



The On-Demand Student



Remember waiting for things?

Once upon a time, not too long ago, we were willing to wait for a full week for the next episode of our favorite series because there was no other option. When we needed a ride, we waited on a street corner for a yellow cab to drive past us. When we wanted lunch delivered to the office, we waited while one of us went to pick it up. When we ordered something online, we waited not three or four, but ten to fourteen days for it to arrive. When we wanted to collaborate with a group of people, we waited until we could get together.

Well, those days are gone.

And that wasn't even a decade ago as Netflix didn't create original content until 2013. Uber didn't launch until 2011 in San Francisco and took a few years to get mass adoption. Smartphones didn't reach critical mass (half of the US) until 2013. Grubhub and Doordash didn't really wind up until 2014. Facebook didn't spin out Messenger as a separate app until 2016.

In the last 5 years, the world changed and we barely even noticed. There was no announcement because it didn't happen on a certain date. The media didn't cover it because it happened so gradually. The experience was different for each of us. We didn't wake up one-morning expecting two-day shipping on millions of items, dinner from hundreds of local restaurants delivered to our door, or being able to watch a whole season of a new series in a weekend, but now we do. And we can never go back.

We have new eyes. We can't see the world the same way we used to. Our expectations about the way things should work have changed permanently. As a society, we are no longer willing to wait for anything. We expect everything on-demand.

The on-demand world

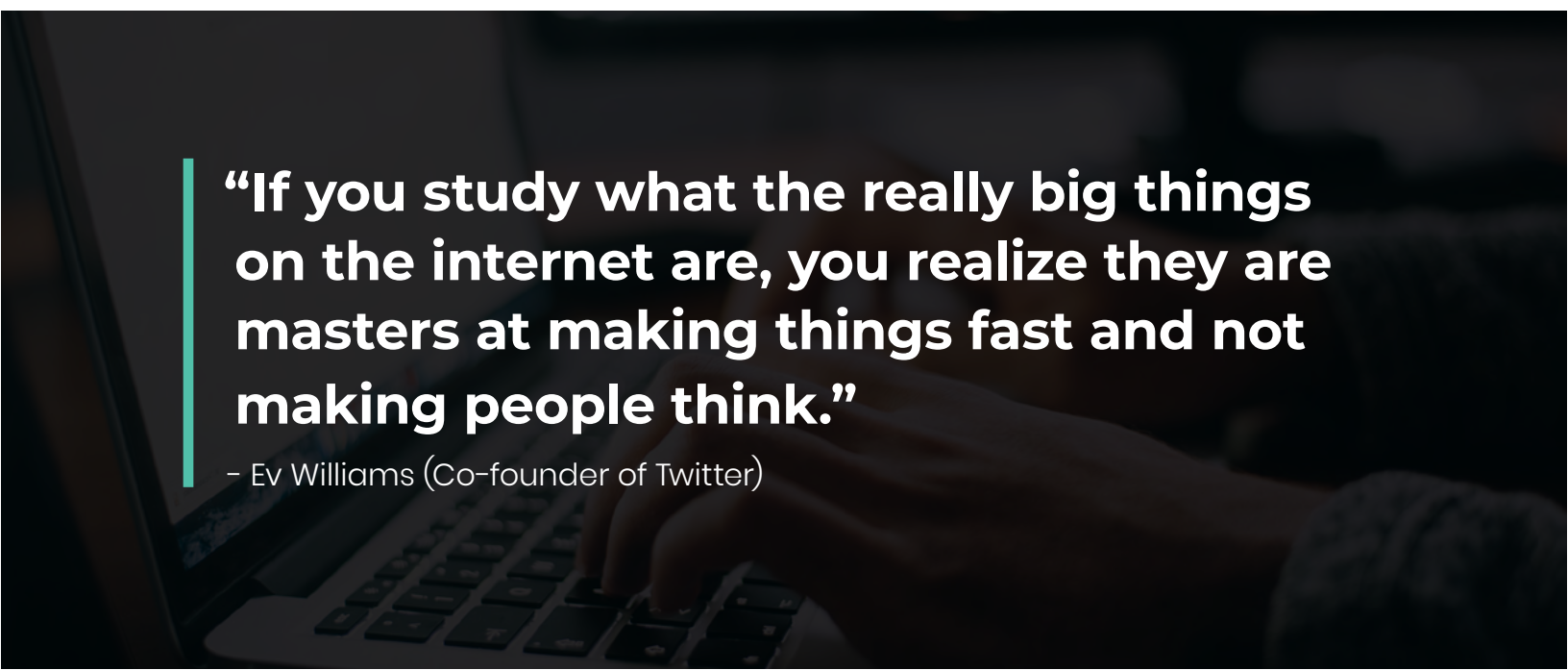
This great change has been called the “on-demand economy” or “access economy” by those who have been savvy enough to call it out. Mike Jaconi (co-founder of Button), has written considerably about this topic stating that “the on-demand economy will usher in a paradigm shift similar to what was seen with the advent of the internet in the late 1990s.”

