

Leadership Vision and E-Learning Plan

Veronica O'Neill

New Jersey City University

Leadership Vision and E-Learning Plan

Businesspeople, by their nature, are storytellers. Marketing teams tell stories about products to entice customers to buy them. Managers tell stories to their seniors to support new staffing proposals and objectives. Senior managers tell stories to investors and bankers to raise capital to achieve the company's goals and objectives. However, this skill of storytelling is not a major focus in most business courses. Students often spend a great deal of time calculating ratios and projecting financials for their business plan, while presenting that plan to others is almost an afterthought.

A walk through the School of Business at Greenville State University, an urban, public university in the Northeast, would reveal a beautiful physical plant, with brand-new furnishings and state of the art technology. Each classroom has an interactive whiteboard, and overhead projectors. There are also two computer labs, with Bloomberg terminals and standard desktop computers. The University also has 60 laptop computers on carts, which can be reserved by any professor who wants to do an activity online during a class period. The utilization of these technologies varies from professor to professor, some lecturing with PowerPoint presentations, and others including various resources from the Internet, such as YouTube videos and infographics.

As my own study of Educational Technology progresses, I have begun to distinguish between students consuming content through technology, and students creating content using technology. My own undergraduate students prefer watching a brief YouTube video and discussing it to listening to a lecture about the same topic. They enjoy playing games that I design to reinforce concepts. However, when students create the content themselves, and present it to the class, they are much more engaged and reflective about their learning. This proposal will

enable the University to help students develop their content creation skills, increase their critical thinking skills, and be better prepared for entering the workforce after graduation.

Vision

John Holt once said “Learning is not the product of teaching. Learning is the product of the activity of learners” (Hennig, 2016, p. 25). My vision of e-learning in the future is a shift from students as consumers of technology to students as creators of content utilizing technology. This idea of students creating content dates back to Papert’s constructionist theory, where students create meaningful products based on their own experiences (Henning, 2016).

As you walk through the hallways of Greenville State University School of Business in my future vision, you see groups of students collaborating on a field assignment about business in their own lives. You see a few students working together to test an app they created using Swift. You see a student composing an advertising jingle using GarageBand. Many other apps and technologies are in use throughout the University, as students find new ways to express themselves and explore their world.

Business students hone their storytelling skills using technology in my vision of the future. Nesteruk (2015) describes the relationship between business studies and the humanities, and proposes that liberal arts studies prepare students for lives in the broader society and help them lead more fulfilled lives. He defines digital storytelling as “using digital technologies to combine voice, videos, images, music, interviews, graphics, and other electronic content into personal narratives” (Nesteruk, 2015, p. 143).

The hardware that will support this vision is the Apple iPad. The iPad is a tablet computer, bigger than a smartphone, smaller and more portable than a laptop. There are many free apps available for the iPad, which can support the learning activities of students both in the

classroom and in the field. Several researchers have done studies based on the use of the iPad in various settings in the university.

Nesteruk (2015) used iPads and various apps in a seminar which focused on morality and contemporary business. Students constructed digital stories over the course of the semester, and presented them to the class. He noted that his students were deeply engaged with the project. He also noted that the project answered many of the elements suggested by Carnegie's BELL Study. The BELL Study examined business schools in the United States, and recommended further emphasis on liberal arts to improve practical reasoning abilities. The assignment resulted in many creative mash-ups of all types of media. The results were collaborative, reflective and unique (Nesteruk, 2015).

Welsh et al. (2015) studied student reactions to the use of iPads as learning devices in fieldwork. They noted that the iPad was very portable, and durable when in a protective case. The screen is much larger than a smartphone, and has many apps that help students in the field capture notes, impressions, photographs and video. The iPad also can be used to look up reference materials in the field, which enhances student learning. Data can easily be exported after returning from the field to be further analyzed.

In the course of their research, Welsh et al. (2015) noted that while most students had no prior experience with tablet computing, the skills they had developed on their smartphones and laptops were readily transferrable to the iPad. This shortened learning curve adds to the appeal of the iPad.

Students with an iPad and a few apps can tell their stories, while they enhance their critical thinking skills and have a chance to reflect on their relationship with the world. They can

practice collaboration skills, and create unique narratives. This experience will serve them well as they move from the university setting into the broader business world.

E-Learning Plan

In some cases, the introduction of mobile computing technologies to the classroom is accomplished by providing each student with a personal iPad. In fact, Greenville State University is currently exploring the idea of providing an iPad device to all MBA students, and delivering course materials, including textbooks, on that platform. While this would be an ideal situation, it is not financially realistic for the undergraduate population at Greenville. The university is located in an urban area, and its mission is to provide a quality education to residents of the local community. These students are often dependent on financial aid to attend college, and the additional burden of purchasing an iPad could make their dreams of an education unattainable.

