

Symposium Introduction

Using Technology to Support Interactive Learning

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This issue of the *Journal of Public Affairs Education* is an invitation to today's public affairs instructors to participate in the largest transformation of social and economic relations since the advent of the printing press. It is an invitation to recognize the potential of what the Internet age can offer our classrooms. It is an invitation to explore new teaching practices from the science of teaching and learning that will help develop astute, analytical, and compassionate public affairs professionals. It is an invitation to engage in the community of scholars convened by the Hubert Project (www.hubertproject.org), whose mission is to address these topics.

The seeds of this issue were planted over 10 years ago, when I had left academia to work in private philanthropy. During this period, I witnessed the incredible talent of public and nonprofit leaders, managers, and program directors who were implementing public policy and responding to citizen need. I realized that so much of their skill was developed on the job, after they had left college or graduate school, and I wondered what public affairs educators might do to better prepare them for their important work. I also witnessed them responding to the fundamental changes in society brought by the rise and development of the World Wide Web, as they rethought operations, marketing, and citizen engagement.

When I returned to higher education in 2006, I realized that the Internet age had had similarly profound implications for my teaching and

other responsibilities. Until 2001, I provided access to articles using a photocopied reading packet that students purchased; I used transparencies placed on projectors in the classroom; I graded stacks of written assignments turned in during class. These practices were no longer relevant just 5 years later given the new platforms and tools I encountered. I experienced similar changes in the process of doing research, in terms of how I accessed peer-reviewed journals or data or used data-analysis tools. To do my job, I needed to invest time in developing new processes and practices for both teaching and research to take advantage of the newly available technological resources.

This led me to apply for an internal grant within the University of Minnesota, which provided both professional development training and financial support for faculty interested in this technological transformation in their teaching. That investment by my university gave me permission to learn and experiment and, ultimately, to develop a prototype e-case, which in turn led to the foundation of the Hubert Project (for which I serve as academic director), an open-access international collection of multimedia teaching materials—such as videos, e-cases, and e-studies—available to public affairs instructors. I began sharing my new knowledge in various ways: through sessions at conferences of the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) and Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA); through articles that considered implications

for public affairs teaching, research, and service (Schweick, Mergel, Sandfort, & Zhao, 2011) and that reported findings of field trials (Brooks & Sandfort, 2014); and through training workshops about the use of multimedia learning objects in the classroom. I reached out to international partners in China and Africa who shared a commitment to the reinvention of public affairs education. I share this account because, like all good journeys, the path developed as I walked it. And it is time for more colleagues to engage in their own professional development journey and explore how technology can enhance their students' learning.

As a student of organizations, I am aware of the importance of the external environment in determining institutional survival. And the external environment of higher education is quite volatile: support for public institutions is on the decline; tuition is on the rise and many people wonder about the "return on investment" of a professional degree; and some worry that professional training focuses on technical rather than moral concerns (Brown, 2014). Like other industries—the media, publishing, entertainment—the business model of higher education is being challenged by the Internet and mobile technologies that make it easy to access information and that change social expectations about engagement. As public affairs scholars engaged in research and teaching, we need to understand these changes and create our own answers to the challenges and opportunities presented by these environmental conditions.

Luckily, we can look to the lessons offered by scientific investigations into the processes and outcomes of teaching and learning. While scholars have spent considerable time comparing student learning outcomes between fully online, hybrid, and face-to-face traditional classrooms, this question is increasingly seen as less relevant because of the proliferation of information communication technologies in all aspects of life (Bernard et al., 2009; Machtmes & Asher, 2000; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009). Instead, scholars are now paying more attention to the effective use of technologies to support learning. Social knowledge has long been recognized as a neglected dim-

ension of social science (Lindbloom & Cohen, 1979), but neuroscientists document that experience and social relations are essential factors in actually changing the neural pathways in adults (Caine & Caine, 2011; Cozolino & Sprokay, 2006; Gibson, 2005; Lee & Gibson, 2003; Sheckley & Bell, 2006). Students need social interaction, appropriate incentives, and adequate time to integrate the information delivered through courses into actual professional knowledge that can inform strategy and action (Fink, 2003; National Research Council, 2000; Salmon & Jones 2004).

As public affairs educators, our public dialogue about this environmental change and our response to it have been quiet. With a few exceptions (Brock & Alford, 2014; Mergel, 2012), public affairs scholars have not documented their efforts to apply and adapt insights about technology-enhanced learning to our own field. Additionally, we have not contributed to the emerging scholarship of adult learning in professional fields. This *JPAE* issue provides an opportunity to address some of these topics. The articles suggest that many of the challenges that confront our field in this area are not primarily technological; with the proliferation of tools and platforms, the barriers that remain have more to do with our values, our sense of professional responsibility, our institutional commitment to applying scientific knowledge, and our ability to imagine what is possible.

The lead article in this symposium, "Teaching Collaborative Governance Online," by Kirk Emerson and Andrea K. Gerlak, showcases a certificate program that teaches collaborative management virtually. The course design and platform enable collaboration among students and between faculty and students. The very form of the course reinforces its substantive content—collaborative management. The authors clearly describe the strengths and limitations of this approach, sharing knowledge important to our field.

The second article, "Using Multimedia Learning Objects in Public Affairs Classrooms," by Susan N. Kilonzo, Jodi R. Sandfort, and Helen K. Liu, explores the application of multimedia teaching cases to public affairs classrooms in

Kenya, the United States, and China. The authors push our field to recognize cases, simulations, even current news accounts as “learning objects”—resources that we instructors can use to improve course relevance and encourage active learning. The authors also stress how important institutional context and student expectations are in shaping the deployment of such resources. Their conclusions offer insights relevant to both teaching practice and future research.

The third article, “The NASPAA Student Simulation Competition,” by Laurel McFarland and colleagues, reports on the first national competition sponsored by NASPAA. Students worked in small teams using a simulation platform to craft long-term policy solutions to the complex problems facing the U.S. health care system. Such platforms may well become more widespread throughout public affairs education as we more effectively leverage technology to engage students in problem solving.

Finally, the fourth article in the symposium, “Pedagogical Design Factors That Enhance Learning in Hybrid Courses,” by Jennifer Shea, M. Ernita Joaquin, and Janey Qian Wang, develops an integrative framework that can help guide research into the implementation of hybrid courses. The authors rightly note that hybrid courses that combine face-to-face sessions with technology-enhanced learning are less theorized than fully online or traditional classroom instruction. Their article uses data from six hybrid courses to explain how technology-enhanced activities can help convey social presence (important for engagement) or create balance between dialogue, autonomy, and structure during course implementation. Like the Kilonzo, Sandfort, and Liu article, the authors do not predict what will determine success but rather stress the ongoing refinement of instructional practice in light of emerging conditions.

These four articles merely touch on how we might better understand how information technology can enhance interactive teaching. Many important topics, such as personal learning networks (Downes, 2012; Mackey & Evans, 2011; Neubauer et al., 2011), massive open

online courses (MOOCs), learning analytics and analytic dashboards (Siemens et al., 2011), open-source textbooks and knowledge commons (Catherine & Marshall, 2010; Hess & Ostrom, 2007), are barely mentioned. However, this *JPAE* issue is a start. I hope these articles will motivate other public affairs instructors to enrich their own teaching practice. New ideas, scientific knowledge, and resources are available to support experimentation. Joining others in our professional community, we can help improve the relevance and rigor of our teaching.

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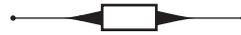
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