

Faculty Fellows Project Report

Reducing barriers for teaching with technology

May 2019 - Cheryl Pinzone

Brief Project Description:

The aim of my project is to assist instructors with utilizing teaching and learning technologies effectively and efficiently, to facilitate a student-centered approach for enhancing the undergraduate learning experience. I proposed to create and share resources to provide exposure to use and integrate educational technology tools and research-supported practices more easily, and reduce barriers to instructors (faculty and graduate student teaching assistants). I achieved this by developing guides and workshops to assist other instructors in integrating and using educational technology tools.

The challenge addressed:

There is a significant time-investment inherent in any adoption of a new technology, keeping up-to-date with consistent streams of upgrades, or a migration to a new Learner Management System. There can also be much frustration and reluctance to adopting or adapting to newer technologies, researching solutions, or determining who to contact for help. However even with this investment and potential for hiccups, there is great promise in utilizing educational technologies particularly in large classrooms, and to implement active-learning activities to move away from lecture-based models.

Desired result:

My main goal was to reduce the uncertainty that arises in planning, implementing, and revising pedagogical strategies using technology to facilitate the undergraduate learning experience. Professionally, I wanted to become more proficient in knowledge of educational technologies, the research supporting the techniques promoted, and the landscape of tools currently available (or on the horizon). Working with ASSETT and the other Faculty Fellows has been particularly helpful, and learning who are experts in certain technologies has allowed me to direct others to the right people more quickly. Furthermore, understanding the disciplinary challenges within the biological sciences has proven useful for me to better assist members in the EBIO department to find the tools they are seeking (embedded expertise in biology and education).

What was completed for the project?

A number of products were created, further developed, and disseminated, including:

- A guide for using Canvas (focused on EBIO courses)
- Hosted a workshop for Teaching with Technology
- Shared resources for links to syllabus statements
- Disseminated information on Disability Flex Plans
- Posted external resources/lists of Learning Technologies, Active Learning Techniques, Classroom Assessment Techniques

Project outcomes and lessons learned:

I received great feedback from a number of colleagues who utilized the resources I created and/or shared. The Canvas guide was shared with the departmental listserv and posted on the Sharepoint site. I received a handful of emails thanking me for creating it, a few requests with specific questions (then incorporated into the guide), and several unique page-views on Google analytics (not counting whichever accounts are set to private browsing). The lab coordinator for a large course (~250 person combined) says that she shares the guide with all new TA's.

In late October 2018, I presented a workshop at the Lunch N' Learn seminar, titled 'Tech or Treat: Teaching (and Learning) with Technology'. We discussed the stake-holders within a classroom, I presented tech ideas for assisting in classroom management, accountability, engagement, assessment, and reflection. We also discussed issues related to accessibility, and some tools for aesthetic design in Canvas. The workshop was well-attended with roughly 15-20 graduate students and a handful of postdocs and faculty. I also provided 'treat-bags' with a few pieces of candy, and small slips of paper with different tech ideas printed on them.

I posted a number of resources on the SharePoint and distributed to the listserv, so that instructors in the department can more easily access and be aware of changes and updates to technology, programs on campus, and resources. It is difficult to imagine every possible question that might come up with different technologies or programs, so being available for specific questions has been most helpful (and then documenting the issues for later users). Also, including contact information for other resources (OIT, faculty experts, staff) expedites assistance, without having to handle every situation that arises. After discussing these topics and resources with others, I have a good idea of what other guides or workshops instructors would like and faculty have asked me to help vet different technologies for their courses.

Reflections on the Faculty Fellows Program and project:

The Faculty Fellows Program was very professionally productive. It was enjoyable to hear about others' challenges and solutions to improve teaching and learning in a variety of disciplines. It was great to hear feedback from colleagues and incorporate disparate ideas into my project. Many of the activities and readings we engaged in were illuminating, especially with a variety of different perspectives. Specifically for this project, having some time and support devoted to tackling the landscape of educational technologies, finding solutions to common problems in the discipline, and then creating resources to assist others in this department has been very rewarding. Moving ahead, I plan to continue tweaking and expanding these resources and spread them with other departments as well as creating new guides and workshops especially in the areas of inclusive pedagogy and/or scientific writing.

Other artifacts and visuals (data, weblinks, pictures, write-ups):

The guide I developed is in the form of a [Google doc](#) which can be commented on. The workshop slides are likely less helpful to link to (mainly for presentation structure), much of it was demonstrative and interactive but I am happy to share on request. Other resources included: [Required Syllabus Statements](#) (Spring 2019), potential statements: [DACA](#), [Children in the Classroom](#), [Office of Victim Assistance](#), [Sexual assault](#); Teaching and Technology: [List of Classroom Assessment Techniques](#), [List of >200 Active Learning Techniques](#), [Directory of Learning & Performance Tools](#), and info from Disability Services information session.