Teaching with Technology II Track Summary: How and Why We Use Technology

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Blended learning describes the integration of computer-assisted teaching techniques with traditional approaches. Participants in the Teaching and Technology II Track considered several technology-driven means that contribute to effective learning to uncover a provocative array of blending processes. Presentations and discussion revolved around a variety of factors brought together by technology: traditional and modern views on technology and society, blogging and customary writing assignments, tech-savvy and conventional faculty, and multi-national faculty and students in a single classroom. Participants left the conference invigorated by the demonstrated possibilities, mindful of the challenges posed by cost and tradition, and focused on the successful use of technology to deliver the desired end—more effective teaching.

Summary of Presentations

Pamela Katz developed a web site to increase understanding of the state court role in the legal system. Cases which include summaries, learning activities, and webcasts for a comprehensive learning experience are linked topically from New York state courts to the U.S. Supreme Court. The model is applicable to other states due to its procedural focus.

M. Victoria Pérez-Ríos constructed a guided bulletin board-based tutorial that teaches U.S. Constitution basics to freshmen via active learning. Each step combines mutually reinforcing lectures with exercises. Students discuss their findings in class and online.

Brett S. Sharp uses iPods to study politics in music. Students download and play songs such as those used for campaigns and those based on civil rights, anti-war, and environmental movements while viewing the projected lyrics. Advantages are high student participation, a feeling of political efficacy, and a vivid lasting impression.

José Angel Gutiérrez and Joshua Been use census data and GIS software to help students understand the political implications of Latino voting power growth in Texas counties. Students use maps and tables to project trends and study relationships between demographics and voting.

Bruce Pencek developed a media based program to cultivate student information literacy. Students analyze unfiltered audio and video broadcasts to determine source credibility. The audio visual element is supplemented with readings, activities, and outlines.

Robert H. Webking drew on Plato's Republic to explore the primacy of images in knowledge obtainment. Technology by its conveyance of pictures, data, and other simulations can help students move from understanding objects to concepts. Much discussion ensued as the presentation is at the crux of the debate over technology as instruction or entertainment.

Gerald M. DiGiusto used blogging to enhance conventional world politics instruction. Additionally, the merits of individual student blogs are contrasted with a group blog. The latter was more manageable as DiGuisto did not have to check a number of separate web pages. Advantages of blogs were high participation and peer-to-peer and student-professor-interaction.

Tomas Karasek and Anja Hennig developed a tri-national course (Czech Republic, Germany, and Poland) in comparative foreign policy integrating online modules with face-to-face workshops. Students were divided into multinational groups to enhance the cross-cultural aspect; they acquired empirical knowledge, social skills across cultures, and multimedia competency.

Richard Vengroff and James Robert Bourbeau compared traditional, online, and hybrid versions of a comparative politics course. The hybrid course had higher student satisfaction and participation than the other two with the notation that the hybrid course was composed of honors students and the online component was in addition to regular class hours. Participation was higher in the strictly online class than in the traditional class, but student satisfaction was slightly higher in the traditional class than in the online class. Grades were similar across all three.

Rosa Gomez Dierks promoted the need for technology leaders, cooperation teams or e-communities, and mentor-apprentice dyads to share, sustain, and increase technological knowledge in academia. The Teaching and Learning Conference is a bright step forward.

Joachim Karl Rennstich advocated methods to incorporate global voices into the classroom. Cell phones, laptops, and webcams can provide historically inaccessible information to students and foster research collaboration among diverse communities.

Conclusions and Future Steps

The Technology II Track broke new ground regarding the use and assessment of technology and reiterated obstacles expounded upon last year. Technology enables student interaction with information in accessible, immediate, and familiar formats, increasing classroom preparedness and discussion. It enhances and extends the learning process, while the academic mediates learning and guides students through the labyrinth of available information and tools.

The use of technology has costs. First, it may distract from the core objective of learning, especially upon occasions when it fails or is used as a crutch. Second, implementation requires time and resources; these commitments may decrease over time as familiarity and aptitude increase. Finally, as technology brings some students into the classroom, it leaves out others.

Additional steps are needed to advance the use of technology and determine its role in the political science classroom. Practically, copyright issues must be clarified, and a forum is needed to archive proven technologies and provide peer review for emerging uses. APSA may be the ideal organization to undertake this role. Pedagogically, there must be an assessment of specific technologies to achieve discrete objectives and a determination of whether technological skill is a legitimate goal for political science departments. Track participants agreed that technological skills can help provide quality courses and prepare students for a technology driven world. However, they must be systematic and discipline directed.

Assessment/Learning Outcomes I Track Summary

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Assessment is of increasing importance for political science faculty and departments across the discipline. One indicator of this relevance is the diversity of backgrounds of the 24 presenters and participants in our track, ranging from graduate students to full professors and deans, housed in institutions of higher learning ranging from community colleges to Ivy League universities, and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096506250893 Published online by Cambridge University Press