

Transcript

[00:00] [background music]

Derek Bruff: [00:00] Welcome to “Leading Lines,” a podcast from Vanderbilt University. I’m your host, Derek Bruff, director of the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching.

[00:03] In this podcast we explore creative, intentional and effective uses of technology to enhance student learning — uses that point the way to the future of educational technology in college and university settings.

[00:21] In this episode, Vanderbilt’s associate provost for digital learning, John Sloop, interviews Jan Holmevik, associate professor of English at Clemson University and co-director of Clemson’s Center of Excellence in Next Generation Computing and Creativity.

[00:35] Holmevik was instrumental in a recent effort at Clemson University to provide all its students and faculty with access to Adobe’s Creative Cloud Suite of photography, design, video and web apps. Just imagine, a campus license to Photoshop, Premier, Illustrator and more.

[00:51] In the interview, Holmevik talks about what it took to launch this project, both in terms of strategic leadership and faculty development and support, but the interview begins with something of a look back at the roles digital literacy has played in higher education in the past.

[01:06] [background music]

John Sloop: [01:09] Hi, this is John Sloop. I’m sitting with Jan Holmevik. He’s an associate professor of Professional Communication and Rhetoric at Clemson University. We’re sitting in the lobby of the Marriott in San Diego. We’re out here for the Adobe Conference, which is

relevant to what I want to talk to Jan about today.

[01:30] A couple of things. Jan Holmevik has been writing about online education, online learning environments since back in the '90s, so way before many people were thinking about this. I'm talking to Jan today about something very innovative he's been in charge of recently at Clemson.

[01:53] I'll let him describe this in a second, but Jan brought to Clemson, or helped cultivate at Clemson, bringing in site licenses for all the students and faculty for Adobe's Creative Campus with all of their programs.

[02:06] He's going to talk about that in just a second what they're trying to do there, what the problems might be, what are the hiccups, etc., but it's an innovative project and one that's being emulated by other universities.

[02:20] Jan, I want to welcome you here to Leading Lines podcast.

Jan Holmevik: [02:24] Thank you.

John: [02:24] Appreciate you taking time.

[02:26] Before we get to Adobe, could you talk to me a little bit about... you've done all sorts of research in game design, game culture, and digital literacy. You've been doing this for quite a long time now. Talk to me a little bit about how you got into this, where your interests were, and then what you've seen change over time.

[02:45] If you look back at some of your earlier writings, what do you think you got right or wrong? I don't know if those are the right words for it, but how do you see if such has changed?

Jan: [02:57] First of all, thanks for having me. I sure appreciate it.

[02:57] Yes, as you say, I've been at it for a while since back in the mid '90s. I got involved with online learning environments through my interest in technology, specifically gaming technology.

[03:18] As I was growing up, I was fortunate enough have a Commodore 64 computer. That set me on a path that leads actually up to this very day. The idea that games could be more than fun and games, so to speak, has always been intriguing to me. What can you learn when you approach the process of learning by playing? What is the role of play in the larger project of learning?

John: [03:56] Wait. Were you thinking this while you were playing?

Jan: [04:00] I saw a very early disconnect between the way that I was taught in school and the way that I learned when I was playing games. This lack of understandings of the exploratory process with learning, that it was all an academic intellectual exercise and that play and experimentation and failure, indeed, was something that was frowned upon, basically.

[04:30] I realized that that was something that...It was not right. It didn't feel right to me. It has never felt right to me. I've always tried to find ways to prove that there is a place for play and games and learning.

[04:51] In the mid '90s, I came across a system that Amy Bruckman at MIT — and she's now a professor at Georgia Tech — she was a graduate student at MIT at the time and she had taken a multi-user online game, basically, that was developed by researchers at Xerox PARC. It's called a MOO. I got involved with that.

[05:16] I started experimenting with this technology in the classroom, have you bring students into an environment that is inherently playful and then have them turn that into learning experiences.

[05:28] Specifically, with regard to writing, I found the computers and writing group in the US. Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher's excellent work in the '80s and into the '90s formed this community of scholars and graduate students who are interested in these kinds of things.

