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1. Title of the submission.

Is There Room in the Liberal Arts for Information Technology?: A Report on the Ongoing Efforts to Integrate Technology into the Required Freshman Program at Willamette University

2-5. Authors.

Sammy Basu, PhD (Princeton)
Associate Professor of Politics
Willamette University Salem, OR 97301
(503) 370-6264
sbasu@willamette.edu
FAX: 503 (370-6720)

Catherine Collins, PhD (University of Minnesota)
Professor of Rhetoric and Media Studies
Willamette University Salem, OR 97301
(503) 370-6281
ccollins@willamette.edu
FAX: 503 (375-5398)

6. Abstract of paper.

See below

Abstract

Is There Room in the Liberal Arts for Information Technology?

We propose to report on the integration of information technology (IT) in a required freshman first semester seminar program taught by faculty across the curriculum at a U.S. Pacific N.W. liberal arts college. Since 1986, this program has introduced all incoming students at Willamette University to the expectations of the liberal arts. The focus changes every four years and for the period under discussion it was 5th Century BCE Athens. We welcome students into the course with the following explanation:

First, why have a required first-year program? For many years now Willamette has ushered its incoming first-semester students into the liberal arts experience through a college-wide program of shared readings, speakers, and assignments. In fact, this program is one of Willamette's central institutional commitments. It is designed through the ongoing collaborative efforts of all of the faculty involved who leave their respective disciplinary specializations in order to join with you, their students, in puzzling through the texts of the program. In class sections of between 15 and 17 students you will invariably find yourself trying to make collective sense of the texts in question by reading closely, thinking critically, reflecting creatively, and responding articulately, i.e., by engaging in the liberal arts. We also value this program because we have found that it generates opportunities for conversation between students and professors that extend outside of the classroom and across the campus.

Over the past four years, on an experimental basis we have been integrating technology into this traditional liberal arts program. More specifically we have used IT in four ways:

- (1) by developing a common on-line course syllabus and instructional materials for the 25 sections of the course (See for example: <http://www.willamette.edu/cla/wviews/>) as well as encouraging faculty to maintain individualized versions (See for example: <http://www.willamette.edu/~sbasu/wv/ids123w-02.htm>)
- (2) by inviting students to enroll in a limited number of experimental wireless laptop sections in which the students were on-line in the classroom during real class time
- (3) by utilizing synchronous and asynchronous communication software enabling threaded discussions within and across laptop sections, on-line peer review of student writing, and small group collaborative writing
- (4) by enabling students to become web authors, posting their projects and written work for an audience that includes not only the professor and members of a particular class, but also anyone exploring the web.
(See for example: [http://www.willamette.edu/%7Estas/worldviews/Capitol OREGON%20STATE%20CAPITOL.htm](http://www.willamette.edu/%7Estas/worldviews/Capitol%20OREGON%20STATE%20CAPITOL.htm))

In reporting on and evaluating the strengths and weakness of these IT experiments in comparison with the traditionally taught sections, we would utilize our institutional data on 'student evaluation of teaching effectiveness' as well as a special assessment instrument used with this program.

Crucially, based on our experiences we would suggest that the question we initially posed can be answered in the affirmative provided IT is used 'wisely'. We offer a list of general observations and lessons on the liberal arts appropriate wise use of IT of relevance to both secondary and college instructors and institutions.

Tentatively we will argue that the wise use of information technology:

1. Includes the non-reactionary freedom to say 'no'
2. Consists of selective incorporation
3. Involves starting over with a distinctive pedagogy
4. Focuses on processes
5. Benefits from creative collaboration
6. Privileges spatial mobility
7. Regularizes support and evaluation
8. Furthers information literacy
9. Enlarges the student's sense of self

The authors are the coordinators of the required program and among the faculty who were responsible for the fuller integration of IT. The IT efforts were funded internally and supported by external grants including: Northwest Academic Computing Consortium Grant Award in the Faculty Incentives for Web Use category and US Department of Education Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to Use Technology Grant to support the Oregon Technology in Education Network.

This presentation would be of benefit to educators and administrators wrestling with the trade-offs between the relatively inexpensive tried and true methods of curricular organization and instruction and new resource and labor-intensive digital alternatives.