

Sharing Lectures Through Social Media and Conferencing Technologies

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- Introduction
 - Nathan Wagoner, general intro
 - Work-Juniata College with Dr.Cushman. I teach Media Production,
 - Manage a production studio that employs between 10 and 15 students, producing media for Juniata College Marketing and External Relations.
 - Sharing presentation with Ben Mallaby UoG, Cheltenham, joining us from London.
 - Ben introduces himself - part of a BCA program which organises exchanges, which is how I met Nathan
- Our Topic - Our Project
 - Shared lectures and guests using online conferencing between our campuses:
 - University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham
 - Juniata College, Pennsylvania
 - University College Cork, Cork, Ireland (not active, but sharing in our guests)
 - What worked
 - What didn't work
 - What we've learned
 - Going forward - in case anyone out there is interested

in establishing something similar

- History/Background of project
 - Visit in 2011
 - Challenges in common
 - Geographic isolation
 - Students unfamiliar with industrial practice
 - Campuses far from production centers
 - Students needing professional contact/s
 - Learning to socialize at a professional level
 - Technical and aesthetic questions
 - Building networks

- Assets/Advantages
 - Personal/professional networks - we know people
 - Media and Film professionals love to talk about their work
 - In industrial/professional environments, little time for mentoring or teaching beyond the task at hand
 - Outside of a few schools, professionals are rarely asked - no academic credentials, different point of view
 - More often than not, eager to share what they have learned, even to go out of their way

- Individual Solutions
 - Both at Juniata and Cheltenham, attempted to address those challenges by bringing in guests, professionals, etc (UCC Film Society, Cork - totally isolated)
 - Exciting the students with interesting guests (people who are willing to go out of their way) A big problem with guest speakers is getting the students as excited as the professionals
 - Students are looking for something they recognize. The colourist on Band of Brothers

gets their attention, EMMY award winning, BAFTA nominated, anything which either quantifies their success or a brand they're familiar with. In the case of Robb Leech, showing his film 'My Brother the Islamist', which he also features in, helps them to form a connection with the speaker afterwards.

- Aspiration: Combining Multiple Institutions and Sharing Guests
 - Both Cheltenham and Juniata require the 'going out of their way' part - speakers who are excited about participating.
 - Cheltenham is 3 hours west of London
 - Juniata is 5 hours west of NYC
 - 3 hours east of Pittsburgh
 - both ages away from Los Angeles or Austin.
 - Individually we could only get a few speakers, but we realized if we combined forces and used technology to connect us, we could deliver a fuller, more engaging schedule of speakers to both campuses
 - Students more engaged with the speakers, merely thanks to their geography - Wylie for example (Austin) is exotic and exciting
 - The University College Cork Film Society benefit as
 - They don't have the professional network to call upon
 - They are able to take part in a much bigger program and we're happy to support their course
- It's exciting
 - There is a detachment with Skype from both parties, part of the job is to cheerlead, to convince them you're really excited by it all, or else they will fail to build up enthusiasm. But this is easy to do, because this is exciting, which brings me to my next point

- It's a good story, my boss loves me. Internal marketing on our campuses.
 - Staff and Student achievements, announced quarterly in school boards, among the other exciting things we do we talk about who we linked up with via Skype:
 - An EMMY award winning DoP last month
 - Cork College.
 - Now we have the relationship this is very easy for us to maintain, and reflects well on our course (and recruitment)
- Even to jaded students this can feel exotic.
 - At UoG the students write up a digest of the visiting lecturers at the end of the year
 - This years batch (the first since Nathan and i started our program) the response to the international guest lectures was very positive,
 - Students liked hearing how it worked across the pond (connecting with people online).
 - They feel as though they're getting value for money
- Issues
 - What went wrong?
 - A lot of things, including persistent technical issues as you might expect.
 - Many challenges not technical at all, but logistical and institutional.
 - Pro/Cons of: Oovoo , Google plus, Skype – video conferencing
 - Constantly struggling with the software.
 - Personally I've never tried hosting a video conference
 - Technical issues: getting everyone on the same conversation with a good signal.
 - Some programs start asking for money

- Others just don't seem up to the task.
- Not that we aren't technical people either, it's just new and we're troubleshooting as we go.
- Some failures:
 - Google Hangouts initially difficult but improving. We're thinking of pushing Google hangouts next year as I understand you can now connect to a 'hangout' much easier now.
 - Oovoo may well be excellent but they didn't endear themselves.
- Bandwidth: getting any kind of decent connection.
 - Wifi is proving not to be up to the task
 - Our lecture rooms are still running windows 95,
 - Laptops not sufficient for 3-way video conferencing.
- There may be institutions out there that have coordinated social media technology strategies - Skype site licenses, allocated bandwidth for conferencing technologies, technical support available - but not ours!
 - Chances are that all of these problems will have to be individually addressed - by you.
 - Individual, institutional solution.
- IT are slow to update our machines.
 - Fighting the hardware as well as the software.
 - You can't take it for granted that it will just work.
- Testing
 - Requires time
 - Complicated gaining access to the room, logging on and testing it sufficiently

