

January 3, 2008

To: Rebecca Courington
From: Etta Worthington

Re: Technology Fellowship Final Report

The project:

We requested funding to create an interactive website to be used for lectures in the TVArts: Writing class in the Television Department.

The team:

The team consisted of Etta Worthington, a part-time faculty member of the Television Department, and Brady Hyde, who was at the time of application the systems manager for the Television Department.

I chose Brady to be my partner in this project because I had relied on him in previous semesters to provide technical support. I came to the project with some technical experience (FinalCut Pro, PowerPoint, PhotoShop) but Brady was to provide major work on putting the materials I prepared in the appropriate technical form.

Purpose and Goal:

The idea for the project was based in my frustration at not being able to provide enough examples to demonstrate points I was teaching about scriptwriting. I found it most difficult to insert a DVD, try to fast forward through trailers, then go to the chapter menu, select the scene, and possibly still have to fast forward a little. That process might take several minutes, which would leave the student detached and distracted.

I wanted a way to seamlessly present the information and the examples without losing student's attention.

In addition, I wanted to screen scenes or short films with the screenplay running right next to it so students would see how scripts were written that produced the video that was being seen.

The goal was to create individual DVDs for each session that would be used for lecture and could thereafter be checked out by students who missed the class.

Final Form of the Project

Initial discussions about how we would use technology started with the idea of using an interactive website. This idea was rejected and the idea of using Keynote was proposed. That idea was also rejected and a decision was made to author each lecture and its materials in a DVD using DVD StudioPro.

The Actual Experience

The experience as a teacher was quite exciting. The most successful part of the project was my deconstruction of three films and presentation of ideas about story structure, about the hero's journey, and about character development.

I took *Little Miss Sunshine* and edited it into brief scenes and sequences that showed basic story elements and how the screenwriter constructed the story. Students had been assigned to watch the film on their own and in class we were able to discuss and see the architecture of the film.

Then I edited *Erin Brokovitch* to illustrate how a modern film follows the form of the Hero's Journey. Again, it was show and tell.

Then I chose three characters from the film *Crash* and with editing showed the complexity of each character, how the character was neither totally good nor totally bad.

The Actual Experience Part II

The attempt to use script next to the video was not a success because it was not implemented in the way that I envisioned. (I am not suggesting that my vision was an easy one—definitely not.) I still think there must be a way to do this, but that will take further experimenting.

The Actual Experience Part III

I confess. I had too much material. With very interactive classes, some of my lecture materials would have taken more time than the class had. Unfortunately the DVD was not authored in chapters so that I could not easily advance through parts that I might decide to skim over or delete. Nor could I store extra materials at the end of each DVD for if there was extra time.

This comes down to a learning experience. The DVD format was not the optimal format. It was neither easy to work with, nor easy to adapt. The initial plan was to create a template that could be duplicated by other teachers. Unfortunately DVD StudioPro was too clunky and was not the program to be used.

The Result

I did not do a formal assessment at the end of the semester but got feedback from a number of students about how effective the lecture materials were. The feedback was all most positive.

Although this is not a controlled or objective evaluation, I found that this semester I got the best work out of students of any time I have taught the course. My one big goal for the class was to have students understand basic story structure and be able to exhibit that by writing scripts exhibiting good story architecture.

This was most successful. Even my worst writers were creating scripts that were complete stories. And others, many who had never written a script before, were doing inventive

and original scripts that were truly good stories. And this happened in both of my sections, not just one.

I really believe that the increased use of technology in my class was the reason for this success. I was also happy to have Sara Livingston visit my class once when we were doing table reads of scripts. She was very impressed at the level of writing from this class of beginning writers, supporting my idea that this was exemplary work.

Final Words

On the one hand, this project was not a success. I was not able to get the script and video combination to work the way I wanted. Also, the technology chosen was clunky and didn't work as I had wanted it to.

But from the students' points of view I think this project was quite successful and their experience in this class was most enriched by the addition of technology.

I appreciated learning about the other projects and as a result of this fellowship have become quite committed to exploring digital learning. This fellowship allowed me the possibility of putting time into developing technology uses for my class. I am also greatly enriched as a result of this experience.

I am committed to expanding and improving my use of technology in my Columbia classes and sharing what I know with other teachers.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity.