

Teaching with Technology

The pace of change in education software and hardware makes figuring out how to best incorporate technology into a course a daunting task for both technophobes and the technosavy. It seems that as soon as you are comfortable using a particular tool, a new version is released or you find out about another tool that is supposedly better. Since there are only so many hours most instructors have to devote to this task, it is wise to be strategic when making technology choices.

Technology should help students achieve the learning goals of your course. Even if you are happy with your course goals or if you have learning objectives determined by your department or accreditor, you should periodically assess whether they are the best they can be. There are many course design approaches that begin with goals and objectives, but the [Cutting Edge Course Design Tutorial](#) is online and free. Designed for geoscience faculty by Barbara Tewkesbury (Hamilton College) and R. Heather McDonald (College of William and Mary), the tutorial is applicable to all disciplines. Even if you do not need to design or redesign an entire course, [their goal setting exercise](#) is a good place to reflect on what you want your students to learn.

Once you are comfortable with your course goals, you can begin to think about technology as a tool to help you manage your course and help students achieve these goals. At this point, you may be tempted to jump head first into an investigation of the many software and hardware options available. Before going down that path, consider reading some thoughtful writing about technology. One particularly good blog on this topic is [Casting Out Nines written by Robert Talbert](#) for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Talbert's engaging, well-written, and much discussed posts are not restricted to technology — he often addresses why and when technology makes the most sense in a college classroom. If you would rather read a book about how to use technology more effectively, Howard Gardner's *Netsmart: How to Thrive Online* (MIT Press) offers more general advice that can help you be more mindful about how you incorporate digital media in your life.

The most logical technology tool to look at first is your institutions' learning management system (LMS). Whether it is Blackboard, Moodle, Sakai, or some other system, a LMS is the Swiss army knife of instructional technology — its strength does not lie in one thing, but rather the fact that it does a lot of things in one integrated place. The other advantage of a LMS is that it is secure (only faculty and students can access it) and usually integrated with your student information database (with uploaded student rosters and the ability to record and submit grades). The disadvantage of a LMS is that it does not help students learn how to use technology in the "real world" outside of your institution's servers. You also may find better (and free) software options outside the LMS environment.

After you have considered how you might use the LMS, think about other ways you might use technology. If you are a novice, start small and think about how you might use technology to improve your lectures or classroom activities. The [SUNY Tools of Engagement](#) website (with self-paced tutorials designed to help instructors learn about technology) might help you make these decisions. After you have tried out a few tools, you might be ready to integrate technology into a significant assignment or an entire course. Once you start down this path, consider whether your course is appropriate for an

online or hybrid instructional format. [The Sloan Consortium](#) contains many resources to help you think through how to move all or part of your course online.

Always keep in mind the idea that educational technology is a tool that should help your students learn and make your teaching life more efficient. If you find that technology is more of an obstacle than an opportunity, change your approach or consult with someone who can help you think differently about how to use it. Most colleges and universities have at least one instructional designer or technologist on staff who can help you think about how to use technology more effectively. If your college or university does not have a person like this, talk with folks from your teaching and learning center or other faculty who actively use technology. If you are willing to spend a little time reflecting on and practicing how to use technology, you might become the person your colleagues turn to for help.

Submitted by:

Christopher Price, Director,
Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching,
The College at Brockport,
State University of New York,
<http://www.brockport.edu/celt/>