Sabbatical Leave Report

Enhancing the online learning experience of Introduction to Anatomy and Physiology Students

During Fall Semester 2011

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ABSTRACT

Creating new learning objects that will improve instruction, learning, engagement, and retention in Biology 100 online was the main goal of my sabbatical. Specifically, the four objectives of this sabbatical were (1) learn how to use the software program Camtasia, (2) create vodcasts using Camtasia, (3) create two Voicethread assignments, and (4) create a Ning Network for my online Biology 100 course. The desktop seminars and the online course that I participated in at the beginning of Fall 2011 semester familiarized me with many useful Web 2.0 tools and their best practices for online education, which I was able to implement during the creation of my Camtasia vodcasts, Voicethread Assignments, and Ning Network. As a result of this Sabbatical, my online D2L course is populated with 9 personalized vodcasts and two Voicethread assignments. These will engage my auditory and visual learners as well as help all my students meet the course learning objectives more readily. In addition, the Ning Network provides a meeting place for social interaction unlike anything offered by D2L. Ning isn’t purely for fun however, assessments may be included as a component of student participation. URLs (links) have been provided for all vodcasts and Voicethreads. Screenshots of the active Ning Network have also been included for our evaluation. Mastering the technology and developing the vodcasts, Voicethreads, and Ning Network took significantly more time than initially estimated in my Sabbatical Leave Proposal. However, I am already sharing these learning objects with my students and they appear to be improving both learning and retention. Therefore, the additional time investment was worthwhile. I look forward to developing more vodcasts and Voicethread assignments in the future and sharing my skill-set with my colleagues.
OBJECTIVES OF LEAVE

The objectives for this project were:

1. Learn how to use the software program Camtasia
2. Create vodcasts using Camtasia software for my online Biology 100 course
   a. Initially I identified approximately 10 topics for which I wanted to create a vodcast
3. Learn how to create and manage a Wiki using Google Groups, Wetpaint, Wikispaces or another, as yet unknown, wiki server.
4. Create one group Wiki project for my online Biology 100 course.

REVISIONS TO OBJECTIVES

In December 2011, I proposed the following revision to Objectives three and four above:

• Revised Objective 3: Create two Voicethread assignments
• Revised Objective 4: Create a Ning Network

After being invited to observe the process of assigning individuals to Wiki groups and the subsequent creation of student Wikis in another of our online courses here at CRC, I determined that a Wiki would not be appropriate for my course. While taking an excellent professional development course through the @One Institute, I learned about Voicethread and Ning, both of which were well suited to my course design and learning outcomes.

The Professional Standards Committee approved these revisions via email on December 6, 2011.

SUMMARY OF SABBATICAL ACTIVITIES

In August 2011, I began taking a series of workshops and seminars that would prepare me for creating vodcasts using Camtasia. Because I wanted to ensure that the videos I produced were of high quality and would be useful for several years, I was interested in not only learning about the software I would be using, but also the best practices associated with creating online learning objects.

The @One Institute (funded by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office) provides a myriad of online courses and desktop seminars for instructors wishing to develop or improve their online teaching skills. There were four one-hour desktop seminars that got me off to a great start: Powerpoint 2010, Camtasia for Mac, Engaging Millenial Students with Funtech, and Upgrading Grading using Jing. Since I intended on using Powerpoint 2010 and Camtasia to create my videos, the first two workshops were incredibly informative. The latter two workshops provided inspiration for how to improve my online presence using audio and video recordings and how to use a really wonderful
free application called Jing. Jing allows you to create short videos and take screen shots and then upload them to your course. It is a great “quick and dirty” way to help students when they are having technical problems. I’ve used it numerous times since learning about it. Being able to send a student a quick video explanation or screenshot without hours of preparation is so useful and it helps the student feel like they have a connection with their instructor.

