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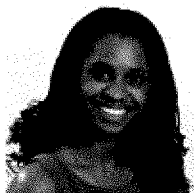
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Assessing Student Learning Through PowerPoint “Games”



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It is undisputed that technology has the potential to change the law school classroom and to impact the educational experience. In the legal writing classroom, the use of PowerPoint-based “games” can create a dynamic learning environment enabling a professor to better assess student progress.

Technology permits a more flexible teaching and learning experience, and can change how a teacher interacts with the students and how the students interact with the materials and each other. However, technology should not be used simply for technology’s sake; it should remain an aid—a supplement to the primary objective or substance of the class.¹ For technological aids to confer positive benefits, teachers need to be committed to integrating a specific kind of technology for an identified and limited purpose.

Learning in the Legal Research and Writing classroom involves less “learning that,” a relatively sudden impartation of knowledge, and more “learning how,” a gradual process involving practice of a skill.² Throughout the course, students need opportunities to reinforce research, analysis, communication, and citation skills, and there are many kinds of exercises which teachers can use for these purposes. Though the students develop their skills over time, there are certain points at which the teacher may seek to know whether the students have sufficiently grasped the material, so that the next skill can be developed or the prior skill can be revisited.

Using either traditional or authentic assessments, the teacher can determine what the students have learned. Traditional assessments are those that gauge a student’s retention of information in a set environment at a

distinct point in time, i.e., “learning that.” By contrast, authentic (or alternative) assessments are those means of determining a student’s collective abilities over a period of time.³ Authentic assessments involve determining whether a student has “learned how” to do a tangible task. Authentic assessments are more applicable in the legal writing classroom than traditional assessments, because the former tests what the student truly knows, as opposed to what he or she is able to recall.⁴

The integration of technology into teaching lends itself more to authentic assessment than to traditional assessment. By using technologically enhanced authentic un-graded assessments, a LRW professor stands to gain a realistic view of what each student has learned as a whole, while the students are individually able to self-analyze. The students can even enjoy the learning experience. Below, I discuss two technology-based authentic assessments that I have used in my classroom.

Touro Trial

I use a PowerPoint jeopardy type game called Touro Trial as a collaborative authentic assessment midway and three-quarters of the way through the fall semester to gauge what skills need further reinforcement and what the students have learned. Touro Trial serves to assess a student’s ability to think through a problem, answer citation questions, and explain how to do research, while presenting the answer to each question in a courtroom manner. Students work in teams to answer questions of increasing difficulty presented on PowerPoint slides, and the students compete against other teams to answer the question correctly first. Questions range from “write the cite” to questions asking about how to research an area of law or how to find a case or statute. Students earn “Touro Trial dollars” for correct answers and the ultimate goal is to be the team with the most money.

Touro Trial also lends itself to the “teachable moment” — that is, when the class segues from the assessment to actively engaging in learning by reinforcement of some skill or topic.

Medals are awarded as recognition of the students' performances. When I play Touro Trial with the students, they are excited and engaged in the game, and sometimes they do not realize that it is in effect a review exercise and a learning tool. Even students that may appear to be not actively participating, i.e., just watching the questions come up, take notes and keep track of the questions and their answers, thus forming their own study guides. The assessment is fluid in its format and I add, delete, or skip questions to reflect the material covered or hone in on an area on which I want the students to focus. Touro Trial also lends itself to the "teachable moment" — that is, when the class segues from the assessment to actively engaging in learning by reinforcement of some skill or topic.

Bluebook Bingo

To focus more on assessing citation skills, I use another PowerPoint game, Bluebook Bingo, again with incentives for correct answers. Here, the class is divided into two teams, but each student has his or her own Bingo card. Two students, one from each team, represent the team at the whiteboard and each student has to write the correct cite for each question presented on a PowerPoint slide corresponding to a letter-number combination, such as "B7." The team with the correct answer earns the right to cover that letter-number combo on all cards for the team's members. The aim is for the individual student to get Bingo in a straight line on the Bingo sheet. Each individual student's "Bingo" earns that student's team points. Students play for team prizes. Significantly, a team cannot get Bingo without answering questions correctly, and the students at the whiteboard rotate after each question. Thus, Bluebook Bingo involves a higher level of individual student engagement than Touro Trial. Similar to Touro Trial, Bluebook Bingo offers many teachable moments, which tend to arise when neither student has the correct answer after the time has elapsed. I find that not only does this use of technology in my classroom reinforce the practical skill of proper citation, but it provides a fun practice exercise as well.

As neither Touro Trial nor Bluebook Bingo involves a grade assessment, the students are more candid and willing to participate. Also, students are able to determine their own performance (or self-assess), while I am able to see how well my students have grasped a concept or skill. Both assessments involve the use of skills that the students have acquired over time. Overall,

using these technological aids in assessment has been beneficial in my LRW classroom. Though technology is not useful by itself, using technology effectively in teaching has the potential to spice up the law school classroom and create many memorable learning experiences.

- 1 Danny Kathriner, *Educational Relevance: Can Technology Make a Difference?* 29 English Leadership Q. 6-8 (2007).
- 2 See Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* 58 (U. Chi. Press 1949).
- 3 See James Hartley, *Learning and Studying: A Research Perspective* 18 (Routledge 1998) (discussing learning through building on prior knowledge).
- 4 See Paul Ramsden, *Learning to Teach in Higher Education* 4 (Routledge 1992) ("Many students can juggle formulae and reproduce memori[z]ed textbook knowledge while not understanding their subjects in a way that is helpful for solving real problems. Merely being able to repeat quantities of information on demand is not evidence of a change in understanding—at any level of education.").