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Technology in the COE: Past, Present and Future

By Andrew Topper and Sean Lancaster, GVSU Faculty

Past

Technology in the College of Education (COE) has transformed dramatically over the last 50 years. Originally, a single technology course was offered at the undergraduate level—Computer Science 150—taught outside of the COE. CS 150 was focused on technology tools, like office applications, which was not unlike many teacher preparation computer courses back in the 1990s. CS 150 later became ED 205, which was taught by faculty in the COE. ED 205 switched the focus from teaching tools to teaching how to integrate technology into teaching to enhance student learning. In an effort to make ED 205 more meaningful by linking it with actual field-based experiences, EDT 370 was developed to replace ED 205.

After moving from Allendale to downtown Grand Rapids, faculty members in the COE used available computer labs—Mac color computers and Windows PC’s—in the Eberhard Center in the undergraduate teacher education program and graduate Educational Technology/School Library Media programs. The DeVos building on Fulton was opened in 2000 with interactive television (ITV) classrooms and lecture-style labs with layouts that made assumptions about teaching and learning—tables in rows of computers and a kiosk for the instructor with projectors and one printer. At the time, laptop computers were available but the labs were equipped with desktop PC’s and specific software for colleges and departments. Eventually, the COE even had a mobile laptop computer cart for use in any Eberhard classroom.

Present

In 2013 the COE moved into the Richard M. DeVos Center providing access to more technology. Campus buildings downtown have wireless Internet and printing, with about 50% of faculty at Grand Valley State University now using BlackBoard for online course content and instruction. We have also seen some integration of smartphones, tablets, and laptop computers, as well as limited use of mobile apps. The COE continues to innovate, currently offering more graduate courses and programs in hybrid and online formats than any other college at GVSU. The COE even offered the first fully online master’s program at the university with the educational technology program now offered in a hybrid format for students locally and also in a fully online format for students at a distance. The COE has also been building online certificate programs for graduate students who want to become proficient in a specific knowledge base without going through a complete master’s program.

Efforts are already underway within the COE and university to support faculty as they migrate their courses and programs online. The Pew Faculty Teaching and Learning Center, in collaboration with GVSU IT/IDeL, instituted...
teaching circles for faculty interested in teaching online in the fall of 2014. COE faculty members currently represent the largest group of faculty attending these circles, which reflects the growing interest in online instruction.

The whole university is learning to adapt to students who are now often bringing their own technologies to campus. This means that many computer labs are no longer as in high demand. And as more students have access to ubiquitous technologies, instructors are able to place more course materials and course functions online even when teaching a fully face-to-face class. The COE is also focused on addressing the changing nature of higher education from globalization to accreditation to even supporting student teachers using technologies.

“In higher education, the U.S. has been outpaced internationally. In 1990, the U.S. ranked first in the world in four-year degree attainment among 25-34 year olds; today, the U.S. ranks 12th.” Education, the White House, ¶2.

Future–2025

Children currently in 2nd grade will enter college in 2024-25. The Z generation, or post-millennials, will live in an information-intensive society where technology is taken for granted as part of life, likely being the first internet-enabled student generation (Digital life in 2025).

Looking into the future should always be done with the realization that things will likely change more quickly than expected and often in unexpected ways. Doing so with an eye on how technology might continue to influence the COE and GVSU may still provide some insights.

Key questions

How will technology change in the next 10 years?

We will likely see continued growth in wireless access, mobile and wearable technology, open source and open education. In higher education, we may also see a reduction in traditional (4- or 5-year degree programs with terms/semesters) and a movement towards more self-paced, guided learning, with alternatives to traditional university outcomes—B.A/S, M.Ed., etc., i.e., towards certifications and other credentials (Trends in Higher Education: NMC
Horizon Report). Flexibility will be critical for success in education in the next 10 years.

Technology trends in higher education include an increase in online offerings, competition from Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and other online efforts, an explosion in educational apps for mobile + tablet computers, “gamification,” open educational resources, etc. As models of instruction change from traditional classrooms, concerns about the quality of higher education and the role of technology in it become more critical.

“Technology can make education better. It will do so, in part, by forcing us to reflect on what education is, identify what only a person can do, and devote educators’ time to that.” Hieronymi, 2012, ¶ 11.

How will college students change?

Universities will continue to see a more diverse student population—older, more ethnic diversity, 1st generation, etc.—along with increased competition for students (The College of 2020: Students). GVSU administrators have identified specific action items for the university in the future (2016-2021 GVSU Strategic Plan): Exercise our existing DNA and culture, increasing creativity, innovation and risk taking, to continue to stretch our high standards of excellence.

What impact will technology have on instruction and assessment at GVSU? How will changing technologies influence or change instruction and assessment in education?

The answer to these questions depends on the vision GVSU and the COE have for the role of technology in higher education, and expectations on the part of decision makers and stakeholders regarding benefits of adopting and using technology. Certainly, technology can be used to support teaching, assessment, and the procedural and administrative aspects of higher education. But are there other ways in which technology can be used that improve our offerings, by providing more flexibility, or expanding our offerings to reach students who would not otherwise come to GVSU?

Opportunities for technology to impact GVSU in 2025

The COE will continue to expand its reach beyond west Michigan, through partnerships, as well as through technology. More high quality online offerings will be necessary to reach a more distant and busy population of professionals. The COE will continue to increase in diversity of students and also increase educational offerings. As State funding continues to reach the lowest levels in history, GVSU will need to look for other ways to increase revenues while holding overall costs steady and continuing to offer a high quality education.

Technology adoption in education affords opportunities to examine how and what we teach, looking for ways to expand or extend our reach and redefine learning, instruction and assessment with the digital tools available. This process of critical reflection can provide improvements in teaching, learning, and student success in college and in life, and support the continued success of GVSU and the College of Education for the next 50 years.

References

2016-2021 GVSU Strategic Plan (in process). See status online at: http://www.gvsu.edu/strategicplanning/


Education, Higher Education, the White House. Available online at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education

