should it offer some content about pedagogy in general.

• stick to current focus.....	75	71.5
• offer more general content.....	29	27.6

25. What was your prime motivation for subscribing to SideBars?

• to learn about online and distributed learning .....	88	83.8
• to meet people online .....	0	0.0
• to learn more about BCIT .....	5	4.8
• to promote a product or service .....	0	0.0
• other .....	12	11.4

26. Rate the value of SideBars to you in achieving your professional development goals where "5" means "very valuable" and "1" means "not valuable."

• 1.....	10	9.5
• 2.....	23	21.9
• 3.....	39	37.1
• 4.....	30	28.6
• 5.....	3	2.9
• Mean .....		2.93

27. Which of the following statements do you think best describes SideBars?

• an electronic magazine.....	64	61.0
• an online learning community .....	26	24.8
• a resource database .....	14	13.3
• Missing.....	1	1.0

28. What changes would you suggest to increase the value of SideBars to you?

To be included in the prize draw (\$50 CDN gift certificate from Amazon.Com), please provide your name, email address and your home city and country.

Thank you for your input. The results of this survey will be published in an upcoming issue of SideBars. If you need to contact Glenn Millar for any reason, call (604) 451-6996 or send an email to gmillar@bcit.ca.



Comments From External Subscribers  
Re: Question 18

- provides a forum for learning the latest news
- faculty consultation
- interesting idea communicated to a college
- It provided me with ideas that I shared with my colleagues.
- provided links to relevant articles/websites
- I'm conducting research in my online Master's programs.. I've been interested in several articles, references that I've found on Sidebars
- Keeps me updated
- gives good insight
- n/a
- Assisted in research & literature reviews; forwarded articles to colleagues
- Useful links to other resources
- used the information to provide perspective to requests from colleagues
- stimulates thinking, introduces new concepts
- Both the Learning Objects issue and the recent CMS issue had some great references in them
- You never know what's going to come in handy.
- Just useful to be able to put my job experience into perspective ie interesting to see what is going on elsewhere.
- used information for workshops conducted for faculty
- I read and share resources from Sidebars editions regularly, and find them very useful.
- general knowledge that I hadn't heard previously

- online facilitation articles
- Directed me towards supportive information otherwise unattainable
- improving development of on-line courses
- The issue on Gaming was of special interest and value, introducing me to new perspectives.
- Led me to a Website that was helpful with teaching patients & students
- share with others
- Great feature on constructivist practices last year - really handy to see how practitioners are turning theory into practice.

Comments from Internal Subscribers  
Re: Question 18

- has the pulse of the online distance ed community
- it has helped me to contextualize my ideas and practise inside of a larger understanding
- information on elearning, constructivist learning used for consulting project
- the articles were timely
- I have accessed info. from other countries re online learning development and characteristics
- Provided insight into emerging technologies or practices
- has led me to consider idea of web-based communities in my distance tutoring. I try and make my tutoring more of a community, a place for discussion of course material than just a way for students to ask ?'s about the assignments.
- Quoted some of the people in assignments, recommended the resource to colleagues
- Knowing what others are doing and how it might improve my practice. Resources for educational pursuits.
- Lets me know who is doing innovative things at BCIT, so I know who the players are in elearning at BCIT
- referenced article in SideBars in a paper on usability and elearning

## Suggestions for Improvements by SideBars Subscribers

### 1. More succinct reader-friendly presentation

- the more succinct or shorter, the better
- A more reader-friendly format (e.g., with graphics)
- (more free time to be able to read it more thoroughly!!).. I feel I haven't been able to give SideBars the time it deserves.. There are lots of interesting things that I would like to follow up on, but given my time constraints (children, other studies) I can only really follow up/read more if it is at least 90% relevant. I like the format as it is. However, if I were to spend more time with it, I might be able to make better suggestions. So.. none really at this time. Good luck with your studies!
- None - only wish I had more time to digest material.
- Can't think of any, except give me more time to use it fully!
- Try to make it a bit shorter, perhaps with links to more extensive coverage of individual topics as an option.
- short stories of how BCIT faculty used resource info in their BCIT practice
- Main problem is lack of time to read all the material available including SideBars
- It is mostly a question of time - having the time to spend on it. Certain times of the year - beginnings and endings of semesters - are tough in terms of having sufficient time.
- Minor web design suggestion: Change the interface on the current issue so the home page is simply a TOC. As well, add a "Search function."

### 2. More resources on pedagogy

- SideBars had more value to me when I felt that there was a chance my organization would move towards online learning. They're not, and my interest level in edtech is dropping. I would value the pedagogy aspect now more than before.

- discussions on current pedagogical trends, issues etc. I would prefer a factual account based on what those known in the field believe to be true as opposed to public comment on a topic on an open bulletin board. I see the latter as useful only as an add-on to promote thinking from both sides of the fence.
- A Little more on Pedagogy
- I strongly believe that it should be more about pedagogy in general as that's where the majority of us live. It would be of interest to more folks and better serve as a tool to move folks toward enhanced teaching without being intimidated by the really big projects.
- Decrease the focus on BCIT and increase on the topic of learning online
- Adapt content to embrace those relatively new to educational technology to emphasize the common elements of good educational practice whether it be in the classroom or online.

### 3. More resources on educational technology

- some "how to advice about particularly useful software and techniques"
- more info on synchronous delivery

### 4. Improve communication/work toward online community

- Attach a blog to SideBars
- asynchronous bulletin board with threading
- Sidebars represents an effort to diffuse innovative ideas through our BCIT community. SideBars is part of the larger BCIT context. If the BCIT culture was more toward innovation, and incentives to promote innovation, then SideBars will be more valuable. The crucial issue is how to build a culture. The discussion board could be a focal point for building this community. Have in-person get togethers and networking sessions would help also.
- to work toward an online learning community.
- Building a program to keep us connected week by week
- Increase the marketing of the magazine. It would be great to get a wider audience input, particularly in the discussion boards.

### 5. No opinion/o.k. as is

- It is an alerting service for me. If our library should embrace online synchronous reference services then sidebars will have more import for me. At this point can't make any useful suggestions for change.
- I think its quite all right as it is
- no opinion at this time
- none at the moment
- I think SideBars is top notch and refer lots of folks to it. I remember when I saw the first issue, I loved the 'inside out' and 'outside in' idea, and think it is a great way to provide a resource of interest both to BCIT faculty and to a general web readership. I would place it right alongside CIT Infobits as one of the best monthly/quarterly ed tech newsletters I get, and I get A LOT. I don't think I would change a thing, other than to improve the ways in which your readership can contribute comments and interacts amongst themselves - a few times I have tried to get into the threaded discussion board that was pointed to and have been foiled each time. But content-wise I think it is great. Keep up the great work!
- I'm not aware of a Web site or anything for SideBars. I would bookmark the site and turn to it as an archive/resource if I knew.
- None - don't use it much.
- fine as is
- no opinion
- not sure
- I would not object to a more active e-mail promotion of Sidebars, as a reminder of new content and its implications. My main suggestion, however, is to continue producing quality material for on-line instructors and trainers. Much of my teaching and learning is web-based and I regard SideBars as a valuable resource.
- I have just discovered this resource so I cannot comment at this time.

