



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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HUMANIZING THE TECHNOLOGY IN A LECTURE CLASS

The rush to adopt technology in the classroom poses unprecedented challenges to pedagogues who value the humanity of their students (and themselves). One challenge is avoiding “dehumanizing” students’ experiences, as more interactivity is transferred to the technology. When online curricula, discussions, research projects, interactive exercises, and practice quizzes are ancillaries to class, there is a real danger of distancing the students from each other and from the instructor who should be their friendly mentor and guide. I offer some tips for “humanizing the technology,” specifically, in the lecture class.

As ancillaries to my Introduction to Psychology course, I use the e-learning platform, Blackboard, Hot Potatoes—a suite of six applications for creating interactive exercises for the World Wide Web, and Test Pilot—an online assessment software. With Blackboard, the Discussion Boards allow for asynchronous discussion by students and teacher, establishing a true “community of learners.” I post more than 25 different discussion boards at the beginning of the semester; students are encouraged to participate (to earn extra credit) and to create their own “threads.” I ask for suggestions for new Discussion Boards as the semester progresses and provide oral feedback, promoting the use of the “DB’s.” Frequently, DB’s prompt interesting in-class discussions; typically, these discussions get all of the students involved and are especially rich, humanizing activities.

To further humanize the Discussion Board experience, I read *all* of the student comments *everyday* and make brief comments in reply to what students have written. I also make longer replies with embedded links to the World Wide Web. Students quickly learn that I am not just monitoring their inputs, but processing them cognitively and responding to them as I would if they approached me in the college lounge, hall, or classroom. Essentially, this creates a greatly expanded “office hour”—yet another opportunity to interact. This ap-

proach has many incidental benefits: improves student motivation, expands students’ experiences (in the service of self-actualization), and stimulates intellectual curiosity.

Hot Potatoes (<http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/halfbaked/>) allows the attachment of interactive tutorials to the online notes, which are linked to our course web page (<http://www2.austin.cc.tx.us/ddydek/index.html>). The tutorials are authored to prepare students for tests and can be presented in a “split screen,” with the online notes scrollable on one side and the tutorial items presented sequentially on the other, with immediate feedback. The humanizing element in the tutorials is the amiable, engaging writing style of the teacher with the incorrect answers immediately fed back to the student in humorous, gently sarcastic comments, like “You must be kidding me! Have you even cracked a book?” or “I guess you were absent the day I discussed this in class.” Frequently, the feedback comments are expanded upon in a succinct “teaching sentence.” The effect is having a virtual instructor interacting with students in an engaging, fun, and educational manner. The feedback is congenial and congruent with the instructor’s in-class “teaching persona.”

The same engaging personal style is used in the authoring of the interactive Practice Tests, which utilize Test Pilot (<http://www.clearlearning.com/index.html>). The technology becomes more transparent, and the teacher/student relationship is strengthened. That’s what it’s all about!

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SENIOR AMBASSADORS: COMMUNITY OUTREACH VOLUNTEERS

At Bainbridge College, the word diversity embraces the “silver generation,” as well as Baby Boomers, and Generations X, Y, and Z! In 1999, retired professionals were asked by college administrators to serve as volunteers for the community and assist the college in a number of initiatives. They would be given the title of Senior Ambassadors—very important keys to strengthening educational, social, and cultural relationships between the college and area communities. They would serve as “cooperative links” to help plan and execute programs and activities of special interest to the students, faculty, and staff at the college.

The program is in its third year of operation. Senior Ambassadors are recognized throughout the community by their forest green blazers. Their commitment to the program, the college, and their community is literally the foundation for the success of the program. Several initiatives, developed since the ambassadors began their work, have improved relationships and strengthened linkages.

Working with student affairs

One ambassador, an avid traveler, gives lectures/presentations on a diversity of topics. In one lecture on the French Impressionists period, she shares personal slides and French artifacts with her audience of students and professors. Entire classes studying the humanities, history, and other related academic areas and disciplines are invited to hear the presentation. It is a wonderful way to get community college students thinking about international travel!

Ambassadors also promote special campus activities in the community and disseminate semester class schedules to residents.

Working with college clubs and other student organizations

One ambassador, a retired schoolteacher, works with teacher education majors through the T.E.S.T. (Teacher Education Service and Training) Club at the college. The club introduces teacher education majors to decision-making processes and helps them learn more about the inner-workings of classroom education. The senior ambassador-in-charge made a presentation to the local school board and received approval for our students to

obtain teacher education practicum experience in the local public schools.

Assisting with recruitment and retention

Another ambassador, a native of Puerto Rico, is developing a program to help recruit Spanish-speaking students. In that regard, she has visited with the pastor of a local church to discuss his congregation’s involvement.

Acting as hosts/hostesses at special events

In November 2001, the community hosted a Community Appreciation Reception for Bainbridge College employees. Senior Ambassadors worked for weeks planning and organizing the occasion and succeeded in securing the Secretary of State as keynote speaker. The Senior Ambassador who served as chair for the occasion observed: “...gratitude for the college has been...profound from the beginning. People are just happy to have a chance to say so.”

Patricia Green-Powell, *Vice President, Student Affairs*

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