If this paradigm shift was created by something, it would be a collection of companies that leveraged technology to create fast and frictionless experiences that we fell in love with. Companies like Uber, Door Dash, Amazon, Pronto, and Facebook are obsessed with removing any friction from the user’s experience. Often it comes down to the slightest difference in effort or efficiency that causes one technology to be adopted over another.

If there were an “**On-Demand Manifesto**” it might read:

Make it effortless. Make it now!

The idea that we ‘don’t want to think’ and ‘hate to wait’ is not a new discovery. It’s just that we haven’t been able to do much about it until recently. Smartphones had been around for a decade and the internet was able to compare its age with an antique car when this shift began. It wasn’t until enough technology and infrastructure had been built up that it was even possible to deliver an ‘easy’ and ‘now’ experience. This is the fertile soil that allowed an on-demand movement to take place.



“If you study what the really big things on the internet are, you realize they are masters at making things fast and not making people think.”

– Ev Williams (Co-founder of Twitter)

We're just getting started

The on-demand economy is not going away. Billions have been invested in companies building for it. Semil Shah (General Partner of Haystack.vc) noted: “every week a new service seems to launch that aggregates and organizes freelance labor (those with excess time) to help those who have money but not time.”

To those of us participating in the on-demand economy, it feels like it has peaked, however we're just getting started. Research firm BIA/Kelsey estimates that the on-demand economy only served 7% of the total addressable market in 2017.

The growth rate is steep. Mike Jaconi affirmed, “the new on-demand models have opened the door to real-time fulfillment of goods and services which consumers have embraced with a frequency that is unprecedented.” The National Technology Readiness Survey (NTRS), collects data on technology behaviors and usage in the US. The NTRS has declared that the on-demand economy is growing at a rate of 58% with an expected 93 million people participating by 2022.



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These people may not be who you might expect. The data shows that the on-demand economy isn't just for the wealthy. Charles Colby and Kelly Bell of the Harvard Business Review pointed out that “46% of on-demand consumers have an annual household income of less than \$50,000 and only 22% have a household income of \$100,000 or more.” The typical on-demand consumer is also geographically diverse with 39% living in rural areas, 30% in suburbs, and 31% in cities.

The young and the restless

While the typical on-demand consumer is geographically and economically diverse, they are not when it comes to age. As you might expect, the majority of the on demand consumers are young. The NTRS data shows that almost half of on-demand consumers are millennials (age 18–34). They have grown up in a world that has become increasingly on-demand since they were born.

On the lower end of this age range, we have Generation Z (Gen Z), who are currently working their way through their college years. They don't really know what it's like to wait for something—as they were too young to remember. They were born into a world where the internet exists. To them, ‘easy’ and ‘now’ are just how things should be. When they got their first



smartphone, they probably immediately installed Spotify and Netflix (and complained that it was taking so long). When they got a driver's license, they had other options than buying a car like Lyft or uber. When they were old enough to get food, GrubHub was a thing...and they could immediately split the bill with Venmo.

