

Constructing a Collaborative Podcast Library for Student Writers in Northwest Ohio: Predicting Success

Core Participants

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Abstract

Graduating student writers, who are prepared to address various audiences in relation to varying purposes and genres and within increasingly complex writing contexts, remains a challenge. Participants of this project, specifically Writing Center staff from Bowling Green State University, Lourdes College, Owens Community College, The University of Findlay, and The University of Toledo, seek to address this challenge in Northwest Ohio through a collaborative podcasting effort believing that a concerted effort will yield greater results. Participants will oversee the production and publication of a series of shared podcasts constructed and recorded by writing consultants at the respective institutions on strategically sequenced and contextualized topics designed to improve the competence and confidence of student writers. Topics will address both global and sentence-level concerns. Participants expect to construct a growing and continually revised series of podcasts, approximately twenty-five uploaded onto designated sites accessible to student writers, during the first six months. Participants expect student writers to find podcasts easy to use and useful in learning about and gaining experience with global and local aspects of writing in addition to getting feedback about how to overcome writing challenges. We also expect that a portion of the users will prefer podcasts as a learning tool, either separately or in combination with other learning methods, and will learn writing strategies that they would not otherwise learn, or that they may not learn as well, without this e-learning tool. Participants will continually

assess the expected results from the perspectives of student writers, writing consultants, and faculty as well as tabulate the number of podcasts downloaded.

Purpose and Readiness

The purpose of this project is to address the writing needs of student writers and the expectations of employers who will hire these students upon graduation. In the short run, we hope students will become stronger writers more capable of negotiating complex writing situations. In the long run, because we believe writing builds the worlds that we live in, we hope the various professional worlds that the student writers participate in after graduation and in their various ongoing teaching and learning situations will be more carefully, accurately, logically, and compassionately built as a result of their participation in this community. We also acknowledge the role writing can play in personal lives. In short, we believe much is at stake in this project to the core members of the community as the investment of time and effort is significant; to the institutions involved as they will derive a new dimension of service to support students; to writing centers in Northwest Ohio as they will become more supportive and more technologically experienced as a result of this project.

The importance of writing to institutional goals can easily be seen in its very visible presence in official versions of learning outcomes. For example, the importance of writing is foregrounded in BGSU's learning outcomes:

Writing--a social activity in which the author purposefully uses written text to relate meaning to an intended audience. BGSU graduates are [expected to be] proficient in multiple forms of writing, with particular expertise in the styles and conventions of a major field of study.

The emphasis BGSU places on writing is comparable to the importance all participating institutions place on it, thus addressing how our communities' goals align themselves with institutional goals.

Key to avoiding our “becoming a random act of innovation” is our curriculum-based, contextualized, and sequenced plan for the podcasts.

We participants are poised and ready to begin to reach our goals as listed below:

Four Major Goals

1. To identify podcast topics that are useful and valuable to student writers across and within participating institutions and to direct and guide writing consultants at participating institutions to construct and record podcasts.
2. To upload them onto writing center websites and/or other mutually beneficial online locations.
3. To advertise podcast availability to faculty and student writers and encourage use.
4. To assess the effectiveness and usefulness of podcasts and desire for continuance or revision.

One of the biggest challenges is perhaps the ability of the participants to take on the new responsibilities of the grant on top of already busy schedules. One way to alleviate this challenge, leverage efforts, and maintain quality of production is to contract a graduate student coordinator who can gain useful professional experience, help expedite the project, and alleviate the time constraints of the core participants.

Other resources are also needed

- Services of the writing consultants, shared among the participating institutions
- Microphones
- Audacity Subscriptions
- Snapkast editing software

- Dell Server
- Attendance at upcoming Teaching/Learning and Technology and Podcast Conferences – with different participants attending different conferences for greater knowledge acquisition and sharing
- Paper for construction of any hardcopy surveys and assessment/measuring tools

Bowling Green State University is the convening institution and key in that regard although all members will benefit from and participate in this project equally, sharing responsibilities, resources, and grant monies.

