DIKTUON: *Technology Training for a New Age*

by Jennifer K. Bartholomew

This fall Luther Seminary welcomed a new incoming class. Our students are here to learn in a few short years skills that will equip them for ministry in a wide variety of communities. Some are here to become ordained clergy, others are engaged in ministering to youth or the elderly, some will concentrate on pastoral care, and some are pursuing advanced degrees (M.Th. or a Ph.D.). Ministry is changing. With innovations in social media, a traditional church-centered community can add new online ways to connect and minister. Technology know-how is among the skills our students want to acquire as they work to build and support a healthy church community. They have many questions about how they should connect online with people in their church. What are the best practices? Seminary education is evolving as it works to be relevant to the change in the world.

INFLUENCE OF ONLINE LEARNING

Over the last five years at Luther I have seen a few changes in our approach to seminary education. The biggest is the online option for obtaining an M.Div. degree. The fourth cohort will begin in January 2011. We will then have 77 M.Div. students in the distributed or distance learning (DL) program. This option allows more flexibility for seminary students who prefer not to uproot their families or leave a job in order to earn a degree. An interesting development has been the number of students living on campus who choose to take some of their classes online. Some do so because of scheduling conflicts with other classes and others because of family concerns. Our assumptions about education for ministry, what students want, and the best way to deliver are continually being challenged.

The Learning Design and Technology (LDT) group was started to coordinate online learning. Seminary students face many challenges but Luther is determined that the computer interface will not be one of them. LDT's mission is to facilitate learning. The LDT group works with professors and instructors to design each course so the online environment is a friendly one. The group members are concerned with presenting quality content with a consistent look and easy navigation.

In addition to creating courses, LDT has responded to student questions and frustrations by creating and posting short videos in the course management software (CMS) that will help students as they use it (also known as MyLutherNet) to download course content, post assignments, and communicate with professors and fellow students. "MyLutherNet Minutes" have been created on how to follow a threaded discussion post, embed a video, use file exchange, manage discussion forums, and more. Since all students use the CMS, these simple videos benefit both online and on-campus students.

TECH TALKS

Last year LDT, in collaboration with the Library, started a series of short talks on technology called Tech Talks (http://blog.luthersem.edu/freerangelearning/tech-talks/). They combine a short presentation (20+ minutes) with pizza (always a sure draw). We have covered everything from working collaboratively with Google Docs, creating portfolios, finding free images online, creating concept maps, using social media, and software. Attendance is strong, usually 12-25. Most attendees are students but we also see staff and faculty attendees. The sessions are also broadcast, recorded, and posted on the LDT blog FreeRange Learning for DL students. We have discovered

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that students are not only asking questions about the topic of the day, they are starting great conversations about learning and communicating in the digital environment. Largely due to social media, our students are very open to learning and talking about technology.

Biblio Bread & Butter

Partly as a response to Tech Talks, the library started a weekly training session, Biblio Bread & Butter (B&B) (http://blog.luthersem.edu/library/2010/09/biblio-bread-butter.html), held in the campus computer lab. We wanted to try short sessions that students could attend during their midday lunch break. We chose a mid-week day thinking there would be more students on campus. Each Wednesday we feature a different topic. Students can listen to the presentation and then practice using the resource. Our fall program includes sessions on searching for books and full-text articles, early church history resources, lectionary resources for Advent, and using BibleWorks.

This is a move away from our more traditional approach to teaching library skills, which can easily devote an hour or more to one topic. We continue to offer a variety of traditional classroom and workshop sessions on print resources, searching online databases, and using software (Endnote, Bibleworks). We also do individual tutoring if a student needs a quick refresher.

A big challenge in the Biblio B&B sessions is the amount of time we have to work with (15-35 minutes, depending on the student's schedule). We have narrowed our focus, choosing about three tasks. We provide a few examples and leave time for practice. The key is choosing examples that will make sense to the students and are relevant. Do they help students complete class assignments? We want students to master a few skills and build a sense of competence.

Response to Online Students

When we first planned Biblio B&B we shortsightedly didn't realize the online students would be interested in participating. As we sent out our announcements to the student list, the online students kept responding with "Are you going to post this session online?" After the second week we decided we would. We've got a bit to learn yet (Is Camtasia the best software? Do we record a different session than the one we do in the computer lab?, etc.). As we plan for these videos we know it is important to keep them simple and short. We are grateful for the help and expertise our friends in LDT are providing.

It's easy when you are face to face with students in the computer lab. You can talk to them and ask questions about their classes and their level of comfort with computers. It's not as easy to create videos for students who are studying online. We don't always know if we are providing the right information. We are trying to maintain a simple and consistent approach in our teaching and coaching. I suspect the first videos we create will not be as sophisticated as the ones we create next spring. This year we'll gain some polish and get more comfortable, while soliciting feedback from the DL students.

Moving Forward—"The Library is a Growing Organism"

The Tech Talks and Biblio B&B are energizing for us. We are meeting more students, engaging in dialogue with them, learning what they are interested in, and finding how we can provide skills and resources that will make a difference. As we get to know them, we see their passion, energy, and perhaps a bit more verve than in previous years. They are approaching ministry with many new ideas: nonviolent communication techniques from pastoral

care, promoting church events on Facebook, and trying hip-hop services alongside Vacation Bible School and traditional Bible Studies. New modes of learning (online, traditional, and hybrid classrooms) are giving us new ideas for resource delivery. We are trying new approaches so that our students feel comfortable asking questions and learning new skills. We are finding that we really do some of our best work outside of the library. I see Ranganathan's fifth law, "The library is a growing organism," deeply at work here.

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