[05:58] That became my audience. Working in the '90s, I wrote two books with Cynthia Haynes on how to set up and how to manage and how to use these kinds of environments for learning.

John: [06:19] I just want to say something now, mark it, and see if this was true in your experience, because it'll be relevant to some of what I want to ask you about when we get to

Adobe.

[06:30] My sense was in the late '90s, when I was teaching -- I was teaching media ecology courses -- I wasn't doing MOOs or anything like that. I was out in front of my students in so many ways, because their digital literacy was so embryonic at that point so that I could easily be teaching them things, in a way that now, the game's very, very different.

[06:58] Was that your experience then that you were leading the way with some of your students?

Jan: [07:02] Part of it is that the Internet was not universally available then as it is now. The people who were in the know, so to speak, were on the real Internet and everybody else was on AOL, which was a bulletin board with a limited set of functions.

[07:25] You had that division. A lot of students who came into the university at that time had not had that opportunity yet to experience the real possibility of the Internet, with all of the telecommunications, capabilities, and file sharing, and websites, eventually.

[07:44] There was that, and of course a lot of them came in, had not had computers at home and did not...coming to school was their first meeting with computers. In other words, they were not digitally natives as students are today.

[07:55] In a sense, it was a different time. To me, it was a question of, what do we do with these new opportunities? That's always been my driving principle, is, what's next? Where do we go next? How do we take advantage of what we have now to improve what we're doing now and into the future?

[08:30] When these multi-user games came along, and we started thinking about, "Well, how can those be used for education? What do you gain if you put people together online and encourage collaboration and learning?"

[08:51] For instance, one of the projects we developed with a group of researchers at Trinity College in Dublin and also University of in Bergen in Norway was foreign language learning acquisition.

[09:03] We would facilitate what was called tandem learning, where you had a German

student wanting to learn English and an English student wanting to learn German, and we put them together and they had a structured learning process.

[09:18] They also had this informal communication in which they would help each other out. We tried to simulate what it's like to go and learn in a foreign country. Learning your language from a native speaker as opposed to somebody who's not a native speaker because there are a lot of nuances that you can't pick up if you're not a native speaker unless you're really fluent, and students at that level were typically not that fluent.

[09:47] Those projects we had in '97, '98. My dissertation grew out of that and I designed this online learning environment called Lingual MOO with a web-based component to it. At the time, I didn't know it, but basically today we'd call it was a web application. It ran in the web browser. It had a chat function, it had plugin capability for video and audio.

[10:24] It was a fairly rich environment that also, and this is important, enabled and encouraged social construction, that is, participation by the users.

John: [10:43] Again I want to get to Adobe in just a second, but if you were looking back at what you thought then, what was going to happen with the Internet, with online communities, clearly out in front of others, how's it been different than you expected? What's been different? What hopes were not realized because there was a lot of heavy utopianism back in those days [inaudible] ?

Jan: [11:03] Things had taken much longer than I had thought. As you get older, 20 years all of a sudden takes on [laughs] a different kind of perspective, right?

John: [11:14] Certainly does.

Jan: [11:16] I had actually thought that we would be further along the road to incorporating digital technologies in a deep and systematic way that not only aids as a tool, but is an enabler on a much deeper, fundamental level. I really had thought that the World Wide Web and the digital world would eclipse the print world much faster.

[11:47] It has not, but it partly is because we didn't have the platform until the smartphone platform and the tablet platform. Even now, the smartphone platform, if you go buy Apple iOS and the iPhone, 10 years old next year, things are still very much the way that they were.

[12:13] If there's been a disappointment for me, it's that the world isn't moving as fast as I would like it to, even though I'm doing my darndest to make it go faster. I guess that's the biggest thing.

[12:34] Of course, there are a lot of things that seemed like a good idea at the time that in hindsight may not have been such a great idea. This is a newer idea, but the whole idea of the MOOC and massively open courses that are developed once and taught a million times, I've never really bought into that.

[13:04] I really think that there needs to be this personal connection, moreso when the technologies are sitting between the instructor and the student, if the students don't feel like they're part of a learning situation that is dynamic — they can reach out and they can ask for help, or they can get input when they need it — I think that's problematic.

