Teaching with Technology Award

APPLICATION

Name
Bahiyyah M. Muhammad

Department
Sociology and Anthropology/College of Arts and Sciences

Email
Bahiyyah.muhammad@howard.edu

Biography

Bahiyyah Muhammad, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of criminology at Howard University. She teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. She received her doctorate from Rutgers University’s School of Criminal Justice. Previously, Dr. Muhammad served as Director of the College Bound Consortium, a prisoner degree-granting program. Dr. Muhammad’s major research interests are mass incarceration, familial imprisonment, the school to prison pipeline and reentry. Focusing specifically on those issues pertaining to children of the incarcerated.

Dr. Muhammad has been on faculty in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology since August 2013 as an Assistant Professor of Criminology. She developed and implemented the Inside Out Prison Technology Program at Howard University in Spring 2015. Since program inception, Dr. Muhammad has worked with 4 undergraduate and graduate cohorts. Through an advanced Inside Out teaching model, Dr. Muhammad uses everyday technologies to merge classroom discussions to include Howard students and incarcerated individuals sentenced within the Bureau of Prisons. Technology has been incorporated into Dr. Muhammad’s criminal justice curriculum as a means to providing students with opportunities to explore crime and justice from behind the walls of correctional institutions.

Dr. Muhammad has taught numerous distant learning courses at the Rutgers University-NJ, West Chester University-PA, and The New School-NYC. She has also taught classes in numerous prisons including Federal Prison Camps--Alderson, West Virginia, DC Department of Corrections, Corrections Corporation of America, DC, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women (EMCF)-Clinton, NJ and Northern State Prison-Newark, NJ. Most recently, Dr. Muhammad presented “Inside Out and Technology” at the 2015 American Society of Criminology Annual Conference in Washington, DC. Next semester, Dr. Muhammad will continue to utilize technology to teach a course in partnership with youth detained in the Department of Youth and Rehabilitative Services, New Beginnings Youth Development
Center, Maya Angelou Academy.

Course Title

*Inside Out: Using Instructional Technology to Incorporate Incarcerated Prisoners In Critical Classroom Discussions and Team Projects*

Course Number

*SOCI 113: Crime and Justice Behind the Wall*
*SOCI 213: Inside Out: Crime and Justice Behind the Wall*

Course URL

*GoToMeeting (used for combined classes with incarcerated “inside” and Howard “outside” students)* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhbQyfraRAY
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4gSV63hhGc Blackboard http://blackboard.howard.edu
https://blackboard.howard.edu/webapps/blackboard/content/listContentEditable.jsp?content_id=_1604597_1&course_id=_1044850_1&mode=reset
https://blackboard.howard.edu/webapps/blackboard/content/listContentEditable.jsp?content_id=_1682073_1&course_id=_1053611_1&mode=reset

*Skype (used to conduct office hours with instructor for both incarcerated “inside” and Howard “outside” students)*
http://www.skype.com/en/ GroupME (used with Howard “outside” students, instructor and prison officials for immediate communications)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCuAbcPGm3g
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBzUAh-w65E

CD/DVD

*Detailed information about the course, implementation and student/instructor outcomes is attached as a PowerPoint presentation titled “Inside Out and Technology”.*

Abstract

*The instructional objective was to teach a combined course to include students incarcerated in a federal prison in West Virginia with a Howard University Administration of Justice course. The various technologies included Blackboard, GoToMeeting, Skype and GroupMe. These technologies were used to provide instructional services to incarcerated individuals who were confined and therefore unable to attend educational sessions in person. Technology was utilized to host group discussions and office hours for Howard students, incarcerated individuals and prison officials associated with the Inside Out course. Through the use of technology students were able to engage with a population that are provided very limited access to the public. Especially those individuals who are not listed on the incarcerated*
preapproved visitors list. The use of technology improved teaching, learning and assessment for all students involved. Without the use of technology rural prisons, which are difficult to travel into, would not have received such educational services without technology. Learning was enhanced because students received feedback and engaged with a population that they have only read about. Technology created a safe-space for students to hold critical discussions with criminals incarcerated in the Federal prison system that revolved around the Howard University motto of Truth and Service.

OBJECTIVE/ PROBLEM

In the age of budget cuts and limited teaching resources students are limited to learning only from their assigned classrooms. Dr. Muhammad’s objective is to create a fluid learning environment that is sparked in the classroom and continued throughout the lived experience of each student. The majority of students learning about the justice system in America obtain their knowledge bank from media and textbook information. In working to engage students in self-developed interests and critical thought about the realities of the prison industrial complex and mass incarceration, Dr. Muhammad utilizes technology to bring students behind the prison wall to learn about the realities of the prison, incarcerated individuals and personal narratives. This addressed a problem that more than 50% of Administration of Justice (AOJ) students complain about. That is, their lack of hands on experience with the criminal justice system. With the best interest of the student in mind, technology was and is used in Dr. Muhammad’s classes to bring students face-to-face with incarcerated individuals.

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology seeks to engage students in community engagement and working to understand the concerns of the community as a means to creating solutions.

METHODOLOGY

Dr. Muhammad began by creating a detailed blackboard course that allowed students to gain a deeper understanding about the correctional institution that was selected for the course. On the blackboard site, various folders were created that included video and hyperlinks to statistical information about the prison population. Here students were able to gain a better understanding about the demographics of those individuals incarcerated in that particular correctional institution. This included length of sentence, crime committed, city in which crime was committed, status as parent, race/ethnicity, gender and age. 50% of course information was placed online to allow for more critical discussion during class sessions.