Learning Community Identity and Growth

Learning Community as Five Core Participants

As a community, this group is unique. Though others may work to serve the needs of students, this group will be able to draw from the connections of geographic location but also from the varied experiences of the participants. From this background will come a library of podcasts specifically for and from institutions in Northwest Ohio. Each participating institution will contribute experience, ideas for new creations, knowledge about writing, and knowledge about the needs of students in the form of new podcasts to be added to a library of on-demand student support for writing. The BGSU contingency will contribute its experience with podcasting as a teaching/learning tool.

This group will be able to pull off the different perspectives to move beyond that of the typical community. Through equal and strong representation, participation, and contribution, a much stronger and more thorough library will emerge than is possible for any single institution. This library will be able to serve the members of the specific community through attention to and discussion of the differences of participating institutions, student writer needs, contexts, and experiences. This process, in turn, will allow the community to play

off consistencies in writing. Also served will be the needs of the students at the campuses of the different institutions. The different learning styles, contexts, and problems that the different students experience can be addressed by the participants.

Each of the core members has been allied with learning communities. For examples, Barbara Toth has been part of the BGSU Center for Teaching Learning and Technology learning communities, and Jeremy Schnieder also has experience with the BGSU Mentoring and Portfolio learning community. Through these experiences, the core participants have seen the power of different perspectives aligned in a single purpose and seen that the creativity and expertise of many are more valuable than that of a single individual.

Learning Community as Core Participants plus Writing Consultants, Faculty, and Student Writer Users

In the fullest sense, our podcast community equals core participants, plus writing consultants, faculty, and most importantly student writers around whose needs the entire community is being organized. The synergistic effect of this podcast learning community is most strong at this point because in a real sense the total effect of these members considered together is greater than their simple addition of each to the others.

The growth of this podcast community can/will be assessed by

- Counting the number of podcasts constructed
- Identifying the types and development of themes of the topics
- Counting the number of downloaded podcasts
- Meeting with core participants monthly to review progress and growth and documenting minutes as a record of issues, concerns, progress, etc.
- Correlating our growth with other projects that are also using podcasts as learning tools.

- Publishing our findings so others can assess the growth of their projects

Means of Assessment

Assessment is an essential part of this project and will provide direction for further growth. The means of assessment for the specific learning community will come through specific production goals. The quality and usefulness of the podcasts will be assessed through user surveys and evaluations attached to the site(s). In this manner, all users of the library will have a chance to comment and provide ideas for further development. In addition, meetings with faculty, podcast users, and potential podcast users will be scheduled so that their input can be used to construct and revise podcast content and publication.

Nexus of Pedagogy, Learning Strategies, & Podcasting Technology

Core participants will contribute to a common understanding of effective pedagogy and e-pedagogy through podcasting by

- identifying writing topics that will benefit student writers across campuses and curriculum
- contextualizing and sequencing topics relative to writing curriculum and writing needs of students
- utilizing podcasting as a learning object, not merely an auditory device
- keeping learners' attention, bearing in mind physical needs and retention abilities
- capitalizing on learning through listening

Podcasting is being explored in this endeavor because it

- Is cheaper for learners than other technologies
- Requires minimal technical training
- Can be accessed anywhere and anytime
- Can motivate students who do not like/have difficulty with reading
- Is valuable for visually-challenged learners

- Can appeal to learners with various learning styles and preferences

In short, we believe that our project will significantly contribute to the success of student writers and to their attainment of the learning outcomes posted at their respective institutions in regards to writing and communication with others.

Open Source Technologies

Some open source technologies will play a role in this community. Creative commons will be an important source of images and music. Likewise, whenever possible, open source methods will be used in production as long as they don't hinder the delivery or production quality. Finally, as a library, the information will be available for all who have web access.

Impact on Students

Both student writers and student writing consultants will be positively impacted.

