Transcript

[00:00] [music]

Derek Bruff: [00:09] Welcome to "Leading Lines," a podcast from Vanderbilt University. I'm your host, Derek Bruff, director of the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching. In this podcast, we'll explore creative intentional and effective uses of technology to enhance student learning.

[00:18] Uses that point a way to the future of educational technology in college and university settings. The podcast is produced at Vanderbilt by the Center for Teaching, the Vanderbilt Institute for Digital learning, the office of Scholarly Communications, and the Associate Provost for Digital Learning.

[00:32] When my colleagues and I started brainstorming ideas for a new educational technology podcast, we knew we wanted to feature Vanderbilt instructors who use technology in innovative ways. We talk to colleagues regularly who impress us and we wanted to share their ideas and perspective beyond our single campus.

[00:48] We didn't want the podcast to be all Vanderbilt all the time however, so we're bringing in a mix of guests. Some from Vanderbilt and some from elsewhere.

[00:55] In this episode, we feature our first Vanderbilt guest, Corbette Doyle. Corbette is a lecturer in organizational leadership in the Department of Leadership Policy and Organizations here at Vanderbilt.

[01:05] I met Corbette several years ago when she started teaching here after a very successful career on the private sector. She was eager to find ways technology could enhance her teaching back then and she continues to do so today.

[01:16] I find that she's usually a couple of steps ahead of most faculty when it comes to

educational technology. I'm particularly impressed with how intentional she is when it comes to adopting new technologies in her teaching. There's always a pedagogical purpose to her use of technology, and I think you'll hear that in her interview.

[01:32] [music]

Derek: [01:32] Corbette, thanks for speaking with me today.

Corbette Doyle: [01:34] Pleasure.

Derek: [01:35] Can you start by introducing yourself and telling us just a little bit about your background and what led you here to Vanderbilt?

Corbette: [01:41] I'm a faculty of the Leadership Policy and Organizations Department on the Peabody campus. The focus of the courses that I teach are diversity, which is my passion, and strategy and analytics, teaching people how to use data to drive organizational strategies, all kinds of organizations.

Derek: [02:06] What are some of the programs you teach in or the students that you work with?

Corbette: [02:11] The primary program that I teach in is one of our master's track, and it is the Leadership and Organizational Performance track within Peabody. The focus is really on students who are seeking either leadership roles in education, in not-for-profits, or in start-ups, or people who are interested in pursuing a human capital career.

[02:36] I also teach, as I mentioned, I tutor a master's level course in a global diversity. I also teach in an undergraduate class in analytics.

Derek: [02:47] With that in context, what are some ways that you've used technology to enhance the face-to-face learning experience that your students have here at Vanderbilt?

Corbette: [02:57] I use technology in all my courses and part of that is because I love technolog. I'm always exploring new technology. I hate to mention the year I acquired my first personal computer, it was 1981, that was early days for personal computer.

[03:16] I've always loved technology and always push the envelope in terms of trying to understand how you can use technology. Same thing in a corporate career, I developed the first knowledge-based intranet for the organization, trying to capture knowledge in accessible format on a broad basis.

[03:38] From a core standpoint, I'm naturally going to look for technology because I have my experience says technology enhances effort, and I'm always looking for ways to be more effective and efficient on a combined basis.

[03:54] In the strategy and analytics courses, I have found technology particularly useful in two key ways. One, I'm a huge believer in problem-based learning because I believe people learn by doing, they don't learn by sitting and listening to someone talk the whole time.

[04:20] Not that podcasts aren't useful and other methods of oral communication aren't useful, they're just not sufficient. I focus all of my classes on group projects and the students work through in order to solve the problem or create a project.

[04:41] They work through the underlying issues identifying what they need to know, what they need to do. I have found a number of technology tools are critical for making that experiential learning effective. The simplest one, near and dear to your heart, is using polling.

[05:06] One of the problems that you encounter as a faculty member when you are centering the learning around the student is that you don't necessarily know what they're learning because you're no longer giving them the content, they're discovering it on their own, and while you want that self-discovery, you also want to make sure people are on the right track.

[05:28] I make extensive use of polling for formative learning purposes. Trying to identify where the majority is, I'll do a poll on a key concept based on where they are and the problem or project they're working on.

[05:45] Depending upon the results...I do it anonymously, it's non-graded, no fear on the part of any of the students, and I'll see what the answer looks like, and then we'll talk through the different answers.

[06:01] Having this opportunity for the students to see whatever they answered, it's unlikely that they were alone, they had company, we can talk through when a certain answer might be

right, the misperceptions that might have led students to pick one answer.