In addition, the instructor signed up for a free 30 day GoToMeeting account. GoToMeeting was the main instructional technology that was used to merge classroom discussions between incarcerated “inside” and Howard “outside” students. GoToMeeting was used because of its ability to be easily assessed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons that works only on a secured network. This instructional technology allowed for voice and video dialogue that allowed for
small and large group engagement throughout the semester. GoToMeeting is accessible on all mobile devices, desktop and call-ins. This software allowed for 15 inside students to meet with 15 outside students during a single class. With the instructors free subscription all participants were able to engage freely. Therefore, students were not required to pay anything for full use of this technology. The unique advantage of GoToMeeting is its ability to record the entire lecture. This was helpful in working on peer-reviewed publications in Technology journals and presentations at teaching and criminal justice conferences.

Skype was used because 100% of Howard University students were familiar with the software and currently held accounts. Office hours with students were held via Skype and allowed for face-time meetings with students to discuss and troubleshoot about course content that struck a cord in students. This software was very helpful, because oftentimes the critical discussions became emotional and students were able to talk though their ideas and concern immediately. The use of technology made this timely and important to the uninterrupted flow of course discussions and questions about group assignments.

Finally, GroupME was used to give immediate up-to-date class information to students. For example, on the dates students were required to visit the prison they were able to communicate in real time with the instructor and other classmates about road conditions, emergencies and updates on public transportation.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

The problem of learning from out or classroom experiences was remedied immediately. With the prison being 5 hours away from the Howard University campus, it would be very difficult and expensive to conduct weekly classes at the correctional facility. Using technology allowed all student participants and the instructor to engage with incarcerated “inside” students without leaving the confines of the classroom. In addition, students were able to use their smart devices during the class session for instructional purposes, which is often a challenge. Because students had to use smart phones and laptops to engage in small and large group discusses, this kept them from playing on their phones during the class. Student engage, critical thinking and interest in criminal justice peeked after the first combined session with incarcerated students. Lastly, the use of the various technologies was successful in reducing fear among students to participate in a spring break experience that required them to live in the prison for seven-consecutive days. Getting students to read and engage in the discussion was no longer a problem. Students were excited about participating in this course from start to finish.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Three student assessments were used to gauge learning outcomes. To begin a pre and posttest were administered. Students were asked about their knowledge of the criminal justice system, incarcerated individuals and various criminological concepts. In addition, students discussed how they had come to learn about the justice system and if they felt it would be important to incorporate the voices of those within the system to gain a deeper understanding. More than half
(65%) of students gained their knowledge about the criminal justice system from various media outlets. Furthermore, 75% of students felt that it was not important to understand the experiences of those directly impacted by the system from those who are or have been incarcerated. Lastly, students held many stereotypes of the incarcerated. At the end of the 15-week course, students shared stories of “transformation”, “a new mind-set”, “unbelievable experience” and “thinking I knew it all”. The outcome of this innovative learning experience allowed students to understand the truth of incarceration from the mouths of those directly affected. This helped students to gain a holistic perspective of crime and justice in America.

The next assessment included focus groups with inside and outside students about the learning outcome and experiences. Both students went into the experience thinking in a way that was completed changed for the better at the end to the course. Two students had the following to course feedback:

“I was caught completely off-guard by how powerful Inside-Out has turned out to be. This program has been a learning experience unlike any other that I have had the privilege to be a part of, and it has absolutely had an impact upon the way that I view the world”

Inside “Incarcerated” Student

“I didn’t expect to learn so much. I didn’t expect to grow and change as a result of the process…. As I reflect on the power of this course I am awestruck and humbled…. 

Outside “Howard” Student

“I will be applying for my degree when I get out of here. I never saw how exciting college was. Before this class, I thought it was boring and just for nerds. I know now that education is power”

Inside “Incarcerated” Student

“People in prison are humans. We are all humans. Learning about crime and justice from the media leaves out a very important aspect. The human aspect. You really can’t believe everything you read in a paper or see on television. This class changed the way I view my life and the world I live in”

Outside “Howard” Student

Dr. Muhammad’s peer evaluation for her Inside Out course was strong and supportive.

TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

Inside Out and the use of instructional technology have allowed the instructor to bridge many gaps between the field and classroom. I was able to connect with various kinds of learners. Some students learned best with video technology, while others learned best from voice technology. The use of technology in this course allowed both aural and visual learners to become engaged. Furthermore, technology allowed the instructor to teach a class behind the secure walls of a federal prison with minimal costs. This course was innovative, enjoyable, safe and effective.
COST-EFFECTIVENESS

The technologies used for the Inside Out course costs the university, instructor and students $0.00 dollars. Technology apps are free of charge and allow students to download the applications (GoToMeeting, Blackboard, Skype, GroupME) to their smart phone for easy access and updates in real-time. In addition, technology reduced travel time for both instructor and students. For example, travel to and from the participating federal prison would be approximately 9 hours round-trip.

GENERALIZABILITY

The technology used by Dr. Muhammad (GoToMeeting, Blackboard, Skype, GroupME) are user-friendly and many informational youtube video and tutorials are available to walk faculty and students through efficient use of the technology. Faculty should be aware that additional time will be needed to learn each software and prepare in advance of class. All technology was reliable and readily available. I strongly recommend the use of these technologies to advance classroom discussion and connect students to outside resources in real time and space. These technologies allow for learning to be fluid and never ending.

ACCESSIBILITY

GoToMeeting and Skype covers student learning styles that are auditory and visual. The technology is student friendly and allows students use their mobile devices in a fashion that is most comfortable for them. These technologies give student access to incarcerated populations, without forcing them into uncomfortable situations. For those students who learn best through hands on experience, this course will accommodate them very well. The use of technology in this course also meets the classroom student where they are and slowly introduces them to an environment that is unknown to most of them. The selected technologies create a safe place for critical discussions regardless of the students learning style.

NAME AND EMAIL ADDRESS OF NOMINATOR

Dr. Bahiyyah M. Muhammad