### 6. Miscellaneous

- Drop-in celebrity editorials (Bill Gates, Sir Berners-Lee)

- More healthcare/professional development information.
- Make it more frequent
- Include case study reviews of course/program developments for online delivery; what decisions were taken, when and why, and what the outcomes were. Let people learn by seeing what others have done.
- More coverage of successful developments in distance learning on a corporate level as in supporting a learning strategy as a culture base in an organization.

## APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP

### Focus Group Announcement

From: Glenn Millar/BCIT  
To: (Names Omitted)  
bcc: Glenn Millar/BCIT  
Date: Thursday, December 11, 2003 03:53PM  
Subject: SideBars Focus Group

Hello Everyone,

Thanks very much for accepting my invitation to attend the SideBars Focus Group. I know how busy everyone is, especially at this time of the year, and I appreciate your taking some time to talk to about SideBars.

As I mentioned to most of you on the phone, the session will serve two purposes: First, it will provide valuable input to Dave and I as we plan improvements to SideBars, and second, it will form part of the data set for my thesis research in the MDE program at Athabasca University. In the latter context, I'd like to assure everyone that any summary of the session will not identify individual participants or attribute any comments made during the session.

I will send a meeting invitation with a short agenda separately so that you can add it your calendar. Thanks again!

Cheers, Glenn.

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SideBars  
the distributed learning e-zine  
<http://online.bcit.ca/sidebars/index.htm>



### SideBars Focus Group – Summary of Participant Comments.

The focus group session took place December 16th, 2003 in the Learning Resources Unit at BCIT. A total of 7 participants attended. Glenn Millar (the principal researcher) and Dave Smulders, two of the three SideBars editors, facilitated the session. The participant group included two BCIT managers, one support staff person and four instructors from the programs of nursing, environmental engineering, electrical-electronics and part-time studies (computer systems). The participant group included two men and five women and all but one were subscribers to SideBars. Of the six subscribers, three had visited the online discussion board at least once. Several of the participants were quite experienced with online learning and had recently completed, or nearly completed, graduate studies online.

Following a 15-minute Power Point presentation that described the operation and goals of SideBars, the participants were asked to address two main questions:

1. How well suited is the SideBars model for professional development to the culture of BCIT?
2. How could SideBars be improved to better address professional development at BCIT?

#### Major discussion threads and comments:

1. The participants were generally favourable towards SideBars and felt it was a good vehicle for professional development at BCIT. However, one participant (the non-subscriber) expressed misgivings that SideBars might be used to promote the cause of online learning, which would not be welcomed by all instructors.
  - “SideBars is a good vehicle for getting people informed and introducing them to new ideas. To me, it’s the way of the future.”
  - “It’s a good model for part-time instructors because we’re so isolated.”
  - “It’s a good way to welcome people into new technologies.”
  - “There’s an assumption that distributed learning is the be all and end all and that’s not necessarily the feeling that instructors have.”
2. Several participants, who had experienced online discussion as graduate students in formal course environments, felt that this aspect of SideBars had the potential for a rich learning experience in a professional development context at BCIT. The use of SideBars as a forum for sharing best practices was thought to offer particular promise. However, they were unsure whether the experience would be the same when participation was voluntary.

3. Some participants felt the SideBars model would be effective for teaching instructors about distributed learning because it used distributed learning as a delivery method.
  - “Using distributed learning is a good way to educate people about distributed learning.”
  - “Putting yourself in the role of a student in an online environment is a valuable learning experience.”
4. Some participants felt SideBars is an especially good model for part-time instructors because they have few opportunities to discuss common problems with other part-time instructors or with day school staff and instructors. Few part-time instructors know about SideBars, however, and it was suggested that the editors should get program assistants to help get the word out. At least one participant took an opposing view, however, and suggested that using a distributed approach might exclude those that are not already involved somehow.
  - “It’s a good model for part-time instructors because we’re so isolated.”
5. While SideBars would appear to be a good model for part-time instructors, few of them seem to know about it. One suggestion for getting the word out to part-time instructors was to enlist the aid of the program assistants who deal with part-time instructors on a regular basis.
6. One participant thought SideBars offered a “safe” way for people to get involved with online and distributed learning. Another participant noted that a colleague who was new to the online field had found SideBars helpful and had recommended it to other staff.
  - “It’s a good vehicle for people to try something new.”
7. One participant, who is using a similar discussion board to disseminate information at BCIT, said it was difficult to get people to post comments. A possible reason for this is the reluctance of people to publish potentially contentious comments where they can be accessed by others, including management.
  - “It (bulletin board) has become more of an information tool with me posting stuff and other people reading it. Somehow, we have to get people over their fear of posting.”
8. It was suggested that we allow anonymous posting to encourage more participation. However, several participants were strongly opposed to this idea because of the potential abuses (e.g. flaming, and the inability of moderators to remove offenders).
9. One participant mentioned a service provided by BCIT’s Computer Resources Department called “Share-in Share-out” which is similar in theory to the SideBars model but much simpler and perhaps more universally used.

10. One participant thought the focus of SideBars should be expanded to include topics about basic pedagogy and not concentrate exclusively on distributed and online learning.
  - “You should cover just the basic stuff. They (instructors) don’t know what a learning outcome is let alone distributed learning.”
11. Another participant felt that an effective alternative strategy would be to change hiring practices at BCIT to ensure instructors come to the Institute with distributed and online learning skills.
12. One of the three participants who had used the SideBars bulletin board complained that poor navigation made it difficult and frustrating to use and thought that some subscribers might be discouraged from using it as a result.

### APPENDIX D: BULLETIN BOARD

Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
3	001	09/05 09:14 AM	a level of comfort.	Ugly depends on perspective	B. Take Sides	I think your analogy is a good one Patrick. We seem to be able to get that we should buy what suits us when we're buying a product we're familiar with, but when it's something more complex like an LMS, we tend to look around to see what everyone else is using. I guess we want that level of comfort that comes with being part of the crowd. However, I agree with you. We'd be better served by focusing on our particular needs. Cheers, Glenn.
7	001	10/24 02:15 PM	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion		B. Take Sides	Welcome to the inaugural SideBars panel discussion. First, I'd like to introduce the panellists and thank them for participating. 008 Alexander is vice president and general manager of Toombs KWA, Vancouver. She has extensive experience in career, cross-cultural and personal counselling, human resource program management and course design, delivery and evaluation. She holds a B.A and M.A. from UBC and a graduate certificate from Royal Roads University in executive coaching. Eleanor Calder is a new instructor at BCIT who started teaching the nursing program last year after many years of experience in the health care field. She has been using online discussion to teach a course that was previously offered as a paper-based distance course and is very enthusiastic about the results... "it works!" Stephen Hollander teaches part-time in BCIT's Bachelor of Technology in Forensic Science program and has helped to design and develop several online courses in forensic accounting. He has used asynchronous discussion in his courses in interesting and innovative ways. Barb Mitchell is an Instructional Development Consultant working in BCIT's Learning Resources Unit (aka LRU) who works with faculty to design online and hybrid courses. A lengthy illness has given her a unique vantage point in that she does all of her coaching by e-mail and telephone. She has learned much about using the medium to build and sustain positive working relationships with people, some of whom she never met. Randy Singer is the coordinator of the part-time marketing management program at BCIT, and has guided the transition of many of the courses in his program from "face-to-face" to online delivery. Randy is a graduate of Athabasca University's M.B.A. program, which is delivered almost entirely online. And now to the discussion...I've been trying to think of a compelling way to kick this off. To me, the start of a discussion is always a key moment. If you can engage people right at the beginning, the discussion stands a much better chance of picking up and sustaining momentum. Any thoughts on that?

Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
14	001	11/05 09:25 AM	Trust.	Use live bait.	B. Take Sides	Hi Eleanor, I think that word "trust" is very important in online discussion. It takes some courage to put your thoughts up in black and white for all the world to see. Participants have to have a level of comfort that they won't be attacked or made to look foolish. I think the moderator can go a long way in establishing the tone of the conference by modelling good online etiquette. Cheers, Glenn.
15	001	10/28 09:02 AM	A discussion I learned a lot from		B. Take Sides	I remember one discussion in particular that I participated in as a student that taught me a lot about how to moderate an online discussion. Or rather, how NOT to moderate a discussion. The style of the moderator was to weigh in at the beginning with quite a long introduction and a series of questions. The students tended to respond with a single long posting in which they dutifully answered the questions. There was very little back and forth exchange between students or with the moderator. These so-called "discussions" might just as well have been extra assignments that we filed to a common directory. How you frame the discussion at the start seems like a very tricky business to me. You want to give enough information so that people have a clue about what they're supposed to talk about, but not so much that you constrain the conversation. In some of the discussions that I've facilitated, I've tried using short narratives, cartoons or photographs as starters. I know Stephen has also done some interesting things with cases in some of his courses. Cheers, Glenn.
17	001	10/29 08:41 AM	length of discussion.	Limits to the length of discussion.	B. Take Sides	I've found that longer more involved posts tend to fetch longer but fewer replies. Shorter posts seem to encourage shorter replies and perhaps more back and forth discussion. Cheers, Glenn.

Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
19	001	10/31 04:47 PM	To be or not to be.... Yes, but....	B. Take Sides		You're right of course, Randy. What's important is the depth of reflection that goes along with the statement that appears on the transcript. Usually, in a transcript, the short comments are throw away statements like "I agree" or "Yes, that's happened to me too." They really don't take much thought or effort. They're sort of like a Greek Chorus adding ambiance but no real substance. What I was trying to get at was those conferences where everyone files a single long post (perhaps to ensure they get their marks for the exercise) but they don't reply or comment on what other people have said. Each student gets value from the exercise because they have to reflect in order to write their post. However, they could get so much more by interacting with the other participants and re-shaping some their ideas by butting them up against someone else's. The real challenge for facilitator's, I think, is to design discussions that encourage participants to do this and to provide moderation in moderation so that the conversation flows (i.e., camp fire on a rainy day). Cheers, Glenn.
26	001	10/28 01:53 PM	A Quest for Fire....		B. Take Sides:	Hi Randy, Good point about the nurturing and sustaining. To me it's a bit like trying to get your camp fire going on a rainy day. You want to add enough fuel for it to burn, but not so much that you smother it. Do you have a rule of thumb that you use about when to jump into a discussion and when to keep quiet? Cheers, Glenn
31	001	11/06 04:50 PM	Pat Fahy and the 13 points	Fanning the Fires.	B. Take Sides:	Hi 008, Interesting post! I'm glad you were able to stop by. Pat Fahy at Athabasca is doing some interesting research around this issue of creating and sustaining trust. Asynchronous discussion is a key part of the graduate program there and they've done quite a bit of research on it. One of the things they found is that there are certain supportive behaviours that tend to keep participants engaged in the conversation. There are 13 of them... 1: Horizontal questions 2: Referential statements 4: Scaffolding and engaging comments 3. Acknowledgements 4. Agreements 5. Apologies 6. Closings 7. Emoticons 8. Humour 9. Invitations 10. Rhetorical questions 11. Salutations 12. Signatures 13. Thanks. As you mentioned in your posting, "how" you say it can be just as important as "what" you say. Cheers, Glenn. P.S. Thanks again to you and Susan for the lead article in SideBars this issue.
37	001	10/30 11:02 PM	Three old men.	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides:	Three old men were walking along the road on a blustery day. "It sure is windy today," the first man said. "No it isn't," the second man replied. "It's Thursday today." "Me too!" said the third man. "Let's go to the bar!" In the context of online discussion, what does this story remind you of?

Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
44	001	10/30 11:18 PM	Specific Outcomes or a Chance to Reflect.	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides	What's the most important objective with online discussion? Should we try to direct students toward specific learning outcomes, or is it enough simply to have them reflect on their own learning?
47	001	10/30 11:22 PM	to mark or not to mark.	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides	Do you give credit to students for participation in online discussions? Why or why not? What effect do you think giving credit has on the discussion, if any?
53	001	11/05 09:35 AM	Barb Mitchell	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides	Hello Everyone, I just wanted to let you know that Barb Mitchell won't be joining us as a panelist due to a death in her family. I'm sure everyone will join me in wishing Barb well at this time of loss. Glenn.
54	001	11/11 04:34 PM	Closing Remarks.	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides	Hello Everyone, The discussion topic "officially" closed yesterday, October 10th. However, new visitors are welcome to carry on with it if they would like. I won't attempt to summarize the points that have been made. I think the discussion stands pretty well on its own.. I would, however, like to thank the panelists for their excellent contributions! Cheers, Glenn.
56	001	09/17 10:22 AM	Java Applet.	logging in.	F. The SideBars Suggestion Box.	Hi Shan, Patrick Muldoon seems to have had this problem too. He was able to log-in from home but not from work. I'll see if Peter Simon in CR can help us with this problem. Cheers. Glenn.
57	001	09/23 08:53 AM	Problem with non-XP operating system.	logging in.	F. The SideBars Suggestion Box.	Hello Shan, I sent an email out about the problem with the SideBars bulletin board, but I'll place a reply here too in case people missed it. The bulletin board is currently only accessible from a browser to users with a version of Windows XP installed. However, BCIT people can also access it from Lotus Notes by placing a SideBars icon on their desktop. You can add the Sidebars icon to your notes workspace by clicking here. You can also add the icon using the following procedure: From Lotus Notes: 1. Click on File, Database, Open2. Change the Server to Notesmail3. Scroll down to the Discuss folder and double-click on it. 4. Scroll down to Sidebars and double-click on it. That will open Sidebars and create an icon for it on the Notes workspace. Cheers, Glenn.

Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
59	001	11/24 09:55 AM	Little Arrows.	Suggestion.	G. Tips and Troubles. How to use the bulletin board	Hi Stephen, You should have some up and down arrows at the top of your screen that you can use to jump the next message up or the next message down in the thread. There's also arrows for jumping to the top or bottom and going to the next unread message. This is a good question, and if you don't mind, I'll move it to the "Tips and Troubles" section in a few days when I figure you've seen it. Cheers, Glenn.
60	001	11/24 10:02 AM	More on the little arrows.	Little Arrows	G. Tips and Troubles. How to use the bulletin board	Hi Colleen. It appears the little arrows are only available when you access the bulletin board from Lotus Notes. In the browser version, they're not there. However, the Lotus Notes version doesn't have expand all so I think we're meant to operate as you suggest.... programmers have all the power. :-) Cheers, Glenn.
62	001	09/24 02:12 PM	SideBars Research Project.		H. Research Project	Hello Everyone, I would just like to remind all of you that I will be conducting research on SideBars over the next few months. This bulletin board, for example, will be subject to observation from September 1st, 2003 to November 28th, 2003. Any activity you perform on the bulletin board, such as posting or reading messages, during those dates may be used as part of the data set. While I will not save or publish information on the activity of individual users, I will be using the data to compile summaries showing overall user activity. If you have any questions or comments concerning the research, this would be a good place to post them. Cheers, Glenn.
2	002	09/04 05:00 PM	Ugly depends on perspective	September 2003: Learning Management Systems--the good, the bad and the ugly	B. Take Sides	I think that the argument is very similar to which brand of new car should I buy. All cars perform the same basic essential function, some do it frugally, others even have the kitchen sink included. The challenge is to match the actual requirements with the vehicle characteristics (and then sort out all those that meet the requirements based on non-essential esthetics). But even then, what may appear to some as a poor choice makes sense to others (i.e. driving a big pick-up to work all year to be able to take it camping for 2 weeks in the summer). In defense of WebCT, it mostly works. But it has also had me frustrated at times to the point I found other solutions. Other LM systems that I have had experience with also work (Blackboard and the RRU system). For me the defining critical characteristic of each system has been it's user friendliness. I remember ISIS, PROFS and early Banner all to well. Patrick Muldoon, E&E



Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
4	003	10/10 08:48 AM	Learning Management	September 2003: Learning Management Systems-- the good, the bad and the ugly	B. Take Sides	The desire to be motivated to learn...develop a catch that is interesting and easy to use.
10	003	10/28 02:19 PM	Seed Question	Discussions-- Starting Them and Keeping Them Going	B. Take Sides	I think that this is another key element, the bridge-in, the seed, the catalyst is different for everyone. You have to catch everyone with on cast, what is the best bait?
13	003	11/05 09:13 AM	Use live bait.	Choose Your Bait to Get the Fish You Want.	B. Take Sides	Using actual experiences or examples is a catalyst for starting discussion. It helps understand a person's values and what is important to them. Helps develop trust which is essential in sharing what is in people's heads and hearts. Looking for lively bait to start the debate! Eleanor
16	003	10/28 02:23 PM	Limits to the length of discussion.	A discussion I learned a lot from.	B. Take Sides	Also have found that people stop reading after a few sentences. I limited my first discussion to 30 words, what experience have you had with this kind of approach?
21	003	11/05 09:18 AM	How long is the line.	I Agree.	B. Take Sides	What is your live experience with the length of the post, what is ideal attention holding line, is there evidence, research done to prove this? Eleanor
24	003	11/05 03:34 PM	Bridge.	Short responses.	B. Take Sides	Another lesson in short connections between assessing what is already known to what new needs to be learned. This might be a key to building a safe place to discuss. asking people to share what they know, is a sustainable bridge. Eleanor
33	003	11/05 09:25 AM	The goal of the dialogue- Beyond starting the fire.	I'm here and "all fired up"	B. Take Sides	Welcome New Spark.. A goal can determine how meaningful the discussion will be. The steps to gets to achieve the goal will have to be clearly planned. Eg Learning and enjoying the fire, and reflecting on what you are learning about the experience of warmth, color, goes beyond supplying the fuel. Perhaps that is the reason that online discussion can be engaging and take time to plan and to be present . Eleanor
34	003	10/28 02:06 PM	Critical Moment (s).	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides:	You mentioned a few key elements to the initial engaging discussion, Right - Giving people leeway for life to happen, and try to capitalize of these learning moments, giving people the Right to engage in their beginning means they have to know ahead of time! Beginning - Ideally the first contact requires an acknowledgement of some kind. Plan- I found my best online discussions have a detailed plan which includes a evaluation. Sustain - The online world has a short time span for involvement, people need to know how many hours will be required for this span of life with the online world.

Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
36	003	10/30 10:38 AM		Short and Sweet.	B. Take Sides:	Another key element, KISS, Keep it short and simple. Eleanor
38	003	10/31 08:07 AM	Perspectives depend on life (experiences and views).	Three old men	B. Take Sides	This story reminds me to have my lesson plan, or directions to the learners online REVIEWED by a few people instead of expecting , or assume that I will be understood, we all have different ways of learning and teaching! A learner....Eleanor Calder.
42	003	11/05 09:37 AM	Back to perspectives.		B. Take Sides:	Hi Stephen, You have provided another example that as Instructors we need to have a bag of tricks, a box of tools available for the multitude of learners who will all be hooked to learn by different approaches. Eleanor
43	003	11/05 09:33 AM	Metaphors can be a catalyst.	An Important Thing....	B. Take Sides	This discussion has used humor..the joke, the metaphors of fire and fishing provide a lighter perspective that can be picked up and played with by everyone...Maybe another purpose for online discussion...make learning as easy as playing. Too bad so many of us have forgot how to play, and this is why we are enjoying the online discussions! Eleanor
45	003	10/31 08:14 AM	Learning Outcomes-Proof in the Pudding.	Specific Outcomes or a Chance to Reflect.	B. Take Sides	I think if we want online learning to be a credible tool or approach, learning outcomes have to be achieved. I think online learning promotes reflection, and the next step is to use the reflection to engage the learners to meet outcomes. Having completed the Provincial Instructor Diploma Program in May, focusing my project on Online Learning, and measuring the outcomes online, I have tasted the proof. (The proof is in the pudding, an actual online discussion with learners during the month of October with achieved learning outcomes Sharing some of the Wonderful tasting Pudding! Eleanor
48	003	10/31 08:33 AM	Marking or not.	to mark or not to mark..	B. Take Sides	If you want to achieve outcomes a mark will have to be assigned. Is it the interaction with others? Is it the reflection on the question? Is it the question? Is it the answer? How does learning occur to get to the outcome? Thus we mark either some or all of the process and progress of getting to outcome! Providing a first opinion, and now waiting to see what other opinions will influence me! Sound familiar. Eleanor.

Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
5	004	10/23 01:42 PM	User Interfaces	September 2003: Learning Management Systems-- the good, the bad and the ugly	B. Take Sides	I agree with Patrick's point that "user friendliness" is important both for the student and for the instructor. From the standpoint of one who works with instructor's to design their online courses at BCIT, I am struck by the number of technical steps required to accomplish any task in WebCT. Having to work through the unfriendly technical design of WebCT software detracts from the most important issue which is to create a stimulating and effective learning environment. The software must be as intuitive (and background) as possible so we can employ our creativity in designing rich and worthwhile courses. I admit WebCT has a number of powerful and integrated features; it's just that there is a steep learning curve involved to take best advantage of them. Others may have a comment on this particular point.
1	005	10/27 04:40 PM	Additional Disclaimer	Rules of Conduct on the SideBars Bulletin Board	A. The Sider House Rules: Disclaimer and Rules of Conduct	IMPORTANT: This website is intended for the use of participants in the in the Sidebars forum named in the banner heading and may contain information that is confidential, privileged, or unsuitable for overly sensitive persons with low self-esteem, no sense of humor, or irrational political beliefs. If you are not part of the intended audience, any dissemination, distribution or copying of the contents of this site, or any part thereof, is not authorized (either explicitly or implicitly) and constitutes an irritating social <i>faux pas</i> . Unless the word <i>absquatulation</i> has been used in its correct context somewhere other than in this warning, it does not have any legal or grammatical use and may be ignored. No animals were harmed in the creation of this site, although that kelpie next door is living on borrowed time, let me tell you. Those of you with an overwhelming fear of the unknown will be gratified to learn that there is no hidden message revealed by reading this warning backwards, so just ignore that Alert Notice from your browser. Sure, you can TRUST the Government. Ask any Native American. The contents of this website do not constitute legal advice. Consult your lawyer before acting, or refraining to act, on the basis of information appearing herein, unless you are one of those people who believe everything they read on the Internet, in which case feel free to take it as unalloyed truth, and make sure that you spell my name correctly in your will.
6	005	10/28 11:41 AM	A Real Head-banger	September 2003: Learning Management Systems-- the good, the bad and the ugly	B. Take Sides	I agree regarding the unfriendliness of WebCT. The fact that an aftermarket product (viz Respondus(tm)) has been developed to serve as a convenient alternative to working with WebCT's quiz tool tells me that something is not right. I remember the story of a software tester who told the engineering group that their product was counterintuitive in application, the in-context help wasn't helpful, and the manual was a mess. When the marketing guy asked what should be done, the software engineers said, "Ship it and hope someone writes a Dummiesbook about it."

Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
9	005	10/27 12:36 PM	Discussions-- Starting Them and Keeping Them Going.		B. Take Sides	The trick is to phrase the "seed" question in a way that precludes a "keener" student from submitting a comprehensive answer that essentially leaves others with nothing to say except "amen." The question that I ask myself when working on a seed question is, "would this make a good question for a quiz or an assignment?" If the answer is "yes," then it is probably not a good seed question for a discussion group. One problem that I have is keeping participation going. This is a bit of an intermittent thing. In my Forensic Accounting courses, I have had terms where students leapt right in, and I only participated for the purpose of throwing in the odd curveball, or to resolve an issue that depended on knowledge that I had and they didn't. In other terms, using the same seed questions, the students sat on their hands, despite any efforts on my part to get them to participate. The only factor that seems to be associated with participation/non-participation is class size: the larger the group, the better the participation. Anyone else have any similar experiences?
11	005	10/29 09:52 AM	Baiting the Hook.	Seed Question.	B. Take Sides	A question that will cause controversy is sometimes good. In my Forensic Accounting 2 course, for instance, I once gave a quotation from the typical audit engagement letter, which essentially disclaims any responsibility for the auditor to detect fraud, and asked what we were paying auditors for anyway. Since about half of the students were CA's or CGA's, this stirred things up a bit.
35	005	10/29 09:54 AM	Short and Sweet.	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides:	I agree--it's like emails--after more than a few lines, people tune out. If more verbage is required, I attach a Word document or post a file
41	005	11/04 04:19 PM	An Important Thing....		B. Take Sides	I often am able to use anecdotes and illustrations to get people thinking. On my course homepage (Forensic Accounting 2, FSCT 8460) is, amongst the other icons, a link to <a href="http://www.dilbert.com">www.dilbert.com</a> , which often has pertinent matter. (Note: Original note included two dilbert cartoons).
50	005	10/31 03:10 PM	Option E.:	Marking or not.	B. Take Sides	I would suggest that it is all of the above. To some extent, it goes back to the phrasing of the original question. The "seed" question should be one that allows for ongoing discussion, rather than setting things up for one student to post a comprehensive answer and the remaining ones struggling to rephrase parts of it for the purpose of "participating."

Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
52	005	10/31 03:07 PM	Discussion Objective: Application.	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides	I often use discussions to give students an opportunity to apply what they have learned to a given set of facts. Thus, for example, after having learned the mechanics of various types of procurement fraud, as well as the means for preventing and detecting them, the discussion starts with a case description. The students may be asked to analyze the situation and arrive at an audit plan, or they may be asked how, in the circumstances, they would distinguish bad management from fraud. In another case, we examine a number of management practices and debate whether they are ethical, unethical, or fraudulent.
58	005	11/24 09:25 AM	Suggestion.		G. Tips and Troubles. How to use the bulletin board.	Perhaps it is my lack of sophistication, but, when moving through a discussion thread, I do not seem to be able to go directly from a messages to its responses. Is there some way of avoiding having to go back to the top of the tree?
8	006	10/27 09:04 AM		November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides	Hi everyone... I submit that sustaining online discussion is separate from--and as equally important as--getting an online discussion started. It is not enough to launch a discussion with a stimulating question or statement. For example, in a recent online discussion that featured a great 'starter', the first response was a thorough reply posted by a student who had reviewed and synthesized all the current literature, which essentially shut down discussion by the rest of the group members who found it difficult to add anything new. Unless the purpose of the discussion is to 'roam freely and see where the dialogue takes us', in addition to getting the discussion started, in a learning environment effective nurturing is needed to guide and sustain a dialogue that achieves the objectives of the exercise. Comments? Randy
12	006	10/31 02:05 PM	Choose Your Bait to Get the Fish You Want	Baiting the Hook.	B. Take Sides	Using the controversial seed question/statement prompts learners to 'take sides', which can lead to a heated as well as lively discussion. I've also seen a starter used that asks the learner to post an illustration or real-life example, which seems to lower the potential of a 'testy exchange between combatants'. Depending upon the socialization of the learner group, the latter dialogue trigger might be more appropriate (i.e. where the instructor/coach deems a lower emotional temperature to be in order).
18	006	10/31 02:17 PM	Yes, but....	length of discussion.	B. Take Sides	To what extent do short posts reflect a valuable depth of thought/analysis on the discussion subject, and contribute to the learning of others

Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
20	006	11/04 06:23 PM	I Agree.	To be or not to be....	B. Take Sides	Glenn... I too, find the long posts troublesome, especially when the point could be made/illustrated more efficiently. A couple of us Marketing instructors, using online discussions as a gradeable component of a f2f course, have had some success encouraging students to respond to each other by... (a) giving specific instructions about quality and quantity of responses to other students, and (b) grading the posts. Randy
22	006	11/10 10:06 AM	Hook Line and Sinker.	How long is the line.	B. Take Sides:	Hi Eleanor... My experience with online discussions as a component of a f2f course is that on average most BCIT students deliver a little less content/analysis than is expected, even with pretty clear instructions. My perception is that both the newness of online discussions, and workload time pressures, contribute to this. I'm not sure what you mean by "ideal attention holding line", but I'm not aware if much research has been done on the impact of the length of posts. Randy
27	006	10/31 02:22 PM	When to Stoke the Fire. A Quest for Fire Take Sides:	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online	B. Take Sides	Hi Glenn, and everyone...I really like your camp fire analogy! Not only do we want to avoid smothering the fire while starting it, we also want to ensure we have enough fuel to keep the fire going. From my experience, we should jump into the discussion when... (a) the discussion has gone off track and we want to bring it back to the subject at hand, (b) the discussion isn't off track, but we want to encourage a different focus/more analysis/further discussion, (c) we want to demonstrate our presence to the learners (i.e. we are actually reading what they are writing), (d) we want to praise good work, (d) we want to summarize key points and wrap up the discussion. Thoughts? Randy
29	006	11/04 06:30 PM	Fanning the Flames.	Fuel and Sparks.	B. Take Sides	Hi 008... I think we do not have to supply all of the fuel. It seems with some groups, providing the spark is enough, and with others a fair amount of fuel and fanning of flames needs to be added. A colleague suggests that this has to do with differences between under graduate and graduate learners. Randy
39	006	10/31 02:55 PM	"If I Understand You Correctly..."	Perspectives depend on life (experiences and views).	B. Take Sides	It reminds me that in an online discussion an author does not always write what she/he means, and a reader does not always receive the intended message. It reminds me of the value of perception-checking and the danger of assuming.

Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
49	006	10/31 03:06 PM	The Power of Marks.	Marking or not.	B. Take Sides	I give credit to students for participation in online discussions because it is a powerful motivator. Eleanor, I don't agree that giving marks is an absolute requirement to achieve outcomes, because motivated students will participate and learn regardless of whether they receive marks. Unfortunately, it seems that every group of learners includes a high percentage of 'less-motivated' students, who need the incentive of obtaining marks. Giving credit enables us to be more particular about our expectations. For example, I advise students that credit will be earned for posts that 'contribute to the learning of others', and that no marks will be given for the short "I agree" and "me too" posts.
23	007	11/05 01:32 PM	Short responses.	Yes, but.... B. Take Sides		I think they can be useful. I'm currently facilitating a facilitator workshop for an external group. The course included a summary question (what makes a good online discussion) that, when we actually got to it, seemed destined to attract either very little response or a lot of repetition from earlier comments. I didn't want to eliminate the question altogether (partly because it was identified in the course materials, so if I moved it I feared there would be a 'house of cards' phenomenon happening...) So rather than asking them for a response, I asked the participants to post a single word that for them expressed what makes a good discussion. (To start with, I posted a starter highlighting some of the points made about discussions in other topics, and noting that we didn't want to just repeat what we'd already done.) To my amazement nine responses were posted within 24 hours. The words included "aha!" and "confusing!" and have themselves led to a lively exchange, as everyone of course expands on how and why they chose their word. This is a long-winded reply to your very succinct point, Randy -- but in essence I'm saying that if a very short response contains a synthesis of a range of thoughts and readings, it can be very valuable and can contribute to learning. Mary
25	008	11/13 09:54 AM	Building on short responses.	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides	I really like this idea, Mary. I've used this technique in F2F classroom teaching and discussions and it's quite powerful. Your example reminds me that a lot (if not most) of the F2F techniques are transferable, with modifications. i.e. I don't always have to re-invent the wheel. One thing that I might try out is to add another layer and get the students to identify the words that stand out most for them, then get them to come up with strategies for improvement. It really speaks to the WIFM (what's in it for me) bit.
28	008	11/04 10:41 AM	Fuel and Sparks.	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides:	I really like this analogy as well. I agree with your stepping in comments as well Randy. I'm wondering though if we, as instructors, have to supply all the fuel...I see us providing the spark.. 008

Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
32	008	11/04 10:37 AM	I'm here and "all fired up"	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides	Greetings Everyone: What a great discussion thread going on here! I haven't had a chance to jump in yet - a lot has been going on (more on that in a few days) - but I'm here now... A couple of things have stood out for me in the discussion about stimulating discussion: 1. although we may not have access to all the info - it's important to know your audience - their background, (this is in ref to the accountants comment), purpose for taking the course etc. 2. in introducing the discussion, perhaps it might be important to explicitly state that the goal is to stimulate dialogue not to display knowledge 3. when I took a particular online course, the instructor stated this from the beginning - it actually freed learners to participate at a more authentic level. Cheers, 008
40	008	11/04 11:06 AM	An Important Thing Response to:	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides	In addition to Randy & Eleanor's comments, this also reminds of the importance of storytelling and humour in learning (and life!). How have you used humour in your online teaching? 008
46	008	11/04 11:16 AM	Double Loop Learning.	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides	I think we can do both, with the primary goal to be individual development and then ask the learner how that connects to the course objective. (i.e. double loop learning). 008
51	008	11/04 11:29 AM	What does participation look like?	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides	I like the learning processes that Eleanor presented. I see the value but I'm not entirely convinced about giving grades for participation - as some choose online courses simply for their own expectation that they won't have to communicate with others. Outlining what participation looks like is critical to ensure that everyone's very clear what the course or program expectations are.



Posting #	Part #	Date (MM/DD) and Time	Subject	Response to:	Category	Comment
30	009	11/04 07:27 PM	Fanning the Fires.	November 2003: Panel Discussion on Online Discussion.	B. Take Sides	Hi all: You are right Glenn ... this is a great discussion thread :) Randy ... you raise an interesting point ... is the difference in the level of inquiry because students are undergrads or grad students?? I think the instructor/facilitator has a responsibility to promote critical thinking suitable to the target audience. It is natural to assume that more inquiry/critical thinking should be present in grad students ... BUT the research that Sue and I did with grad students overwhelmingly showed that grad students wanted more direction and structure even in their online discussions. The simple fact is that the instructor's use of questioning, comments, summaries and provision of additional resources promotes not only critical thinking but the interaction with content and other students. One interesting book not mentioned in the Australian article on online facilitation is: "The Online Teaching Guide" by Ken W. White and Bob H. Weight. Emphasis is placed on the way that we communicate online with reference to the WRITE (warmth, responsiveness, inquisitiveness, tentativeness and empathy. model of communication). What you might well ask is inquisitiveness? Inquisitiveness is asking a question and serves two purposes to reduce defensiveness and provide useful problem-solving information for students. Tentativeness works hand in hand with inquisitiveness, "it appears that ..." as opposed to "it is." In our research time and time again we heard also that trust and respect were big issues for students. Have you any thoughts about how to develop and sustain that kind of relationship online?? All the best, 008 Waddell
55	010	09/17 09:51 AM	logging in.	Placeholder.	F. The SideBars Suggestion Box.	The java applet didn't load on my computer (IE 6 at my BCIT office). However, I could log in using my regular lotus notes client, by opening the database: discuss/SideBars.nsf. Shan
61	011	11/24 10:03 AM	Following the thread.	Suggestion.	G. Tips and Troubles. How to use the bulletin board	I've been experiencing the same frustration, finding myself back at the top of the tree every time I click on Back. Clicking on Expand All helped because now I can see all the branches. -- Colleen

