Ahmad Yousef (Faculty - Tenure-track History)

"I want to inspire students and get them excited about History!"

Background

Age: 38
Occupation: Professor, on-track for tenure
School: Faculty of Liberal Arts, History, University of Alberta, Canada
Technology level: Comfortable with email, the web, office products... He sees technology as a "means to an end".

Main Points

- Enthusiastic educator
- Organizes online course content chronologically
- Frustrated with slowness of LMS
- Open to new technologies but only as a means to an end

Goals

- Get tenure
- Finish his latest book
- Teach students - including how to learn, how to make good arguments by creating compelling lectures
- Get students excited about his area of study so they learn, engage, and participate actively in class
- Build his department at U of A

Frustrations & Pain Points

- Slowness with LMS
- More to fill in from his notes

Scenarios

- TBD

Ahmad received his PhD in History and Middle Eastern Studies from Yale. Ahmad taught for several years at the University of British Columbia, before moving to the History department at the University of Alberta where he's been for four years. He's on track for tenure, is working on his third book, and has numerous publications in academic journals. Though research is very important to him, both in his pursuit of tenure and because of his passion about his field, he tries to also be an engaging teacher. He wants to get students excited about history too! He sees teaching as another important way to make an impact in the world.

He teaches both graduate and undergraduate students, and no matter who is students are, likes to make the class an exciting experience that will inspire students to learn more about history. He likes to use PowerPoint slides with lots of photos, multi-media, and video (instead of text), and uses clickers to allow students to give feedback in his large undergraduate classes. He thinks they enjoy the 'game-show' atmosphere he works hard to create, and encourages a lot of class participation. He really likes classes to 'spill over' outside of the lecture; a good day is "when students have a lot of questions after the class is over. He's always making notes about what he could do to make his classes better next time.

Though Ahmad likes the benefits technology can give him in the classroom and for his research, he sees it as "a means to an end." He doesn't explore much beyond what he sees as necessary to meet his needs. For example, he tried Firefox when everyone was raving about it, but switched back to Safari when he found Firefox too slow. He does enjoy using websites such as YouTube and thinks it is a way to reach a large audience. He really loves any application that will help him search for rich content like movies and images.

Personal

He has a big yard for his black lab, Farah, and likes to work from home as often as he can (which he usually ends up doing about 3 days a week) where his dog can sit by his side, chewing on a bone. He uses a Mac laptop, which he brings back and forth between work and home. He's been a Mac user since grad school, when he bought one as a present to himself.

Ahmad has been too busy with his scholarly work to think much about marriage, but does date occasionally, often when he meets someone via his work. He is very concerned about the environment, and takes public transportation whenever possible, including to school. He usually works on his laptop on the bus.

Teaching

- He thinks students should be taught to create good arguments and support them with evidence, and he structures his lectures this way in order to model this skill to them.
- He doesn't like to give students his PowerPoint slides before class because he's put a lot of work into them and thinks students should have to come to class to see them.

Blackboard

- Ahmad has been a Blackboard user for 3 years. Every semester he tries to use a new feature of the system. He uses Blackboard for all of his courses, and gives students a short orientation to it at the beginning of the semester. He also has a website where he posts material that is applicable to *all* his courses (e.g. instructions on how to do research) so he doesn't have to copy it into each Blackboard site. He really wishes there was a way to keep everything in one place.
- He has TAs to help him in his large undergraduate lecture courses, and they use the same course site in Blackboard to run their sections. He thinks each TA needs to "grow their own pedagogical wings," so he likes to encourage them to develop their own teaching style. He lets them use Blackboard to do this to some extent, but still likes to retain a fair amount of control. For instance, he doesn't want them to post any Course Documents to the site, as he likes to review and filter any document that's put on the site, but does allow them to send Announcements or set up their own discussions in the Discussion Board.
- Ahmad lays out his sites in a very chronological manner. There are folders in for week in Course Documents (which he renames to "Lectures") where he posts readings and assignments. He has students post "reading responses" in response to a question he's asked about the weekly readings to the Discussion Board, allowing them to see each others ideas. He always includes a chronologically-organized syllabus on the site as well. He didn't organize the first site he created chronologically and sometimes found it hard to deal with, and his much happier with this new organizational scheme.
- He wishes it didn't take so long to upload documents. It's a little faster when he uses WebDAV, but he can only use that on the U of A network, not at home.

Scenarios

- **Learn students' names:** The photos of students are provided in Blackboard to help him learn all the students' names at the beginning of the semester. Ahmad likes to review the student photos before the first class and keeps it handy during class in the initial weeks so he can call on students by name.
- **Release materials at specified times:** Post materials at specific times throughout the semester as opposed to post them all at once to make sure the course appears "fresh and unfolding," although Ahmad reuses material from previous courses each semester.
- **Announce important news:** Use Announcements (with email notification) to communicate important information to students.
- **Preview pages in student view:** Use Blackboard's student view to see how the site appears to students, but often it is too slow to be very useful.
- **Manage grades:** He manages grades separately too, as he's found Blackboard's Gradebook confusing and hard to manage. As a work-around, he had a friend help him set up an Excel spreadsheet to manage his grades, which he reuses every semester. He wishes there were a way to have the Graders who sometimes assist him with large classes enter grades into Blackboard, but do nothing else on his sites (this is another reason he doesn't use the Gradebook).
- **Post assignments:** He posts all assignments in Blackboard and has students turn in them in via Blackboard's Drop Box.
- **Create and grade quizzes:** He also creates quizzes in Blackboard based on readings from the textbook. Once the students complete the quizzes online, Ahmad prints them out to grade them on paper and gives students feedback on them. It would be great to be able to do the grading in Blackboard.