DIGITAL SCHMIGITAL: MOBILE SCHMOBILE!

Here we are in the twilight of 2008, and we are debating the relative importance of embedding "digital" versus -- what? -- "non-digital?" -- media into our teaching and learning. Show me the medium that is truly "non-digital" and I'll show you a piece of paper that was probably typed on an old-fashioned typewriter or chiseled onto a slate tablet! The point is, that regardless of the form of communication, today virtually all forms of communication are "digital." Today's "tools du jour" includes such things as podcasts, wikis, blogs, web-based video, social networking and other communication methods that never graced pedagogical conversation as recently as five years ago.

Stories abound about the new communications habits of the younger generation. Post-secondary educators are being urged to re-cast teaching practice around these changes. We need to meet the needs of the "millennial generation," we are told. But wait! Might we not be getting ahead of ourselves? Recent research published by EDUCAUSE gives us pause. In a study of more than 27,000 students, strong preference was discovered for face-to-face interaction in undergraduate education. Other findings showed that, although a majority of students possess Internet-capable mobile phones, by far the greatest portion of them fail to use these devices for Internet access. More locally, in a recent hybrid WCU psychology course, 16 of 20 students reported not knowing what the term "podcasting" meant.

These findings call into question the ostensible ubiquity of mobile device use among younger students. If our current institutional intent, therefore, is to design instruction to "meet students [technologically] where they are" in their personal lives, mobile tools and digital media may not provide the best methods for doing so. May we, therefore, take comfort in the notion that discussion of this technological change among millennials is over-hyped? Not exactly. The EDUCAUSE study also tells us that conditions are rapidly changing while ever more technology-weaned young people enter college and university.

What do we do, then? The Coulter Faculty Center (CFC) finds itself needing to encourage faculty to transform instruction in response to technological changes that never fully stabilize. Therefore, the CFC supports the traditional principles of excellent teaching while simultaneously encouraging the risk-taking of technological innovators. In doing so, we recognize that most faculty are committed primarily to their scholarly disciplines. Teaching and course design constitute little more than means to fulfill this core commitment. Just as excellence in site-based teaching often serves as foundation for transformation to digital means of instruction so, too, do digital innovations find their way into our site-constrained classrooms. Let's look at two examples:

Masafumi Takeda decided that his students would benefit from the capacity to listen to his lectures repeatedly. He also wanted his distant students to be able to participate in a live classroom

experience. To do this, Masafumi creates a video stream of his Japanese classes for live Internet broadcast. With a simple video camera connected to his laptop computer, he is able to broadcast his class live to the world, as well as archiving each session for all students to review retroactively on-demand.

Carlie Merritt uses "Second Life" (a virtual networked universe where real people are represented as avatars in a simulated physical setting) as an innovation to present sensitive courtroom information to her class. An example of how she has used Second Life involves the simulation of courtroom testimony by a victim of child abuse. For a number of reasons, until now Carlie has not been able to display an actual video representation of how a child witness would testify in a courtroom. By creating a virtual child in Second Life and having that child act out the testimony, Carlie has overcome what has long been a hurdle in her presentation of this type of instructional content.

In designing support for the technological "trailblazers" and "settlers," the CFC follows the principle of strong faculty involvement in service design and delivery. The following CFC services support faculty tackling the mysteries of digitally-driven teaching (for easy perusal, each service is linked to its source on the Web):

– [eLearning Faculty Fellows](#) are responsible for designing eTeaching support and development.
– [eLearning/eMentors](#) comprise a Web-supported service linking expert faculty eTeachers with faculty clients through individually-negotiated agreements.
– [Online Course Assessment Tool](#) affords faculty the opportunity for peer assessment of online course design and teaching.
– [The Annual *Passages* Faculty Retreat](#) offers WCU and Haywood Community College faculty to learn, practice and network about teaching digitally and online.
– [The eTeachers' Water Cooler](#) automatically confers membership in an electronic meeting space for faculty members through their WebCat online course accounts.