[13:30] At the same token, I think the technologies that make something like a MOOC possible also make almost one-on-one instruction along the lines of the old traditional wizard and the apprentice possible, where you can make those connections. The MOOC is of course newer than what we were talking about back in the '90s.

John: [14:03] Absolutely. You gave me a good way to transition to our discussion of what you've done at Clemson, or what you're doing, I should say, because this is an ongoing project with Adobe. When you said things are not moved as quickly as you expected. I think this is an example of you moving things forward.

[14:20] I'm going to let you talk about the project, but I want you to talk about it with the full knowledge that other universities are looking at you as a model of where we might go. Something you said was, you thought we would move faster, I think it's interesting.

[14:36] What you're doing with Adobe is taking digital literacy seriously, when most universities — and, God bless, writing is still very, very important, I don't want to ever say it, sounds like I'm not saying that. I have invested so much in writing in an old fashioned technology way as the skill set to teach.

[14:58] You're looking and saying, "Yes, but there's more, there's change taking place, students need to be not just literate, but digitally literate." You found tools, or a way to make that happen, or a way at least to get you moving. Can you talk a little bit about that, your

partnership with Adobe, how this happened, what you're trying to do?

Jan: [15:20] We at Clemson, and I'm sure Vanderbilt and other universities, people have been teaching with Adobe tools for a long time. Up until recently, Adobe had their software distributed as packages. You bought a license, you installed it, then you had it.

[15:39] This made it easy for us to get it installed in lab machines and so on, and typically the programs that would get it, because it was expensive obviously, would be journalism, graphic design, art, communication of various kinds.

[15:59] We had our professional communications program that we taught this to our students. Back when Adobe changed to the Creative Cloud 2011 and 2012, everything was up in the air.

[16:15] We didn't know now, they changed from a model where you buy a package and install it on a computer to a model where you have an individual license not to a computer, but to a person. We started worrying about what this is going to mean for our ability to continue to teach these tools.

[16:40] At the same time, I also thought that this is an opportunity to really go to the next level with this and really bring it to the students in a whole new way that we haven't had the opportunity to before because now it would be tied to them and their trajectory, as opposed to a program's capability.

[17:10] In 2011 and 2012, as Adobe moved to the cloud, we were concerned about the fact that our old ways of deploying their software was no longer going to be workable.

[17:22] We got in touch with our CIO, Jim Bottum. Instructional Technologies was under the CIO's office area at that time. He will tell you that he thought Adobe was just about PDFs and he didn't really want to sit down and talk about PDFs. He had bigger fish to fry.

[17:47] The folks from Adobe had tried to get in his door several times during that 2013 without really any success. Then he started hearing from us, the professors who wanted to find the right solution to this Creative Cloud problem that we foresaw.

[18:10] He was hearing from Adobe. They wanted in and tell him about Creative Cloud. He

was hearing from the faculty saying, "We need to figure out what we're going to do with Creative Cloud."

[18:21] Then he said, "OK. Let's talk." We got together. Jonathan Hammond came into campus with a group. Jonathan loves white-boarding sessions, so he did a big white-boarding session about extolling the virtues of Creative Cloud.

[18:39] I remember after it was done, I just looked across the table. I said, "That was nice. Now let's get down to business." I said, "How can we do this? You don't need to sell us on this thing."

[18:49] Within English, within Computers and Writing and rhetorics for 20 years and more, growing out of...I was saying Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher in the computers and writing groups, there has been this awareness of these technologies, and willingness to experiment and use.

[19:11] I told him, "We're ready. We're here. We're onboard. You don't need to sell us on this, but what we need to figure out is how we're going to make this affordable?" We're a state institution. We have about 20,000 undergrads. We have 5,000 graduates, and they were at the time charging \$19.95-a-month per student. You can do the math and you'll see that doesn't add up.

John: [19:36] No.

Jan: [19:36] We're saying, "We need to find a way to make this affordable enough." In fact, we also want to find a way to give it to everybody because at this point, people were, now, starting to talking about the new generation of not just consumers of knowledge, but makers of knowledge.

[19:52] We're looking at learners as both and the fact that by producing, you're also learning.

[19:58] You have to now be thinking about enabling production in addition to just consumption of knowledge. We, like I said, sat down with them.

