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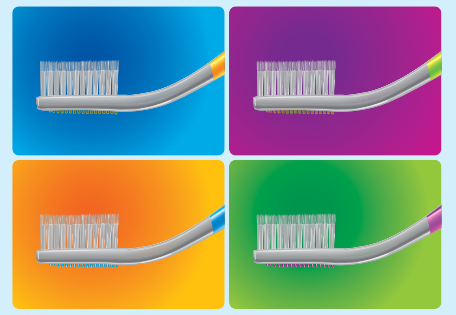
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Technology and Education

Changing how teachers teach, students learn

By Amanda Kuehn



Photo courtesy Lafayette School District

Recent innovations in educational technology are changing the face of traditional classrooms. “In the last decade, especially in the last five years, I’ve seen more and more technology used,” said Raina León, assistant professor in the Kalmanovitz School of Education at Saint Mary’s College. “I’m a huge proponent of using a lot of resources.”

León is no stranger to the classroom. She taught at a global education high school in Las Vegas before working with middle and high school students in Bamberg, Germany, and currently teaches courses on the foundations of secondary education and

instructional design at SMC. Her research includes the effective use of digital technology in the classroom. “I have a lot of technology in my own life and use it with my students as well,” said León.

Technology has come a long way since León began teaching in 2007. “[My first school] was tech-focused, so every classroom had a projector and every teacher had a computer. We had multiple labs, but no tablets or smartphones,” she said. “Then I went overseas and every classroom had a Smart Board, but the majority of teachers had no idea how to use it.” The Smart Board is an interactive

whiteboard that uses touch detection for user input. It functions as part of a system that includes a computer, a projector, whiteboarding software and a board that accepts touch input from a finger, pen or other solid object.

According to long-time educator and program director of SMC’s Educational Leadership Program, Heidi Marie Rambo, Ed.D., “Technology threatens that comfort space of the teacher knowing where the class is going and being in control of how it gets there.”

Rambo, who works with pre-service and in-service teachers, explained that learning to use new tools

not only takes time, but poses risk. “It’s a different way of thinking. It represents a paradigm shift in how you access information and use materials.”

It used to be that teachers were viewed as content masters who passed along information to their classes, but this is changing with the influx of technology and integration of new tools. “Now every student can have an iPad,” said León, whose students connect to the classroom through Apple technology. “Students being a part of that kind of education is a huge shift.”

Though technology can, as Rambo noted, “create ways for students to take ownership over their own learning,” it can also cause complications.

“You have to be resilient,” said León, “able to adapt on the fly to a hiccup.” That adaptation isn’t always easy.

“It’s a mindset shift to say ‘I can give up control,’” added Rambo.

One of the biggest challenges in integrating technology is that teachers “have to know the technology in order to be an expert,” León noted. That kind of learning takes time, and with the rapidly changing tech industry, new tools are always being introduced.

“There’s just an explosion of apps,” said Rambo. “There are so many that are relevant and usable. The problem is how am I as a teacher supposed to know about all of these apps and become proficient in learning how to use them?” León agreed. “Teachers can easily be over-

whelmed by the process and the cost.”

“There’s also a perspective from outside of the classroom that this one magic app will solve all of the problems,” said Rambo. “Technology is not the silver bullet. It doesn’t replace teaching and learning.”

For León, one of the keys to combatting teacher frustration is collaboration. “My caution is for teachers to work with one another; that can help so much in helping with the fear and anxiety of having to relearn something.”

“It seems to me that we are all subject to shiny object syndrome,” said Rambo. “There’s always this idea that new is better. But sometimes you don’t have to look further. Find out what kinds of creative capacities you already have. If you can teach in a more effective way using the white board, use the white board.”

For Rambo, the key question to ask is “How is this technology helping us do what we already do better?”

“And in a more innovative way,” León added. “There may be something we can’t even imagine that students can do with that material and that technology.”

“It accesses and creates capacities for different learning styles to come forward in a classroom,” said Rambo.