One of the CFC's newer initiatives is its commitment to support the newer digital tools of teaching and learning. There is a new digital media wiki providing detailed video tutorials and printable step-sheets detailing many of the digital resources on campus. The CFC works one-on-one with faculty members, providing them the skills necessary to incorporate digital media in their classes. The Center also offers workshops for podcasting entire class sessions. Two different blogging servers are offered for a variety of needs and an easy-to-use wiki service is available for collaborative class projects. An iTunes U service is also available for delivering audio, video or PDFs directly to students' computers or portable digital devices.

A final CFC challenge, therefore, is to encourage faculty to utilize these services.

<div align="right">

John LeBaron
Educational Leadership and Foundations
Neil Torda
Digital Media, Coulter Faculty Center

</div>

Responses to the October Issue of the *Faculty Forum* entitled
The Death of the Lecture Revisited by Dr. Laura Cruz

Peter Nieckarz, Anthropology and Sociology

First of all, excellent piece Laura!

I think that those who are ready to bury the lecture are doing so in haste. Lectures are still relevant and effective, and tradition has nothing to do with it. A good lecture is compelling and inspiring, not all can lecture in such a way, but many can. I often suspect that those who are the biggest critics of the method are those who never had much success with it. A good lecture can do much more than some superimposed and awkward group exercise.

Of course when many of you say "lecture" you may be talking about a PowerPoint presentation with the instructor just repeating what is already on the screen. To my mind that is not in any way a lecture. A lecture is not the information presented, but the manner in which it is presented. The "lectures" I am thinking of are interactive and Socratic; Not some sleepy recitation with the lights out.

I had many classes as both grad and undergrad that were group discussion or project driven and I remember many of them falling quite flat, to the point of where I felt I got nothing out of the class. Just because you are not lecturing does not mean you are automatically doing something better; there is bad teaching taking place via all techniques. Ultimately it lies with the talent and enthusiasm of the instructor regardless of teaching method.

And like Laura pointed out, we think we need to ditch the lecture because students report that they do not like it… I am sorry, but as old fashioned as it sounds, they are hardly the experts. Many of them would be just fine if we did absolutely nothing as long as they got credit and a grade at the end. A lecture requires students' focus and concentration, "soft skills" we seem to have discarded in the post MTV era. It's no wonder students find it tedious.

Sharon Jacques, Nursing

It pained me very much to give up my "last" lecture on Florence Nightingale after 30 years. My RN to BSN students now do their own online search and write short papers on some aspect of FN's many contributions to nursing in both her day and ours. They comment on how delighted they are to discover and appreciate her impact on humanity, and several have gone on to read further for their own enjoyment. Shifting from lecture to a discovery writing assignment and further discussion has worked very well on almost all of the topics I cover.

I asked these practicing professionals to reflect on their Liberal Studies requirements. If they had a dynamic lecturer (one name from a NC Community College setting kept reappearing), they were energized to incorporate new ideas. All of them appreciate that they can now converse more widely with their patients and have a broader world view. Is it possible that we over saturate 17-21 year olds with more concentrated knowledge than they can see an immediate use for? How many of our lectures show off our own knowledge because we are afraid that students will never be exposed to it otherwise?

Vera Guise, Political Science & Public Affairs

Today, I projected Laura's Cruz's "The Death of the Lecture Re-visited" onto the overhead in my two Freshman Seminar classes and had students read the article and then discuss it. It was interesting to hear the conflicting points made by students: "No, we do NOT think the lecture is dead...that is the best way I learn BUT, the professor's approach is what makes the difference." "If it is straight lecture or reading", they all agreed, without interactive discussion, then it is boring." "NO, they do not want a McUniversity education, but NO they do not want to have to read a textbook either! Yes!" they proclaim, "we want instruction, but NO we do not like to read!"

So, my question to them was, how shall we prepare you, the next generation of leaders and parents, for solving the world's problems? They were shocked when I suggested perhaps someone will invent a "chip" that can be implanted at different stages of maturation: Say, reading, writing and arithmetic in the early grades, and literature and biology and political science in young adulthood. "NO NO NO", they objected, "we certainly do NOT want to be programmed!"

And so, I guess the challenge is still on the professor: continue the lecture, but make it interactive and entertaining and somehow, also make it educational.