[20:13] Jim Bottum was integral part of all of this process. We negotiated a contract with Adobe that in 2014 became the first all-in contract basically, offering up Adobe Creative

Cloud to everybody at the university.

[20:31] For me, that was a huge step in the right direction because, A, we had solved the licensing problem. We also now have a baseline for the technologies that our students will have. As a professor, you can now say you will be using Premiere Pro and you'll be using InDesign and you'll be using Photoshop, whereas before, if you wanted to teach with digital technologies, you had to have two or three plans.

[20:52] For Mac users, for Windows users and then you have people who come in with an old laptop that needs [inaudible] excuse me, a laptop requirement, but it doesn't really say you have to have a minimum config.

[21:18] A lot of people come in with an old laptop that can't run this type of state-of-the-art stuff anymore so they have to go to a lab and use it.

[21:28] For a lot of instructors, that was a deterrent because it's just so troublesome to get this done. It's much easier to have students read out of a book and then discuss what they read and then write a paper about it afterwards.

[21:44] We were able to make it easy for the students to get access to the technology. We were able to make it easy for instructors to know what they can plan on students having.

[22:00] We also moved from having to provide lab spaces for these things, to now students having the laptop. Now, they have the software on their own laptop and now in later revisions, on their mobile devices as well.

[22:15] That was a super-exciting development, and that was negotiated in the fall of 2013. We finalized the agreement in March of 2014.

John: [22:27] You said something and I want you to speak about that I think university is going to have to face. While it is true that Adobe then, you've made it accessible to all the students, one of the things most universities have is that we already have a setup for supporting writing. We have setups for supporting all this.

[22:48] It's not just a matter of a teacher saying, "You don't have Adobe, so it's going to be hard for me to assign it." Now they do.

[22:56] A teacher, an instructor, a professional might still say, "But the university has these tools to help me support writing, which I may or may not be an expert in, but do they have tools to support Adobe, which I may or may not be expert as an instructor?" How do you solve that support problem?

Jan: [23:13] In my talk here at the Adobe MAX yesterday, I went through some of the things that we had done at Clemson to do that because we realize that you can't rely on build-it and they will come. In other words, just deploying the software, giving students the software, giving people the software is not going to be enough.

[23:34] I think you're right. I think institutions who are looking to go into digital literacy with this kind of heavy involvement and investment need to be thinking about software as part of that equation. The other elements of the equation will be showing an outreach on the ground and most universities already have training and training programs.

[23:57] They have trainers. Those trainers may need to be realigned, and that's what we did at Clemson. All of the trainers are now working on... Whereas before, we had one Adobe trainer, now all of our trainers can do Adobe support and training.

[24:15] We created a Center of Excellence for this. What that does is it helps identify opportunities and then support those opportunities, whether it is faculty or departments who are interested in getting into this in a more in-depth way.

John: [24:35] This Center of Excellence?

Jan: [24:38] Yes.

John: [24:38] Is this separate from the Center for Teaching and specifically about...?

Jan: [24:43] Right. Our Center of Excellence is a trifecta, if you will, but it has next gen computing, it has GIS and it has creativity. You may wonder what did those three have in common, and nothing other than the fact that the three of us who are running or those of us who are involved in it were seen as doing interesting and forward-thinking work.

[25:08] Our CIO thought it would be interesting to see what if you put these folks together in a Center of Excellence and let that influence and unfold?

[25:25] It has been a really interesting experience. For the creativity side of things, what we're seeing is, we can identify individual professors who we can help become centers of excellence, who can then influence their colleagues.

[25:39] I try to remind people of this every time I talk about this is, traditional literacy has taken over 2,000 years to develop. The kind of digital literacy we're talking about here, we can't have a short-term perspective on this.

[25:56] Hopefully, less than 2,000 years, but certainly more than three to six years. Certainly going back to what I said earlier, things don't move as fast as those of us in the area would like to. The support efforts are going to be in place for a long time to ensure the success.

John: [26:19] I may be asking a question that's getting back to what you just said, but let me try to see if I can put this in a different way. What I see as one of the hindrances to rolling out something like the Adobe Creative Cloud across the entire campus...If we're going to take digital literacy seriously, this is every class, every student becomes part of it.

