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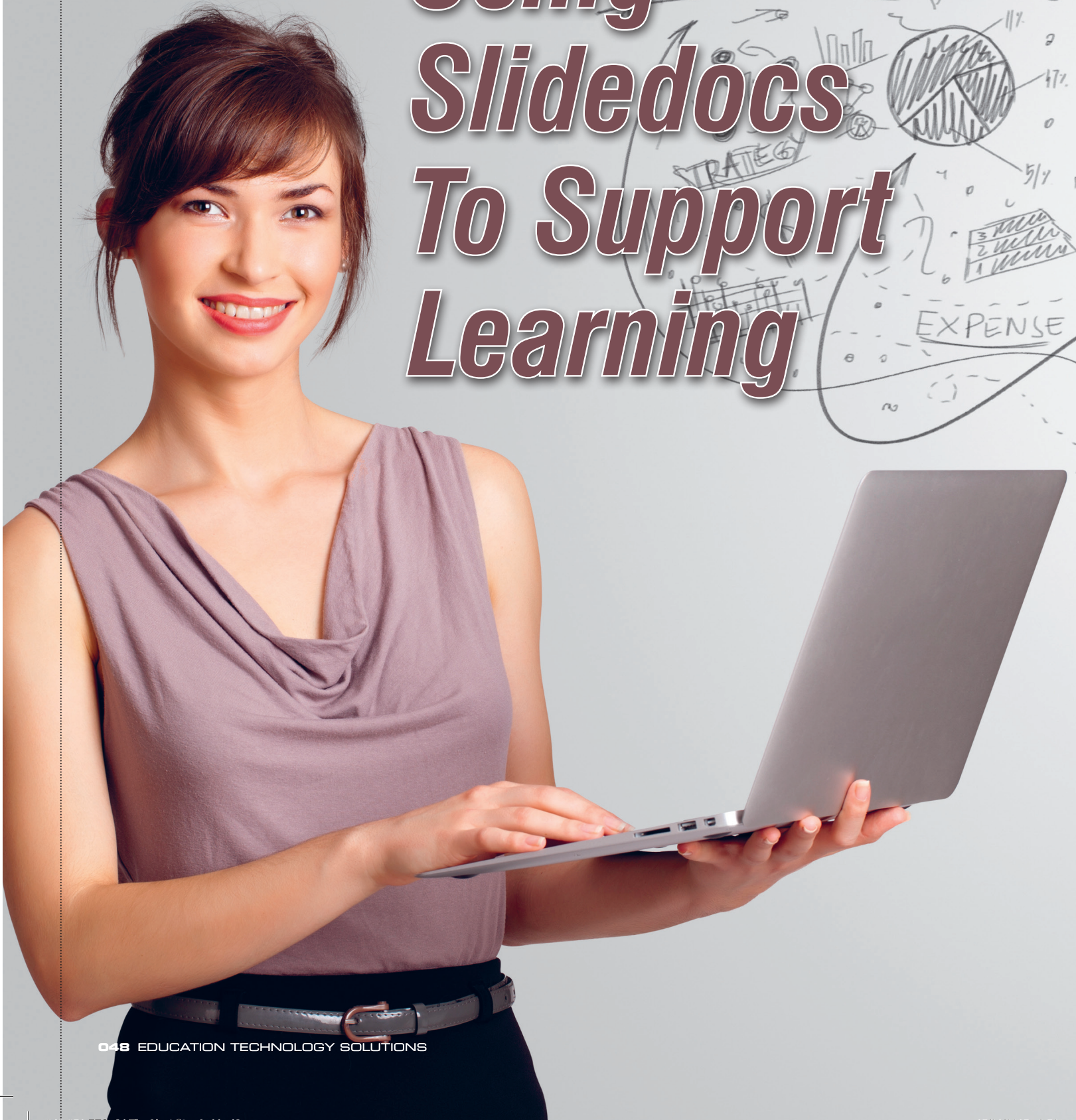*Bond University*, Jacqueline_Christensen@bond.edu.au

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Using Slidedocs To Support Learning

| By Christian King, Shelley Kinash & Jacqueline Christensen |

Every day, droves of students at universities and secondary schools settle into their seats as they always have. What they do next has changed dramatically in the last decade. Instead of pencil and paper, students reach for laptops, tablets or smartphones, and then commence multi-tasking.

