Mobile Technology Meets Mindful Technology

As a young professional, I used alliterations in my journal articles and presentations. I thought they were cool and catchy linguistic devices. Today, I use them as mnemonic devices to help myself (and those I am writing for and speaking with) remember an interesting theory or concept that might otherwise get buried in our information-saturated minds.

In that vein, I have started to use four Ps—purposeful, pragmatic, proportionate, and present—to describe the mobile technology program we are launching at Hiram College. I hope these Ps provide a constructive framework for appreciating how and why Hiram wants “mindfulness” to be the definitive feature of this initiative.

Tech and Trek

Thanks to a $2.1 million gift from Hiram College Trustee Dean Scarborough and his wife, Janice Bini, we will launch a 1:1 mobile program (one mobile device for every person) in the fall of 2017: Tech and Trek. Officials had deemed such a program a priority because students already use their smartphone or tablet to interact with friends, download films and games, stream music and videos, order clothes and food, and more. For today’s digital natives, using devices in the college classroom is largely an extension of an online life they know well.

High school students are not the only ones who expect to see and use various technologies. The increasingly normative nature of technology has also heightened parents’ expectations that their sons and daughters will have access to technology throughout the K–12 years. It should come as no surprise, then, that these parents expect at least the same level of technological access from the colleges and universities they and their teenagers are considering for postsecondary education.

To meet this expectation, Hiram College’s program will issue an iPad Pro, Apple Pencil, and keyboard bundle to full-time students in the undergraduate college, as well as to faculty and staff. In doing so, we will become the first four-year college in Ohio and one of a just a dozen or so nationally to implement a 1:1 mobile program. As we make our foray into this realm, Hiram’s faculty and administrators are committed to designing the program in ways that go well beyond the broad distribution of contemporary gadgets. Our plans have quickly galvanized around the idea of “mindful technology”—teaching students how to creatively and critically use technology to augment classroom learning, navigate the literal and figurative treks that constitute their college experience, and prepare for the 21st-century workplace.

Tech and Trek will be framed by the four Ps, described in more detail below.

Mindful Technology and the Four Ps

First is purposeful. Perhaps the most fundamental aim of Tech and Trek is to further enhance interactive pedagogies. It is rarely the case that Hiram students sit through a “sage on a stage” lecture; instead, flipped classrooms that foster intimate and interactive teaching, learning, and sharing are the norm. Given this norm, faculty are considering modifying and redefining key classroom activities in the SAMR model:

- **Note taking**: Utilize apps like Notability to compile and organize online resources and Evernote to create, access, and share notes at all times with all people.
- **Researching**: Use apps and other tools that help students find, store, annotate, transfer, manage, and sync files, PDFs, web sites, and more.
- **Presenting**: Design state-of-the-art multimedia presentations, produce iMovies, and create dynamic presentations.
- **Delivering content**: Display interactive and manipulable real-world environments whose elements are enhanced by the digital sounds, computer-generated graphics, and GPS data of AR (augmented reality) apps.
- **Authoring interactive documents and books**: Replace static texts and pictures with dynamic images that can be rotated; students can highlight text, take notes right on the document, and easily search for content.
- **Sharing and managing course files**: Store course materials in a shared folder that students can easily access, or ask students to collaboratively work on a shared spreadsheet or presentation as part of a group project.

The use of technology in any one of these ways will help students assimilate personal observations, textbook theories, and interdisciplinary perspectives and methodologies. Doing so will integrate their learning and sharpen the very skills thought to be diminished through a perfunctory use of technology. Indeed, Tech and Trek will help students develop the real-world and real-time skills of oral communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, and civil discourse with the classmates sitting next to them at any given moment.

The second “P” is pragmatic. Tech and Trek will allow students to develop a contextualized, material understanding of and/or make practical improvements in the real-life situations
associated with the fieldwork, internships, study-abroad, and clinical treks they take at Hiram. On study-abroad trips, for example, mobile technology will help students capture and reflect on the life-changing experiences they encounter in a foreign country. Their travel journals will come alive with photo- and video-enhanced entries. Their real-time understanding of historical buildings and natural wonders will be sharpened as they immediately access location-aware apps to answer on-the-spot questions. Later they can use wikis, Twitter, and other forms of social media to send to friends and family, thousands of miles away, the multimedia presentations they created minutes before. All of this deepens and memorializes their learning.

There will also be iPad-powered experiences for those who earn credits through service-learning, internships, and clinicals. Student volunteers can record audio and video of the immediate impact of their project at their service site. Student interns can record presentations for their boss. Meanwhile, a student teacher can review the math lesson taped by her master teacher and improve or change the parts that didn't go as expected. If she wants, she can watch, re-watch, and carefully analyze exactly where things fell apart in the lesson. At the same time, a student nurse can improve his patient protocol after he watches how he did or did not hit the mark during interactions taped by his clinical partner. All of these real-world interactions can become part of instructors' tangible (vs. speculative) assessment of their professionals-in-training.

Next is proportionate. As we see it, mindful technology is more than simply knowing how to use technology. It is also about delving into the when, where, and to-what-extent questions that are sometimes out of sight or overlooked in our technology-saturated world. This mindfulness will call into question the constant or perfunctory use of technology, which is claimed by some to be purposeful, pragmatic, proportionate, and present, it helps them avoid the pitfalls associated with technology use that is automatic, even “mindless.”

In determining when or when not to use technology, Tech and Trek will prompt students to explicitly consider cultural mores, privacy concerns, institutional (hospital, museum, theater) policies, personal health, and other factors that may be at play in the situation at hand. Furthermore, Tech and Trek will remind them that in many situations (foreign travel, restricted areas, etc.), failure to make the right decision can result in real-life consequences. All of this will help students determine when it might be better—more natural, more humane, more sensitive—to put the device down and keep their eyes, ears, and most importantly their hearts open.

The final “P” is present. To help us celebrate the rural, bucolic location of Hiram College, we will use our mobile program to capture and reflect on the sights, sounds, and textures of our environment and the various forms of life that flourish here. This special location lends itself to all kinds of high-impact learning experiences, including explorations of the natural environment and contemplations and commemorations of the people and events associated with the historic village that is part and parcel with our campus.

We are also planning for a campus-wide “no-tech trek time”: an hour or so each week when all members of the community are encouraged to put their devices down and “be present” without technological interventions. During this time, many of us will lead hikes through the trails at the college's 550-acre Field Station or organize a walk along the 3-mile square around campus. This will also be a time when we can enjoy a cup of coffee while engaging in the highly personal and nonjudgmental conversations that build authentic relationships.

**Conclusion**

When a mobile technology program aims to teach students to be purposeful, pragmatic, proportionate, and present, it helps them avoid the pitfalls associated with technology use that is automatic, even “mindless.” This focused and educationally purposeful use of technology is explicitly designed to ensure that students develop the 21st-century work skills sought by modern employers. In this way, the Tech and Trek program not only enhances Hiram's in-classroom and out-of-classroom learning but also prepares students to flourish personally and professionally throughout their lives.

**Notes**

2. For more on the SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition) model, see “SAMR and Bloom’s,” Kathy Schrock's Guide to Everything (website), accessed April 3, 2017.

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