**2014-2015 Annual Program Assessment Report**

**Department of Journalism**

The Journalism Department focused its 2014-15 assessment activities on measurements in many of the program’s tablet-based classes. The goal has been to evaluate the teaching and learning so that faculty can develop a strategy for operationalizing the most effective in-class activities and applications (apps). Ultimately, this information will be shared with all faculty teaching as part of the myCSUN Tablet Initiative, as well as those who are new to the mobile and digital concepts so critical to the rapidly changes skills required in the profession.

Our students working in both English- and Spanish-language classes, publications and projects have been at the forefront of digital and mobile journalism as part of the Department’s efforts to integrate technology and multimedia into the curriculum. The iPad has played a big part in this transition. Journalism faculty and students were among the pilot participants in the campus-wide tablet initiative formally launched in Fall 2013. Since then, a range of skills and lecture courses have been identified as iPad classes, requiring students to have the devices as a condition of enrollment.

The assessment process began almost immediately among faculty, who developed what we called the “iPad Project” in Spring and Summer 2013. Early on, we asked faculty to regularly report on progress, successes and failures as they implemented the initiative in 15 classes that first semester.

As the project has matured, various formal assessments of the Program Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) have taken place. For example, as we noted in last year’s report, the iPad had a positive effect on student learning in the J110 (Writing, Reporting and Ethics I) class and that J110 students who created flashcards using an app outperformed students who didn’t create digital flashcards. We also know from surveys and regular progress reports that the iPad project has been the catalyst for faculty – both full- and part-time – to review and change their teaching practices. Many say they have been re-energized, revamping curriculum, rewriting course syllabi and/or positively altering their pedagogy to improve the learning in their classrooms.

In the most recent academic year (2014-15), the following SLOs were assessed in the iPad classes:

* No. 1 – Students will be able to report and write for diverse publics, using proper grammar and punctuation, word usage and spelling, sentence and storytelling structures across multiple journalistic formats.
* No. 2 – Students will be able to gather and analyze information, including basic numerical concepts, using reporting techniques, such as interviewing, observation, and researching primary and secondary sources.
* No. 5 – Students will apply tools and technologies appropriate for the news media professions in which they work to communicate for and with diverse publics.

Several themes emerged in these assessments, including:

* The iPad made it easier and more convenient for students to capture information, including photos, audio and video, and post on social media than using traditional equipment and computers.
* Students seemed more interested in doing assignments like drawing editorial cartoons and diagramming sentences and taking quizzes, when they were done on the iPad vs. using pen and paper.
* Faculty report improved student interaction and engagement, particularly in reporting with social media and in production, such as note-taking, shooting photos and capturing audio and video. Also, in using apps, such as Nearpod and Socrative for presentations and in-class activities has had a positive result.

The direct assessments are broken down into four categories and summarized below:

Using the iPad as:

✓ a teaching/assessment tool

✓a reporting/content creation tool

✓a data analysis tool

✓a production tool

✓a promotional tool

**Teaching/assessment tool**

**SLO No. 1:**

– A sentence diagramming assignment in J110 (Writing, Reporting and Ethics I) in both Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 used the Educreations app. This allowed students to use different colors to represent the different parts of speech.

In Fall 2014, the activity started late in the semester and happened just twice. The professor realized that opportunities to diagram were needed throughout the semester because diagramming was a new skill for 90 percent of the students. This would have given students a chance to become more proficient in sentence diagramming as well as to explore more complex parts of grammar, such an indirect objects, interjections and appositives.

Despite the late start, students said they benefitted from the activity by becoming more familiar with the basic parts of a sentence. In Spring 2015, the activity began in the fifth week and took place a total of three times during the semester. Pre- and post-grammar quizzes showed the students’ knowledge of grammar and, in particular, the prepositional phrase, improved as a result of doing the diagramming exercises. The professor suggested that five diagramming activities during the semester would give students more chances to improve their skills.

– A J250 (Visual Communication) assessment in Spring 2015 demonstrated that students who used the iPad, specifically employing the Kahoot! app, out-performed their peers who took a traditional quiz on identifying font families. In previous semesters, about 85 percent of students received a C on the typeface quiz. This semester, when the Kahoot! game was used, only 25 percent received a C (43 percent received an A and 22 percent received a B). The app is an Internet-based game that can be administered and played on any device that receives a Wi-Fi signal. Thus, it can be used on a tablet, laptop or smartphone.

Students wanted to win and take home bragging rights, as well as a few bonus points. The class turned into a game show. Learning became fun and many students told the professor that after taking the quiz they would remember the differences among the typeface families.