With the distraction of mobile devices and social media – compounded by attention spans that average 12 minutes – it is no wonder that many educators are struggling to gain and maintain student attention. Educators today face a monumental challenge to adapt their teaching styles to accommodate the current generation of learners.

Commonly referred to as *digital natives*, the *net generation* or *millennials*, today's students have vastly different learning expectations shaped, in large part, by the rise of the internet. Demand for digital literacy, interactivity, and immediacy, has created a new learning paradigm. The traditional "*sage on the stage*" pedagogy – in which the professor dispenses knowledge through lectures punctuated with PowerPoint slides – is no longer acceptable.

To be successful, educators must take a student-focussed approach, creating an environment in which learners can actively engage with the subject matter. Teachers must adopt new roles, as facilitators, experts and mentors.

This revolutionary teaching approach is commonly referred to as "*flipping the classroom*". In lieu of in-class lectures, students are expected to study new material outside of class, via reading or videos. Class time is reserved for discussion, problem solving, application and debate.

The flipped classroom model is making great strides in capturing students' attention, but it poses its own challenges. There is still a struggle to get students to prepare ahead of class, particularly to complete readings. Two studies (Hoeft , 2012) show that the most common reasons students fail to complete set readings are because they are assigned too much reading, and that social and work commitments leave little time for reading. In addition, American studies have claimed that up to 75 per cent of USA students fail to even purchase the subject textbook (Nawotka, 2012).

This past semester, faculty at Bond University took on the challenge of piloting a 'flipped classroom' approach for an infamous accounting subject: Auditing. The course covers highly regulated standards-based processes requiring large volumes of textual information, making it particularly challenging.

Instead of rote learning, the instructor used a case-based teaching method, focussing on applying key concepts to problems in real time. Second, to address students' aversion to reading and increase engagement with textual information, the instructor used a new tool: Slidedocs.

What are Slidedocs?

A Slidedoc is a document created using slide presentation software (such as Microsoft PowerPoint), but designed to be read rather than presented. Slidedocs were created as a means to communicate textual content that is too dense for a presentation. The concept was developed by Nancy Duarte, a communication expert who specialises in presentations. Notably, Duarte designed Al Gore's global warming presentation, featured in *An Inconvenient Truth*.

A Slidedoc is similar in layout to an eBook, but it is not intended to replace a textbook or lecture presentation. Slidedocs are intended to accompany presentations, enhancing and highlighting detailed information in an accessible format. Each page in a Slidedoc focusses on a single core point with enough textual details for the idea to be easily and concisely understood (typically between 100-250 words) and uses headlines, subheadings, paragraphs, bullet points, key quotes, and images.

In this trial, it was found that presentation software has the advantage of being ubiquitous, easy to edit, highly visual, interactive, and tablet-ready. Also, it contains a large library of assets, charts, templates, colour schemes, and layout options. This allowed the instructor to easily create a document that could be readily understood by students.

Content was chunked into digestible pieces that offered visual and interactive stimulation, such as photos, icons, html links, videos and buttons. This approach aimed to improve learning and express meaning in ways that are otherwise difficult or impossible to convey. The resulting document was shared as a PowerPoint file on the students' LMS course site.

Slidedocs in Auditing

Slidedocs offered written information in a format more appealing to today's learners. Content, activities and formative assessment were presented in a searchable, visually effective and easily digestible fashion. This allowed the content of the accounting textbook to be contextualised within the instructional delivery mode, and delivered with rich visual imagery and detail at a glance.

