George McFadden (Online Instructor - Journalism)

"I'd like to open up access to my course to as wide an audience as possible."

Background

Age: 52
Occupation: Instructor - Online Course in Advocacy Journalism
School: Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto
Technology level: TBD

Main Points

- Uses technology to build relationships with his geographically distributed students and track their progress
- Works closely with an Instructional Designer on the course
- Not too worried about career advancement so he focuses on making a difference

Goals

- Remain intellectually fulfilled
- Teach students about something he's passionate about - to help them make a difference in the world
- "Open up" his courses to as large and diverse an audience as possible
- Help other instructors and faculty see online learning as exciting and worthwhile
- Encourage collaboration and sharing of information across schools, since the field of Advocacy Journalism is so specialized
- Continue to contribute to the field of Journalism
- Spend lots of quality time with his family

Frustrations & Pain Points

- George and Lucy like to preview the course site after making changes to be sure of what the students are

seeing. However, they haven't been able to get the student view of Blackboard to work properly so they created a "dummy" student account to log in and see the student view.

Scenarios

- TBD

George is an retired journalist, who worked for over 20 years as a respected editorial writer for Madison's Capital Times newspaper. He decided to retire a little early at age 50 when the paper stopped publishing a few years ago. After thoroughly indulging his passions for travel, reading, and fishing, and biking, he decided the best thing he could do with his free time would be to teach. When he learned there was an opportunity to teach a pilot on-line course for the School of Journalism on Advocacy Journalism 2 years ago, he jumped at the chance. Since he began teaching the online course, George has become a staunch advocate of online learning. Though sometimes there are technology glitches and challenges, he really appreciates being able to reach and connect such a large group of students, and is always telling other instructors and professors at the university about how great it is to open up a course via online learning.

Personal

George lives with his wife, Rosalie, and one high-school age son in a historic home on the west side of Madison, which he and his wife spent a lot of time and effort renovating. His daughter left for college at Ohio State last year, but since the family is close she is often home for holidays.

Technology Use

George purchased a Dell laptop when he retired, which his wife now primarily uses in their very tidy home office. He does use it occasionally when his own computer isn't handy, but he also received a Tablet PC from UW-Madison which he usually brings home from work.

George used Microsoft Word for many years to write his stories, and is a PC user with an average level of tech-savvyness. He used the web often to research his news stories as a journalist, and is still very talented at finding good information using Google. He does his taxes online every year, and will often watch video clips on YouTube.

Though he still subscribes to the paper newspaper, but also reads news online and follows several different blogs written by thinkers in his field. He didn't have to do much photography as a journalist because he was more of a writer and could always ask for the help of a photographer at the paper if he needed it. However, he does own a Canon SLR which he doesn't use often these days. He leaves most of the personal photo taking and organizing to his wife, who uses Picassa to put photos online for family & friends, but he occasionally uploads photos, creates albums of trips with his buddies, or add captions to the family albums.

Teaching

The Journalism Department uses the Blackboard Learning Management System to manage course material along with the ePresence for webcasting the course, which has three 1 1/2 hour sessions a week. George usually records many of the lectures before the term begins. ePresence allows students to watch a video synched with PowerPoint which they can pause, review, and access different sections of via a table of contents.

George is a gregarious person who works hard to build relationships with his students across the country. There are usually 25-30 students in each class who live all over the United States. The entire class also has a teleconference (by phone, no video) 3 times a term to help the students collaborate and feel connected. He usually answers student questions over email, but is always happy to have a phone conversation or meet with them in person (for his student which attend UW-Madison) if necessary.

George is teaching the Advocacy Journalism class for the second time so he is reusing much of the material from the first time he taught but also adding quite a bit of new material that he's since found. He also likes to keep the class fresh and focused around current events so he brings new content into the class on a regular basis.

George manages the course with an Instructional Designer, Lucy, who has more experience with presenting content on the web. While he designs the course material, Lucy is the one who puts it up on Blackboard. Together, they want to create an engaging and interactive environment for their on-line students. Lucy created an "Intro to Blackboard" page which is reused every semester. Some of their lectures are reused across terms, and some parts of their course have been reused as modules in other courses. It can be hard to efficiently transfer content from one semester or course to another in Blackboard, so this is a bit of a pain point for them.

George comes into his office on campus about 2-3 times a week to collaborate with Lucy, hold office hours and just generally stay connected with colleagues in the department. However, he also often does work from home.

- He encourages students to download and print his PowerPoint slides to take notes on as they view the lecture.

- All the information in Blackboard is organized chronologically. They feel it is better to handle the course this way so students don't get overwhelmed and pace themselves week by week through the material.
- George thinks this helps them practice their writing skills, and has seen improvements in assignments since he implemented this policy. Students are also required to submit weekly assignments to Blackboard's Digital Drop Box. All the assignments are made public so other students can read them, and critiquing each other's work is part of their grade. George thinks this this is a logical way to handle this, since in the world of journalism most of their work will be public.

Scenarios

- **Release materials at specified times:** Use timed release so the students only see the material for the current and past weeks.
- **Quiz students online:** Create a quiz for students in Blackboard to test their knowledge in between exams. This way, the marking and grading is extremely quick especially for multiple choice questions. George would not rely on BlackBoard for important exams.
- **Check students' online activity stats:** Take advantage of the usage statistics Blackboard offers to see who is doing what on the site and to make sure students are accessing the system, since George does not get to meet his students face to face. He relies on Blackboard to help him get to know the students and also evaluate their participation in the class.
- **Facilitate online discussions:** Use the Discussion tool and assign students weekly discussion topics. The students each have to post 1 new topic
and respond 2 relating to the week's topic.
- **Submit grades on Blackboard:** Currently grading is a pain with the online course since George can't just submit grades for all his students in Blackboard. Instead, he must submit them through the home systems of each university. This means he keeps a separate spreadsheet of grades which he keeps on his Tablet PC.
- **Preview pages in student view:** Preview the course site after making changes to be sure of what the students are seeing.
- **Present online lectures live and get live student feedback:** George and Lucy are considering using ePresence to broadcast the lectures live in future semesters, as this would allow them to use the chat functionality to communicate with students in real time.
- **Send announcement via Blackboard email:** George also sends out a weekly email with the week's lecture topics, any schedule changes (e.g. if an important news event merits it), and a reminder about tests and assignments to encourage students to keep up with the course.