**Reporting/content creation tool**

**SLO No. 2:**

– In a J495LF (Selected Topics) class, students were asked how they used the tablets in terms of their function as newsgathering and communication tools for disseminating news and information to an audience. The class produces a half-hour multimedia public affairs program that airs on television and online. The most popular uses were for graphic design and display. It was easy to connect to a larger monitor, students said, and for posting text and photos to social media, although they also could have used a smartphone for the same purpose.

Although students used their iPads for communicating with sources and other journalists about as often as they used a desktop or a laptop, their tool of choice for communication was a smartphone. They did not use the devices for writing-intensive assignments because the keyboard was inconvenient nor did they use them to shoot or edit video, preferring the department’s or their own equipment.

For the 12 shows produced over the course of the semester, 25 percent used the iPad to design and display graphics during the show (one student also used the iPad for reference but not to display graphics). The size of the audience was no different, but, when appropriate, graphics definitely added to the audience’s understanding.

The decision to provide graphics seemed to depend on two factors: 1) preparation time and deadline pressure and 2) story content and appropriateness of graphics. The professor indicated that in her larger class in the spring 2015, she would stress the need to assign students to work specifically on graphics, using the iPad to design and display them during the shows.

**SLOs Nos. 2 and 5:**

– Also in Fall 2014, students in a J314 (Reporting for Broadcasting) class used an iPad as a reporting tool to gather audio, video and photos as well as supporting information to produce audio news wraps and features. It was discovered that the internal microphone resulted in poor audio quality. After students used an external microphone, the audio quality was better. The assessment? The iPad complemented traditional journalism equipment for practicing mobile journalism.

**SLO No. 5:**

– In a J210 class in Fall 2014, students did a group exercise in which they shot and edited videos for mock news stories. This exercise was designed to help them better prepare to incorporate video into their individual work. The multimedia component of the students' final reporting projects was then compared with same elements of a previous class taught without iPads – and without the lessons in shooting and editing video.

The students in the iPad class displayed a much higher propensity to tackle multimedia storytelling and, in particular to include video as a component in their projects. The grades on the multimedia component of the assignment were higher in the iPad class. (An average of 86 percent in the iPad class vs. 78 percent in the non-iPad class.) While there is a certain amount of subjectivity in grading such skills assignments, both groups were graded with the same requirements in mind – that the multimedia elements should effectively help tell the story contained in their written articles. The professor said he intended to place greater emphasis on exercises that promote students' use of video to complement their articles, and to spend more than one week developing students' skills in shooting and editing video.

– Another iPad assessment that took place in Fall 2014 involved J250 (Visual Communication). Students created an editorial cartoon using drawing apps rather than pen and paper. Nearly all of the students (93 percent) completed the assignment, compared to three-quarters (73 percent) who completed the same activity in Fall 2013 – but without the iPad and apps.

The quality of the cartoons was better as well in the Fall 2014. Many of the students were familiar with these drawing apps and felt comfortable in using them to produce their work. Some students created more than one cartoon for the assignment because they had fun working with a drawing app and wanted to practice.

**Data analysis tool**

**SLO No. 2**

An assessment in a J498 (Senior Tutorial) class called Data Driven Journalism indicated that data analysis was a weakness for the iPad. Other platforms, including laptops and Google docs, offered more effective and robust data-oriented tools. Requiring students to have a tablet for the class did not guarantee that they would use the tool for all of their class assignments. Students used the technology that helped them execute their assignments. The strengths of the iPad emerged from its visual capabilities and its ability to link class members.

**Production tool**

**SLO No. 5**

– In Fall 2014, a comparison assessment was made among three apps, Pages, Lucidpress and InDesign, in a J331 (Graphics) class. Students were assigned to create newsletters with images, display type and basic text in Pages. Lucidpress, a web-based drag-and-drop publishing app, was used for a simple magazine cover with a single large image and blurbs in various sizes. InDesign was used for a more complex cover with a silhouetted photograph.

As text and images come from outside sources, the only real difference among these three trials was the user interface. There was no real qualitative difference in the final visuals, certainly not one that can be measured with any degree of validity. The professor felt that the layouts produced on the iPad Minis lacked attention to fine detail that was more easily discerned on the classroom’s larger computer monitors but these results were difficult to quantify.

In a post-assignment survey, 69 percent of students responded they thought Lucidpress was the easiest to *learn*, compared to 23 percent for Pages and 8 percent for InDesign. When asked which was the easiest to *use*, 84 percent preferred Lucidpress, compared to 8 percent for both InDesign and Pages. However, when considering their own marketability, 69 percent of students said they felt that InDesign looked better on a resume, compared to 31 percent of Lucidpress. When asked if the majority of class time should focus on InDesign, 92 percent said yes.

– Another assessment was conduced in J331 (Graphics) in which students were given two newsletter assignments, one using an iPad and one using conventional computers, and the results were compared. The assessment did not show much of a difference between using a tablet and using a traditional computer to produce a newsletter for print or PDF distribution. Students certainly improved their skills in graphic production if success was measured by ability to manipulate software.