Reuters Institute recently published an interesting study demonstrating the behavioral differences between Gen Z and previous generations. The data showed that “young people are very reliant on mobile, and spend a lot of time with a range of different social networks.” According to Global Web Index (GWI), the average Gen Z'er spends 2 hours and 52 minutes per day on social media across a number of accounts. The top five platforms visited are Facebook (88%), Youtube (86%), Instagram (80%), Messenger (77%), and Whatsapp (74%) with Twitter (64%) and Snapchat (52%) surprisingly lagging behind.

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The idea that Facebook is losing its younger audience is not true according to GWI. Their Q4 2018 data shows that Facebook membership rates have actually increased from 84% to 86% since 2015 with over 77% of respondents saying they use Facebook every month. And since Facebook owns four of the top five platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Messenger. And Whatsapp), they have a significant influence on Gen Z culture and lifestyle.

The media usage patterns of Gen Z only further support the 'easy' and 'now' mentality. They expect things to be nicely packaged and easy to consume. In fact, the Reuters study found that Gen Z even prefers to get their news from social media. In the study they confirmed, “much of their media use is on-demand and algorithmically curated/ personalized.” One of the Gen Z respondents from the study named Courtney said the first thing she would do in the morning was “check social media, see if there's anything on Facebook.”



Ding, Dong, the inbox is dead

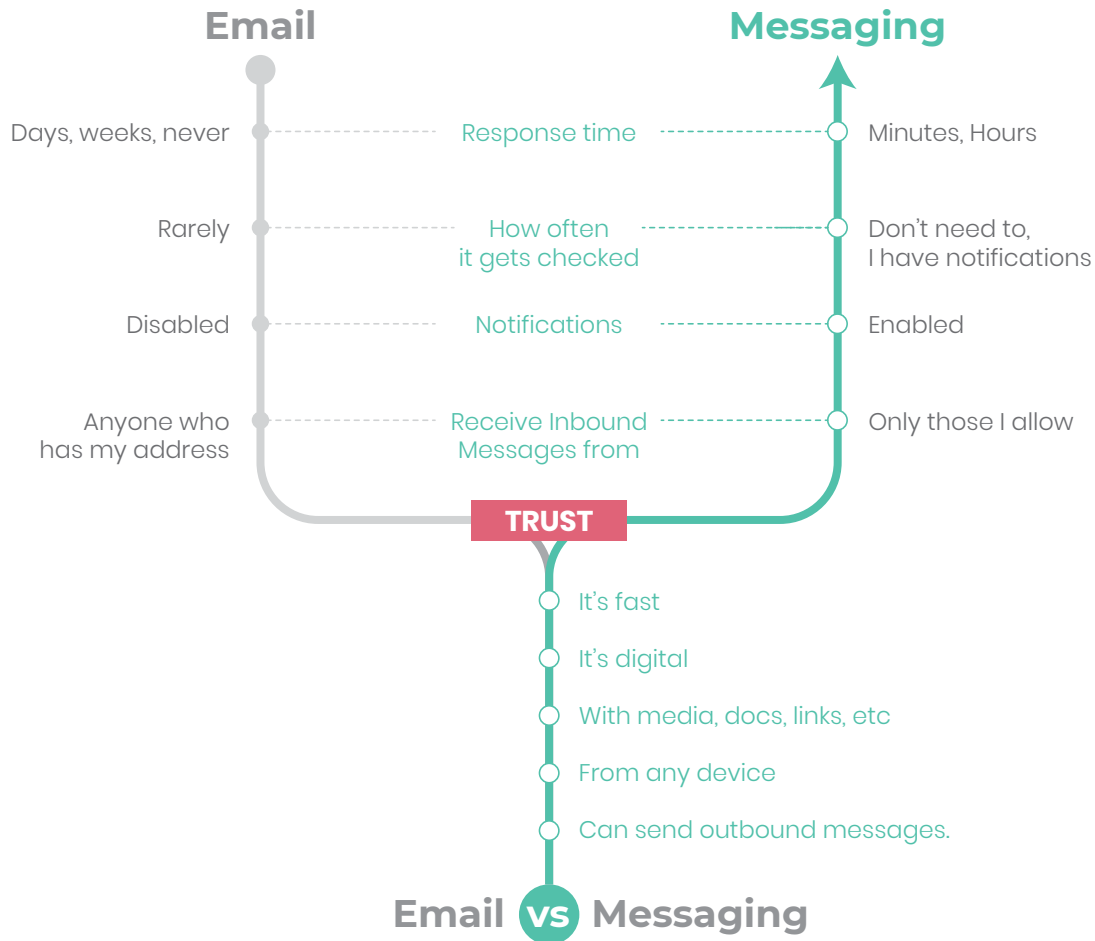
It is no wonder then, why young people struggle with email. They live in a world in which email would never be invented. Henry Ford once said, “If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.” Email is a “faster horse.” It applies old world ideals to a digital realm.