By providing Slidedocs as a key resource for the students, all the elements of the course seamlessly linked together. The students appeared to be better prepared for the work planned within the course. This bridged the content (reading) with the application (class activities) using one central source, enabling the simultaneous

combination of a lecture and tutorial. By making the readings more interesting and incorporating both formative and summative assessment, students were more actively engaged with the journey rather than focussed on the destination: course exams. For example, the Slidedocs featured a character called Gavin, an auditor who introduced key concepts throughout the material and illustrated how these related to real world application. The formative case studies also appeared to be of higher relevance and importance to students as they formed a foundational understanding required for the summative assessment problems.

Student Feedback

Feedback from students indicated that they were strongly in favour of the use of Slidedocs. A survey of Postgraduate and Undergraduate accounting students at Bond University revealed the wide range of ways that students use Slidedocs; before and after class reading, as a revision tool, as a reference tool, during in-class activities and group work. The survey was distributed to 21 undergraduate students and 21 completed them for a response rate of 100 per cent. The survey was distributed to 13 postgraduate students and 13 completed them for a response rate of 100 per cent. Postgraduate and Undergraduate students reported the most popular uses of Slidedocs were for Class preparation (85 per cent, 76 per cent respectively), revision (77 per cent, 81 per cent) and in class activities (85 per cent, 76 per cent). The main strengths of Slidedocs identified were fast searching and navigation (38 per cent of respondents), summarisation of key points (38 per cent of respondents), and ease of reading (32 per cent of respondents). More than 25 per cent of undergraduate students and 45 per cent of postgraduate students reported accessing Slidedocs on a tablet or mobile device. These results are summarised in the charts pictured.

How Post Graduate Auditing Students use Slidedocs
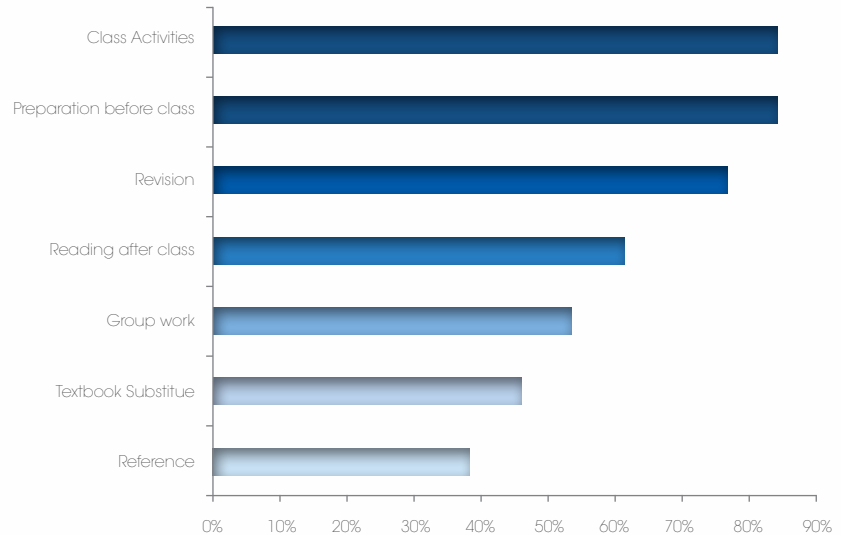
How Undergraduate Auditing Students use Slidedocs
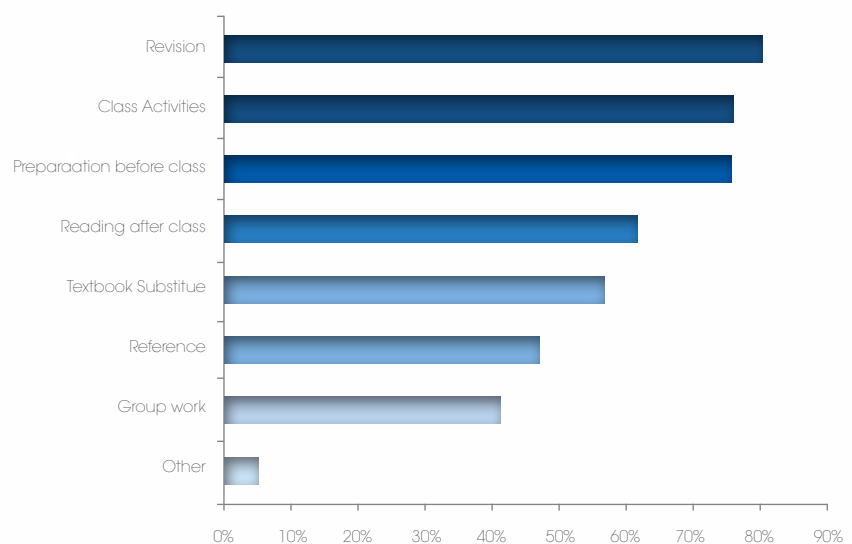
Students consistently reported a reduction in cognitive load, a reduced amount of subject reading, and the ability to quickly find relevant information using a Slidedoc. International students in particular appreciated the use of Slidedocs – they reported being able to review at their own pace and were more likely to read and come prepared for class. Students with high grades also reported high esteem for Slidedocs due to flexibility and enhancement of class topics, as well as accessible information summaries.

