

Video Editing In the University System

During the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, the documentary *Tarnation*, created by Jonathan Caouette, was making headline news. Caouette's film, a story of his dysfunctional family, became the first feature-length movie edited entirely on Apple Computer's free video editing software, *iMovie*. His film became a huge success and all for mere cost of \$218.32. (Silverman).

Caouette's experience demonstrates how the price of video editing has dramatically decreased over the past ten years. For example, the UCL Images of the University College London was able to dramatically cut the cost by switching from an industry-leading Avid system to one based on a Pentium PC. This innovative system cost the UCL Images £25,000 (\$44,000) one-third of the price of a traditional Avid system ("Video editing costs fall"). Prices are continuing to drop, for today consumers can purchase a PC with video editing software for under \$1000. No longer do universities have to spend tens of thousands of dollars on one editing system, but instead can create entire labs providing students with an experience only known to Hollywood directors. But how has the introduction of these new systems affected and influenced the university system culture, and classroom? In this paper, I will address this question and explore how students and faculty are using this new technology. First, I will cover, briefly, what is meant by non-linear video editing.

Non-linear video editing

In the late 1800s, Thomas Edison and his assistant William Dickson create the Kinetograph, the first motion picture camera, and the Kinetoscope. These two invention allowed us to easily (in a relative sense) record live action and paved the way for a huge new industry of film and video production. Fortunately, a lot has changed in the last hundred years, technology as

well as technique has greatly improved. One of the influential advancements was non-linear video editing.

In the past, to edit footage captured on VHS or Beta, it required two tape decks, two television sets, and two tapes (one with footage and a blank tape). Then to bring random footage in sequence required queuing up the tape to the first scene of the film, recording it to the beginning of the blank. Then queue up the tape to the second scene and recording it to the blank tape and so on. If a mistake was made at the beginning of the film or a scene was left out, the entire processes must start over (Editors learned early on not to make mistakes.). This process is known as linear editing, and it was very time-consuming and frustrating.

Fortunately, there was the introduction of non-linear video editing. With non-linear editing equipment, a switch is made from tape decks and TVs to computers and monitors. The video was also converted from an analog to a digital system. Now because the film does not have to be edited linearly, hence the “non-linear,” it gives the editor freedom to move scenes back and forth quickly editing and the option to try different techniques and experiment with their footage without the usual concerns of linear. But the most recent benefit of non-linear editing system is the significant drop price. The cost factor allows this technology to be present on universities affecting their culture and classroom environment.

Effects on the University Culture

Geoffrey Sauer, an English professor for Iowa State University with a long history of non-linear video editing experience, expressed his thoughts on the effects that non-linear video editing has had on American culture. “In terms of my personal opinion,” Sauer said, “I believe that a lot of television culture by the late 80s early 90s was pretty stultified...and that non-linear audio and video editing has led to... explorations and attempts in other genres.” He explained

that the introduction of these systems has given many independent companies an editorial power previously available only to the major networks. According to Sauer, the university culture, where print and live presentations remain a norm, have not see much influence from the new video editing systems. However, that could soon change.

Some universities are beginning to provide free classes in video editing and other multimedia software. The Library Instruction Division of the Marriott Library offers free classes to all students and faculty of the University of Utah. These classes cover popular software such as Dreaweaver, Excel, and Powerpoint as well as techniques in digital photography and video editing. Iowa State University is also offering classes, through the Academic Information Technologies' Computer Survival School, ranging from web design software and Photoshop to Microsoft Access and video editing. The first class of the semester, Pinnacle Studio DV 8, was just offered a few weeks ago, free to all students.

In return, students are embracing this new technology more quickly. Video and DVD portfolios are becoming a popular ways for students to display their work to potential employers. Students will use DV camcorders and editing and DVD authoring software to create live video resume', introductions, and tours of their works in ways that were not possible just a few short years ago. Students are also using video technology for entertainment purposes, as students create new wave of film festivals. Although elementary compare to the Sundance Festival, these fast-paced, student-run amateur film festivals, such as Washington University's iMovie Fest, are springing up on universities across the country. "The event, [coordinated by Eric Chou and] sponsored by Apple computers, gives students a chance to learn how to make movies without having to purchase expensive gear by providing cameras, laptops and iMovie software," stated Geggel in her article about iMovie Fest. "Once Chou dispensed the equipment from Apple,

participants in the contest only had four days to complete their projects.” These film festivals are becoming widely popular and are giving many students their first experience into the world of video production. Of course, at the heart of all these festivals is the inexpensive non-linear video-editing software.

Effects in the Classroom

Last spring, Amanda Bemer had the opportunity to learn the process behind video production and how to use iMovie for the very first time by creating several videos for her multimedia class. Although Bemer said the projects were time-consuming, she thought the software was fairly easy to learn and would consider creating other videos in the future. Bemer was part of the experimental class English 410x Multimedia Design, a new trend of semester-long courses focusing on the applications of new multimedia technology. The incentive of these classes is that students will become more marketable as companies are beginning to seek employees with a wide knowledge in computer applications. But it has only been recently, due to the declining cost of video technology, that universities have been financially able to add these courses to their curriculum. Unfortunately, courses like English 410x have remained only within fields related to communications. However, professors outside of communication are aware of the potential of video editing and other technologies and are finding ways to incorporate them into the classroom.

“I was given the choice of making a multimedia project [or] writing a lengthy term paper” said Sharon Brown, who attended Animal Science 415 Equine Management last spring, “I chose to make a multimedia project because it was something different. It was a new idea for me and seemed like more fun than writing a paper.” Brown, with no prior video production experience, produced a “Horse Trailer Safety” video and, like Bemer, used iMovie to edit the

movie. Although Brown required assistance in using the software and was surprised by the time commitment of the project, she said she would definitely choose to create another video if given the opportunity.

Multimedia projects are beginning to emerge in courses outside of communication field as an optional assignment, but they are still rare cases. A video project, like the one created by Miss Brown, is not always practical for a course because equipment is still not largely available and because of the time commitment involved in production. Although more professors, in the future, may decide to add a video project as part of classes, there maybe a much more practical use of video technology in the classroom.

Sauer believes that there is a push for video communication. “There is a demand... for more professors [to] video tape classes and [to] make those streaming [-video] lectures available online.” This could be in the very near future. Sauer said as standards and technology become more widely accepted these alternative ways of presenting will be more often, and not just for lectures. It is possible today for a professor to record class presentation, create a DVD, and use those presentation as examples for future classes, much the same way writing or print design examples are used. Once again, this was only really made possible lower cost of video production technology.

Inexpensive non-linear video editing software is beginning to change the world. We are finding it faster, easier, and cheaper to make videos than ever before with near the same quality as the professional. Students, professors, and universities are seeing the potential in this new technology and are finding ways to embrace it. Video can be a very powerful communication device, and today, all it takes to create a feature masterpiece is some creativity and a couple hundred bucks.

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