You might be thinking, isn't email basically the same as Snapchat, Instagram and other messaging platforms? After all, it is digital and messages do show up pretty quickly. And like those other platforms, you can still send media, files, and links. Are young people just being lazy?

Those are the similarities. There are a few subtle differences that make all the difference in the world. Especially to an on-demand world citizen.

Where the paths between email and messaging begin to diverge is at the intersection of trust—which is found in the answer to the question—who can send messages to me? What happens at that intersection sets the course for what could mean the difference between a response time in minutes to never. Because if anyone who can find my email address can send me a message—including those that pay for a list or scrape my information—then I don't want to receive a notification, because it's mostly junk. And if that junk is not worth the time to delete, it's certainly not worth the time to 'manage preferences' or 'unsubscribe.' In fact, I'll just start ignoring that little red dot that has a number with a comma in it because it doesn't mean anything. Because of this, I check email rarely. If I do, I have to wade through a pile of junk to even find a legitimate message in the off chance someone wasn't clever enough to reach out to me in a method I prefer. In which case, I'll respond a few weeks later.

On the other hand, if I only receive messages from those I allow, then notifications are welcome. Helpful, in fact. That way I can get right back to someone who messaged me.



The difference between these paths is the difference between an inbox and a profile. The inbox is a digital version of the mailbox. A target for anyone to shoot at. That is an old-world convention that is no longer necessary in the new, on-demand world. And, we hate to say it, but texting isn't too far behind the inbox as a phone number is just another form of a target. As anyone who has spent a reasonable amount of time with a Gen Z'er has probably heard, "I haven't checked my texts for a couple of days."

Although Messenger is the second most downloaded app of all time (Facebook is #1), Gen Z is happy spreading their communication across multiple platforms. According to GWI, the average Gen Z is active on 9 social platforms. These platforms allow more purposeful communication in tighter circles. They might keep up with their high-school friends on Snapchat, chat with gamer friends on Twitch, and talk with family on Messenger. They use the right app with the right crowd for the right reason..

Email is probably not going away for business communication anytime soon...until Gen Z takes over.

The shift in student communication

Now that we've set the stage with all sorts of context about the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs of those participating in an on-demand world, let's talk about how these principles apply to life as a student. And because this is such a vast topic, we're going to drill right down into how student communication has changed over time. We believe this is the epicenter of the matter because the foundation of student success is good communication.

Jory Hadsell is the Executive Director for the California Virtual Campus Initiative. Over the last two decades, he has been a professor and administrator giving him both a ring-side seat and a birds-eye view of how student communication has evolved over the years. He said in a recent interview "in the mid-2000s, you were OK with your instructor getting back to you within 24 hours if you had a question. The younger students we have coming in, live in an on-demand world. There's nothing they have to wait for in most of their technology-mediated interactions."

The changes started becoming more clear as new technologies were adopted. Jory noticed that "once the smartphone hit critical mass, we saw a big dropoff in email." In fact, he tells a story about a large project to implement a new email system. Trying to choose the right system seemed like a big deal at the time. Once it was rolled out, he said they "immediately discovered that a large number of students were never looking at it" and didn't even know they had an account.

