

Marty Hale-Evans
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Put Yourself In the PICTURE

A Digital Citizenship Intensive at The Tech Station

Introduction

The Tech Station (TTS) partners with other community organizations such as public access television, schools, libraries, local businesses, social services, and local government, to help provide instruction, resources, and other assistance in facilitating increased access to technical skills and knowledge in the community. TTS operates a community center where the public may use computers and other technical equipment; bring their computers and other technology for help in using, repairing, and maintaining it; attend classes and instructional events to gain knowledge about technology, media, and information literacy; and participate in donating and exchanging unwanted equipment. Some of TTS's current and future projects include:

- Providing one-on-one and group tutoring in basic computer skills and maintenance, as well as information literacy instruction for children and adults.
- Providing a volunteer-based open walk-in help desk for practical questions about using technical equipment, loosely based on the "genius bar" model.
- Providing instruction and assistance for small businesses and organizations in leveraging technology and media for promotion and public relations, including production assistance for public access television programming.
- Zero Dollar Laptop workshops, in which low-income participants use donated hardware to build a free media-enabled wireless computer running free open-source software, gaining equipment and skills in the process.

Information literacy instruction is a fundamental offering at TTS. While building technical skills is important, building information and digital literacy skills is equally necessary to use technology effectively. As Michael Eisenberg has put it, "Will learning isolated specific skills such as word processing, electronic spreadsheets, and even World Wide Web searching suffice? Clearly not. Will learning to use whatever technologies come along to boost our skills within the overall information problem-solving process? Absolutely!" (Eisenberg, 44) As TTS presents instruction primarily to adults, our goal is to offer content that is theory-based, but presented in a way that focuses on practical information and skills and draws on the learners' experiences and interests, because this is usually more effective in teaching adults. (Stern & Kaur, 72-73) To keep course content lean and practical, a basic definition of information literacy drawn from the American Library Association will be useful as an overarching guide for learning objectives. This model has three basic components: 1) To access information efficiently and effectively, 2) to evaluate information critically and competently, and 3) to use information accurately and

creatively. Beneath this framework, objectives and ELOs will be formulated that are specific to the aims of a particular course, as well as assessment and evaluation criteria.

Plan for the Intensive

While TTS offers general instruction on information and digital literacy as well as technological skills, motivation to learn and use these skills will be enhanced by targeted content that focuses on how skills may be applied to real-life projects and situations. The newest TTS offering will be a month-long intensive on citizenship and digital democracy. The centerpiece of this program will be four sessions, one per week, each of which will demonstrate how to use practical information literacy skills as set forth in Eisenberg's Big 6 model toward a different goal. These goals will be taken from Steven Clift's model of e-democracy as adapted by Shirazi et al.: "There are five components that construct the e-democracy model namely: ICT [information and communication technology], e-citizens, government, civil society and media. *e-Citizens* in this model are individuals that use ICTs to participate in democratization process. This participation can take many different forms. e-Citizen[s] can use ICTs to interact with social groups, government agencies, media and private sectors as well as the ability to use, create and disseminate information, and demand for a more open and democratic society and/or organize social action in form of e-petition, organize social rallies and participate in the debates and policy dialogues that are shaping global, national and local governance in the emerging information age." (Shirazi et al., 23)

In this case, the theory will be information literacy as set forth in Eisenberg's Big 6 model, and placing this theory into the context of digital citizenship will provide practical application. Simultaneously, technical and media skills will be added in as relevant, to create a larger pattern and a toolkit for enabling action that includes both the means and the technique for using information wisely in a political context. Other materials in the TTS center and featured content in live and online programming will support the goal of citizenship awareness. At the end of the month, participants will be invited to provide feedback and assessment of the program in the form of a written questionnaire, online forums and tests, and a live discussion focus group.

The special e-democracy program will comprise several components to draw participation and enhance awareness and IL learning.

