

4-14-2000

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Recommended Citation

"Basic Teaching Tools are Revolutionizing College Classroom" (2000). *News Releases*. 9095.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/9095

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April 14, 2000
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NEWS RELEASE

BASIC TECHNOLOGY TOOLS ARE REVOLUTIONIZING COLLEGE CLASSROOM

DAYTON, Ohio — “Killer applications” — complex, exotic and time-consuming — are not making the biggest difference as technology becomes a common part of the college curriculum. Instead, classrooms are being redefined by technology basics — e-mail, Web sites, threaded discussions and list serves — says a University official in the forefront of the technology movement.

At the University of Dayton, named in the May issue of *Yahoo! Internet Life* as the most wired Catholic university in the country and the most wired university in Ohio, 90 percent of the faculty are using these primary tools of the networked environment, estimates Tom Skill, assistant provost for academic technology. “These are the simple tools that make massive differences,” he said. “We’re not using technology just because it’s there. We’re using it to enhance teaching and learning.”

At UD, all University-owned student housing on the highly residential campus is fully wired for direct high-speed Internet connection, and free dial-in service is provided to the small percentage of undergraduate students who live off campus. UD is among the 11 percent of universities nationwide that requires students to own computers, ensuring compatibility and accessibility for students.

Several features of the new Ryan C. Harris Learning Teaching Center, dedicated April 14 at UD, are designed to explore how technology is changing the way faculty teach and students learn — a significant evolution in UD’s technology-enhanced learning environment.

Microsoft applications are an integral part of academic technology at UD. The University represents the largest implementation in higher education of Lotus Notes R5 software, which, combined with Lotus LearningSpace, easily provides faculty and students with the tools to integrate technology into the curriculum.

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Support and training comes, in part, from the Ryan C. Harris Learning Teaching Center, where the Collaboratory specializes in groupware and software that make collaboration possible. Faculty members can attend group sessions and arrange one-on-one lessons to learn about the tools.

"More and more, we're moving toward a paperless classroom, and that has all kinds of ramifications," said Ken Graetz, director of the Collaboratory and assistant professor of psychology. "Students don't need to write down everything the teacher says or flashes on the screen because they can go to the class Web site and get it whenever they want. Teachers are spending less time lecturing and much more time collaborating with students and talking with one another.

"For faculty members, we have to think much more about what we're doing, reflect much more on our own techniques and our own teaching methods," Graetz said.

Teachers who master the technology are having "such a blast," he said. "The Web pages are so fun to do. It's a very creative process. It's like eating potato chips. Once you create one Web page, you can't stop with that. You have to create more pages."

Additional support for technology comes from the Webmentors, computer-savvy students who teach professors how use technology tools. They are based in the Williams Web Development Lab in the Learning Teaching Center.

Faculty members and students are finding that technology basics are making the difference at the University of Dayton.

- E-mail is revolutionizing teacher-student interaction. Students e-mail questions as they think of them, and professors reply on a daily basis, making office hours redundant. Research papers and essays are e-mailed by students, comments are inserted electronically by teachers and the corrected papers are e-mailed back. In a UD history class taught by adjunct professor Doug Jenks, the era of the Vietnam War came alive for students born in the 1980s because military veterans shared their experiences with the class via e-mail (<http://homepages.udayton.edu/~jenks/252.HTM>).

- Web sites, whether created by UD faculty members or someone outside the scope of the University, are providing valuable information on subjects that range from ancient history to current events. Students can access grades, order transcripts and check out and renew library books online, at any time of the day or night. Faculty members routinely post readings, class assignments and links that are carefully screened for accuracy.

Some offer further tools. Biology students use the online Mentor tutorial (<http://mentor.udayton.edu/>) created by David Wright, assistant professor of biology, to review course materials, such as the bones, arteries and muscles of the human head.

It's adaptable software that others, including Harvard University and the Boy Scouts of America, have used to develop their own interactive practice exams.

More examples? UD students can review exam questions for their religion and science course, taught by Michael Barnes, professor of religious studies, and get pointers on how to frame their answers (<http://homepages.udayton.edu/~barnes/477-exams.htm>). Those studying communication in the information age can follow a link and find the timeline of the Internet (<http://www.udayton.edu/~computer>)

- Threaded discussions allow students to add their comments about topics posed by the professor as well as any of the comments contributed by their classmates. It's a method that tempts students who are hesitant to speak out in class and it primes the pump for informed classroom discussion, says Marilyn Fischer, associate professor of philosophy. Threaded discussions can also let students work on group projects without synchronizing their schedules and meeting in person.
- Listserves allow for easy e-mail distribution of important information, either from the professor or from classmates.

In addition, a select number of UD courses have used components of distance learning.

Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, M.H.S.H., director of the Institute for Pastoral Initiatives, taught a 1998 religion class from campus that was aimed at students at Chaminade University in Hawaii. In keeping with UD's emphasis on community, she prefaced the interactive videoconference classes with two weeks of intensive face-to-face sessions to form a community of learners. Students used the Internet and e-mail to study cases and discuss books they were assigned to read.

The evolution continues. If results turn out as expected, more distance learning courses will be instituted, including the introduction to psychology courses in fall 2001.

"These big survey courses are easily adapted to distance learning because many, if not most, have a major objective of conveying a substantial amount of information of which a big portion is factual," said Don Polzella, a professor who has been teaching psychology at UD for 28 years and who early on adapted to technology in the classroom. Student group work and meetings with faculty members will keep the experience from being an exercise in isolation while preserving the Marianist emphasis on connections and collaboration as important qualities in education, he said.

"The Web can be used to do anything — deliver lectures, get information — and it approaches in quality what can be achieved in the classroom," Polzella said.

And student achievements are comparable. Greg Elvers, associate professor of psychology, and Polzella ran a pilot study during the fall 1999 semester. Fifty students were randomly assigned to two sections of the course. One group attended class and listened to the lecture, the other group did not. All had access to the same class resources on the Web.

With what they learned — students in both situations spent about the same amount of time on the material and learned about the same amount, but the distance learners thought they had spent more time and thought their grades would have been better had they attended the lectures — Polzella and Elvers will revise the course and try it again in the spring 2001.

Given good results, the entire Psych 101 roster will go online in the fall.

“We see this as a community of practice, and we’re always ready to learn new stuff,” Graetz said of the University. “We are all interested in the same thing: How do you incorporate these tools into your courses and do it effectively? How can they improve your ability to teach and improve student learning? I’ll show you something I know how to do and later you can show me something you know how to do.

“That’s collaboration.”

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