In October, I also enrolled in a four-week course through @One taught by Michelle Pacasny-Brock called “Building Online Community with Social Media”. Although this course was tremendously time-consuming, it was, without a doubt, the best thing I did during my sabbatical. This course was entirely online using Moodle, a learning management system I was unfamiliar with. Michelle incorporated the use of Twitter, Voicethread, Ning, and Google Docs into her assessments, knowing full well that many of her students had never used these Web 2.0 tools before. Since this was a course for college (and some high school) instructors, Michelle was very careful to demonstrate best practices and she gave plenty of troubleshooting suggestions. I enjoyed the experience of being a “newbie” when using these applications and am thankful that I can now empathize with my students each time I introduce a new technology to them. In addition, during the course I was able to participate in various Voicethreads and a Ning Network, which ultimately inspired me to revise my Sabbatical Objectives.

While taking the @One desktop seminars and the “Building Online Community with Social Media” course, I was simultaneously developing my vodcasts. Prior to creating my first video, I watched a few tutorial videos at the Camtasia Learning Center website: Overview of the Camtasia Studio Interface, Recording the Screen, Editing Dimensions & Saving Projects, PowerPoint Add-in Toolbar, and Cut & Split Using Markers on the Toolbar. After completing these workshops it became clear to me that recording and editing these videos would require more uninterrupted time than I would be able to find in my office on campus: I would need to work from home. I then set about purchasing and installing VMWare Fusion and Windows 7 on my Macbook and finally installing Camtasia Studio for Windows. The process of installation, training, and becoming proficient with the software took significantly more time than expected.

Once I had Camtasia up and running on my Macbook, creating the vodcasts was a relatively straightforward, albeit slow, process. I followed the procedure originally outlined in my Sabbatical Proposal, with a few exceptions:

- Identify the learning outcomes
- Create a PowerPoint presentation
- Write a transcript for the narration, include as PowerPoint notes
- Record the vodcast
- Edit the vodcast
- Embed assessment in the vodcast
  - Revision: Since there are Chapter Quizzes each week, some vodcasts do not have embedded assessments.
- Revision: Upload vodcasts to CRC’s web server using FireFTP. Create Quicklinks in D2L for students to access them.
Recording the vodcast often required numerous attempts and adjustments to screen resolution, microphone volume, timing, narration phrasing, etc. Often a five-minute recording would take at least one hour to record. Editing each vodcast required anywhere from 4 to 10 hours depending on edits required to the narration, captions, callouts, transitions, assessments, etc. While creating a short vodcast could take significantly less time (as demonstrated by one of our colleagues at convocation this Spring), this would produce less polished results. Since my goal, once again, was to create polished vodcasts that can be used for several years, I was very careful with my recording and editing.

Ultimately, I created 9 vodcasts out of the original 10 intended. One vodcast I spent over 12 hours creating, recording, and editing was lost when my hard drive crashed. Given the amount of time already spent on training and recording and editing the other vodcasts (estimate of 235 hours), I felt that this vodcast would have to wait until summer vacation to be re-created. Below are the links to the completed vodcasts:

http://web.crc.losrios.edu/billsj/IntroD2L_1/IntroD2L_1.html
http://web.crc.losrios.edu/billsj/Homeostasis_Quiz/Homeostasis_Quiz.html
http://web.crc.losrios.edu/billsj/Terminology_WithQuiz/Terminology.html
http://web.crc.losrios.edu/billsj/CellSizeScreenRec/CellSize.mp4
http://web.crc.losrios.edu/billsj/MembraneTransport/MembraneTransport.html
http://web.crc.losrios.edu/billsj/MuscleOrg/MuscleOrg.html
http://web.crc.losrios.edu/billsj/MuscleContraction/MuscleContraction.html
http://web.crc.losrios.edu/billsj/ImmuneIntro/ImmuneIntro.html
http://web.crc.losrios.edu/billsj/Antigens/Antigens.html

In addition to the vodcasts, I also created two Voicethread activities. Voicethread is a collaborative Web 2.0 tool that allows users to post slideshows, videos, or still images. Other users can then comment on the content using text, audio, or video recordings, creating a dynamic learning environment far superior to the Discussion Board on D2L.