- Bigger problem is that without incentive we just don't do it
 - We just need to test more, and our biggest problem is that we're busy.
 - Too busy to book a lecture room and have a 1 minute chat with two different timezones, I know that sounds lazy but we just very rarely found the time!
 - We promise each other we're going to fix that this year, I'm skeptical.
- Even if tech problems are solved, simple scheduling is very difficult, in unexpected ways
 - First - we are dealing simultaneously with professional and academic schedules - very different
 - Even if we schedule professionals far in advance, we can't expect them to turn down paying jobs, even on short notice. Plans are always provisional, right up until the day of the event.
 - Although students in Cheltenham might attend an event in the evening if we were broadcasting from the US, it's unlikely they could present in the evenings. Professionals making a day trip to Cheltenham from London would have a 2 hour return trip and generally leave earlier.
 - American professionals often suggest evenings if they are busy, but that rules out anyone in Europe for live participation
 - Two very different academic systems
 - American Liberal Arts: a media/film student may concentrate in media production but in any given class period on any given day, might be nearly anywhere in the curriculum - Chemistry, Religion, Psychology. Other

faculty have different expectations, allowable absences, etc.

- English 'Module' System: film students are all in the same classes, with a relatively small number of faculty from the same department - much easier to schedule.
 - Juniata not only has more of a scheduling problem, but is responsible for more of the problems vis a vis UK or Ireland.
 - A schedule that allows participation with professionals and academics from LA to Austin, through EST, Ireland and England is clearly a challenge.
 - 3 PM in the UK, a relatively simple time to schedule, is 10 AM at Juniata, a very busy class time, and only 7 AM in Los Angeles, a little on the early side. You see the problems.
 - Going forward I think we can begin to sketch out a protocol based on which institution is presenting, scheduled as far ahead as possible.
- Beyond scheduling
 - Don't expect support or money at first - it will be up to you to drum up the support in your institution.
 - There probably won't be a communal license for Skype conferences that you can join, and you may well have to spend some time convincing your IT System Administrators to give you much technical support or allocated bandwidth
 - If you come up with the idea then you're responsible for it, and you must be willing to stick with it until its value is appreciated.
 - You'll have to promote it, tell people about it, invite other faculty and administration to come and observe – and hope that even if everything doesn't work perfectly on that day that the value

will nevertheless be clear.

- Students who aren't present with the guest, will not connect as well
- However if the class/es have either
 - Know each other (student to student) or
 - Seen the guests work or
 - Met the lecturer hosting
- They are more inclined to communicate.

- Building on what i was saying earlier, you need to have the student engaged.
 - Rob Leech presenting at UoG
 - Cheltenham students engaged and connected
 - Juniata students disengaged, almost challenging
 - Dodgy connection
 - Bad WiFi
 - Poor emotional connection with people they didn't know and weren't in the same room with.

- Looking ahead:
 - Stronger personal connections:
 - One thing we're thinking of doing to fix the emotional distance are exercises involving the students getting to know each other. We're thinking short film exercises.
 - Being Pro-active: even we have trouble sustaining our enthusiasm
 - With a lot on our plates it can be hard to keep it at the forefront of our minds
 - Face to face visits matter: Nathan was able to visit again this year and after a couple of pints we had reminded ourselves just what

- an amazing opportunity this is.
- Nathan met my course leader, forming a new bond there, after a short chat she now sees the value in a way she couldn't before when it was just me: meaning we have more support.
- This is how these things grow, not by my Skyping it in, but by person to person visits, free to chat to you afterwards and form relationships. That's how we feel you sustain this type of initiative.
- Our hope for this project is a self-sustaining 'salon' around the core of
 - Students
 - Alums
 - Professionals who participate
 - Others who would like to participate
- To a degree, this aspiration dictates our choice of platforms – Google + is our platform of choice, even if we may have to struggle with implementation, because of all the available social 'conferencing' platforms, it alone offers the possibility of a growing, fluid and spontaneous Salon.
- Looking for as many new forms of participation as possible: smart-phones for example, joining from film sets for example.
- Publically accessible guest lecture spots that can be available for graduates or even other guests to host on a whim
- And if anyone in the audience is keen to join our program of speakers next year, just get in touch and we'd love to include you.