The heart of this implementation plan is the purchase of 30 Apple iPads, which will be stored on a cart in the Information Technology department. This mobile cart will be brought to classrooms if professors want to complete an activity using the iPads during the regular class period. The iPads would also be available for overnight loan to students for the purpose of completing class projects. In that case, students will complete a standard loan agreement, accepting responsibility for loss or negligent damage to the device.

The most important part of implementing this plan to introduce iPads into the classroom is to assemble a group of enthusiastic faculty who are willing to brainstorm ideas and experiment with this technology. As the project leader, my first task would be to recruit a team who would share this vision and who understood the potential of the iPad to develop creativity and critical thinking skills. The team would include faculty members from all departments, as well as a

representative of the Information Technology staff. The Dean's Office would also be invited to send a representative to the meetings. These professors would agree to pioneer the use of this technology in an individual or group project in one course.

The next step would be to train this core team in the operation of the iPad and its media creation apps. Drouin, Vartanian and Birk (2014) studied introducing mobile tablets to university faculty within a Community of Practice model. They assembled a team of faculty members and trained them in the basic operation of the iPad and its apps. The group met once as a large group, and then subsequently as smaller groups who were interested in collaborating on projects. As this group became more familiar with the iPad and apps, they were able to take on a mentoring role for other faculty members. As faculty members gained familiarity with the new technology, they were able to offer demonstrations and hands-on workshops to their own departments. (Drouin, Vartanian & Birk (2014).

Apple has created a series of iPad tutorials for educators, which are freely available in its iBook store. These range from an introduction to the iPad, to specific apps such as iMovie and GarageBand. These tutorials are self-paced, and hands on. For example, in the iMovie tutorial participants download materials and use them to make edited movies, complete with special effects and soundtracks. By the end of the tutorial, the participants are competent to create their own movies and eager to try these new skills with their own materials.

In addition to the self-paced trainings, some face-to-face workshops will be scheduled with the project team, to maintain their level of enthusiasm and keep the project on track. In addition to honing new skills, these meetings will be an opportunity to showcase student work, inspire new projects, and troubleshoot any problems encountered along the way.

Students will also need some orientation to the iPad and its apps, although Welsh et al. (2015) notes that students are so familiar with technology that their skills transfer readily. A brief self-paced tutorial modeled on the Apple tutorial for educators will be offered as an orientation experience. Students will then create a brief independent assignment, with a topic such as “A Day in the Life”, as a formative assessment to demonstrate that they are able to operate the iPad and apps effectively. Students will film video segments, and bring them to class for editing and movie creation. This will allow for troubleshooting, and for collaboration between students. The completion of this formative exercise will enhance student confidence and competence. They will also be able to share their work with the class, to spark imagination and creativity in their peers.

At this point, the students will be ready to take on a substantive project that is relevant to their course. Each professor who is participating in the initiative will have different ideas for this project, which can be completed in groups or individually at the professors’ choice. It would be desirable to allow several weeks for this project, to maximize the students’ chances to be creative. At the end of the project, it is recommended that student work be shared with the class in a “Film Festival” to allow the entire class to be informed, entertained and inspired by their classmates’ work.

Because the iPads are not assigned to a particular student, students will store their work in cloud storage. This will permit them to access the projects from any iPad, as well as from other devices. Students will not have the ability to add apps to the iPad, to ensure that only approved apps are installed. Only the administrators in the Information Technology department will be able to install additional apps.

The iPad is a powerful tool, but it is simple to maintain. The devices will be covered by AppleCare, which is Apple's insurance plan for new devices. That plan will cover routine hardware and software issues. The proposal also includes the purchase of protective cases for the devices, to minimize the chance of damage if they are dropped. The mobile cart will be powered, which will allow the devices to be charged as a group when they are not in use.

For this plan to be successful, it must be accepted by a critical mass of the Business School faculty. One of the challenges in this respect is that many business faculty members come to education as the logical next-step after a long career in business. This is an asset for students, as they benefit from the faculty members' real-world experience. All faculty members have some familiarity with computers, as many of the university's functions and reporting are completed online. However, most of the faculty are not digital natives, and may not be confident in their ability to implement this program in their own classes. As project manager, it will be important to help faculty members overcome this reluctance, build their confidence and encourage them to try the technology themselves. Ongoing faculty support will be needed to allow our students the chance to reap the benefits of this program.

To be an effective project manager in this instance will require that I hone my team leadership skills. I often used the team leadership approach in my past life as an Operations Manager. However, when I was in the project manager role, I most often assigned duties and received status reports. The hardware aspects of this project are fairly straightforward, but it is important that every member of the team have the opportunity to have their own voice heard. Since this project involves creativity, it is important that every idea be given consideration, and that the team collaborate to refine and implement these ideas.

I have personally been a part of a community of practice in my career, but have never attempted to start one. I am fortunate to have studied this concept during my doctoral studies, and will have to work hard to transform this group of faculty into a true community of practice.