- TTS will present the four e-democracy classes.
 - Topics can be determined by needs assessment. Some examples might be Assessing News Sources and Media or Formulating Meaningful Political Participation Actions.
 - Special emphasis will be placed on using mobile technology and social media, as these are currently some of the most powerful and fastest growing tools for political action and knowledge transfer.
 - TTS will bring in local government officials and representatives of political organizations when applicable, to advise and network with the community.
- As part of class participation or as a separate effort, TTS will facilitate formation of special interest work groups, so learners can apply new IL skills on causes that interest them, such as

environmental issues or helping the homeless. These groups will be supported to continue working after the focus month if they wish.

- TTS will produce online content to augment its existing online presence that focuses on e-citizenship. This may include a networking and resources wiki, discussion forums and other collaboration tools, and web pages that gather quick information, contacts, and useful links.
 - Creating these resources may be part of the classes or a project for special interest groups.
- TTS will produce displays and signage in the center that inform and reinforce IL concepts as they relate to e-democracy. Additionally, a series of takeaway materials will be available, such as information sheets and resource lists.

Vision

The digital citizenship intensive will focus on teaching students how to become more effective citizens using information, communication, and technology. This is represented by the title, *Put Yourself In the PICTure*, including the acronym for “Politics + Information + Communication + Technology.” The material involved in this intensive will present a range of skills related to increasing awareness and facility with technology, as well as an awareness of information literacy as expressed in the Big 6 model and related skills. In the larger context of supporting technological fluency and information literacy in TTS programming, we aim to show students how these skills may be practically applied in the political arena, as well as raising their awareness about why active citizenship is important and how technological and information tools can increase their reach and scope as active citizens in an increasingly digital world.

Program Goals

At the end of the month-long Put Yourself In the PICTure intensive, participants will:

- Understand how private citizens can influence local and national government and how information and communications technology can empower them.
- Learn about the history of citizen involvement in the American democratic process.
- Understand the nature of media and its role in the political process and assess the credibility and objectivity of news sources.
- Network with other interested people to form interest groups and project teams to work on activist and informational projects related to political and social issues.
- Learn how to create and use networking tools such as websites, wikis, and social media sites to organize and inform for political participation.
- Learn how to create effective information tools such as websites, flyers, and leaflets, as well as social media outreach information such as tweets, blog posts, news article commentary, and video presentations for public-access broadcast and online streaming (such as YouTube).
- Understand the basics of using social media to organize live political actions such as demonstrations or attendance at city council meetings.

- Encounter local officials and political groups, learn about specific local government processes (such as schedules for meetings and hearings) and resources (such as online forms for providing government feedback or participating in voting efforts).
- Acquire relevant technical skills to achieve these goals.

Preparation, Activities, and Timeline

As described above, there will be several components to the Put Yourself In the PICTure program. The centerpiece will be four weekly class sessions, each on a different topic related to the digital democracy/citizenship theme. The program coordinator will invite input on topics that particularly interest the TTS community, which will be considered in the final decision. Since one of the goals of PYITP is to connect participants with specific local resources and procedures, the coordinator will invite guest speakers and other participants from the representatives of local government and political groups such as party organizations, topical lobby groups (such as the Sierra Club or business organizations), representatives from local media and public access television, and other individuals who may have a valuable viewpoint or opportunity for involvement. These participants may also host their own presentations and discussions to augment the four class sessions. Connecting with these public figures will also help TTS gain good public relations exposure to the wider community. In addition, TTS staff will produce support materials that will appear at the center all month, such as displays and informational handouts. Also, TTS will produce and sponsor ongoing online tools and resources to facilitate political involvement and have procedures to assist PYITP participants to produce and publish their own new resources. Finally, TTS staff will gather feedback about the intensive and assess its effectiveness, and then analyze the results internally to process any learning TTS gains about producing this sort of intensive and how better to produce such a program in the future.

