

Topic: The Use of the Computer in Teaching
Convener: Mary Ann Hinsdale, College of the Holy Cross
Presenters: Mary Ann Hinsdale, College of the Holy Cross
Mark Johnson, Marquette University
Stephen Schloesser, Boston College

This session was devoted to a practical, "show and tell" approach to the use of the computer in teaching theology and the possibilities for research and theological reflection that are afforded by electronic means of communication.

The twenty persons who participated in this session were asked to introduce themselves and describe their level of computer literacy (email, personal web page, web-based teaching materials, Powerpoint class presentations, etc.). Most of the participants were fairly adept computer users. Since the meeting room was equipped with two computers connected to a DSL line, an LCD projector, and stereo sound system, the presenters were able to take the audience into their "virtual classrooms."

Mary Ann Hinsdale presented a "Tour for Absolute Beginners" that introduced participants to such topics as: finding things on the internet, a short history of the internet, and internet sites that explained the "jargon" used in the digital world. She handed out a three-page list of useful URLs and demonstrated how to post links on a web page, using the CTSA web page as an example.

Stephen Schloesser demonstrated the use of a Powerpoint slide show for a typical day's lecture in his course and then showed how the same slide show can be saved to a web site for students to view on their own. Using his survey of modern European history course web pages, Schloesser illustrated how one can incorporate visuals and music in classroom teaching by means of an interactive web page. For example, Schloesser's three-week unit on "subjective individualism," which treats the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Reformation, and the development of skepticism, includes music by Martin Luther ("Ein' Feste Burg Ist Unser Gott"), William Byrd ("Ave Verum Corpus"), and Joseph-Marie Amiot ("Mass of the Jesuits in Beijing"); paintings by Cranach, Vermeer, and Rembrandt, as well as primary historical texts from the period. Schloesser also illustrated how he evaluates web-based assignments in some sample test questions from his course. See <http://www.bc.edu/~schloess/> for further examples.

Mark Johnson's presentation focused on what one's personal web site can do, what a department's web site can do, and what software is needed to make it happen. Johnson used the theology department web site at Marquette University (which he maintains) to illustrate some of the tensions that many theology departments are beginning to experience as a result of university demands for standardization and "marketing" strategies. He also drew attention to how the internet raises questions concerning the criteria for tenure and promotion. For example, how are departments to evaluate the time a professor spends on

developing web-based course materials? Should time spent as "webmeister" or internet guru for one's department only count for "service"?

Those present agreed that the CTSA ought to spend more time considering the practical, as well as the ethical, dimensions of teaching and doing theology in a digital world. Strong encouragement was given to planning future sessions that did not compete with other convention presentations, perhaps even making these issues the subject of an entire convention. A session on how departments and programs are dealing with "distance learning" was also suggested.

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