Student Survey Question

What do you think about the use of technology in the classroom?

Since the theme of the CTE conference this year was low-tech teaching, we thought it would be worthwhile to bring some of what we learned to the newsletter. Of course, the technology we are speaking of has to do with those tools that are meant as a pedagogical instrument, anything from clickers to Smartboards, but not technology as it is used in the sciences as part of the content per se.

The most important thing for anyone to do who would like to use technology in the classroom is to have open and frequent conversations with the students. If not used appropriately, technology has the potential to interfere with teaching and learning, so it is critical that instructors ask for constructive feedback when they use it.

Another piece of insight from the students is that less is better. While this generation may be very familiar with technology and accustomed to it being a part of their lives, they actually prefer a classroom in which the focus is on interaction between the students and the instructor. If technology pushes aside personal contact in a classroom or in some way inhibits the building of a healthy student-teacher relationship, then students would be satisfied to go without it.

If we do decide to use technology, then students expect that we are familiar with it. Time spent in the classroom trying to work out kinks is perceived as wasted time, which can lead to distraction and frustration for the students.

When it comes to the ubiquitous presentation software, Power Point, students offer the same criticisms of it that we may share when we attend meetings and conferences. A really bad Power Point (filled with lots of information that the presenter reads...
to the audience) is a thought-killer and can quickly drain a classroom of energy. If you use Power Point, try to keep the information succinct so that you can still do some dynamic teaching and have the students actively engaging with you in the class.

In their words

“I think that technology can help in the classroom when it is used a little bit. I think that it can do more harm than good though when it is used in the wrong way! Power Points with way too much text are a great example of a poor use of technology.” —Annemarie McGonagle

“Having technology in the classroom allows a teacher to be efficient – but I do not think technology should be a crutch for learning. A teacher who teaches well should be able to handle teaching without the comforts of 21st century technology.” —Megan Ward

“Technology should not be the central focus. Technology should supplement learning that comes from human interaction.” —Kyle McCartan

Students on Teaching with Technology

What gets rave reviews:

- Minimalist Power Points that allow for some interaction
- Overhead projectors (because the teacher can interact with it)
- Use of relevant media

What doesn’t:

- Power Points loaded with information
- Any technology that creates a barrier to communication
- Instructors who hide behind technology

Students on students

“Be patient and give feedback about how technology is working – or how it is not.”

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

“I never did very well in math—I could never seem to persuade the teacher that I hadn’t meant my answers literally.” —Calvin Trillin

The April Teacher of the Month

Joseph Bodenrader,
Associate Professor, Mathematics

Joseph Bodenrader exemplifies the style of teaching that has been successful since before the invention of that versatile piece of technology, the blackboard. Part of the reason he is successful is because, as with our other Teacher of the Month winners, he cares about the students and loves to teach. Another big reason is that he has a clear sense of what happens in the learning process, which is why he emphasizes concepts as well as techniques in his teaching. And he understands the role that students must play in their own learning, which is why he says that he “tries to engage the students, even in large classes.”

Joe has been teaching for 42 years, and when I asked him if he had any plans to retire, he responded, “Why should I retire when I’m in my prime? I feel like I’ve finally got this down!” According to his students, indeed he has.

Excerpts from nominating submissions

- Mr. B has been more than a teacher to me. He has been a mentor and has given me the confidence I need to be a teacher myself. He always believed in me, even when I didn’t, and he pushed me to do my best. I want to be just like him when I’m a teacher!” —Katelyn Martin

- “He is always willing to take time out of his day to help students, even if you are not in his classes. He shows a real love for mathematics, and he tries to get his students to see it the way he does.” —Kacie Murphy

- “He makes calculus a breeze. He takes complex stuff and makes it easy to understand—and he’s funny.” —Jon Bray

Joe now has a CTE Teacher of the Month coffee mug to join the tray and the several clocks he has received for his many years of teaching.