

The original intended goal for my “Self-Directed Professional Development” plan was to enhance the classroom experience by bringing more elements of the Internet into the classroom. At Cass there is no universal online system that they use to post grades, assignments, or course materials. They offer several options, however none of them have been fully endorsed by the school and therefore none is considered fully secure or understood by the student body and their parents/guardians. One such example is “Teacher Web.” My mentor teacher had worked with it before, but after viewing the system it seemed extremely limited to a place where students can go to print off an assignment they had lost. I was hoping to seek something more effective and worthwhile to use in the classroom. The intended goal would be that students could use the site to blog, check assignments, keep better contact with me, and view valuable online resources from home that could add and enrich the course material outside of the class. Overall, I felt like I lagged behind my fellow interns at other schools in terms of using the Internet and this project was an opportunity to discovering more about it and use it in my class.

The first step I took into including the Internet more into my class was research sites like “Blackboard” and free online wikis. However, what I discovered was that these websites were extremely labor intensive to plan and that if I tried to implement it during the middle of the year it might disrupt my student’s progress by changing the format of the class drastically. I did however realize that these sites are extremely valuable and if included at the beginning of the year can be helpful to both students and teachers. In terms of my “Self-Directed Professional Development” I feel I failed in my attempt to use an online site for the class. Though I did valuable research and moving forward have an understanding of how to work with it, I did not implement it this year. Therefore, my students will not be able to benefit from this development this year.

Secondly, I wanted to improve the use of Internet research in the class. This portion of the class led to much more success than the first portion. The fourth class I picked up for my lead teaching portion of the semester was Sociology and it offered a few opportunities to use the Internet in the class. The first project that included Internet research was a monthly budget project that asked the students to create a budget for a given month based on a certain income. Their income was based on the national averages, for example, if 20% of the U.S. population made under \$20,000 then 20% of the class also made that much or less. I compiled a list of valuable sites for the students to view and they were expected to find evidence for an apartment or home, car payment or public transportation, various insurances, and utilities. The general idea was for students to get an idea of how difficult it can be for people with limited incomes to balance their finances and also use very realistic and every day sites to accomplish this. The next project I introduced was more media oriented. The students viewed the documentary *Hoop Dreams* then had to find examples of social stratification, racism, and gender or age issues. They were asked to use examples from pop culture including television, music, sports, and any other media outlet. This involved viewing youtube clips, researching the *SI Vault* online, and finding other examples. After this research was complete they were expected to compile an analysis about how these things are prevalent in our American culture today.

My first attempt at including the Internet into my class was not as successful as I would have liked. The thing I learned was that to implement technology like this it must be planned well in advance and must take form right at the beginning of the year. Starting next year in my own

classroom I will have made those adjustments to assure that there is some online forum up and running well in advance of the first student walking in the classroom. The second attempt I made was much more successful. As my students learned more about Internet research, so did I. With this information I was able to be more resourceful and help them from the first project to the second finding relative materials to include in their projects. I still feel like I can do more in this area. I need to work my way through online databases that may lead to me discovering collections of online texts that might be valuable to the class as well.

Self-directed professional development can be a difficult thing. When we are on our own we tend to not be as diligent as if someone was leading a conference or a member of the administration is standing over your shoulder. The most important thing I learned from this project was to create a plan in advance and try to execute it as closely as possible. This way you stay on task and are able to gain the most from the experience.