Criticisms

A few issues were identified regarding the use of Slidedocs, for both students and teachers. Students who did not come to class or engage with the subject materials appeared to struggle, potentially due to increased expectation and responsibility placed on the learner. Attempting to address student accountability, the instructor sent email notifications each week setting explicit expectations, however more could be done in future. Some issues were raised about printing and writing notes on a Slidedoc, highlighting a lack of user experience with digital formats, which may require explicit teaching.

From a teacher's perspective, there were concerns regarding the large amounts of time required to develop and maintain Slidedocs. In addition to the time invested in learning a new skill, Slidedocs required careful consideration and planning related to delivery and integration of activities.

Colleagues expressed concerns regarding whether Slidedocs encourage laziness by spoon-feeding content to students. As Slidedocs are a newly emerging software approach, there is no research evidence to establish whether this approach improves learning. Within this pilot, it appeared as though students who engaged with the Slidedocs approach did benefit, demonstrating an ability to apply their understanding to solve case study related problems.

Conclusion

Despite some concerns with the use of Slidedocs within the subject of auditing, the benefits to students were clear and encouraging. The aim of both motivating and engaging students with the textual content was assisted by the use of Slidedocs, which were especially embraced by *digital natives* using mobile and tablet devices.

The authors suggest that Slidedocs appear to be appropriate in subjects using the flipped approach because they allow dense textual information to be understood and applied in a case study / problem solving capacity.

More information on Slidedocs can be found on Duarte's website: http://www.duarte.com/slidedocs/

Dos and Don'ts

Don't:

- expect students to adapt to Slidedocs without explicit instruction on their use
- replace lectures with Slidedocs or PowerPoints
- add Slidedocs to your subject without considering your overall teaching approach.

Do:

- give yourself time to develop resources
- incorporate activities that apply the content
- consider how Slidedocs will enhance or detract from your existing classroom
- check copyright images and content
- be explicit about learning outcomes
- offer a Slidedoc in multiple formats: PowerPoint, PDF or HTML5
- teach students how to use them effectively (printing, taking notes)
- combine formative case studies with summative critical thinking and problem-based questions which are based on those case studies. **ETS**

Dr Shelley Kinash is the Director of Learning and Teaching, and Associate Professor Higher Education at Bond University on the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia. Shelley has been an academic for twenty years, first in Canada and then in Australia. Her PhD topic was blind online learners and she is an active researcher in the field of education. She is currently conducting collaborative, inter-university research on assurance of learning, and university improvement and student engagement through student evaluation of courses and teaching.

Christian King is a Blended Learning Designer and Lecturer at Bond University. With extensive experience in education, information technology and game design, Christian brings a multifaceted approach towards blended learning and a solid grasp of the core pedagogies required for successful blended learning.

Dr. Jacqueline Christensen is an Assistant Professor of Accounting in the Faculty of Business at Bond University.

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