[26:42] There's going to be a number of instructors who feel ill-equipped to utilize this in the classroom if they're not experts themselves or users themselves, in a way that most professors, rightly or wrongly, feel like they're good enough teachers of writing to pull that off.

[27:01] If they don't use Adobe products, they might not feel like they're equipped to do this. At what level of skill does the faculty need to be to incorporate this in their class or region? Could they do it without any facility themselves or what sort of expertise do you see there?

Jan: [27:23] Creative Cloud is the top end of Adobe's offerings. At this conference you've heard us talk a lot about the spark tools and the mobile tools. These have lower thresholds for entry and can act as bridges to the more professional-grade tools.

[27:47] I always am of the opinion that choosing the right tool for the job is probably more than half of the job. You can start out with doing a job and if the tool is wrong, then you're struggling with the tool more so than the solution.

[28:03] That's what a Center of Excellence or a similar organization can do, is help sit down with a professor and say, "What do you want to accomplish with bringing digital tools into

your teaching? What do you already know? What do you need help with?"

[28:24] We can act as a connector between. We can then bring in training resources from our training group. Our trainers can come in and teach the whole class about Premiere Pro, if that is the case.

[28:35] On the professors' side too, I think what we, as professors, have to start thinking about is we don't need to know everything about everything. That is, we need to be content experts but we don't necessarily need to be technical experts in order to bring this in.

[29:00] In most classes, you have students who already are doing this kind of stuff. You'd be surprised. You start asking around.

[29:08] Somebody has a YouTube channel. They've been doing videos on games for years. They're already experts in this thing. They can become... just deputized them right there and say, "Hey, you're a teaching assistant in this course and you're going to help me do this."

[29:25] For a lot of instructors, of course, it's scary to have to rely on the students for help. I always thought that the classroom is an environment in which you need to be able to give and take, and students are a resource. I have always looked at my students as resources. I always learn so much from my students.

[29:50] It puzzles me sometimes that we're not thinking about students, the resource that they bring to the classroom. Rather, we often tend to think of them as empty vessels that must be filled with some knowledge that only we possess.

[30:08] [background music]

Derek: [30:09] That was Jan Holmevik, associate professor of english at Clemson University, interviewed by Vanderbilt's John Sloop.

[30:15] I have John here with me for a follow-up to the interview. Unfortunately, the interview itself was cut off when a session let out at the conference where John was recording, which is one reason we don't have our usual question about analogue technologies.

[30:34] John, you and Jan talked a little bit more about the Clemson initiative. Did he point to

any particular challenges that they've run into as they've been rolling out this Creative Cloud digital literacy work at Clemson?

John: [30:45] Yeah, some of the challenges are predictable. You have people more or less interested in working with Adobe, not just Adobe, but some professors more or less interested in working with digital technology all together.

[30:59] The thing I found most interesting he talked about in the interview with me but also in the session, we were talking about...someone in the audience asked "What's the bottleneck to really extending this campus wide?"

[31:12] There's a discussion that broke out and somebody else in the audience said, "I will assume that the bottleneck is faculty who are older, don't know how to work with these products, have no interest in doing so."

[31:23] Jan said, and he emphasized this to me later, and has on several occasions now, that in fact, "The bottleneck is not only the faculty but some students, that there's this myth that as digital natives that all of them are adept at every product, whatever it is, and have the same interest."

[31:41] He said that's quite frankly not true. There are faculty who are interested and students who are skittish and want to stay away from it and don't want to learn something new, etc.

[31:51] He said, "You're having to bring along..." and this is only a problem because they weren't even prepared for it. They thought the faculty were going to be the bottleneck, so they focused all their training efforts there and didn't think enough about this.

[32:05] They assumed the students will be willing to jump out at all at once. They had to rethink how to make sure the students were getting excited about it and getting the right students in the right classes doing the right kind of work.

Derek: [32:16] I believe that in part because as I've seen students, particularly when I teach my first year writing seminar, and I have first year students, there are technologies that either they have never used that I want them to use in my course, or they've used it just for entertainment or social purposes.

