Back to Real Teaching
By Grant Haley

Why can’t we go back to the real way of teaching students through oral discussions supplemented with the chalkboard for notes? Just because we have all the technology for an increase in virtual learning, does it mean we should use it? I have had several business classes where the professor simply reads off of the slides, adding a few comments here and there. It is difficult to stay focused when you know you can just print off the slides and read them later for the test. I have found that I retain the information much less than if the teacher were presenting it to us by using key terms/topics on the board and then expanding upon them and describing them in detail through a verbal communication with the student. These “aids” have done nothing but hinder learning. So much more can be taken and retained from a class that teaches the material “the old fashioned way.”

The Hawk article I wrote that brought me to the Academic Rigor presentation:

Be wary of omnipresent tech: PowerPoint removes note-taking from education
By Grant Haley ’07
Printed: January 28, 2005

On many occasions I have contemplated the role that PowerPoint plays in our learning here at Saint Joseph’s University. Now that I have completed three semesters at SJU, I am beginning to think that the way this school uses this tool is hindering us in our overall learning of the course material and is stealing from us true understanding of concepts necessary for life’s applications. I am by no means against technological advances that enhance the quality of what is being taught. What I do have a problem with is when teachers use these tools as a means of presenting the solution without the benefit of engaging in intellectual discussion. We are being cheated out of a higher education because teachers are no longer the ones teaching. Computers have now become the instructors because they can simply spit out the information rather than have a human facilitate conversation.

Now don’t get me wrong; there are certainly more than a handful of teachers who can use technology to adequately supplement a lecture; to those teachers I give my highest regards. However, it is such that in increasing numbers, teachers are no longer using the blackboards and are instead opting to use PowerPoint presentations to instruct the class. Does this mean that all PowerPoint presentations are bad? Certainly that is not the case.

There are three types of presentations: those that use the blackboard along with their lecture, those that use PowerPoint which the professors have created that work in conjunction with their lectures, and those that come as teaching aids with the textbooks we buy. Can’t we go back to the days when teachers were actually putting chalk to the blackboard? When we take notes from the board or from visual aids combined with lecture, we retain so much more important information because we are not only hearing the words, but we are writing them down too. Perfect examples of this teaching style
come from Dr. Robson in the Management department and Professor Kopans in the history department. Any of you who have had the pleasure of having either of them as your instructor know that their presentations are effective because of how they integrate the more specific details while using the computer as a visual aid.

What good do printed PowerPoint teaching aids do for us? They take out the element of writing, which is one of the greatest tools in long term memorization. Not to mention their information is generally very broad, only covering some major points of the chapter. These professors are using what the publishing company meant to be an aid as the entire means of teaching a class. I am not going to point fingers at anyone, but it is really sad that so many professors are lackadaisical in their efforts toward developing an effective lesson plan that will better our understanding of the subject material.

Faculty, if you are reading this, reconsider what and how you are teaching students and if the material is being covered the best way possible. Students, if you too feel you are being cheated out of a higher education, talk with your professor outside of class and see if there is some other way which can supplement your learning. Make sure you are getting the most out of your tuition; student feedback can be one of the greatest resources for the betterment of current and future courses and for the university as a whole.

**The 3 Effective Styles of Teaching:**
After completion of three semesters here and taking from previous experiences, I have identified three effective styles that teachers can use to effectively present the course material to the students. There are numerous methodologies teachers can employ to provide their students with the necessary tools and these can change among the different disciplines available. It is the discretion of the instructor to determine which one is most appropriate to use. Not that changing the presentation of the material is easy, but often it comes down to trial and error in selecting the most efficient means of presenting course material.

**Blackboard only:**
I had an economics professor my second semester of Freshman year who wrote all of his notes on the board as he was teaching the subject material. This proved to be very effective in getting the majority of the class involved in note taking so they would have the information necessary for taking the tests. Since it kept more students’ attention, more students were actually learning the material as it was being taught, as opposed to letting it get over their heads and trying to learn and understand it all before the test. I did very well in this class, learning and retaining a lot of information that I still use today. However, if this method is not conducive to a certain teacher’s style or a large amount of material at hand, an approach similar to that of my current history and theology classes should be taken.
Verbal with Power Point Supplement:
I have a history class that effectively uses Power Point as a tool to combine with lecture. When we cover a new event, that information will be put up in the title and then a few bullet points will be utilized for pertinent material. This allows the student to organize his/her notes and expand upon these bulleted points as they are supplemented by the professor’s lecture. Emphasis needs to be put on the importance of what is being said because I see too often that students have the tendency to lose interest quickly and stop taking notes.

Verbal only:
I also have a theology class this semester that teaches students as if everything said is important and will be later seen on a test or in work we do. This style is very effective for me because I know that if I am not paying attention in class, I am only hurting myself. Therefore, I know I need to attend every class to assure that I get everything down that is said. As far as student engagement is involved, the same holds true for this style as for the verbal presentation with PowerPoint supplement; students need to be encouraged to continue paying attention because it will only benefit them in the long run by enabling them to retain useful information they will somehow use later in life.

Assessment:
Periodic assessment is necessary to ensure that students understand the information as it is being taught. The previously mentioned teaching styles of “Verbal with Power Point Supplement” and “Verbal Only” have a detrimental potential for those students who are not motivated to partake in this style of note taking. Therefore, quizzes should be given to keep the student current on the material, but should not take over the course and instill a fear and hatred for the material.

Conclusions Drawn:
We need to get back to a more traditional way of learning. With technologies literally changing the ways we think, we need to reexamine what their place in our lives really should be. What was once something that aided learning by making some things easier, we now have become dependent on it and have allowed it to change how we think. Teachers are the guardians of knowledge and need to determine the best way in presenting the material to their students so it stays with them for a long time. Though there is no definite solution, I have laid out some ways teachers can present material to their students so that it is important to them and they see the value in retaining it throughout their lives.