### User Activity log

Record #	Part #	Date (mm-dd)	Time	Posting #	User Data ID#
1	001	09/03/03	12:25 PM		425
2	001	09/04/03	2:48 PM		418
3	001	09/05/03	9:33 AM	3	401
4	001	09/09/03	9:33 AM		390
5	001	09/09/03	12:59 PM		389
6	001	09/12/03	1:23 PM		366
7	001	09/17/03	10:55 AM	56	364
8	001	09/18/03	8:58 AM		363
9	001	09/22/03	4:03 PM		354
10	001	09/23/03	9:29 AM	57	351
11	001	09/24/03	1:31 PM	62	349
12	001	09/25/03	9:16 AM		340
13	001	10/01/03	12:36 PM		336
14	001	10/02/03	9:54 AM		335
15	001	10/08/03	2:59 PM		334
16	001	10/10/03	11:47 AM		329
17	001	10/20/03	4:17 PM		325
18	001	10/23/03	2:49 PM	7	307
19	001	10/27/03	9:01 AM		302
20	001	10/27/03	2:13 PM		300
21	001	10/28/03	10:11 AM	15	297
22	001	10/28/03	1:05 PM	26	293
23	001	10/28/03	2:14 PM		291
24	001	10/28/03	2:29 PM		289

Record #	Part #	Date (mm-dd)	Time	Posting #	User Data ID#
25	001	10/29/03	11:50 AM	17	286
26	001	10/30/03	10:23 PM	37, 44, 47	282
27	001	10/31/03	8:59 AM		258
28	001	10/31/03	2:01 PM		248
29	001	10/31/03	5:20 PM	19	233
30	001	11/02/03	5:59 PM		163
31	001	11/03/03	2:02 PM		150
32	001	11/03/03	2:03 PM		149
33	001	11/03/03	2:46 PM		145
34	001	11/04/03	10:19 AM		108
35	001	11/04/03	11:31 AM		78
36	001	11/04/03	12:51 PM		67
37	001	11/04/03	2:03 PM		65
38	001	11/05/03	9:43 AM	14, 53	47
39	001	11/05/03	3:57 PM		42
40	001	11/06/03	5:15 PM	31	35
41	001	11/11/03	4:28 PM	54	25
42	001	11/13/03	5:15 PM		10
43	001	11/24/03	10:05 AM	59, 60	6
44	001	11/25/03	9:58 AM		1
45	002	09/04/03	4:29 PM	2	415
46	002	09/11/03	5:05 PM		373
47	002	09/22/03	8:06 AM		360
48	002	09/22/03	9:40 AM		359
49	002	09/23/03	8:07 AM		353
50	002	10/17/03	8:13 AM		327

Record #	Part #	Date (mm-dd)	Time	Posting #	User Data ID#
51	003	10/10/03	9:05 AM	4	331
52	003	10/23/03	11:13 AM		321
53	003	10/28/03	2:27 PM	10, 16, 34	290
54	003	10/30/03	10:44 AM	36	284
55	003	10/31/03	8:44 AM	38, 45, 48	259
56	003	11/05/03	9:46 AM	13, 21, 33, 42, 43	45
57	003	11/05/03	3:54 PM	24	43
58	003	11/07/03	11:40 AM		33
59	003	11/17/03	11:32 AM		9
60	004	10/23/03	12:05 PM	5	320
61	005	10/27/03	2:21 PM	9	299
62	005	10/27/03	4:41 PM	1	298
63	005	10/28/03	12:35 PM	6	294
64	005	10/29/03	10:14 AM	11, 35	287
65	005	10/29/03	4:39 PM		285
66	005	10/30/03	1:48 PM		283
67	005	10/31/03	3:53 PM	50, 52	234
68	005	11/04/03	4:21 PM	41	64
69	005	11/05/03	4:12 PM		41
70	005	11/24/03	9:25 AM	58	Missed
71	006	10/08/03	5:33 PM		332
72	006	10/20/03	4:03 PM		326
73	006	10/22/03	8:34 AM		322
74	006	10/27/03	9:30 AM	8	301
75	006	10/28/03	11:32 AM		295

Record #	Part #	Date (mm-dd)	Time	Posting #	User Data ID#
76	006	10/31/03	3:24 PM	12, 18, 27, 39, 49	235
77	006	11/04/03	6:39 PM	20, 29	63
78	006	11/10/03	10:27 AM	22	26
79	007	10/31/03	1:10 PM	23	256
80	007	11/05/03	1:38 PM		44
81	008	10/28/03	11:23 AM		296
82	008	10/29/03	9:40 AM		288
83	008	11/04/03	9:45 AM	28, 32, 40, 46, 51	130
84	008	11/06/03	4:39 PM		38
85	008	11/07/03	5:39 PM		29
86	008	11/13/03	9:30 AM	25	19
87	009	11/04/03	7:05 PM	30	62
88	009	11/05/03	8:49 PM		40
89	010	09/17/03	9:59 AM	55	365
90	011	11/01/03	11:23 AM		232
91	011	11/03/03	2:39 PM		148
92	011	11/04/03	11:51 AM		71
93	011	11/24/03	9:51 AM	61	Missed
94	012	09/01/03	11:31 PM		431
95	012	11/01/03	7:40 PM		172
96	013	09/01/03	11:55 AM		429
97	014	09/03/03	1:50 PM		424
98	014	09/09/03	12:22 PM		384
99	015	09/04/03	10:41 AM		423
100	016	09/04/03	11:53 AM		419

Record #	Part #	Date (mm-dd)	Time	Posting #	User Data ID#
101	017	09/05/03	12:00 PM		400
102	018	09/05/03	2:47 PM		397
103	019	09/09/03	2:20 PM		386
104	020	09/10/03	12:23 PM		382
105	021	09/19/03	4:38 PM		362
106	021	09/29/03	12:23 PM		338
107	022	09/22/03	7:38 AM		361
108	023	09/22/03	9:58 AM		358
109	024	09/22/03	11:54 AM		356
110	025	09/22/03	1:09 PM		355
111	025	10/24/03	4:10 PM		305
112	025	10/31/03	1:47 PM		254
113	026	09/23/03	9:13 AM		352
114	027	09/23/03	2:19 PM		350
115	028	09/26/03	12:04 PM		339
116	029	10/01/03	11:16 AM		337
117	030	10/08/03	3:13 PM		333
118	031	10/14/03	1:31 PM		328
119	032	10/21/03	1:22 PM		324
120	033	10/28/03	1:07 PM		292
121	033	10/31/03	11:38 AM		257
122	034	10/31/03	1:28 PM		255
123	034	11/04/03	12:35 PM		70
124	035	10/31/03	2:41 PM		246
125	036	11/03/03	1:00 PM		162
126	037	11/03/03	2:46 PM		144

Record #	Part #	Date (mm-dd)	Time	Posting #	User Data ID#
127	038	11/07/03	12:44 PM		32
128	038	11/24/03	3:26 PM		5
129	039	11/18/03	3:34 PM		8

