

## **The Center and Best Use**

Considerations of Use

Kevin Kvalvik

There are certain advantages and disadvantages with being an "early adopter" of technology: As an early adopter you get the energizing boost of attending to new affordances, which by virtue of their "newness" offer extrinsic motivation, and attention. If these technologies offer no "killer app" and have no clear advantage over the previous way of doing things then this motivator soon wanes. With the classic analogy of the eight-track player, it is easy to demonstrate that even proliferation and wide initial excitement do not cause permanent acquisition of a technology. In the case of that audio device there was no overriding benefit, while it actually had less functionality than existing technology. This is the risk of early adoption: excitement exceeding usefulness.

The Center is itself a technology. The eagerness of certain individuals to use it shows a certain optimism and interest in altering current pedagogy. If the *bells and whistles* are not significant and do not offer a clear advantage, then moving one's class is a distraction more than a help. The instructors who want to immediately embrace these differences run a risk, and will also serve a necessary function of debugging the amenities offered. Each class will have several systems that all must run in concert to offer the goal of nearly transparent use. These spaces will offer all of the presentation media that one can anticipate, and are designed to switch seamlessly from one to the other with audio following the choice, etc. However this will take a bit of energy and patience to use it and see it all begin to behave as instructed. But this process should begin ASAP, so as to get it fixed while it migrates in this semester.

Then there is the issue with course-appropriate use. This is a discussion that references the change in the use of these several technologies. As mentioned ad-nausea by me in the myriad tours that I have given in the building, the labs are not really designed to be labs, and the class spaces are really designed to just be standard class spaces. The entire enterprise anticipates shrinking technologies and the need for best-practice as it relates to these. If one can have access to all information at all times, and have means of varied interface at all times, and one can further have multiple choices about display and audio

distribution then the perfect class environ is established. You can distribute and broadcast and connect in any way that you desire with any medium you choose.

The lab area is just a class where we provide the interface that soon the student will be able to bring to class. The *class areas* are areas that assume the student will bring part of the interface and we will provide the larger carriage and transmission devices. Neither area is about data entry. These are classes that are dandy for teaching **about** technology, but if they are *limited to* or *prioritized for* that function then they are not being employed as one would hope. The goal of adopting technology as a necessary and important part of modern pedagogy assumes that it will be infused *across the curriculum*. So much so that terms like “interdisciplinary” take on a cliché, although not meaningless tenor.

The Center should be opened up to all classes, and the clear relevance of teaching educational technology in the space should not disqualify the use of each space for literature, history or physical education. The Humanities may well benefit by the interface provided every bit as much of teaching spreadsheet creation. I feel that the important question is not so much the *content* of the course, but of the equitable availability to the students. If we leave open other “lab” spaces while one is being used for class, then from 7-5 (or so) Monday –Friday the students and the faculty will have the greatest benefit that we can render in these spaces. Class “size should be considered in these choices more than content perhaps.