

Technology and Students: “Call my cell.”

By President Richard Artman, Viterbo University

My nine-year-old granddaughter, Jordan, wanted a cell phone. She carefully prepared her case to be made to her parents. She produced a PowerPoint presentation with the top ten reasons she needed a cell phone; she outlined the benefits for her and her parents; she researched the costs and had a payment plan recommendation. She burned the PowerPoint onto a disc so she could project her presentation onto the large screen TV in their family media center. She made her pitch. Unfortunately for Jordan, my son and daughter-in-law were not persuaded. Impressed, but not persuaded.

When Jordan enrolls in one of our colleges or universities in another eight to nine years, or perhaps sooner through online options for gifted students, will we be ready?

In April 2009 I invited a group of freshmen honors students to a session on technology. I wanted to know how the University was responding to their needs and what we should be planning for the future. Their responses were in some ways surprising and in other ways predictable. Do you know the song “I Want it All” by Queen? I expected I would hear the refrain from the song, “I want it all, and I want it now!” That was pretty much their take on technology, but that would be too simple and would be an injustice to their feedback.

These students are frequent and competent users of technology. Their expectations are high for ubiquitous access to the internet. They want speed, and they do want it now. Their sympathy for prehistoric tales of dial-up access is similar to mine for my parents’ stories of walking to school, 20 miles, uphill, both ways. Every student they know owns a cell phone and they expect that there will be ever-increasing applications available for computing on the fly and in the clouds. “We have an app for that” is more than an advertising slogan. In other words, they’ll download customized applications to fit their needs. And they want to be sure that wherever they go on campus they can connect and stay connected.

Students expect the faculty to be well-versed in technology. While they don’t expect 24/7 responses, they think nothing of sending an email or posting a thread on Blackboard in the wee hours of the morning. A professor’s or administrator’s response in the morning will do just fine, but before noon, thank you.

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Faculty will need to wrestle with classroom policies on the active use of laptops, iPods, smart phones and emerging technologies. Our students seem willing to defer to the professor's classroom policy, but the students noted perceptively that technology applications in the classroom encourage active learning, accommodate various learning styles, and transform the role of faculty to learning facilitators. A smart phone will be able to serve as a clicker for quick assessments and classroom votes, an instant internet search might clarify or resolve a question, and a text to one's friend will confirm plans for dinner. After all, this is the multitasking generation. Attempts to stifle or control their use of technology will be fruitless or, at best, frustrating for students who believe the only way to find a phone number is to search whitepages.com.

Instant communication is here to stay; there's no turning back. So our policies and practices need to adapt. If a crime takes place on campus, trust that it will be on Facebook or Twitter in seconds. Administrators who wait for a complete investigation before communicating to students will allow the students to control the message, which will be inaccurate and distorted as happened after a recent robbery on our campus. Emergency contact systems must be as fast as the students' social networks.

This generation of students has been on camera since dad captured their birth – so they do not see cameras for security purposes as an invasion of privacy. Have you seen the smart cameras with video analytics that can intelligently monitor parking lots and entryways? Don't bother students with excuses for not having all administrative processes online and don't expect them to wait in line for anything. Our students admitted they are an impatient lot.

We can go green and go paperless — the students will respect the effort. This is certainly one area where sustainability can be advanced. Debit cards or debit accounts for campus printers are no brainers, and while we are at it, network those printers for printing anytime, from anywhere. If I could put their eloquent comments into plain commands, a partial list would look something like this:

- Stop wasting time and money by mailing stuff – put grade reports online.
- Take out the phones in my room; I shouldn't have to pay for something I never use. Remove the pay phones too and save a few dollars.
- Put my electronic signature on file and allow me to sign electronically my financial aid papers and housing documents.
- Stop the posting of all those flyers around campus. No one reads them.
- Put the student newspaper online.
- Make my student ID card do everything I need to do – access buildings, pay bills, buy books or a candy bar from the vending machine.

- ❑ Keep the computer labs up to date and spread them throughout campus. They are still necessary for robust computing, data base searches and research papers.

Picture this recent cartoon. A baseball catcher walks to the pitcher's mound for a conference and the pitcher says, "Why didn't you just text me?" While technology makes certain aspects of our life more pleasant or convenient, there can be downsides. Some experts say we should gear up for more cases of student depression and lessened ability to resolve conflict via face-to-face communication. The effect of social networks may indeed be an increased sense of isolation. Watch students leaving class, hands appear attached to an ear, earphone cords dangle on the shoulders, they walk with and pass each other but in a private zone of attention. Our students text a lot. But they still crave personal contact with their friends and faculty.