## Participant Activity Summary

Part #	Internal (1) External (2)	Panelist Yes (1) No (2)	No. Postings	No Lurkings	Total Words Posted	Mean Words per Post
001	1	1	18	30	1,744	97
002	1	2	1	5	166	166
003	1	1	14	3	687	49
004	1	1	1	0	133	133
005	1	1	9	3	869	97
006	1	1	9	4	711	79
007	1	2	1	1	222	222
008	2	1	6	4	394	66
009	2	2	1	1	255	255
010	1	2	1	0	31	31
011	1	2	1	3	36	36
012	2	2	0	2	0	0
013	1	2	0	1	0	0
014	2	2	0	2	0	0
015	2	2	0	1	0	0
016	1	2	0	1	0	0
017	2	2	0	1	0	0
018	1	2	0	1	0	0
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023	1	2	0	1	0	0
024	1	2	0	1	0	0
025	1	2	0	3	0	0
026	1	2	0	1	0	0
027	1	2	0	1	0	0
028	1	2	0	1	0	0
029	1	2	0	1	0	0
030	1	2	0	1	0	0
031	1	2	0	1	0	0
032	1	2	0	1	0	0
033	1	2	0	2	0	0
034	1	2	0	2	0	0
035	2	2	0	1	0	0
036	1	2	0	1	0	0
037	1	2	0	1	0	0
038	1	2	0	2	0	0
039	1	2	0	1	0	0
Total			62	90	5,248	85



## APPENDIX E: WEB REFERENCES

### Partial List of Websites and Blogs with SideBars Links

#### CIT INFOBITS

<http://www.unc.edu/cit/infobits/>

DIY ONLINE TEACHING September 2003

In "Rolling Your Own: Online Without an LMS [Learning Management System]" (SIDEBARS, September 2003) Bob Byrne, technical liaison at the British Columbia Institute of Technology's Centre for Distributed Learning, shows how small organizations offering fewer programs and courses could offer online classes using free or low-cost tools. As a minimum, Byrne suggests providing a website for course content and communication tools (email, discussion, and chat) for instructor/student interaction. The article, which includes links to some of the tools, is available online at <http://online.bcit.ca/sidebars/03september/inside-out-6.htm>.

#### Centre for Teaching and Learning Website Dalhousie University

<http://www.dal.ca/~clt/ids.html>

#### Sidebars

(<http://online.bcit.ca/sidebars/current/index.htm>)

Published via email and the Web, published by the Learning Resources Unit of the British Columbia Institute of Technology [<http://www.lru.bcit.ca/>] to provide "useful information and news items for instructors, course developers, educational technologists who have an interest in distributed learning in its various manifestations." For more information, contact the editors at email: [sidebars@listserv.bcit.ca](mailto:sidebars@listserv.bcit.ca). Subscription information: <http://online.bcit.ca/sidebars/subscribe.html>.

#### Technology4Teachers.Com

<http://www.technology4teachers.com/>

Facilitating Online Discussions The theme for the November 2003 issue of SIDEBARS is online discussion. The issue includes links to articles on effective online facilitation and successful strategies for faculty using discussion boards in their classes. The issue is available online at <http://online.bcit.ca/sidebars/03november/index.htm>. SideBars is distributed by email and on the Web at no cost and is published by the Learning Resources Unit of the British Columbia Institute of Technology [<http://www.lru.bcit.ca/>] to provide "useful information and news items for instructors, course developers, educational technologists and anyone else who has an interest in distributed learning in its various manifestations." For more information, contact the editors at email: [sidebars@listserv.bcit.ca](mailto:sidebars@listserv.bcit.ca). Subscription information: <http://online.bcit.ca/sidebars/subscribe.html>.

#### Stephen's Web

<http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/website/find.cgi?string=site~BCIT>

Searching for: site~BCIT

Sidebars I haven't had time to read the articles in detail, but via Slashdot today came this link to Sidebars, a wonderful publication out of BCIT. I love the 'outside-in' and 'inside-out' theme for the articles. I had a quick look at a few of the articles and found them to be crisp, well written and informative. Have a look. (Note: because the site is being 'Slashdotted' it is unavailable as I write, but it was working fine this

morning and will no doubt be accessible as you read this.) By Various Authors, BCIT, September 2, 2003  
[Refer][Research][Reflect]

EdTechPost

<http://www.edtechpost.ca/mt/archive/000081.html>

September 02, 2003

This Month's SideBars: Focus on CMS

<http://online.bcit.ca/sidebars/current/index.htm>

If you haven't seen it before, Sidebars is an always fun and educational newsletter produced by the staff of the Learning Resources Unit of the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). This month they focus on all things CMS - they are undergoing their own change process currently and have published their well-worth emulating evaluation plan, and various staff also contribute pieces on a few existing open source choices as well as rolling your own CMS.

Human Performance Centre HPC Spider

[http://www.ott.navy.mil/index.cfm?RID=WEB\\_OT\\_1000369](http://www.ott.navy.mil/index.cfm?RID=WEB_OT_1000369)

SideBars. Published by the Learning Resources Unit of the British Columbia Institute of Technology to support and recognize innovative practice in distributed learning at BCIT, and in the greater educational community. Sample articles include:

- Effective online facilitation
- Successful Strategies for Using Asynchronous Discussion Boards
- The Moderator's Home Page

e-Learning Centre

<http://www.e-learningcentre.co.uk/eclipse/Resources/elblogs.htm>

Sidebars

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Added: 21 May 2002

Reviewer's Note: The use of a blog in staff development

Florida Community College at Jacksonville

<http://www1.fccj.edu/ngardner/acid/acid/objects.htm>

Learning Resources Unit of the British Columbia Institute of Technology

Sidebars

This web site was created by the Learning Resources Unit of the British Columbia Institute of Technology to support and recognize innovative practice in distributed learning at BCIT, and in the greater educational community.

The EduResources Portal—a Gateway to Higher Education Instructional Resources

[http://sage.eou.edu/SPT/SPT--](http://sage.eou.edu/SPT/SPT--AdvancedSearch.php?vn=Classification&vv=%22Sample+Learning+Objects+Information%22&Debug=)

[AdvancedSearch.php?vn=Classification&vv=%22Sample+Learning+Objects+Information%22&Debug=](http://sage.eou.edu/SPT/SPT--AdvancedSearch.php?vn=Classification&vv=%22Sample+Learning+Objects+Information%22&Debug=)

Learning Objects 101

This is short introductory article about Learning Objects from Sidebars, the newsletter of the British Columbia Institute of Technology. The article shows how metatags and learning objects are connect...  
<http://online.bcit.ca/sidebars/02november/inside-out-1.htm>

BellaOnline The voice of women

<http://www.bellaonline.com/subjects/4497.asp>

Sidebars [offsite link]

This ezine is brought to you by the Learning Resources Unit of BCIT: provides useful information and news items for instructors, course developers, educational technologists and anyone else who has an interest in distributed learning in its various manifestations.

Central Queensland University CQU's Teaching and Learning Portal

<http://learning.cqu.edu.au/links.php>

SideBars e-zine

This e-zine is produced by the British Columbia Institute of Technology and is dedicated to distributed learning,