



# Thinking about Communities in Distance Education

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# Conceptualizing the Problem

- Think back to your degrees.
- What memories did you think of?
  - Physical spaces
  - Special events (graduation, parties)
  - Informal talks with faculty and other students in the hall

or

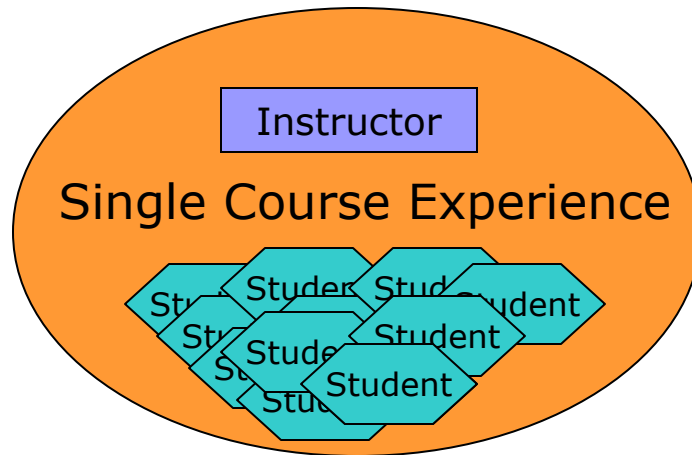
- Time spent sitting in class???



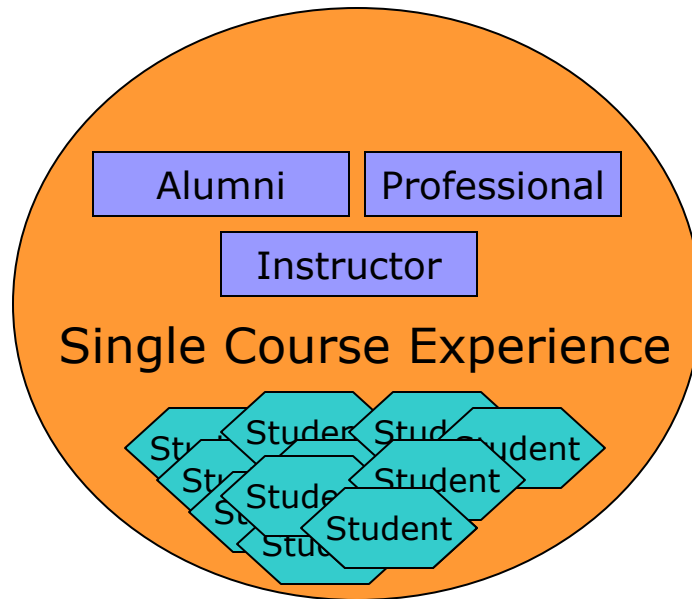
# The Problem

- We focus on class-based activity
  - It's "the goal"
- What is being left behind?
  - Sense of belonging
  - Community bonds
    - With other students
      - In-class AND out of class
    - With faculty
    - With staff
    - With alumni
    - With the profession

