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Clemson University

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SHORT PIECES
CLEMSON UNIVERSITY
PAM MACK

While the honors program at Clemson University has not developed its own technology plan, the university's efforts have opened interesting opportunities. Most of our interdisciplinary honors seminars are taught in a smart classroom, with a computer that projects onto a screen, so Internet resources can easily be accessed. I've taught honors seminars there, such as one on "2001: The History of the Future," and use the computer projection to show web pages to the class. I am particularly fond of the Oxford English Dictionary on line, to which Clemson subscribes; looking up the definition of a word that has become important in a class discussion can be very illuminating. I'm looking forward, as soon as my teaching schedule allows, to teaching an interdisciplinary seminar on the impact of computers on society, which would be a laptop-enhanced course, requiring students to bring laptops to class and log into the network.

Clemson now requires laptops for students in engineering, physical sciences, business, and social sciences, and plans to do so for the remainder of the student body in a year or two. The process of revising courses to make use of student laptops goes slowly; this fall semester only three of the approximately 35 honors sections offered at the 100 and 200 level were laptop-enhanced and in the spring only two are. I taught one of the three last fall, a separate honors section of a course on "History, Technology, and Society," designed for freshmen engineers. I had students use their laptops to read web sites, do searches, write contributions to a discussion board, and fill out opinion surveys that I could then discuss in class. I also allowed them to write in-class tests on their laptops, if they preferred, as most did—then I didn't have to read their handwriting. Laptops open many opportunities for new classroom experiences that we are just beginning to explore.

Honors students are not necessarily more enthusiastic about the use of computers; in fact, they can be more difficult because they want to do things their way or they aren't willing to admit what they don't know. However, some of the most significant opportunities for computers in the classroom have particular value for honors teaching. I'm excited about the use of the Internet in teaching because it helps students explore what interests them and share that knowledge with the rest of the class through discussion boards and student-written web pages. The Internet opens a much larger world than the old model of professors telling students what they need to know, a new world that I hope honors students will want to explore.

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