Fabiola Torres has been a long term faculty member at Glendale Community College near Los Angeles. She has also had a first-hand witness to the changes in student communication over the years as eighty percent of her classes are distance education (online). She believes strongly that "social interaction is necessary when we're dealing with student success." It used to be that students were OK with email as "behaviorally they were used to waiting 24 to 48 hours for a response," said Fabiola in a recent interview. Ten years ago it was a necessary form of communication, Now, she says students "do not respond well to email." Adding that "students like to be communicated to in a method that is instant. They want to feel like they can interact with their instructor anytime, anywhere – on-demand."

"The biggest factor in student success is social interaction with instructors."

Fabiola Torres – Glendale Community College





Fabiola feels these changes started with the proliferation of messaging apps like Facebook's Messenger. She feels the big difference was that these apps didn't require you to give out your phone number. She asserted that "It's a layer of privacy where I don't have to give you my phone number to communicate with you."

This story is all too familiar with Brandon Tenn, who is a professor of Chemistry and Mathematics at Merced College. He remembers how painful it was when students weren't checking their emails. Because he didn't like using the campus LMS, the only way he was able to communicate with students was email and a website he maintained for each class. The website, he says, "was a pain" to keep updated and wasn't checked often enough by students as it didn't change very frequently. And email was a challenge because students "weren't checking their college emails."

He also feels that Facebook has significantly changed communication citing the same privacy concerns as Fabiola. Brandon emphatically pronounced "I don't collect student's phone numbers and I'm not giving them mine!"

Brandon mentions that "I stopped using email to communicate once I got access to Pronto." Fabiola says that Pronto has "opened up the classroom beyond the four walls" and has made "communities of learners feel connected and successful." But...that's a story best handled by our [website](#) :)

Back to student communication....

The adapting university

As preferences in student communication began to change more significantly over the last five years, higher education institutions have had to find ways to adapt. Real time messaging tools have become a trend, but there are some considerations that need to be made before diving in.

Jory says that "you have to start with the faculty who love to do this." With any technology there are early adopters, the majority, and laggards. Administrators probably

already have a sense for who might be right to pilot a new toolset before rolling it out campus wide. Jory also notes that it used to be harder to find faculty who understood learning this way because only a small subset had taken an online course themselves. He says that today it's different—“with more faculty that have done degrees online or taken multiple classes online, they can put themselves in the student's shoes. They can relate to what it's like to be a student when you're waiting on an answer.”

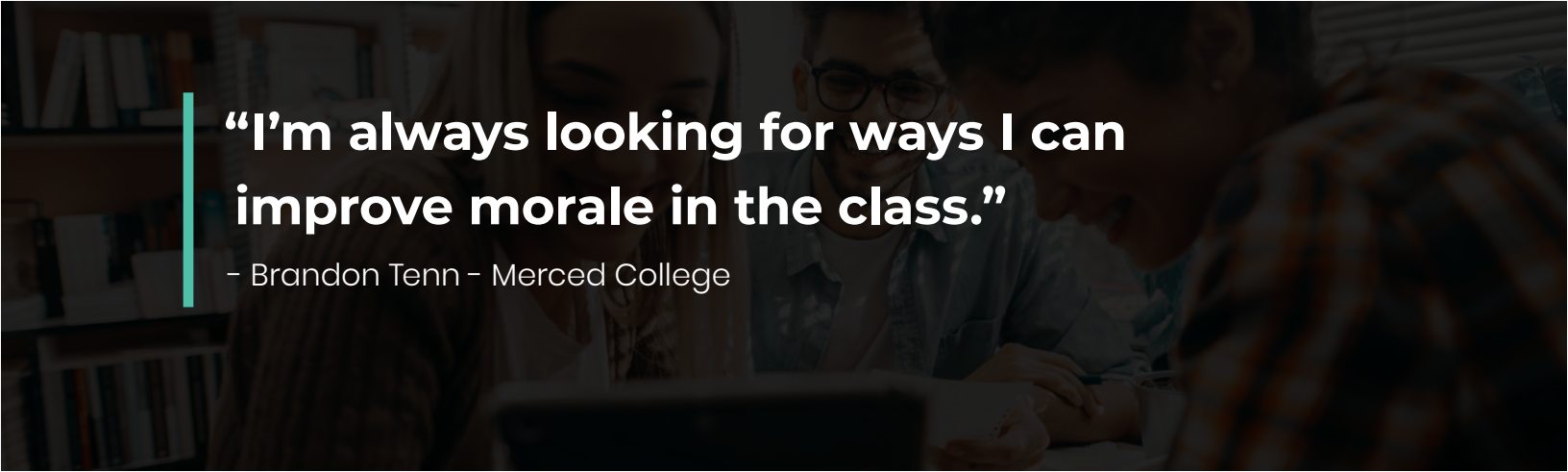
Another thought Jory had for administrators is that they need to carefully consider the technologies you choose. Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws are interpreted differently from school to school. However, one thing that everyone agrees on is the importance of student data and privacy. Jory suggests that “you need good platforms that protect student data and privacy and have different levels of configuration that can support multiple institutions.”