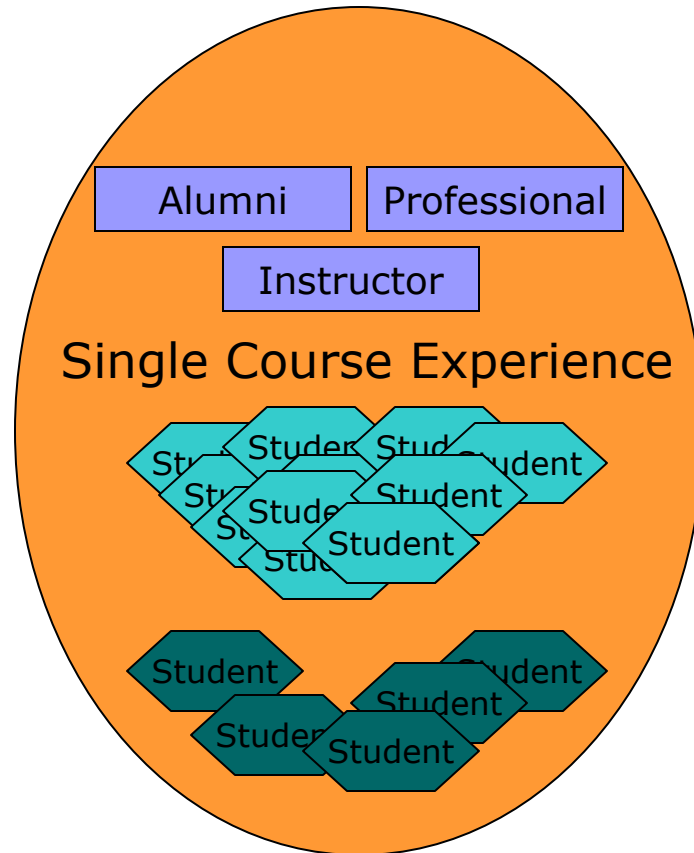
# One Course



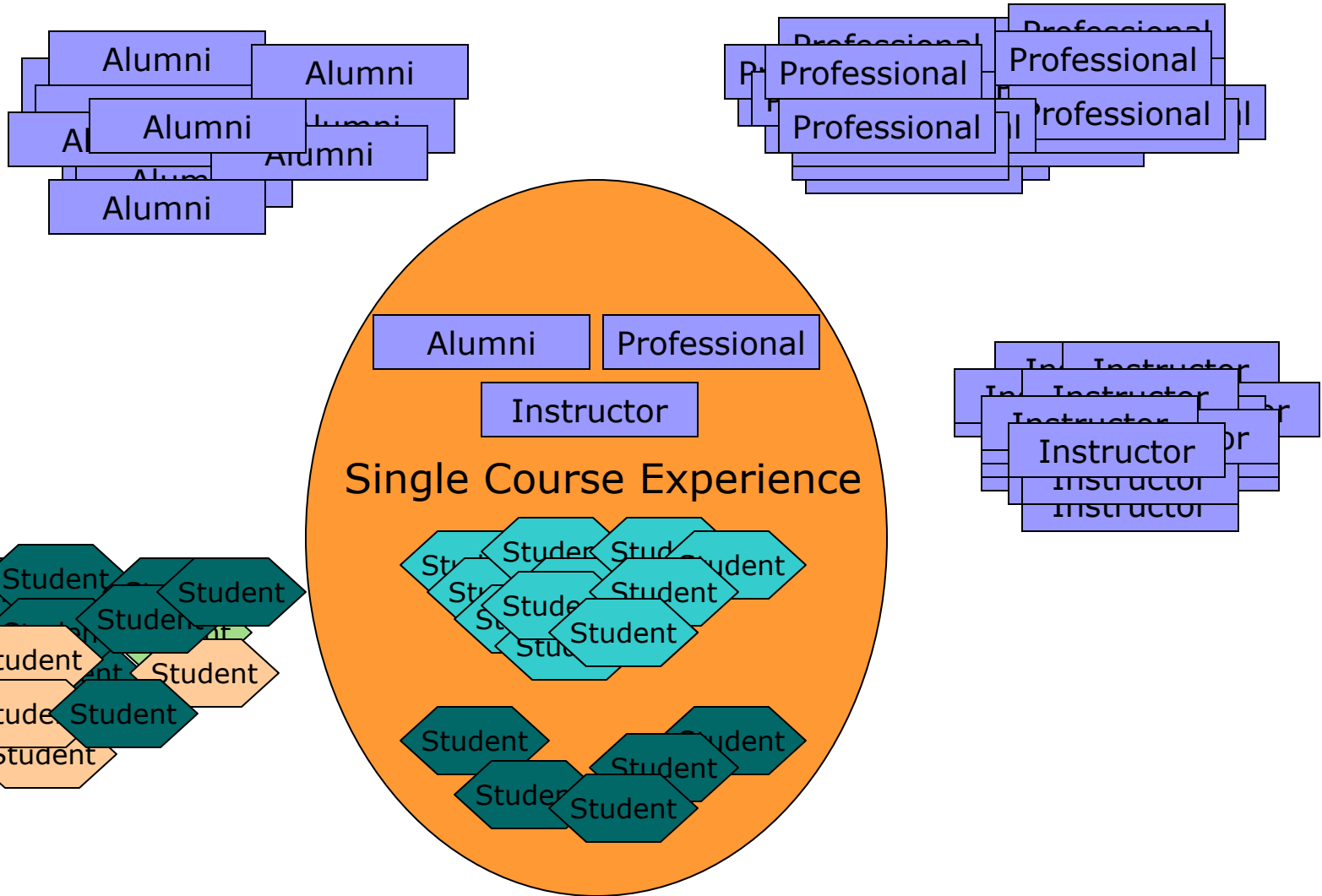
# One Course



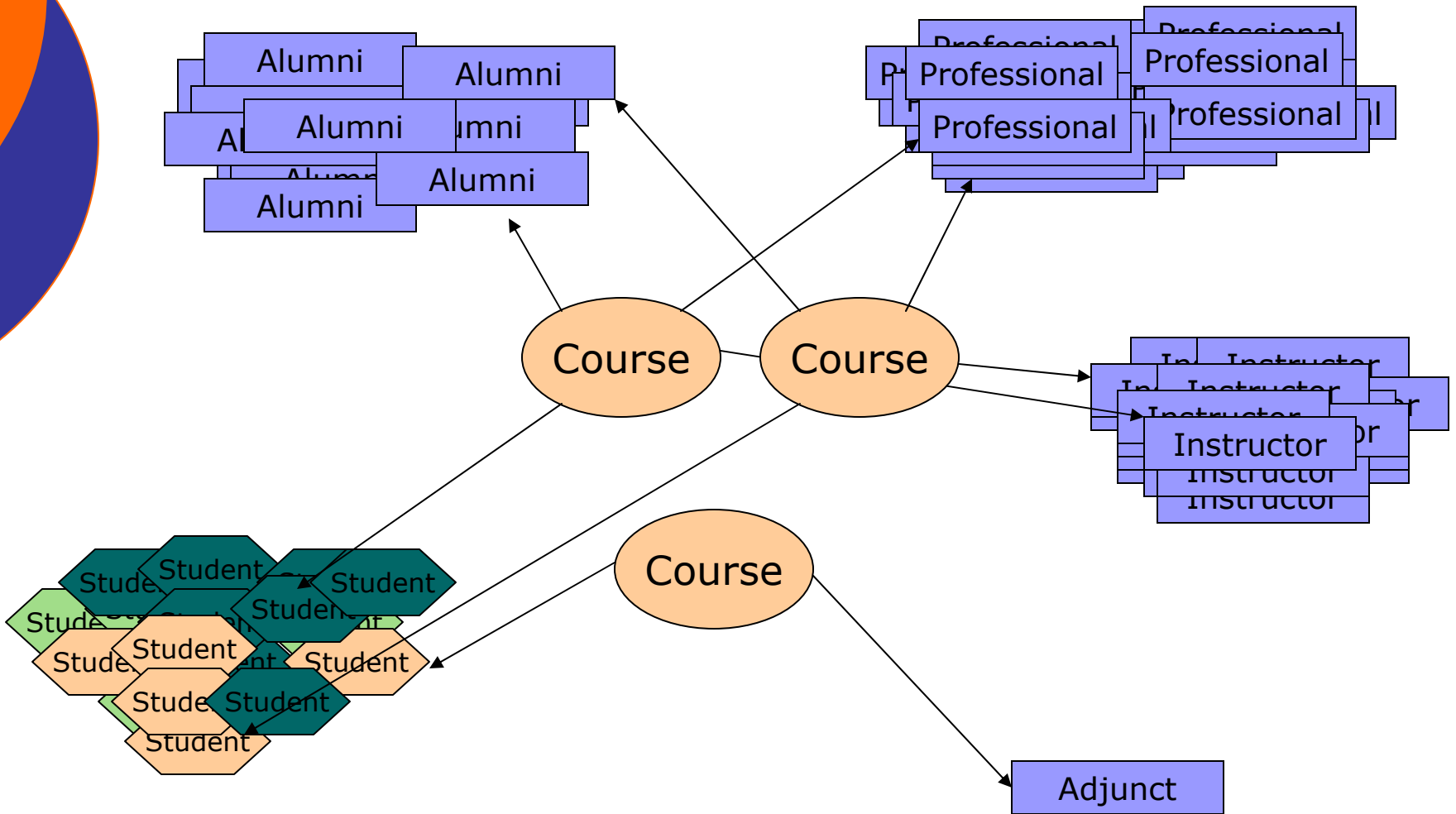
# One Course



# One Course – Larger World



# Current Model







# The Challenge

- One instructor = one course
- Building community across courses requires assistance
  - Infrastructure
  - Facilitation
  - Commitment to unseen students
    - E-mail and telephone = face-to-face



# Where to begin

- Look for existing infrastructure
  - Course Platform
    - Create non-course spaces
      - Student <-> Student
      - Student <-> Staff/Faculty
      - Alumni <-> Student <-> Staff/Faculty
    - Discussion Lists
    - Newsletters and Mailings
    - Conferences
  - Use what people already use



