2010-2011 Grant Proposals

Prof. Scott Cohen
Texts Unbound: The Apple iPad as Intellectual Portal
Classroom Innovation Grant

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

With a CTL Classroom Innovation Grant, I propose to integrate Apple's newest touch screen device, the iPad, into my courses beginning fall 2010, tracking their use and effectiveness during the term of the grant. Immediately following Apple's announcement of the new device, learning and technology commentators and scholars began imagining how the iPad could enhance student learning and engagement. The range of possibilities are, in the words of some commentators, limitless--from digital textbooks to interactive quizzes, from immediate ("Clicker"-like) feedback to podcasting.

Although some of these exciting teaching and learning opportunities depend on the device being widely adopted by students, there are several exciting ways I propose immediately integrating the device in my courses at Stonehill. My plan is to incorporate the iPad in a way that will provide students with better access to a broader array of texts, offer students a new way of collaborating inside and outside the classroom, and enhance student engagement with audio and visual course material. With the grant, I would purchase three iPads, two to be shared among students and a third for the instructor. Some specific uses of the device will include:

- Collaborative digital whiteboard, allowing students to contribute to contents of projected virtual chalkboard via the iPad
- Share annotation and commentary on texts, using Aji Annotate (a iPad & Mac .pdf annotation client) and/or a class created "Wiki"
- Immediate and flexible access to course materials and resources
- Allow common bookmarking and sharing of links on the web
- Collaborative writing during class through editing and revising documents on the iPad
The first course where I propose integrating the iPad is EN220: Storytelling in the Age of Information (Fall 2010). This course is uniquely suited for the early adoption of the device because nearly all of the course material is already available in the form of audio files, podcasts, videos, and electronic book format. For instance, one of the primary texts in the course, the weekly radio program "This American Life," already has an application for the iPad (in the form of its recently published iPhone/iTouch application). Since we will be moving quickly among stories featured in the program as we investigate contemporary transformations in storytelling, the iPad is the ideal device for navigating through this material. Although it is outside the ordinary single-semester term of the innovation grant, I anticipate continuing to use the iPads in my spring 2011 courses and beyond because all of my courses draw on an array of different media and student collaboration is a vital in them all.
In addition to reading and listening to course materials, the device will be used for student collaboration with writing. The iPad will make an exercise I use regularly in my classroom easier and more efficient. This exercise involves students collaborating in the composition process, whereby students take turns writing parts of a document that they then revise individually after class. Currently, this takes place using the classroom computer, but an iPad would allow this exercise to be more seamlessly incorporated in class discussion and in-class group work.

The device would also allow students to share links and their comments about them in the form of a bookmarking application, such as Google reader. When the course material itself contains links to additional material, as in the Storytelling course, having all of these texts on one device will be invaluable.

Finally, the device would allow me to preserve the material presented in the class. Using a stylus with the iPad, making it a writing tablet, will allow me to present information to the class on a projected (virtual) white board.

This would be a major step forward and away from the considerably clunky technology I currently use in the form of a writing tablet and a classroom computer, which in addition to being an imperfect device has significant limitations when it comes to compatibility and accuracy.

BENEFIT TO THE STONEHILL COMMUNITY:

This project would allow the college to evaluate the usefulness of this emerging technology in the humanities, a place where the iPad (unlike other classroom technologies) might be quickly embraced by teachers. The learning advantages for students in the course should, I hope, be clear from the above proposed approach. This proposal might very well blaze a trail other instructors might choose to follow or clear their own approaches. With the support of a CI grant, two iPads would rotate among four or six students in the course during the semester. An additional iPad would be provided to the instructor. Students, selected randomly among volunteers, will be required to keep a "Tech Log" for the duration of the course. Importantly, students will continue their logs even when the iPad has been passed to their peers, allowing us to determine how the device shapes habits of study and engagement.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PLAN:

The student Tech Logs and the faculty reports will be published in the final report after the term of the grant and study. Selected students and the faculty member will present at an Academic Development Day break-out session. Of course additional outreach could take the form of an article in the alumni magazine or another publication, helping demonstrate that the college remains on the cutting edge of classroom technology. Similarly, I am always happy to hold workshops or a roundtable discussion, as the CTL director deems appropriate.

Budget (detail how you will use the funds requested) Budget: $1700 (approx.)
3 Apple iPads (2 16GB @ $499, 1 32GB @ $599) 3 Pogo Stylus Pens (@ $15)
3 licenses for applications, This American Life, Aji Annotate, and additional developing "apps" for instruction. (@ $25-40)