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How do college students use IT?
The EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research recently published The ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology, 2009. Some key findings are quite relevant to our students:

• College Library Website: About 95% students use their own computers (mostly laptops) to access it weekly.
• Social Networking Sites and/or Text Messaging: About 90% students use them daily.
• Contributing to Blogs, Wikis and Video Websites: About one-third students do it monthly; additionally 37% students use VoIP (Skype).
• There is a marked difference between personal and academic use of podcasts, and video-audio creation software. Only five to six percent of them create audio or video content for courses.
• Students prefer a moderate amount of IT for courses.
• 65% students disagree with the statement “I skip classes when materials from course lectures are online”. (http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/EKF/EKF0906.pdf)

Inside this issue:

Technology Classrooms

We are one step closer to bringing teaching technologies into all of our classrooms! Fox 102 and 107 became “smart” rooms in the Fall Break, thanks to the special gift donated for renovating Fox Hall. Every classroom in the building (five upstairs and four downstairs) has a computer and video projection system. Some of them also have cable TV access and an interactive smartboard.

We aim at outfitting Copley 243, Haley 109 and the Music Tech Lab later this academic year.

Please visit our website for a list of technology classrooms — http://library.rmc.edu/mis.html.

Clickers: Student Response System

At the Faculty Back-to-School Retreat, the Higgins Fellows demonstrated how to use “clickers” to encourage student participation in class. The student responds to the information displayed in PowerPoint format to answer questions, take surveys, or vote on issues. The instructor uses it to call students’ attention, check students’ understanding of concepts, and conduct in-class simulations (such as debates and mock elections). The instructor and students can see the result of responses presented instantaneously in charts and graphs. Responses can be anonymous or associated with the student’s name.

If you use PowerPoint, you will find it very easy to create “clicker” interactive presentations. Just borrow a clicker kit from the Media & Instructional Support office, and install the software on your computer. Contact Lily Zhang (zzhang@rmc.edu) if you plan to try out the “clickers”.

PBS Videos @ Your Library

The McGraw-Page Library (http://library.rmc.edu) is pleased to announce access to a comprehensive collection of video programming from the Public Broadcasting Service. The content includes series such as Frontline, NOVA, and The American Experience. This extraordinary video collection contains educational and cultural programming to support many course curricula, including:

• History (example: Ken Burns’s The Civil War),
• Scientific research (The Brain),
• Philosophical and religious questions (The Question of God: Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis), and
• Compelling issues (The Global Marketplace).

Anyone with a R-MC network login can access the programs on MaconCat. The videos are available via streaming, and are not for download or copying. Detailed information can be found at http://library.rmc.edu/pbsvideos.html.
Digital Storytelling as Course Assignments

Digital storytelling involves a narrative accompanying digital content, including video, images, sound and text. The process typically begins with scripting and developing a storyline or point of view, followed by collecting and assembling digital content. The technique can be applied to many disciplines. At R-MC our FYE instructors have given digital storytelling assignments in multiple courses. Students enrolled in Anthropology, Honors and other courses also had the opportunity to create their own media-enhanced narratives.

 Appropriately guided, students working on storytelling projects learn to tell a story or present a point of view from the audience perspective. Collecting and assembling the digital content in a meaningful way — in order to effectively communicate the story or idea — requires deep thinking. Digital storytelling allows students to express themselves with their own words and voice; students tend to have a strong sense of ownership. Also, research data shows the net generation — who may not have problem uploading music or making YouTube videos — does have a hard time assessing online resources. The video-making experience helps to increase their media literacy.

There are downsides to assigning digital storytelling projects. Putting together a coherent digital presentation is more time-consuming than people think. Students’ time management skills and feedback from the instructor are crucial to ensure quality work. In addition, acquiring production skills as well as using the equipment and editing software require a great deal of support.

If you consider giving digital storytelling assignments, please contact Lily Zhang (zzhang@rmc.edu; x3216). She will be happy to come to teach basic production skills to your students, provide tech support information, and share with you ways of structuring collaboration for the production and evaluation rubrics.

Moodle Tips

Moodle is great for posting course information such as lecture notes. Some faculty also enjoy the Assignment, QuickMail, and Forum tools. There are some less known features, which may be helpful for engaging students.

Questionnaire: Use it to create a survey to get students’ feedback on the course. You can view the results by the student’s responses, or by responses to the individual question. Download the data to Excel as needed.

Q & A Forum: It requires the student to submit his/hers thoughts before viewing other students’ postings. After the initial (original) posting the student can view and respond to others’ postings.

Glossary: Each student is assigned a term or concept that he/she is to become an expert of. He/she will contribute the entry to the Glossary, and edit it as needed. Other students can view and comment on it, and even rate it if the instructor allows such an option.

Wiki and Separate Group: Two or three students in a group collaborate on writing in a Wiki. The group members can view and compare the versions while editing.

Blog: This is a great tool for student discussion across coursesites, although the instructor can make it course-bound. The students can tag their postings. The term that gets tagged most will display in bold font, informing the instructor what topic students are most interested in. Youtube videos and Flickr galleries may be embedded in a blog.

How do you use your favorite Moodle tool? Please share with us by going to Moodle.rmc.edu (click on the link on the right panel).

iTunes U & YouTube EDU

There are many academic videos on iTunes U (http://deimos3.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/Browse/itunesu.com.1555792676) and YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/education). They cover a wide range of content areas. The MIT OpenCourseWare is among the contributors, publishing over 1800 teaching materials. Other universities also have posted recordings of course content, academic seminars, guest lectures, and discuss forums.

Tech Buzz

Twitter is a social networking site. It allows the user 140 characters for each posting to say whatever he/she wants. The user can share his/her postings, and follow other tweets. (Some 2008 presidential candidates kept their followers posted by tweeting regularly). Professional organizations and businesses use Twitter to announce events and promote productions. Twitter works with cell phone and other messaging services. It has been growing steadily due to its capacity for establishing interconnected networks of users and updating information rapidly.

Mark your calendar

February 1, 2010: Faculty Lunch-time Tech Talk
August 2010: Moodle for Beginners & Intermediate Users

Thanks to Jennie Callas for editing the newsletter.