

tures, photographic images, lesson plans and study guides all available via the Internet. The hope is to develop in these graduate students the skills they will need in their future classrooms, while developing models, instructional materials and techniques for other courses throughout the University system. I hope this academic year to combine the works of Professor Davis and my own to make all of my courses an elec-

tronic workshop for both faculty and students, providing a model and dissemination point for the use of the new applications of technology to the classroom. At the very least, my students will be assigned work, both individually and in groups, that will enable them to fully utilize the vast array of technology which will shape their future work place within and without the academic world.

Multimedia and the Senior Seminar

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As coordinator of the international affairs major and associate professor of political science, I work with words—not pictures. The scholarly values we political scientists convey to students reflect critical thinking, rigorous research and well-prepared analysis. Working in a visual medium is, therefore, very different for me, my colleagues in the discipline, and our students. While we incorporate graphs and tables into our work, we rarely “do pictures.” As a result of this incongruity, the incorporation of multimedia into my department’s senior seminar made me feel as if I stepped onto a weak limb of a threateningly high tree. I did find it comforting to learn that the University of South Carolina has incorporated multimedia techniques into an honors English seminar in which students “attach” photographs, maps and even music to their text.¹ Now that my students’ multimedia projects are complete, I am so satisfied with the results that I would like to share my experiences with others who want to incorporate multimedia projects into their capstone course.

Before I go into the details of how I integrated multimedia technology into the senior seminar, let me provide a standard definition of multimedia. According to Egil and Kinnaman, multimedia refers to “a seamless digital integration of text, graphics, animation audio, still images, and motion video in a way that provides individual users with high levels of control and interaction.”²

How We Began. In the summer 1997, I met with Kennesaw State University’s Presentation Technology Department (PTD) Director, Karl Aldag, to work out a plan in which he agreed to introduce multimedia technology to my fall quarter senior seminar students. The plan was to be a pilot project for PTD since they were just beginning to install computer equipment in their newly created technology laboratory. I assured them that, because our senior seminar was new to the major, we would not inundate the lab with students. In fact, this pilot project got underway with four students. This proved to be important as both director and Assistant Director, Shannon Cronin, were new administrators to an emerging and technologically sophisticated department. Both provided invaluable time to introduce students to the

various computer programs such as Adobe PrintShop and Adobe Premiere which were required for multimedia productions. Neither student nor their instructor had any idea how to use the multimedia computer software. PowerPoint was about the most I had ever used in “multimedia technology.”

Lest anyone think making a video simply means pointing the camcorder in the right direction, let me add that my students incorporated both audio and video into a digital version on the computer. Only at the end was it downloaded to a videocassette. In fact, a camcorder was not even used. How does one make a video or compact disk (CD) presentation of Mexican oil issues or the French role in NATO from our campus? That is where digital imaging creation from existing photos in books and magazines enters the process. Images are scanned and digitized, and contribute to the final product. Fair use doctrine currently permits the incorporation of copyrighted material into a multimedia product for academic purposes.

Multimedia Products. One student created a CD and two students produced videos. One international affairs student who wanted to reveal her language ability, chose to narrate her video in French! Such a technique should hold promise as a means of future assessment within the new “applied foreign language” concentration of the international affairs major. All projects were completed by the end of fall quarter 1997. My instructions required students to prepare a portfolio that included several written components one of which was a research paper. They could choose to write a more lengthy research paper and opt out of the multimedia part, or write a shorter version and use it as the basis for a multimedia production. The multimedia portion of the senior seminar was optional and three of the four students successfully completed a multimedia product. Of the eight course objectives stated in the syllabus, the most fitting was the one which allows “for the production of a research endeavor which will utilize student writing, research, analytical, oral and creative skills.” Putting their research product into a multimedia format certainly fit the creative requirement for my senior semi-

nar students.

Lessons Learned. From a pedagogical standpoint, three “lessons learned” emerged from this pilot project. They include:

- Multimedia productions are very time consuming for the neophyte.
- Meshing of technology and critical thinking must be accomplished.
- Projects must be designed as an *applied* extension of the learning process within our respective disciplines.

Projects take lots of time. When assigning the standard research paper in our classes, most instructors can gauge the time it will take for students to research a given topic, write, edit, and bring the paper to completion. This may not be true for multimedia. If the instructor has never put together a multimedia project such as creation of a video or CD, it becomes difficult to set parameters on the project. My students estimated that it took 80-100 hours to complete their projects. Research had to be conducted, photos gathered and audio components created.

Care must be given not to overload the student with a multimedia requirement that cannot reasonably be completed within one quarter or semester. By keeping the multimedia requirement flexible, two students were able to learn various techniques for creating a digital video. As the quarter as coming to an end, and they had yet to complete their videos, the one logical solution was simply to make a shorter video. Since I set no production length this is exactly what they did. Without compromising the learning experience, the original expectation of a twenty-five minute video actually turned into a final product of 5-10 minutes in length. As student William Weatherford noted, “it took eighty hours to make a five minute video.”

Meshing of critical thinking and technology. Multimedia creation is not just about creating pretty pictures. Senior seminar students were expected to incorporate critical thinking skills they learned during their years at Kennesaw State University into a multimedia format. This meant that they had to first acquire an in-depth understanding of the topic under study. The next step was to create a “storyboard” layout of certain aspects of their topic that should be included in the video or CD. Admittedly, student Deidre Allen’s CD project allowed for greater incorporation of research material because she could include the entire text of her paper on the CD. A video project is more restrictive and students had to carefully pick and choose the audio portion which took the place of Deidre’s text. The audio portion of Nancy Padilla and William Weatherford’s videos is where they exhibited their critical analysis. An extensive pictorial presentation made the audio component that much more interesting.

An applied extension of the learning process. Multimedia senior seminar projects should be presented as a tool that

bridges the gap between discipline-related analysis and application of students’ findings via a new medium. Thus, academic discovery by students can now be disseminated in a medium other than the standard paper format. While the multimedia project is merely another way to display one’s work to others, it also has the benefit of permitting students to work in a medium that may be of application in their future places of employment. My senior seminar students transcended the standard presentation style traditionally used by academics in my discipline and exhibited their knowledge in a way that meshes intellectual strength with technology skills. Hopefully, such a marriage will assist them after graduation in their quest for employment. Since all students were close to graduation, they readily saw the utility of this task.

Final evaluation. At the end of the quarter I asked the students to complete an evaluation of the multimedia project. All of them viewed the assignment as positive and worthwhile, but extremely time consuming. As students become more familiar with the technology, especially those students now in high school, the time involved to complete a project should greatly decrease. There will, however, be a lag time until these young students enter our university classrooms.

Student comments ranged from “I feel much more confident now due to all the accomplishments I have made over the quarter in this class” to “helped get me ready for the real world.” Every student commented on the time consuming nature of multimedia projects and wanted to forewarn other instructors and students about undertaking more than can be realistically completed in one quarter or semester. Comments included “requires long hours of lab work” to “the only problem is the amount of time it consumes, especially if you are new to the equipment.”

What senior seminar students took with them from this course was not only a “paper” portfolio, but a multimedia sample (video or CD) of their talents as well. Future expansion of the multimedia concept could also include putting student portfolios online via the Internet.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Lawrence Van Gelder, “Term Paper on CD-Rom Turns Words into Virtual Reality,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1995, B8:3.
- ² Dyrli, Odvard Egil and Kinnaman, Daniel E. 1995, “Part 4: Moving ahead educationally with multimedia,” *Technology & Learning*. 15(7), 46-51.