They were diligent workers both with iPad tools and the computer-based programs, but no difference could be determined or quantified in their work based on platform. One observation the professor made was that students showed remarkably little ability to recall simple facts for more than a day or two, even when those facts had visible bearing on their work, such as understanding the point sizes of type. He planned to examine tablet tools, like Socrative and Kahoot!, coupled with repeated quizzing and see if that worked better; this is another area for assessment. Gamification might also yield better results for retention.

– Students in the Spring 2015 J455 (Documentary Photojournalism) class used an iPad to process photographic images through cloud-based storage and app technology. These tools were used to create a multimedia iBook, which featured photographs, audio and video. Students who followed the demonstrated methods for processing their photographs – uploading photographs taken with DSLR cameras into MyCSUNBOX, then opening them in their iPads so that they could enhance and essentially “develop” their photographs using app technology – generally achieved excellent results.

The process of preparing photographs for publication and dissemination using this technology is relatively simple compared to more traditional digital methods, such as using Photoshop or Adobe Lightroom. Similar to traditional darkroom photography work, the overall quality of the photographic images varied widely, depending on the skill and talent level of individual students.

It could not be determined whether there was any quantifiable increase in learning, in this particular instance where the technology was used mainly as a means of production and not as a primary (or even supplementary) source of curriculum design and implementation. That the iPad offered a convenient way to process, store and disseminate documentary work was indisputable. What was less clear was the intrinsic value of this convenience; other than expedience, the final results in sheer image quality, while potentially excellent, was not better than other technologies and methodologies.

**Promotional tool**

**SLO No. 5:**

– A follow-up assessment in the J495LF class was done in Spring 2015. Students were required to record their use of different devices, to see if social media posts were a device-specific activity, and to fill out a survey explaining their record. The assessment found that students continued to use a variety of devices to perform the tasks associated with broadcast news production, choosing devices based on convenience and accessibility.

In addition, students chose tablets at times to post on social media, but preferred to use smartphones for the ease and number of available applications, and for size and weight. The professor felt that making social media part of the *On Point* experience was a success because more students were involved in the production of each show, they learned new and highly marketable skills. The audience for each show was better informed, more diverse and probably larger (hard to measure that) with social media as an entry to each story. It gave students a way to think about journalism, storytelling, writing and marketing in new and more complex and creative ways.

– Data were also collected for the J398 (Public Relations Practicum) and in a graduate program course, MCOM620 (Seminar in Media Analysis), during 2014-15. Analyses are planned during 2015-16.

**Conclusion**

From a broader perspective, assessment of various assignments in many of the iPad classes has shown us that these devices have benefits as both teaching and content-creative tools. As a teaching tool, the iPad in Journalism classes is not dramatically more effective than teaching in a traditional way. For example, using a whiteboard and PowerPoint.

Some teaching apps have been used in our iPad classes with positive results. These include: Nearpod (which allow the professor to “take over” the students’ iPads so they are all seeing the same presentation and responding to the prompts), Socrative (which allows students to take quizzes), Quizlet (which allows students to create digital flashcards) and Educreations (which turns their tablet into a personal slate for taking notes or drawing).

These apps can make presentations more interesting and engaging to the students and, in turn, help the professor better keep the students’ attention. An iPad isn’t necessary to teach news reporting and writing, but using it does have some benefits.

In journalism classes, the greater benefit has been seen in reporting and production classes. Because of its compact size and ability for a student to take notes, capture audio and video and take photos, the iPad has proven a powerful reporting tool. Also, it is useful for editing audio, video and photos, as well as posting content to websites and social media sites. Learning and applying these skills are crucial for our students’ success in a rapidly changing profession.

**Next steps**

Moving forward, faculty plan a combination of assessment and analysis for 2015-16. We want to conduct assessment on our program SLOs related to critical thinking skills and other competencies that have not been evaluated. Deciding how to assess other SLOs that aren’t as skills-oriented will be a challenge but it is one that we need to tackle. The Department’s previous five-year plan included identifying capstone courses that would be evaluated using a portfolio system. This remains a viable option, particularly with the recent adoption of Portfolium. The University’s new digital showcase will allow students to share projects and work in a variety of electronic formats. One of the problems in the past was in finding ways to accurately and fairly assess print, broadcast and multimedia assignments.

At the same time, we have collected a wealth of rich information on the digital/mobile tablets. This information demands closer examination: We’re mindful of the obligation to more visibly close the loop. To do that will involve a group effort. We expect to convene a meeting of the iPad faculty to disseminate information, share ideas and develop “Best Practices” that will be implemented across the appropriate skills classes.