

Chapter 19

Connected: Collaborative Solutions to Technological Challenges

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the launch of their mobile learning initiative in the fall of 2008, administrators and faculty at Abilene Christian University (ACU) began working together to conceptualize how the campus should move forward to strengthen and diversify what students would learn from and about technology, and the skills they would take with them into their chosen careers. One result of these cross-campus conversations was the Learning Studio, an interdisciplinary, technologically focused, collaborative space, located within ACU's Margaret and Herman Brown Library. This chapter explores how ACU constructed this facility to respond to the technologically sophisticated needs of 21st-century higher education and how the creation of this type of collaborative space both offers solutions to current issues and opens the door to solving future problems educators must take on if they hope to truly prepare their students for 21st-century careers.

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2008, Abilene Christian University began distributing iPhone or iPod Touch mobile devices to all incoming freshman, launching a campus-wide initiative to integrate technology into higher education (ACU Connected, 2012). With an overarching framework of collaboration, innovation, and scholarship, the first three years of this mobile learning initiative have encouraged students and faculty to redefine how technology can enhance and facilitate learning. But ACU's quest to remain at the forefront of technologically driven pedagogy did not end when students began the semester, iPhones and iPods in hand. Instead, administrators and faculty began working together to conceptualize how the campus should move forward to strengthen and diversify what students would learn from and about technology, and what skills they could take with them into their chosen careers. One result of these cross-campus conversations was the Learning Studio, an interdisciplinary, technologically focused, collaborative space, located within ACU's Margaret and Herman Brown Library (Learning Studio, 2012). As Dr. Kyle Dickson, Learning Studio Director, writes, "a pioneering gift of \$1.8 million from AT&T" enabled ACU to construct "a laboratory for continued experiments in media, mobility and the future of the academic library" (Dickson, 2011, p. 16).

The Pew Internet and American Life Project reports that, in the United States, only 17% of adults use their computers or mobile devices to connect remotely with others (e.g., conversations via webcam to meet with others working or living in a different location), and only 14% work on/create their own websites or blogs (Pew, 2011). Similarly, in July of 2010, MSNBC's Alex Johnson wrote that:

However deeply computers may have embedded themselves into modern life, there are still millions of people for whom they remain a challenge. For these Americans, finding a new job during a time of high unemployment can be especially difficult. (Johnson, 2010)

As this data illustrates, merely owning a piece of technology is not enough to succeed in today's increasingly technology-saturated workplaces. The Learning Studio offers one solution to this problem by combining cutting-edge hardware with the knowledge of trained media specialists, the vision of professors from disciplines across campus, and spaces that facilitate and invite collaboration.

To strengthen the media literacy of ACU students, the Learning Studio has employed two principal diffusion strategies: placing technological capabilities into the hands of professors and providing the resources necessary for students to tackle media projects. To accomplish the first of these, Learning Studio staff members conduct numerous faculty presentations, trainings, and workshops to

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