[06:19] That allows me to steer the classroom, to do spot learning, and just-in-time learning, and make sure that the class is moving together collectively on an appropriate path. That's critical, that use of technology, for that action oriented or experiential learning.

Derek: [06:39] Let me ask you a quick follow-up on that. If you were to take the polling technology out of the classroom, and try to do that same kind of thing, what would what would be challenging about that, without the polling technology?

Corbette: [06:49] The challenge without the polling is that...When I'm doing the group-based learning, I go around the room, and I sit with groups, and I listen. But you don't hear everyone talking, you don't know what everyone is thinking, and you can't, for every concept get to every group in the class.

[07:11] It's impossible to get that insight that is critical to truly making sure that the vast majority of the class is grasping critical concepts and isn't going off in a wrong direction.

[07:25] The other way that I use technology is, I now use a whole series of Screencasts. When you switch to this group-based learning, you have all this content you want to make sure they have access to, yes they have whatever reading materials you've assigned, but everyone has different learning styles.

[07:46] Not everyone can learn content, particularly quantitative content they don't like by reading the book. I have taken lectures that I used to give on some of the critical concepts of accounting, finance, analytics, and use of Excel, and turned them into a series of Screencast.

[08:07] I've created a YouTube channel for the class and they're all on the YouTube channel. I've had TAs create additional ones, some of the Excel workshops I've had some of my the TAs do. There's a whole series of YouTube videos and the students love it because...I set them up with questions, and then I pause, they have to try to think of the answer, and then it goes on.

[08:35] They can watch some over and over again if they're struggling with a particular concept. They don't have to get it, it's not once and done, and students really appreciate that.

Derek: [08:45] How directive are you with those videos? Do you say, "Before Wednesday's

class, you need to watch these three videos," or is it more a general resource bank that students can access as a medium?

Corbette: [08:55] It's a general resource bank, I encourage you to watch it. I do an upfront survey before the course starts to try to test the fear factor for analytics as well as the experience with some of the different concepts. I advise students up front, "Look, if your fear factor was five, you might want to watch these videos all before the first class."

[09:22] What I have since gone to is recommending certain videos at certain points in the class. If you haven't watched these, or you might want to watch them again, these will be very useful at this point in the course.

Derek: [09:34] One reason I ask is, you've heard about the flipped-classroom model, which is more directive. "Watch these videos and then come to class and we'll do these activities together."

[09:44] But I think there's value in having some direction for students, because often they're not quite sure where to go with their questions. They're in the middle of a problem and they need access to some kind of content that's going to help them solve that, but navigating their way to the right kind of content can be tricky.

Corbette: [10:00] At the right time.

Derek: [10:01] Right. Giving them a little guidance, I think, it's often very helpful.

Corbette: [10:04] Yes, I've also moved away from...I know a lot of faculty are very concerned that students might not be reading the assigned material. I've, for the most part, abandoned that. I still struggle, on occasion, but I've really come to the position that my goal is where students are at the end of the course.

[10:29] If they can get there without reading some of the material that I've assigned, so be it. These are adults, they're young adults, but they are adults. I'm not going to test them to say, "Did you read this?" and ask [inaudible] questions. I just don't really care. I'm more focused on learning acquisition.

Derek: [10:50] What does assessment look like in your courses? I'm guessing there's not a lot

of tests.

Corbette: [10:53] I do use one test. In the analytics classes, each of them, I have one test. It's at the three-quarter point in the course. All of my analytics classes, graduate and undergraduate, I bookend. Half the class is problem-based learning, the first quarter and the last quarter.

[11:12] Then, in between, it's more traditional. I have homework in the middle. The way I do homework is…The group projects are group-based, all the students and I use Google forms.

[11:26] I have the students complete a survey, they evaluate one another in the group, and they distribute 100 points among the whole group, and that forms an individual weight, and that's applied to the group grade. It might be more than one, it might be less than one.

[11:40] But that's your grade, everybody knows that going in. That's a wonderful anonymous tool, it's amazing how much information students will give you on people in the group, good and bad.

[11:52] Then for the homework, the way I do the homework is, you do it on your own. You can talk to people before you start it, but you have to do it on your own. You come in, they sit in groups, and they share their answers with one another.

[12:05] They make notes on what they would have done differently, and they make notes on how they would have changed the answer, things they learn from other people that they thought were more useful.

[12:17] Then I present a sample set of answers, because there's usually multiple ways to approach it. Then they self-grade based on their effort before they got to class, their contribution in the group discussion, and then I grade.

[12:30] That's the grade they get on the homework. That's how I assess it. The one test is really case-based. I give them a situation from the news, and I come up with a series of questions that links to the course content. Again, there's rarely a right answer.

