Coffee Conversations
Feature Article

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Coffee Conversations

Top Three Lessons Learned by a Technology Novice

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As a teacher with 39 years of experience, I have used various forms of instruction in my academic career ranging from an overhead projector and transparencies and a chalkboard (and chalk!) in face to face instruction to the use of learning management systems such as Desire2Learn, Brightspace and Blackboard and computers and broadcast technologies such as H.323 and Skype for Business.

In fact, when an undergraduate education major at OSU back in the 1970's, our instructional media course required preparation of transparencies with color overlays, threading a filmstrip projector and development of eye catching bulletin boards. I remember the instructor giving us two examples in particular: One: He though we eventually we *might* see newer strategies coming along but we would always need to know how to thread a filmstrip projector correctly! Two: Nothing would ever replace the need for high quality teaching. He was correct in the later but not the former. No, I have not had to thread a filmstrip projector in the last thirty years but the need for high quality teaching is an absolute necessity. I daresay that if pulled out an overhead projector today, most of my students would not recognize or even know what it is or they might think we were getting ready to film a segment for Antiques Roadshow!   As our student population continues to desire online easily accessible coursework, it becomes important to evolve in our use of instructional technology.   Ultimately as an educator, whether I wish to be or not, I am a model to my students.

This past summer, I was teaching a course in our Masters in Teaching, Learning and Leadership: CIED 5813, Educational Advocacy and Leadership. 27 students were located throughout our state. I chose to embrace a technology, Skype for Business to deliver this course. Coupling that experience with my previous experience using H.323 for over 15 years and a great deal of assistance from much more knowledgeable people, please allow me to share my lessons learned. David Letterman famously shared his Top Ten on many topics during his late night television show. Using that analogy, I humbly submit my Top Three on the Use of Technology for College Professors:

#3: **Be Prepared to Learn from your Experience, Experts, Tutorials and Students**

Be Prepared with Plan A, Plan B and maybe even Plan C. This is no different than face to face instruction. Sometimes the technology does not work so then what? I have learned to have multiple ways ready to present and share course content and engage students as contingencies.

As a college professor, I must model the ability to professionally request help from someone more knowledgeable and graciously accept the help. What a valuable lesson to teach students! This includes being willing to learn from them! In a recent class, I was attempting to allow students to see a graded quiz and their answers we had recently taken. One of my students respectfully spoke up, said we use that LMS, and do you mind, Dr. Self, if I tell you how to do that? I wholeheartedly said yes but can remember a time when I would have not been as accepting of help from students.

Recently I have started developing videos using Camtasia on my desktop computer. With the assistance of Elaine Johns and Simon Ringsmuth, I have two very basic videos with music and graphics made. My goal is to embed a quiz into my video using Camtasia. Additionally I don't mind asking questions of knowledgeable individuals or watching tutorials online.

#2 Knowledge of Your Students and Setting Expectations

Understand that all students do not have an equal knowledge and use of technology. I now ask students to complete a short questionnaire asking what technologies they have used, internet reliability and speed of connectivity. It is very simple: mark the technology with a 4 if you are comfortable enough with the technology that you could teach someone else; 3 if you have been to a PD, heard of it but have not used it extensively; 2 if you have heard of it but have no previous PD or use of it and 1 if you have no idea what I am talking about!

We are customarily used to setting class norms and expectations and Skype is no different. I jokingly tell students to please don't try and watch Monday night football, help their children with homework and cook supper, while in class! I have not had any major issues with this and have rarely had to call and talk to students when it appears they are not as connected and focused as I expect. Again, no different than a face to face instructional session.

#1   Use of asynchronous and synchronous modes

In our program, for the most part we use hybrid delivery formats. I have a weekly set date and time for synchronous meeting(s). These sessions are primarily for large group discussions, clarification of assignments or review as a class over course content. Using my class roster and much like I do in f2f instruction, I call on each student at some point during the session. You are always allowed one punt per class. If you don't know the answer, you may punt the question one time each class but only once! Reduce wasted time if connecting synchronously: bell ringers are widely used and can be very effective when using modes such as Skype. As we are connecting, there are sometimes delays. In the very first class, the use of bell ringers is described. I post them ahead of time on Bright Space but set the system to allow the document to be seen at the start of class. Students are instructed to complete and then post it into the appropriate drobox. This also gives me the added advantage of knowing exactly when students were connected. With as many as 25 in class at times, this is very helpful.

I go ahead and start class as soon as most are connected. Students are instructed to send me a message using the chat feature of skype if they did not get connected right away for some reason. I have found students using the chat feature too as we discuss to ask each other questions or make comments.

When to use synchronous and when to use asynchronous? I am still learning! Fitting in CIED 5813 around work schedules, other courses and family commitments, I scheduled a total of 12 asynchronous times over the course length of one month. I required students to connect a minimum of 3 times. Anecdotally, I found that those who connected more than 3 times did better in the class which was no surprise! I did not require the sessions to be in separate weeks but would do so this next time: for example, in week one, I expect you to connect during 1 of the 3 asynchronous times.

I also make short videos for reviewing answers to a quiz that students watch at other times keeping the length of those between 5-7 minutes. I have learned if more needs to be covered, make another video. No one wants to binge watch Dr. Self teaching Legal Issues in Career and Technical Education!

I have face to face office hours as we all do but after another professor shared that she was doing online office hours, I have started the practice. Because I have typically have full time workers and part time students, I have online office hours such as a Tuesday from 5-8 or a Thursday from 4:30-6:30.

I am hoping these simple ideas might be of help to others. If you ever need someone to thread a filmstrip projector, just let me know!