

Lessons Learned From Jane Doe College Professor

By Angela Humphrey Brown, Barbara Benson, and Anna P. Uhde
Piedmont College

The three of us – Jane Doe’s one, two, and three – are typical professors with varying degrees of proficiency and comfort regarding technology. Our recent experiences validate current research regarding barriers encountered by professionals when trying to infuse technology. We have all struggled with multi-faceted problems during our adventures with technology integration. Our experiences are representative of Jane Doe college professors across the country. One of the most important problems that Jane Doe college professors face is the minimal support for faculty in the pursuit of technological infusion. In connection with this problem, three issues that we three Jane Doe’s have also confronted are time, self-esteem, and collaborative mentoring.

Bates (2000) notes that training in itself is not the ultimate solution in preparing Jane Doe college professors to be more savvy in their uses of instructional technology. One of the most important lessons that we three Jane Doe’s learned regarding time was that in addition to allowing time for initial training, one must allot time to use programs and equipment continually so that information is not forgotten. We have each had the experience of learning an important skill during trainings, and yet without ongoing practice, the skill was forgotten. Another issue with time relates to the rapid advancement of technology encountered by the Jane Doe college professor. How can Jane Doe catch up when she is already behind and what she learned last semester is obsolete the following year? There is a relearning curve imbedded in becoming technologically savvy. All three Jane Doe’s first began learning about technology more than 15 years ago and continually sought training in technology. However, the technology practices we Jane Doe’s received in the trainings were no longer cutting-edge practices or were even obsolete by the time we were proficient in using them.

Bates reported that many college professors remain on the fringes of technology because they fear that the integration of technology into their instruction will increase their work load (2000). The situations of us three Jane Doe’s support Bates’ findings. As college professors all three of us have encountered technological issues that led to increased work or lost teaching time. This increased work load had negative effects on the amount of technological infusion in our professional lives.

The typical Jane Doe college professor is not a risk-taker due to the anticipated sense of failure. Technology requires risk-taking. Findings indicate that one predictor of using technology effectively is the computer self-efficacy of the college professor (Hirschbuhl & Faseyitan, 1994). We three Jane Doe’s continually make efforts to increase our knowledge base of technology and yet we do not reach our goals for using technology in the teaching/learning process. We read about technology practices, we attend instructional technology workshops, but we three Jane Doe college professors know that our level of proficiency is limited. Consequently, insecurities emerge and the self-perceptions of technological competence decrease. Our experiences tell us that the Jane Doe college professor does not have enough practice to make technology work the way she wants it to work. One’s lack of experience confounds one’s sense of insecurity and lack of a strong self-concept. Once having successfully integrated technology into one aspect of instruction, a professor’s confidence and enthusiasm will likely increase (Hirschbuhl & Faseyitan, 1994).

According to Spotts and Bowman (1995), “most articles about technology in higher education appear to be based on anecdotal evidence about outstanding professors who are using the latest innovations in dramatic and highly effective ways” (p. 58). Current literature continues to emphasize cutting edge technology practices by a few as if it were the norm of Jane Doe college professors across college campuses. The Jane Doe college professor never seems to receive enough training and practice to reach the bar described in current literature. It is a vicious cycle that perpetuates frustration of never reaching the “cutting edge” of instructional technology integration in the teaching/learning process.

One important lesson that we three Jane Doe college professors have learned related to collaboration is the need for scaffolding when providing technological information and the opportunities for performance. As in other skill areas that require instruction and practice, there is an apprenticeship inherent in the acquisition of technology expertise between the technologically savvy and the Jane Doe user. We three Jane Doe’s get frustrated when those who are technologically savvy do not seem to have the time or patience to aid us in our quest for effective technology infusion. This makes it difficult for Jane Doe’s to ask for assistance when we feel that the expert is too busy, condescending, and/or impatient. Many times, in working with the technological gurus, the Jane Doe college professor may feel intimidated and technologically illiterate. The Jane Doe may feel technologically abused and thus her self-esteem is negatively impacted.

Positive attitudes towards the infusion of technology and the development of technological skills are enhanced through a risk-free environment (Richards, 1999). In a safe collaborative environment, the person who

provides the scaffolding is committed to helping Jane Doe college professor at her current level of technology development through an encouraging and supportive atmosphere. We three Jane Doe's have established a risk-free environment through an open atmosphere working with other Jane Doe's where ideas have been shared and mistakes have been permitted in the acquisition of technology skills. To handle our fear of being technologically abused, we three Jane Doe's have learned to move smoothly in and out of the mentor/apprentice roles as needed to complete the task at hand. For example, through her collaboration with the other two Jane Doe's, Jane Doe Three learned several new strategies for editing efficiently on the computer during the creation of this exposé.

The revelations from our technology experiences lead to questions that need to be explored by Jane Doe college professors as well as the technologically savvy professors in every post-secondary institution. The Jane Doe's highlighted in this exposé request that the questions below permeate the reflections of all of those in higher education who are committed to effective technology integration in the teaching/learning process. How can the one-hour "technology workshop" method be incorporated to have a greater impact on the technological development of Jane Doe college professor? What role should college administration take in supporting Jane Doe college professors to develop their technology integration? How can those in higher education who are technologically savvy help effectively scaffold the technological development of the Jane Doe college professors? How can we create an on-campus environment which encourages and facilitates professors using technology effectively in the teaching/learning process?

REFERENCES

- Bates, T. (2000). Managing technological change: Strategies for college and university leaders. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Hirschbuhl, J.J., & Faseyitan, S.O. (1994). Faculty uses of computers: Fears, facts and perceptions. T.H.E. Journal, 21, 64-65.
- Richards, R.T. (1999). Lessons learned from teaching with technology: A critical perspective. Tech Trends, 43(4), 31-33.
- Spotts, T.H., & Bowman, M.A. (1995). Faculty use of instructional technologies in higher education. Educational Technology, 35, 56-64.