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Industry Connections: Linking Design Professionals to Fashion Students Using Real Time Technology

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Purpose of learning practice

The purpose of this presentation is to share the results of using videoconferencing to inform fashion students in a sophomore level research methods class on the integral role of research in product design and development. A talented young designer employed by a multi-national athletic footwear conglomerate (headquartered on the west coast of the United States) was invited to speak to students at an east coast university using Internet videoconferencing.

Basis for the study

Research shows that guest speaker visits are beneficial for improving student learning and making connections between school and the work world and can supply information not typically found in a text book (Sniezek, 2005; WGBH Educational Foundation, 2006). Guest speakers can now readily enter the classroom via Internet videoconferencing. Results from an introductory study (Bruce Ashley, 2010) using Internet videoconferencing to connect fashion students with apparel industry professionals, indicated that students, industry professionals, and instructors overwhelmingly benefited from this type of interaction and there was a need to have this type of interaction regularly in the classroom. Student access to technology has transformed dramatically since 2000 and a comparison with Bruce Ashley's 2010 study findings was made to determine the overall effectiveness of this instructional method today, in 2013.

Procedure

Students were given the name of the designer (who was invited to connect with the students via the Internet) and his employer and were asked to do online research as a homework assignment. Class discussion followed regarding the many accomplishments of the young designer who sparked the student's interest. Facts discovered about the designer are, he is a graduate of one of England's most prestigious design schools, he completed an internship with Alexander McQueen and, he is currently playing a pivotal role in the design and development of limited edition running tights for the company where he is employed. On the day of the videoconference, students arrived early and eager to participate in the conference.

The instructor of the research methods course worked with the University's Educational Technology office to prepare for the Internet videoconference. The technology used in the

original study was Skype and a web camera. For this study, Blackboard Illuminate (a learning management system) and a web camera was chosen, which offered more control and created a recording of the videoconference that remained with the course on Blackboard. Students who missed the session were able to watch it offline. One practice session was held in advance with the guest speaker who was given general instructions to discuss the role of research in his position as a designer. After the session, the students completed a one page essay discussing three things they learned as a result of the videoconference. They were also asked to comment on the effectiveness of the technology. Students also completed the student assessment tool used in the Bruce Ashley study (2010) in order to make a comparison of the findings.

Learning Outcomes

The response from twenty three students in the research methods class confirms the findings by Bruce Ashley (2010) with students reporting very similar, overall positive responses to the videoconference experience and guest speaker. The current study validates videoconferencing as an instructional method to connect students with industry professionals by providing a “real world” snapshot of how a designer works and conducts research. Students learned how observation of changing trends in art, design and science, and a deep understanding of the target customer informs the business of product design and development and the marketing of fashion. The Bruce Ashley study (2010) guided the instructor to try the new teaching method and the results show how it can assist students with an in depth understanding a specific “problem.”

Follow up plans

Since the student response was so favorable, more videoconferences in future classes are being planned. The results of the current study have been shared with the All University Technology Committee with the goal of making videoconferencing with industry professionals a more common practice across all disciplines.

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