[12:50] I'm more focused on how they dissected the issues, how they tried to understand what the pros and cons were, and then how they put their responses to the questions

together. It will be a series of questions that's all laddering that course content as well as the solutions.

Derek: [13:13] But very applied.

Corbette: [13:14] All applied.

Derek: [13:15] All applied. I'm curious, you mentioned the global diversity course that you teach. Have you found ways that technology works particularly well in that course, as opposed to the analytics courses?

Corbette: [13:29] Yes. Again, I use a lot of group projects in that course, so there's a lot of group sharing of what they're all doing. One of the things I forgot to mention, in all of my classes, I use this, it's even more important in the diversity class, and it's a discussion form. I don't like our LMS discussion forms, so I use Google Plus.

[13:50] I like Google Plus because it's so mobile-friendly. Everybody has Gmail, it's very visual, and I think the visual nature is far more appealing, students constantly share articles. I encourage in all of my classes, students to...

[14:11] A heavy part of the participation grade is participating in Google Plus, because it's showing that they're thinking about the content beyond the classroom, and that they're applying it to the real world.

[14:23] In the diversity class, it's a combination of voluntary, and there's...the last 12 months, the volume of information on diversity issues is massive. I was actually teaching the course when Ferguson happened, and we happened to have an African American divinity student from Ferguson in the class, and he was going home every weekend.

[14:48] It's just so dynamic right now because of where the world is, and students are constantly sharing information that they're coming across with one another.

[15:01] There's also assigned content, so the students all do a group lecture. They pick a topic of interest to them, and then they teach the course.

[15:10] They learn about it, then they teach the class. They all have to post assigned readings

on Google Plus for the rest of the class before they teach, and they all have to do a lit review table, and they all have to pick one article from their lit review and share the summary of that on Google Plus.

[15:30] It creates a forum for sharing what each person is learning outside of the classroom and in a dynamic arena, like diversity, and inclusion. It becomes such a robust vehicle for continuing the dialogue, and allowing people to express their thoughts, and again, amplify the learning.

[15:59] I'm willing to take risks because I like technology, and I'm pretty adept at figuring it out. People who don't love technology struggle to figure it out on their own.

[16:11] A lot of students, it continues to amaze me...my own children, I have two daughters, they're both in their early 20s, neither one are tech-savvy, despite what everyone says about millennials. They come to me with all of their tech questions, including for their phones.

[16:31] I find a lot of students are not as tech-savvy as the media would have you believe, so it's important to keep technology simple for students, not just for faculty.

Derek: [16:46] You've touched on a couple of thoughts on this next question already, but when you consider experimenting with, or adopting a new educational technology, what are some principles you keep in mind?

Corbette: [16:57] A key one I haven't mentioned is student reaction to having to go to multiple sites for course content or course activities. This is a frustration for me, because I like robust, easy-to-use technology.

[17:22] No offense to anyone, but Blackboard is robust, but it is not simple to use, and it's not attractive, it's not user-friendly, and it doesn't meet a lot of my needs, in terms of what I'm looking for in a technology platform. But that is the vehicle where all copyright-protected information needs to be provided.

[17:49] I am trying to minimize my use of textbooks for a host of reasons. One is costs for the students. I just object to the idea of asking students to pay a fortune for the textbook, so I won't use extremely expensive textbooks. There's other sources, you might have to look harder to find them.

[18:12] I'm able to find a lot of publicly available sources for content that I want to use, but a lot of content that I want to use, particularly for my diversity course is copyright-protected material, so it has to be on Blackboard, so I have to use Blackboard for that. I have to use Blackboard for anything with grades and submission of content.

[18:38] That's my struggle. Whenever I'm looking at technology, I'm always looking at how minimizing the number of sources. It's why I've resorted to Google, because I can get so much on the Google platform and it's only one other place I have to send students, and they can get everything else.

[18:59] They can get the Google docs, they can get the Google forms with the surveys that I ask them to complete on one another or for the class. They can use it for hangout, for conversations, and I can use it for discussion form.

[19:13] That's the key thing that I look at when I evaluate an alternative technology use, "Am I going to get push back from the students by sending them to one more place?"

Derek: [19:27] I get that because I find that in my courses too, that I want to use social bookmarking tool over here, maybe Twitter over here. I use WordPress for lot of my activities. I try to run as much as I can through my own blog, but yeah, they still need to go to Blackboard for some things too.

[19:44] There is this kind of calculus you do where you think, "OK, here's a tool that would add a lot, but does it add enough to the experience to outweigh the negatives of having yet one more place students have to track of."

Corbette: [19:58] Right. Then, what I do to try and compensate for that is make sure I have links for everything everywhere. If they want to go to Blackboard, I have links for everything we're doing on Google on Blackboard.

