

VioceThread for On-line Courses

**Pre-Workshop Statement
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I wish I could write a concise, but elaborate statement describing all the wonderful things we are doing to prepare our students to be successful in geoscience degree programs and careers, but I cannot. We are a small to moderate sized school. Most of the students taking our science courses are non-science majors satisfying general education requirements or students trying to get into one of our allied health programs. Given our typical clientele, we have done little or nothing to prepare students to be successful geoscientists. Probably the one area where we have done something is in K - 5 teacher preparation. Students seeking degrees to teach these grades in Maryland are required to take two courses in the geosciences, one in general physical science and the other in earth/space science. In order to maximize outreach to these students, we offer a hybrid version of each course, on-line lecture and face-to-face laboratory. Natasha Cleveland, the lead instructor for both courses, has incorporated *VioceThread*, an interactive software application, into the on-line component of the courses. The biggest advantage of this software is that it allows the students to see and hear their instructor. It also provides a platform where the students are able to do the same. In many ways it is almost like being in a regular classroom environment. Initial student reaction to *VioceThread* has been overwhelmingly positive (based on student evaluations). One of its strengths is adding the personal touch to the on-line experience. Students have a greater opportunity to engage the material by having being able to interact with both the instructor and fellow students. Natasha is currently in the process of conducting a formal assessment of *VioceThread* as a learning tool so I am unable to provide further details as to its effectiveness. The biggest challenge thus far has been getting College support to implement *VioceThread* in more courses. We currently have a workgroup of faculty from across campus training to incorporate it into their on-line courses.

That said, my main reasons for participating in this workshop is to see what others are doing and bring the best practices back to my campus to make a concerted effort to involve more students in geoscience programs and careers.