The most likely barrier to faculty participation in this program that I can foresee is the demands placed on faculty time, especially as other new initiatives are introduced. The Dean of the School of Business is a proponent of incorporating mobile computing into our programs, as evidenced by the proposed one-to-one iPad initiative for our MBA students. In order to overcome any reluctance due to time constraints, the bulk of the training for the initiative will be self-paced and online. The opportunities for scholarly activities, including presentations at conferences such as NJEdge, will also be highlighted.

Funding Proposal

Universities have an obligation to their students to prepare them for life after graduation, in the real world. Especially in a School of Business, graduates expect that they will have the skills needed to succeed in the business world, and that they will be qualified to accept entry level positions in that field.

In the past, many jobs, even in business and finance, were fairly routine. There was an opportunity to become an expert in a particular field, and have a long and successful career working in that field. Modern automation has eliminated many of these jobs, as sophisticated algorithms perform jobs that were once done by expert humans. Now, when a university graduate seeks an entry level job, they are interviewing with potential employers who value problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and creativity. These are not the traditional skills learned in a business school, but business schools must adapt and change to this new reality.

This proposal will help students hone those creative, problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Creating an iMovie is an engaging and challenging process, using that iMovie to describe phenomena in contemporary business demonstrates both functional knowledge and creativity. The iPads can also be used for other projects, using other apps. For example, Entrepreneurship students can use the Swift app to create their own apps. The potential uses of this technology are limited only by the imagination of the user.

It must be noted that per the Apple website, these devices are generally believed to have a 3-year life, although they may be useful longer depending on battery use throughout the life of the device. As such, the 30 devices proposed in this document have the potential to be used by hundreds of students over their lifespan.

The projected expenses of implementing this proposal include:

30 iPad devices@\$299	\$8,970.00
30 protective covers@\$39	1,170.00
1 Bretford powered cart	2,199.95
AppleCare for 2 years@\$99	2,970.00
Total	\$15,309.95

Notes: The apps mentioned in this proposal are free and available in the App Store

The self-paced tutorial modules are free and available in the iBook Store

Pricing was sourced from the Apple Store for State and Local Government

As previously stated, it is not realistic to fund this proposal through university tuition and fees. Many of the students at Greenville State University are from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and simply cannot absorb any increases in costs. In order to implement this program, an outside funding source must be identified.

The first choice of funding source for this project is a grant. The university grants office is very helpful in identifying current grant sources, and in assisting with the filing of grant applications. Additional sources of grant information include the U.S. Education Department (<https://tech.ed.gov/funding/>), the State of New Jersey (http://www.nj.gov/cgi-bin/education/grants/gropops.pl?maxhits=10000&string=active=archived&datafile=gropops_alpha) and the Lumina Foundation (<https://www.luminafoundation.org/grants>). Finding grant funding may be challenging, and may impact the timeline for the implementation of this project.

An alternative source of funding is the School of Business Alumni network. Greenville State University has loyal and generous alumni support, and contacts will be initiated to identify some alumni who may be willing to partially fund this project to keep our students competitive in the workplace. Any shortfall could be bridged by various fundraising efforts.

Conclusion

This proposal is to introduce a mobile tablet device, the Apple iPad, to the School of Business at Greenville State University. The devices will be used by undergraduate business students to tell their own stories, and bring elements of the real world into the classroom. Using tablets to create content, such as movies or musical compositions, builds confidence and competence in students. Employers value creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and want to hire entry level workers who can look at a problem from a different perspective and generate solutions.

This project will be a success if a core team of professors participate in the initiative in Year 1, and students begin to develop their creative talents. In subsequent years, the initiative will be a success if it spreads throughout the school, with the core team acting as mentors and coaches for newer faculty participants. The success of the project will be demonstrated at a multimedia display at the annual School of Business Research Day, showcasing student movies and creative work, and inspiring other students to want to participate.

The ultimate test of success will be if our students have greater success in the business world after graduation. This outcome will be difficult to measure, but is the true test of the effectiveness of the proposal. There is an opportunity for a longitudinal research study to track the success of graduates who participate in the program, which may be another incentive for faculty to adopt this initiative.

References

Apple Store for State and Local Government (2017)

<https://ecommerce.apple.com/asb2b/home.do>

Drouin, M., Vartanian, L. R., & Birk, S. (2014). A community of practice model for introducing mobile tablets to university faculty. *Innovative Higher Education*, 39(3), 231-245.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10755-013-9270-3>

Hennig, N. (2016). Content creation with mobile devices. *Library Technology Reports*, 52(3), 25-30,2. Retrieved from

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1783574833?accountid=12793>

Nesteruk, J. (2015). Digital storytelling: Bringing humanistic inquiry to management studies.

Journal of Management Education 39(1) p. 141–152. DOI: 10.1177/1052562914545335

Welsh K, Mauchline A, Powell V, France D, Park J, Whalley W. Student perceptions of iPads as mobile learning devices for fieldwork. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 39(3)

p. 450-469. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2015.1066315>