# Thinking about transitions

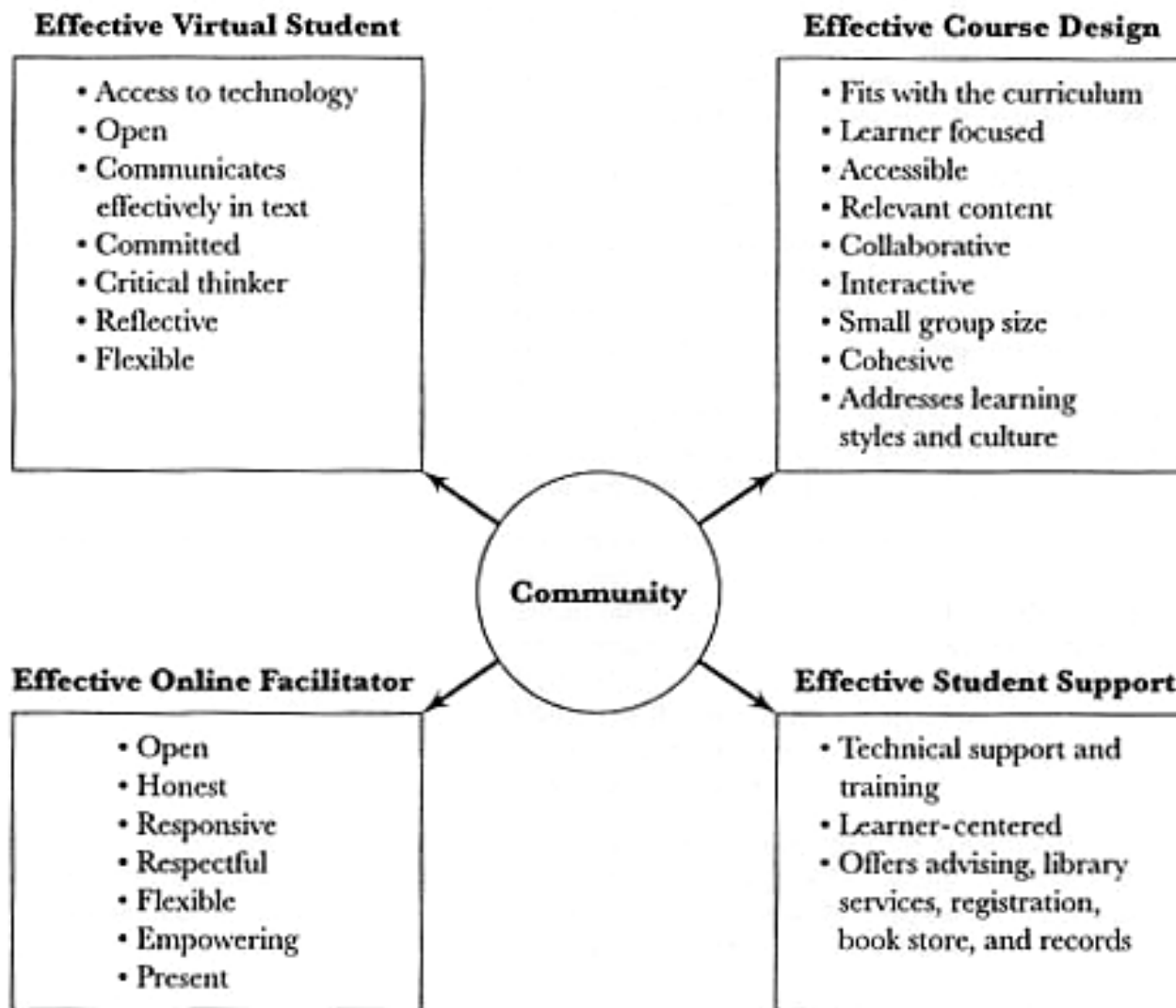
- Have transitions in place
- Don't lose track of students
- Tie in requirement
  
- Keeps alumni involved
- Easier to keep professionals
  
- Keeping the community alive



# School-Wide Effort

- Accustomed to sharing physical space
  - Community develops naturally
- New mindset for sharing virtual space
  - Community requires additional effort
  - E-mail = student at door
- Think about ways to integrate community-building across program

**FIGURE 10.1. ELEMENTS OF A HIGH-QUALITY ONLINE COURSE OR PROGRAM.**



From: Palloff, R. & Pratt, K. (2003). *The Virtual Student: A Profile and Guide to Working with Online Learners*