

Kurt Lindemann

Statement About Teaching and Technology Use in the Classroom

I use technology in the classroom to create community, connection, and collaboration with 2,000 (mostly) first-year students. While I consider these concepts integral to a rigorous and affirming pedagogy, I have also discovered that the use of technology itself may change these concepts into something new. Below, I detail the ways my technology use serves to sustain and transform these concepts.

I attempt to create a sense of community in each of my 500-person lecture classes through the use of several technologies. Our @COMM103 Twitter feed is an excellent way for me to answer questions and provide students with related links and prompts for upcoming lessons. Twitter allows me to reach students where they are, and shows them that I am accessible and invested in their overall class experience. Our class Facebook page provides a similar outlet, with students posing questions to me and interacting with each other by posting questions, study guides, and helpful tips for speeches and exams. Unlike our Blackboard site, to which I regularly post notes and study guides, Facebook helps me disseminate information to students in a context with which they are already familiar.

While Twitter and Facebook are useful for creating a sense of community, they also allow me to connect with students. I have found that students hesitant to ask a question in a 500-seat lecture are more willing to ask me a question via Twitter or Facebook message. These technologies also allow me to connect with past students as well, extending the class experience. In addition, I use classroom response technology, the i>clicker, to pose questions to students, which they answer through their handheld device. These questions consist of

opinion-based prompts, exam-type questions, and peer-learning scenarios (in which students answer a question, talk to a classmate, and then answer the question again for hopefully better results), and provide a connection otherwise unattainable in a large lecture format.

Twitter also helps me collaborate with students on lesson plans and curriculum design. When teaching media literacy, in which students are asked to consider the implications and consequences of media messages they create and consume, I ask students to reflect on their own Twitter use. Before the lecture, I search for keywords related to our class, which inevitably leads me to discover sometimes negative and vulgar comments about our class. Rather than reprimand or chastise these students, I incorporate their tweets (read without identifying the author) into my lecture as examples of a lack of awareness of one's audience when using social media. Students enjoy hearing "real life" tweets, and the authors themselves will sometimes own up to their tweets. My use of technology here has allowed me to collaborate with students in teaching them that a safe classroom space is one in which we are still held accountable for our communication. By collaborating with students in these "teachable moments," I also illustrate that technology use is not a faceless, neutral practice; our use of technology, like our communication, has consequences for us and for our audiences.

While some teachers adapt their lesson plans to fit the capabilities of exciting new technologies, I believe that technological innovations should be incorporated into the classroom to serve the needs of teachers, students, and the curriculum. I have been successful in my pedagogical approach precisely because I embrace new technology with a mindfulness of how it may allow me to better communicate, connect and collaborate with my students.