Student Writers

This community will have a positive collective impact on the students of the separate institutions. The value to the students in the community will be immense in that they will have on-demand support for problems with papers. Students who are visually challenged or who have trouble reading will benefit particularly. Additionally, ESL learners and writers will benefit not only in that they will have writing support on-demand but also will hear English spoken by experienced speakers of English on the podcasts. Moreover, as our aim is eventually to construct audiocasts with visual components, our chances of appealing to students with a wide range of learning styles is maximized. We point out that learning through podcasts will be a less tedious method of learning for some students, thereby increasing their retention and chances for graduation.

Because student writers will be requested to give feedback about podcast production, they will be involved and have a vested interest in the development of the project.

Writing Consultants

Writing consultants will not only be teaching; they, too, will learn as they draft and record podcasts, becoming more experienced in writing with purpose and to various audiences. This experience will provide them with material for their resumes and vitas that will make them more competitive in a global marketplace. Furthermore, they will gain valuable technological experience and new and improved writing knowledge throughout the production process. Keep in mind that the consultants also are/will be student writers and will find the podcasts created by other consultants useful for their writing needs as well.

The impact on the writing consultants will be monitored through traditional writing center assessment as well as through qualitative means. The impact on the students using the library will be monitored through tracking of use and user surveys linked to the site(s) itself/themselves.

Student writing consultants in the different writing centers will be directly involved in the creation of the podcasts that will allow students at their universities to get the help they need. Furthermore student writers as student writers will be called into discussions about useful podcast topics.

Impact on Members

Through shared access, each institution will have direct access to podcasting benefits. Each group will benefit through workshop-based training delivered at the start of the project by Barbara Toth and Jeremy Schnieder as well as through ongoing discussions about administrative and pedagogical topics. However much experience members have with podcasting to date, all members will learn

more about podcasts as learning tools as the project progresses. No doubt we will experience unexpected impacts too.

An even greater audience will benefit from the sharing that can/will take place on the Ohio Learning Networks Podcasting Listserv, of which all participants will be members.

Core members were invited to join this podcast learning community through email and a phone call. Sharing funds equally, encouraging conference presentations, publication and co-authorship of articles about our collaboration will also be encouraged. Additionally, it seems fitting that we together should co-create a podcast about our podcast project linked to our podcast site(s).

Participants will also gain in increased collaborative experience, leadership experience, and teaching learning and technology experience. Because all participants work directly with students either in the classroom, online, and/or in writing centers, they will be directing students to use the podcasts, which, in turn, will maximize their involvement. It strikes us that individual publications and co-publications will be particularly effective in order to promote the scholarship and research of individual members.

Qualitative means will be used to assess the growth of the participants. Interviews, discussions, and anecdotal evidence will be gathered to help show what we are doing well in addition to what we need to improve and revise. Another meaningful assessment tool is noting what new skills individual participants have gained, what new is added to their vitas, and what knowledge they are able to share with others as a result of the participation.

The members will also be in direct communication with each other on a regular basis in various forums, monthly in-person meetings, online discussions, email, etc.

Impact on Institutions, Partners and Beyond

What the writing consultants learn will be directly transmitted through the podcasts themselves to the student listeners. What is learned through the production will be shared in a variety of means. Already the BGSU contingent participated in the BGSU Teaching, Learning and Technology Fair. We will strive to make use of similar opportunities at the other institutions. Likewise, other Ohio schools will benefit through our participation and discussions on the Ohio Learning Networks Podcasting Listserve. Finally, a commitment will be made to show the success of the program to other writing centers and in K-12 forums through conference presentations and traditional journal venues. For example, Christine Reichert, core participant from Lourdes College and editor of *The Learning Assistance Review*, a publication of National College Learning Center Association, has suggested a co-authored article in that journal.

Perhaps the most beautiful aspect of this program lies in the fact that once it is started, it can only grow. As the different institutions contribute, the library will become more varied and thorough. Likewise, with success, more intrastate cooperation as well as perhaps interstate and international cooperations can be established. For example, Barbara Toth has established ties with Xian International Studies University (XISU) in Xi'an, China by helping to establish a Writing Center in the XISU School of English Studies and can vouch for XISU's interest in shared podcasting. The possibilities are endless although we wish to start our project serving student writers in Northwest Ohio using the compelling new technology of podcasting.