Welcome to this quarter’s newsletter. This issue aims to tell you about the latest software and apps that you can easily use in the classroom. From big things, such as entire collaborative classrooms, to the smaller bits, like mobile polling, this newsletter should hopefully inspire you to try some new techniques. If anything mentioned in this newsletter interests you, or if you have any queries, then don’t hesitate to email us at r.j.ansell@leeds.ac.uk or vle-maps@leeds.ac.uk.

Mobile Tools

The UniLeeds App will soon provide an easy way to run quizzes or polls in class, but while we wait for it, there are tools already available doing similar things. Going onto an appstore and looking at everything available can be a bit overwhelming; there is a huge choice, and an even bigger chance that you’ll end up with something that doesn’t do what you want it to. An alternative is to use web-based tools that have very well-integrated mobile platforms. Two of the most popular solutions are looked at in further depth here, and although they both have subscription services, they also have free versions that are still very functional:

**Socrative** – An easy to use tool that links between devices. Your host device (be it a laptop/PC/tablet) shows a control panel where you can load previously authored questions, or you can utilise the ‘Quick Questions’, giving a generic multiple choice or true/false question for the students to respond to. All the students see is the question, then you can broadcast the results if you so wish. There are also games to spice things up a little or to add competition between groups. Alison Voice (Physics) says, “It is very simple to set up pre-planned questions” and that “it gives instant feedback to the staff (and the students).” It also “allows students to interact in lectures anonymously, so they are more willing to have a go.”

**Kahoot** – If you’re wanting something a bit more fun, then Kahoot might be what you’re looking for. It takes ‘gamified’ learning to a new level, where students are pitted against each other, either individually or in groups, in a timed quiz. Points are awarded for people who answer first (and get the right answer).

Collaborative Learning

Asking students to pull out their phones in the middle of the lecture might be ice-breaking or a fun intermission between topics, but the university now offers teaching spaces where you can tailor your entire course to be taught via interactive and group-based activities. The new collaborative lecture theatres, mentioned in the last newsletter, have now been in use for two terms and are proving popular. Samantha Pugh (Physics) says the room “has been superb for the delivery” of one of her modules, and “the opportunity for students to share their laptop screen with the class on the whiteboard is great too. These rooms certainly increase the sense of community within a class.”

One student says, “Just the fact that we are arranged in groups has been great. In the past, trying to do group work in a conventional lecture theatre was a bit of a shambles. This is much better.”

With a laptop for every 5 students, 2 lectern computers and 2 projectors, it’s easy to be
overwhelmed by the abundance of technology, but don’t let that put you off. It’s worth coming along to one of our workshops as a quick way to try things out and you’ll soon be comfortable with it. Absolutely everything is controlled from a central display at the lectern, from blinds to projectors.

For the lecturers, you have two independent PCs, one like any other you’ll have used before, the second mainly controlled by its huge touchscreen display. This digital whiteboard replaces the normal physical ones, and you don’t have to worry about popping next door to find a pen with any ink left.

For the students, the layout of the seating has been completely redesigned so as to encourage group-work. Instead of long rows, the room has been split up into ‘pods’ which seat 5. Each pod has a microphone that can be activated to present to the rest of the class, and a large workspace where everyone can use their laptops to share ideas. The most important part of the pods is the touchscreen laptop which is connected to the room’s projectors. Any work the students do on these laptops can be put up on the main board for class-wide display, enabling a much more fluid environment for presentations, while not forcing the students out of their comfort zone and into the front of the class.

If you feel like your module could benefit from this sort of teaching space, then you can contact timetabling to book a time-slot for your class.

Ad-Hoc Recordings: For the Class at Home

In the last newsletter we featured the University’s desktop capture software, which can be used to make recordings and distribute them via the VLE or other channels such as VideoLeeds. It’s worth pointing out that the lecture capture equipment in the lecture theatres can be used in a similar way, via ‘ad-hoc recording’.

If a teaching room is empty, you should be able to wander in, start up an ad-hoc recording, do your piece, then stop it and upload it to the VLE. All it takes is the ‘Start Ad-Hoc Recording’ shortcut that you will find on the lectern PC.

This is possible in all lecture theatres with lecture capture installed, including the new collaborative lecture theatres. The digital whiteboards in these spaces are extremely useful for creating worked examples, or recording annotations, perhaps doing a live marking of an essay as a feedback example for students to see the sort of things you look for.

Other Blended Learning News

MoocS for Staff – The University is currently creating a plethora of online learning courses through FutureLearn aimed at all kinds of students, but many modules and packages will be of interest to staff too.

If you aren’t looking for an entire course, then there are hundreds of informational videos on platforms such as TED, KAHN Academy, and MIT Opencourseware. Your students are using these websites (more than they use books!), so it may be useful to see the sort of things that they’re finding interesting right now.

Upcoming Events

Digital Whiteboard Workshops – With the aforementioned collaborative lecture theatres becoming more popular, we are offering a number of ‘open workshops’, where staff are welcome to turn up and give the equipment a go, ask any questions they may have, and be shown some of the tools that are available for use. If this sounds interesting, then don’t hesitate to contact vle-maps@leeds.ac.uk so that we can get an idea of the numbers turning up.

Digital Dates - are short, informal workshops for staff and students co-ordinated by Organisational Development and Professional Learning (OD&PL) and Skills@Library – the next is on 25th April on ‘Mobile Polling and Surveying for Research, Teaching and Learning using MQlcker’. Book at http://www.sddu.leeds.ac.uk/learning-teaching/workshops-and-events/digital-dates/