Planning Timeline

Date	Action	Resources	Responsibility	Assessment	Completed
April 15	Perform needs assessment to determine focus of classes and specific goals and interests.	Hold informal discussion with people at TTS. Provide written survey/suggestion box.	PYITP Coordinator TTS Staff	Review of suggestions, selection of best/most popular/ timely topics.	April 30

<p>May 1</p>	<p>Invite guest speakers and participants; schedule special presentations in addition to class times if any are willing to present.</p> <p>Finalize programming plan; choose class topics and speakers and schedule them.</p> <p>Plan how staff will execute prep work and classes/events.</p> <p>Plan how to publicize intensive to broader community.</p>	<p>Gather suggestions for guests and do research on local government and organizations.</p> <p>Call/write prospective guests.</p> <p>Choose class topics, sketch how they will be taught.</p> <p>Find out what staff will be available and who would like to help with which tasks.</p> <p>Research PR plan.</p>	<p>PYITP Coordinator</p>	<p>Final plan for programming and staff delegations completed.</p> <p>Hold meeting at end of this period to make sure TTS staff understands plan, delegate tasks to appropriate staff, answer questions.</p>	<p>May 15</p>
<p>May 15</p>	<p>Produce class materials and supporting handouts, displays, etc.</p> <p>Prepare online components (websites, wiki framework, assessment survey); prepare tech support for work groups who want to help create new resources; set up social media accounts if these don't already exist.</p> <p>Send out</p>	<p>Coordinate between presenters and producers of materials to make sure all needed materials are being created.</p> <p>Coordinate and program online resources.</p> <p>Select and set up social media.</p> <p>Write press releases, flyers, etc. and send to media outlets at appropriate times.</p>	<p>PYITP Coordinator</p> <p>TTS Staff</p> <p>TTS Online/Web Team</p>	<p>Continuously monitor progress on production of materials to make sure they're on schedule and complete.</p> <p>Check online resources to see if they are as planned.</p> <p>Watch for promotional messages, collect any feedback and answer any questions from the public.</p>	<p>June 30</p>

	announcements, press releases, social media campaign, flyers, etc. to raise awareness of intensive events.				
June 23	<p>Check progress and troubleshoot preparation.</p> <p>Remind guests about presentation dates.</p>	<p>Review all materials for completeness; have any presenters check materials related to their topic.</p> <p>Plan and delegate to finish prep on any materials or resources that are not finished.</p> <p>Get confirmation that guests will be available and prepared on the agreed dates.</p>	<p>PYITP Coordinator</p> <p>TTS Staff as needed</p>	<p>Complete set of materials for classes and support materials to appear in the center is done.</p> <p>Online resources and staff are ready; instructors are prepared to present classes.</p> <p>Guests are ready and prepared.</p>	June 30
July 1	Present classes and other events.	<p>Classes are given as planned.</p> <p>Online projects are proceeding as planned.</p> <p>Support materials and non-class events are proceeding as planned.</p>	<p>PYITC Coordinator</p> <p>TTS Staff</p> <p>TTS Online/Web Team</p> <p>Non-TTS guest presenters</p>	Classes, events, online projects, etc. are attended, ongoing in-process feedback and assessment is being gathered.	July 31
August 1	<p>Assess and process outcomes.</p> <p>Thank guest presenters and send appreciation gifts.</p>	<p>Hold assessment discussion session(s).</p> <p>Gather online assessment information.</p> <p>Collate and</p>	<p>PYITC Coordinator</p> <p>TTS Staff</p> <p>TTS Online/Web Team</p>	On or around August 15, hold wrap-up meeting to present results to staff, discuss what happened, share and assimilate experiences and	August 15 (and beyond)

	<p>Send out press release about what happened and results and outcomes of program.</p> <p>Monitor progress of ongoing project teams and interest groups formed during intensive.</p>	<p>review assessment forms from classes.</p> <p>Prepare report on outcomes and lessons learned.</p> <p>Send thank-you notes and small appreciation gifts to guest presenters.</p> <p>Write and send out press release about results and outcomes.</p> <p>Keep contact with project teams and interest groups, assist when needed.</p>		<p>learning among staff.</p> <p>Watch for coverage in local media.</p> <p>Monitor ongoing feedback and results in TTS community, individually and in groups.</p>	
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A Sample Lesson