A final thought here is you must consider the implications of peer to peer communication on a specific platform. When you provide a tool for student communication that fits their current paradigm, it has the potential to be used a hundred times more than email to communicate with one another. Jory feels “it's harder to monitor peer to peer so you need systems in place.” The systems he is referring to are tools for discoverability and read receipts. More on this later. Before we go there, let's peer through the eyes of an instructor.

The adapting instructor

Fabiola said it best when she said “the biggest factor in student success is social interaction with instructors.” We could probably end this piece here because of how profound that statement is. Because of constraints in time, place, and tools, there has never been a time in the history of the world that students could have rich interaction with an instructor that only takes each of them mere seconds. Those constraints don't exist in the on-demand world. Fabiola asserts “most of the questions students ask can be answered within 30 seconds. I just speak to my phone. I don't even type anymore.”

Because we know they exist, let's first handle the objections. One of those might be that having a 24/7 communication tool that you carry around with you is going to open you up to an all night chat festival with students. While that could be the case if you wanted it to be, it's just not going to happen. Jory wisely said “we encourage faculty to set expectations in their course materials and their syllabus that discusses when they're available, when they're



“I'm always looking for ways I can improve morale in the class.”

– Brandon Tenn – Merced College

not, and what to do.” To this, Fabiola adds “just like a face to face instructor, you have to tell them your boundaries. I takes a level of impression management that we as faculty need to acquire so that we are clear with our boundaries with our students.”

Another objection might be that opening the lines of student communication will open the floodgates and therefore upset a work/life balance. Fabiola’s answer to this concern is “opening the lines of student communication has made my job a lot easier because then the responsibility is placed on them, not me.” Jory noted that you have to decide if you’re going to “batch this all at once, or just do it as things come in.” There are merits to both, but he did speak to the ease of the just in time approach as the backlog can build up if an instructor is not dealing with things. This is true regardless of which communication tool you choose. He said “some instructors say I can quickly pull out my phone and respond to a student so then when I get home that’s not waiting for me.” It seems this comes down to a personal preference.

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- Fabiola Torres – Glendale Community College

One of the benefits of using a real-time communication tool with a feed that everyone can see is that it can be more efficient. Brandon said “with email, I’ll get the same question four, five, maybe 10 times and have to respond back to each of them.” And he felt there was such a lag in the response time of email that he felt like “it didn’t feel like it actually helped them out at all.” He says that using Pronto has completely solved this problem, affirming “I could answer one student’s question and everybody sees my answer.” The ability to only answer a question once and know that students saw it was a huge step in efficiency for Brandon as he remarked “it really helped lighten the load.”

Another benefit of opening the lines of student communication is removing the barriers to success. Brandon felt that when using email or clunky LMS chat tools “students were only using it when they really needed help.” He saw many other opportunities where students wouldn’t reach out because of the friction and lag time in communication.