Since I anticipated that my students had never used Voicethread before, I plan to provide them with instructional documentation (provided through Creative Commons License by Michelle Pacasky-Brock) and ample time to participate in their first Voicethread. The first Voicethread I created is an “introduction” to Voicethread and a place for my students to practice posting. The second Voicethread I created is a modification of Discussion
Board assignment from D2L. I created a slideshow and video recordings to make it more dynamic. This semester is the trial run.

http://voicethread.com/share/2693932/

http://voicethread.com/share/2418003/

The last objective of my Sabbatical was to create a Ning Network for my online course. A Ning Network is a social network similar to Facebook or MySpace except for they are private. “Mini” Ning Networks (the basic version) cost $35, however Pearson Higher Ed provides free 3-year subscriptions to those who qualify. (I am still waiting for my reimbursement.) The creator of the network can invite whomever they wish by providing them with a link and moderate their activities. I provided my students with an “invite” link inside of D2L, and then moderated who joined just in case someone who was not enrolled in Biology 100 tried to join. Each week my students have blog assignments and are also required to post videos related to the course material (they can embed them from YouTube) as well as comment on their classmates blogs or videos. They can also create their own Discussion Forums (which they cannot do in D2L). As the moderator, I have control over what photos, videos, blogs, comments, and discussions they post, however unless it is completely inappropriate I allow it. The goal of a Ning Network in online instruction is to provide an online learning community where students can interact with one another in an open environment that is of their creation. If they feel like they “own” it, they are more likely to participate in it.

I have included some screen shots from the currently active Ning Network (see below). Development of the Ning Network was relatively straightforward; adapting assignments to meet the SLOs was a bit challenging but definitely doable. Probably the most challenging part of the Ning Network is moderating and grading all the student posts and encouraging the reticent students that it is really worth their time to engage in the Network. However, in the long run, I believe that Ning is a worthwhile endeavor because it builds a feeling of community more than D2L can.

Ning Homepage:
Ning Members: Essentially a “classlist” or “Friends”
ACHIEVEMENT OF SABBATICAL GOALS

The overall goal of my sabbatical was to creating new learning objects that will improve instruction, learning, engagement, and retention in Biology 100 online. Specifically, I set out to create vodcasts that would engage my audio and visual learners and to create Voicethreads and a Ning Network that would enhance engagement and foster a sense of community. I have attained all three goals.
ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

My Biology 100 Online students are already enjoying the fruits of my labor. The vodcasts are available for my students to view this semester (Spring 2012). A number of students have commented on how much they have helped and lamented that there are not tutorials for every chapter. I am also using the Voicethreads and the Ning Network in my current course. Since these required my students to learn a new technology and my students have just begun to master them, it is difficult to assess how much they are helping. Currently I am receiving mixed reviews for both Voicethread and Ning, although I imagine it is because my students have a lot on their plate (midterms, papers, work, family) and are overwhelmed. This is definitely something I will have to keep in mind for the Fall semester. Overall, however, I feel that my students know each other better, know me better, and feel better about the material than any group of students I have previously taught online. So although they may find the technology frustrating at times and the benefits may not be glaringly obvious to them, from a pedagogical perspective, it is working just as planned: my students are mastering the concepts, interacting with one another, and staying enrolled in the class.

The results of this Sabbatical will benefit my colleagues as well. I have already shared my projects with my department and anticipate sharing with other faculty during Fall Flex. Hopefully some of the techniques or tools will inspire my colleagues and ultimately be used to improve the learning experience of students in other online disciplines.

Finally, because the majority of my students are a part of the Careers and Technology Program, they will take what they learn in my course into the community in the form of medical assistants, EMTs, pharmacy technicians, and medical billing technicians. Therefore, these students are a direct line to the local community, and their impressions of CRC, my course, and what they learned will quickly be shared with family and colleagues. A positive experience in my course, a better understanding of the human body, and how biology applies to our day-to-day lives is what I hope my students take home with them at the end of the semester.

METHOD OF SHARING

As mentioned above, I have shared all the vodcasts, Voicethreads, and Ning Network with my students this semester. In addition, I have shown some of my work to my colleagues during a recent department meeting. Finally, I intend on hosting a Flex workshop about engaging online students using videos and social media next Fall.