Derek: [20:10] I know students. I've heard many students say too, they like the kind of one-stop shop. They really like to know where all things go. Occasionally, I even imagine what if a student of mine has four other instructors who were taking the approach I'm doing. Now, the problem is magnified by five courses, right?

Corbette: [20:29] Correct, right, and I haven't even thought about that but that's a great

point.

Derek: [20:33] Let's look ahead for a minute. If you can imagine the next three or four years, I tend not to think too much further beyond that, it's hard to make predictions.

[20:43] I am not actually asking you to predict, but as you think about where you would like to see educational technology go, either in terms of its [inaudible] and what it can do, or ways that you'd like to use in your own teaching, or just changes to the landscape you'd like to see, looking ahead, what would you like to see happen in the world of educational technology over the next few years?

Corbette: [21:05] The solution to the problem I just identified, a very robust, secure digital platform that allowed me to integrate all the kind of tools I want to use, which probably means it has to be a flexible platform, because those needs and the tools are going to change, that is highly mobile-friendly. That would …

Derek: [21:35] Why is that so important?

Corbette: [21:36] Because so many students are using their phones the majority of the time, that's going to increase. Because I put such a heavy emphasis on digital dialog outside of the class, when you see something that relates to the course learning, I want you to say, "Oh, wow! Let me share that."

[22:05] I want you to be able to do it where you are and most students are getting their news from their phones, and so I want an easy way for them to quickly share that, right at the moment, otherwise it won't happen. It doesn't happen to me. I mean I'm constantly seeing things, "Oh! I want to share that with my class." If I don't have an easy way to do that, I tend not to share it.

Derek: [22:28] Yeah. I'll do this thing where I email myself a link…

Corbette: [22:31] That's what I do.

Derek: [22:33] so that when I'm back in the office, I can post it somewhere, but that's awkward, right?

Corbette: [22:36] That's exactly what I do and I get very frustrated because sometimes I have a long list of to-do links because now I have to go do one more thing. I want to be able to share it right then and there as well.

Derek: [22:47] We have a question we ask all our guests and it's a little weird, but I'm curious to know how you'll answer it. What's your favorite analog educational technology?

Corbette: [22:58] You know, I think I'm going to borrow from one of my favorite technology gurus namely, you, and say that it is a flexible classroom situation, because I rely upon group works so heavily in all of my courses. I have to have a classroom setting that facilitates the formation of groups and the easy formation of groups.

[23:24] That means tables and movable chairs, and fortunately, I teach on the Peabody campus and all of our classrooms, at least all the ones I teach in, we do have one auditorium, but I don't teach in the auditorium. All of our classrooms have movable tables and chairs.

[23:44] We can constantly shift the physical structure of the classroom to meet those needs and I generally only have students sitting in groups and it just makes it easier.

Derek: [23:55] You're preaching at the choir here, but for the sake of our listeners, what makes a fixed-sitting lecture hall challenging for you to teach in?

Corbette: [24:07] The problem is that if it's a true lecture hall, the floor is slanted, so it makes it very difficult. Your chairs might swivel around, so what you're forced to do, I occasionally have given presentations at [inaudible] . Our business school, most of the classrooms are structured with fixed tables and fixed chairs that swivel.

[24:33] But it's a more awkward arrangement because the floors are slanted and it isn't as congenial as being able to literally pull your chairs up to a table and all be on the same level. It's doable if you're in a room with fixed chairs that swivel. If you're in a room with fixed chairs that don't swivel, on a 360-basis, you can't do it. I don't know what you would do.

Derek: [25:01] I find that you can often have students turn to their neighbor, right? You can have pair work.

Corbette: [25:07] Pair work. I don't do much pair work.

Derek: [25:09] But beyond pair work, if you have groups of size three, four, five, or six, I find that you need some furniture that supports that.

Corbette: [25:15] I do groups of three to six.

Derek: [25:18] All right. Well, thank you Corbette. This has been a lot of fun.

Corbette: [25:21] It was a treat. Thank you.

Derek: [25:23] Thanks for being in the podcast.

Corbette: [25:26] Thank you. All right.

Derek: [25:27] That was Corbette Doyle, lecturer in organizational leadership here at Vanderbilt University. You can find Corbette's contact and phone on the show notes.

[25:32] You've been listening to Leading Lines, a podcast on educational technology from Vanderbilt University. For more on the podcast, visit our website leadinglinespod.com (https://leadinglinespod.com/) or follow us on Twitter @LeadingLinesPod. We would love to hear what you thought about this episode, so feel free to reach out to us.

[25:48] Look for new episodes the first and third Monday of each month. We hope you'll subscribe. I'm your host, Derek Bruff. Thanks for listening.

[25:55] [music]