[32:35] Maybe they have a little experience with video editing tools or something, but they haven't used those tools to create an academic product in the past. There's often quite a learning curve for students.

John: [32:48] Yeah, there's quite a learning curve. I was also thinking, and this is maybe going a little out of bounds.

[32:53] One of the things that I would like to talk to Jan about at some point, and probably something you think about quite a lot, is even when we have faculty and students both interested in trying some of this out, thinking about how to assess work that's not the normal sort of work we assess.

[33:10] I'm generally assessing public speeches or papers. Assessing a podcast, that's a different sort of monster. That's basically the type of training we also have to think about.

Derek: [33:22] Well, did Jan point to any successes from this program, does it seem to be working?

John: [33:28] Yeah, I can't bring up something in specific right now, but it's working really well and that's evidenced by the fact that if you talk to the representatives at Adobe, when I went to the conference and when they've come here to talk to us, almost all of the examples that they bring to the fore are Clemson students.

[33:48] First off, Clemson's further along than other universities. They were the first one to do a full site license. Secondly, they did it the right way. They've gone in knowing to roll it out they were going to have to train people, put some resources into doing so and make sure it works.

[34:05] There's plenty of examples. I'm sure that Jan would be happy to show you some of those. You can also find those on Adobe's website for this.

[34:15] I do want to emphasize this. I think this is one of the things that Jan points to and that some of the other universities that I've talked to, University of North Carolina is an example, that rolling this out, rolling Adobe Creative Cloud out, and Jan says this early on, you can't just say "Here, we have a license," and it's going to work. You have to have a plan in mind.

[34:39] There're several universities that I've discovered, and I won't mention them here, but they have full site licenses, but even the students and faculty that I've talked to there have no idea.

[34:48] The university paid them for the resource, but did not think about how really to unroll it, and as you know in your position, that's a whole lot of the game.

Derek: [34:59] Yeah, if it doesn't live in the curriculum in some fashion, then it's just window dressing.

[35:06] If folks at other campuses wanted to find out more about what they're doing at Clemson, what could they do?

John: [35:12] I was sorry, we didn't get to this in the interview. Jan who I've only gotten to know in the last year, sees his role at Clemson and sees Clemson's role as one of the schools to first do this as...Evangelist might be too strong of a word.

[35:33] For Adobe, Jan will tell you, you can teach these same skills on other types of tools although he likes having the site license or something that used in the industry, but he sees part of his job is to help show other schools what they've done, what the successes are and what their headaches have been, what their labs look like, etc.

[35:51] He invites anyone who's interested to come down and take a look at their labs, to walk through. He's got something of a program built now on doing this, so he sees folks come in.

"[36:01] We'll have lunch. We'll talk about this, this, this." He is very collaborative, doesn't see this as a one university initiative but as something that should be happening all over the place.

Derek: [36:12] That's great. As I find with teaching innovations, if they're not made visible in intentional ways, it's really hard for other people to understand, "Why would I do that? What does it actually look like?"

[36:22] The fact that he's willing to host people says a lot about how he's thinking about spreading this work.

John: [36:28] It's interesting. He seems to be thinking about it in the two prong ways. One, on campus, how do you spread it? And then outside of this campus, how do you spread it?

[36:36] As educators, thinking of ourselves as not simply...We try to break down silos in our universities but the idea of breaking them outside too, that's a nice effort, I like that idea.

Derek: [36:49] Well, thanks, John. In the show notes, we'll add a few links to some of the initiatives at Clemson. You can find those show notes on our website leadinglinespod.com.

[36:58] We welcome your comments and questions there and on Twitter where our handle is @leadinglinespod. You can subscribe to our podcast through iTunes or your other favorite podcast app.

[37:07] If you like what you hear on the podcast, please leave us a rating and review on iTunes. That helps other listeners find our show.

[37:13] Leading Lines is produced by the Center for Teaching, the Vanderbilt Institute for Digital Learning, the Office of Scholarly Communications and the Associate Provost for Digital Learning, John Sloop.

[37:21] Thanks, John. This episode was edited by Rhett McDaniel. Look for new episodes the first and third Monday of each month.

[37:27] [background music]

Derek: [37:27] I'm your host, Derek Bruff. Thanks for listening.