The following sketches a sample lesson that might be presented as part of the intensive. Designed according to John Keller’s ARCS model as described by Ruth Small, this lesson focuses on assessing the credibility of news sources. (Small 29-31) At the end, students should be able to understand why new source credibility is variable and why it’s important to question and assess it as part of the goal of being an informed and involved citizen, be able to distinguish between objective journalism and editorial, and be able to seek out reliable news sources. This session would be presented by an instructor, preferably with the help of a local journalist, representative of a local media watchdog organization, or other knowledgeable person in the field so that students can get a professional perspective and to help fulfill the program’s objective of giving students contact with local officials and organizations.

The lesson begins with an attention activity. The instructor will bring some humorously absurd “news” stories, such as from tabloids, that are obviously dubious. As students are examining them, instructor can use these extreme examples to ask students some engaging questions, such as: why do you think this may be untrue? What clues do you see? Would you trust other stories from the same source, and why or why not? This should gain the class’s attention via both perceptual arousal and inquiry arousal.

Next, the instructor will establish how this is relevant to the students’ experiences by discussing how they seek out news. She will invite students to name some favorite news sources and lead a discussion

about why they prefer these. Then, the instructor will move into discussing why it's important to assess the credibility of a news source, and how this contributes to being a well-informed citizen. She will also discuss some motives political entities and media companies may have to sway public opinion, and some techniques that are commonly used to convince a reader or viewer to take a side rather than think independently about information. If there is a journalism or media-analysis professional, the instructor will invite her to give views on this as well.

The next section of the discussion will bring in some participatory activities. The instructor will present some news stories from different sources, some printed, some online, and some in video form. For each one, the class and instructor will identify biased language, conflict of interest, editorial slanting, and other signs that a story may not be a trustworthy piece of journalism. These will be of various quality – some good examples and some flawed – to aid in comparison. When the class seems reasonably confident in assessing the stories together, the instructor will have them split into pairs or groups, give each group an example, and give them a few minutes to analyze the example. Then, each group will present what it finds to the rest of the class. The final exercise will be for the class to collaborate in writing a short press release about an event or story; they should demonstrate using sound journalistic form and sources for further information (these can be fabricated), and then select two media outlets appropriate for receiving the release. This will help them develop the skill of being able to produce good information as well as being able to analyze it.

The class should end with a wrap-up discussion, in which the instructor will encourage students to talk about what they learned, what surprised them, ways they might use what they learned or how it might change their information-seeking behavior. To support the program goals of networking for political action, producing tools, and using social media, the instructor should suggest that some of the students might form a media-watch interest group to publicize their analysis of good news stories and sources on a website or wiki and through social media feeds.

Assessment

Assessment of the *Put Yourself In the PICTURE* intensive will take several forms. Instructors for each of the class sessions will invite personal feedback and distribute a short written survey. Online surveys will be provided to check understanding of key information as well as to gather feedback about the resources and other material. At the end of the month, all participants will be invited to join a focus group discussion about the intensive, at which facilitators will gather information about the effectiveness of the programming and other feedback. Some possible discussion questions include:

- What classes and events did you enjoy most?
- What did you learn that you think you will use in the future?
- Did you end up joining any interest groups or project teams?
- Do you feel more confident in finding citizenship resources such as city council meeting schedules or contact information for local political groups?
- Was there anything you wanted to learn that was not covered? Do you feel you have the technical skills to pursue your political interests more fully?

- What would you do to improve future classes and events?

Once feedback has been gathered from discussion groups, online assessments and surveys, and classroom survey forms, a report of the findings will be prepared and TTS staff will review and discuss it together. Finally, TTS staff will continue to monitor and facilitate ongoing interest groups and project teams that arise from the intensive's programs.

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