Presidential skin needs to get thicker. YouTube photos of residence hall rooms, of parties off campus, or of a faculty lecture could cause embarrassment and we have no control to stop it or retract it. Better to harness the technology and use it for recruitment and retention. Find creative ways to encourage or facilitate positive image postings, and have enough good clips on YouTube to counter any that will induce a call from your board chair. Students and the new media are close friends who are growing up together.

I was pleasantly surprised that our honors students didn't want technology for technology's sake. They expect high tech equipment in the science labs, simulation laboratories in their nursing training, state of the art graphic tools for theatre and set design, and smart classrooms in which technology boosts teaching and learning. But they especially want personal contact with their faculty; they want high tech and high touch.

In my session, students emphasized that the personal relationships with faculty distinguish our type of college from the large publics. The students realize there are more online databases in the libraries at the state institutions attended by their friends. Yet, they welcome the trade-off: smaller classes and connections with full-time faculty. They said they wouldn't hide behind "rate my professor" websites but would speak directly to a faculty member or department chair if they had issues with teaching or advising. They expect faculty to state clearly their policies and penalties on plagiarism and to be held accountable for misusing resources and references. They believed professors at Viterbo would know if a research paper or essay came from the internet. (A Google search for "buy a research paper" lists 26,300,000 sources.)

In a CIC-sponsored project, especially one between presidents, we're accustomed to some "take-aways." I offer these:

1. Ubiquitous access to the internet and speed outrank students' historical desire for more parking and better food. Being a "wired" campus no longer deserves bragging rights. Being wireless is expected.

2. Put it online. It's the first place this generation of students seeks information.
3. We live in a digital universe. Make sure your policies, practices and codes of conduct reflect this. In the past, it wasn't necessary to prohibit cameras in locker rooms – but do you have a policy about photos secretly taken via a cell phone?
4. Begin weaning your institution from costly view books, printed catalogs and handbooks that are outdated the day of printing, fancy president's annual reports, and printed letters, forms and documents.
5. Communication modalities that were successful in our career paths to the presidency are no longer sufficient. Presidents must be conversant in the use of new media in order to communicate effectively with our students and constituents. Students need not be our friends on Facebook, but senior management should know how to advertise on Facebook, send a Tweet, or interview an international student or faculty candidate over Skype.
6. When designing new facilities, involve students as well as the technology experts. Think of "learning spaces" rather than classrooms. Put wireless ports and power outlets everywhere. Make space and furnishings as flexible as possible.
7. Allocate resources for faculty development to help faculty incorporate new media and emerging technologies into their teaching and communication with students.
8. Be familiar with the technology and its evolution. Two subscriptions I find helpful: *Campus Technology* – www.campustechnology.com and *EDUCAUSE Review* – www.educause.edu.
9. Engage current students and younger generations in website design and evaluation, in student recruitment and in technology operations. Build a connection with a middle school and some elementary school teachers. Get a head start on who's coming to our campuses.
10. Stop investing resources into large, general-purpose computer labs. There is a need for curricular labs linked to specific disciplines and the pedagogic needs of the faculty. But, in an era of cloud computing, students can access the specialized software that now sits on desktops in computer labs from their residence halls, off-campus residences and even while studying abroad.

Before investing in catching up, stop and assess where your students are. The laptop campus is now the cell phone campus and we don't even have to provide the phones. Ninety-nine percent of students have a mobile communications device (*Campus Technology* June 2009). Palm pilots and other PDAs are morphing into smart phones whose minor function will be to make or receive a phone call. Let your imagination leapfrog and prepare for smart phone technology and its thousands of applications. If you're not sure why, I have a PowerPoint from a nine-year-old that might persuade you!

About the Author



Richard Artman
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Richard Artman was appointed the eighth president at Viterbo University in La Crosse, Wisconsin in July, 2006. Prior to this appointment, President Artman served as president of Siena Heights University in Adrian, Michigan for twelve years. His administrative career path to the presidencies has been a progression of various positions in student affairs. From 1982–1994 President Artman served as vice president for student affairs at Nebraska Wesleyan University. Prior to that, he held various student affairs positions at the University of Miami, Florida where he received his Ph.D. in administration of higher education and his Master of Education in student personnel administration. President Artman is a 1990 graduate of the Harvard University Institute for Educational Management.

During his tenure at Siena Heights, the University was rated one of the most wired campuses in the United States. President Artman is a member of the boards of directors of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities and the NAIA Council of Presidents, for which he served as chair from 2006 to 2008. President Artman served as a consultant evaluator for The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association for 17 years and is a frequent presenter at the CIC New Presidents Program on the topic of fundraising.