“The students who are most likely to really push us forward, who innovate and dream are probably the ones we don’t understand right now,” said León. Giving them new tools as a means of creation, discovery and expression may empower these students to push us further into the future.

Use Your Most Powerful Tool for Getting Into College

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

As a college advisor I give college related advice all year round. One of the most common conversations I have with families is about high school coursework—what to take, when to take it and how much it matters (to get into a good college). In order to give back to a community which has given so much to me, this article addresses this question in the most fundamental way possible. There are, of course, many special needs and unique situations to be considered. Still, there are some general principles that can apply to most of our students, most of the time.

If you are a high school student that is college bound you should understand that the most powerful tool for getting into college rests in

your hands. Simply stated, colleges admit students who show an interest in going to school. This statement rests on the premise that you like learning, since you are going to college to continue your education. So your best tool to help you get into college is to design a four year schedule that shows your commitment to learning, and your willingness and ability to take core coursework, and possibly some advanced coursework during your high school years. The recommendations below work well for each year in high school. A few are especially important for certain grade levels.

1. Middle school sets the foundation for your high school curriculum. Work hard and do well in a

foreign language and math in middle school and prepare to take geometry and the 2nd year of your foreign language in high school. Take your first laboratory science as well, biology. If the language you studied in middle school truly doesn’t suit your interests, switch to another language in your freshman year so you can still complete four years of a foreign language in high school. If language is not your ‘thing’ be sure to take at least three years and then supplement the dropped language with strong coursework that does interest you.

2. Take core coursework. Remember, meeting minimum requirements does not make you a competitive applicant. In today’s college admission world it is wise to go well beyond the minimum, not only to be admitted to college, but to be eligible for scholarships and grants to ease the financial strain of college costs. Continue taking core courses in all academic subjects, including English, mathematics, laboratory sciences, social sciences, and a foreign language (see the tip above if you are utterly convinced you must drop language.) Five core subjects plus one elective is ideal for your senior year. In earlier grade levels you will have additional coursework because you are taking physical education for two years and meeting your visual and performing arts requirement.

3. Complete your VPA requirement early. The University of California (UC) and California State

University (CSU) systems as well as many other four year colleges require one full year of college preparatory coursework in the visual and performing arts. Don’t leave that to your junior or senior year. Unless you are an arts focused student, you will want to free up your schedule for academic subjects that help further explore and expand your interests, like creative writing, if you love composition, or introduction to computer science, if you enjoy programming.

4. Challenge yourself. If you took Honors or AP classes in earlier grade levels and enjoyed the challenge, continue taking advanced coursework in 11th and 12th grades. If you did not take advanced coursework in earlier grades, add one or two to your junior and/or senior year schedule.

5. Use summers wisely. Colleges say that fancy summer programs that cost a great deal of money and don’t enhance your education add little, if anything to the college application. On the other hand, taking a college level class for credit to open your eyes to a new academic interest or add depth to an existing one does add value to your college application. So does being gainfully employed or participating in a program that builds substantive skillsets (like laboratory methods or customer relations), or doing an activity that helps meet a specific goal (like earning the President’s Service Award or your Girl Scout Gold Award). These types of en-

deavors strengthen the college application because they strengthen you.

Don’t misunderstand these recommendations. You are not participating in a summer program, taking core coursework or performing an activity in order to ‘get into’ college (although this may well be one of the rewards); you are doing it to help you better understand yourself and what you want to do in college and beyond. Parents, teachers and counselors support your college aspirations by helping you understand and use the power of your high school years.



Elizabeth LaScala, PhD, guides families through the sometimes complex world of college admission. She helps students identify college majors and career paths, develops good fit college lists, and provides essay coaching and application support to help students tackle each step of the admission process with confidence and success. Elizabeth also helps families maximize opportunities for scholarships and financial aid awards. Visit www.doingcollege.com; Call (925) 891-4491 or email at elizabeth@doingcollege.com.

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