Brandon related a story about a time when on the night before a test, he started to see several students making comments about feeling worried about the test as they didn’t feel prepared. He said he watched the conversation happen on and off for a couple hours until it felt like there was sincere concern. At that point he announced that he would push the test back two days and the next day in class they would go over the material again. The discussion immediately change to one of gratitude. He said that a platform to have this kind of discussion “gives the class a little bit of a sense that I’m listening to them.” He feels that “nobody wants to ask this type of question face to face.” Because of the nature of this type of communication, it can be used to adapt the instruction to the needs of the learner instead of the other way around. Brandon feels this is a big win as he says “I’m always looking for ways I can improve morale in the classes.”

“Community building and all the things that go along with students talking to each other is an integral part of the learning experience.”

Jory Hadsell – California Virtual Campus Initiative



Class-sourcing

I'm sure you've heard of crowdsourcing where the power of the large numbers create a collective wisdom greater than that of any individual. This phenomenon is well illustrated on the TV series, "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire." The contestants on that series are answering trivia questions and have three "lifelines" they can use - phone a friend, 50/50, and ask the audience. The studio audience is not a group of academically elite individuals. The audience is comprised of a group of about 100 people that happened to want to spend their afternoon waiting in line to view the live taping of a TV show. However, together, the audience is the most reliable lifeline because they are almost always right. The audience is able to answer correctly 91% of the time versus the phone a friend coming in at 65% and 50/50 at 50%. This is the wisdom of the crowd at work.

How large are your classrooms? What if it was possible to leverage the wisdom of the crowd in the classroom? It is. The additional benefit of students all having access to the same feed is they can help each other. We call this class-sourcing. Brandon noticed quickly that "because students are part of the thread, they start answering each other and I wouldn't have to be the one answering every single question." Anyone who has spent time in front of a classroom knows that this is the holy grail of instruction. When you can shift the responsibility of not only learning, but also teaching to the shoulders of the students outcomes improve and retention goes through the roof.

Group work is a necessary evil in the eyes of every college student. Everyone knows that learning to work with others is an essential life skill no matter which career path you choose. Everyone also knows that group work sucks because it always seems like one or two people do all the work. Savvy instructors have learned that poor communication tools have been a major contributor to group work failure. Fabiola declared that "as faculty, we can't require group projects without giving them the tools to be able to communicate with one another." She continued suggesting "if you're dealing with a group, email is where we have problems with certain students picking up most of the slack with others don't." She strongly feels that quality real-time student to student communication is "essential when your course requires group interaction."



Jory noted that once they started using effective communication tools, they needed to alter their regulations. He said that they used to require what they called “regular and effective student contact.” They just revised this regulation to include student to student contact stating that there is plenty of evidence to show that “community building and all the things that go along with students talking to each other is an integral part of the learning experience.”

The risks

There are indeed risks to opening the lines of communication, but hopefully by now you’ve realized that the rewards greatly outweigh the risks in opening the lines of student communication. We’ve discussed some of them previously here. Adapting to any new change, especially the on-demand world is hard and can bring with it fear of failure.

Brandon said that when he first adopted Pronto, he was worried that he might not be able to “mediate or moderate some of the discussions and there may be some inappropriate things occur between students.’ After two years of use in his classes he’s happy to report that “I’ve seen none of that happen –I’ve never had to take any kind of action.” He thinks that this is probably because of the lack of anonymity in the platform. Everything you do or say is tied to your name and is tracked and discoverable. He feels that the very public nature of this communication vehicle is “holding everyone accountable.” As Fabiola observed, “I’ll take the online environment over the face to face threats. I’ve experienced both sides and the physical threat is horrible.” I think we feel comfortable in safely saying we would all agree with her on that one.

The road ahead

Hopefully by now we’ve been able to do our job in helping you see how the world around us has changed and with it our expectations around almost everything. There is no longer a question of if the world will become on-demand as the code has already been written. It’s already happening. We can’t go back. The world will only continue to become more and more ‘easy’ and ‘now.’

The question now becomes, **what will you do about it?**
(if you really don’t know, just [contact us](#) and we can give you some ideas)



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