

# One Professor Focuses on the Skills Students Really Need to Succeed

*By Casey Domski*

For most of us, learning how to use multimedia programs is no easy task. For Professor Allen Larson teaching students how to use those programs is not much easier. While there are many important skills that communication and journalism majors must master before graduating, knowing how to effectively use multimedia platforms has become an increasingly vital skill in landing a job. Penn State New Kensington Associate Professor of Communications Allen Larson has been given the daunting task of teaching these skills to students.



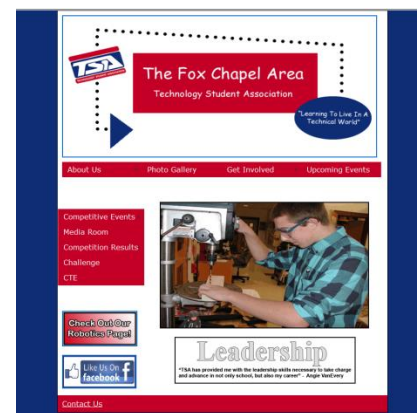
Professor Allen Larson explains the final website proposal to students.

Multimedia has become an increasingly important tool for business and companies around the world. Every business or company has a website, many use online publications, and some even have their own YouTube channels. An article on [ragan.com](http://ragan.com) said that a recent study conducted by PR Newswire found that companies who use multimedia in their press releases alone have a 77 percent increase in views. These forms of multimedia include photos, videos and external links.

A typical class session for Larson is filled with questions, confusion, and of course the ever so annoying technical issues that never seem to skip a class. Despite these setbacks, Larson knows that multimedia skills are crucial to his student's success after graduation, and is dedicated to teaching them.

"The thing that employers say over and over again is that communications skills are one of the most essential things they're looking for in hiring graduates," said Larson when asked why he feels multimedia skills are so important for students to learn. "Multimedia platforms are a continuously increasing portion of how organizations and people communicate, so it's obviously quite important that students know how to use these platforms, and how to use them well in order to accomplish specific communication goals."

Over the course of the semester Larson teaches everything from Microsoft Office Power-Point and



Larson teaches students to use programs such as Adobe Dreamweaver to create original websites with custom graphics and animations.

Publisher, to Adobe Dreamweaver and Fireworks. Students learn to make their own websites, graphics, and animations, while also learning basic visual design skills.

But why is teaching multimedia such a daunting task for Larson?



Students also learn how to use Microsoft Office Publisher to create print media.

On the first day of class Larson hands out a simple survey to all of his students. The survey asks the student's to rate their overall levels of comfort and experience in using a variety of multimedia programs. The outcome is ten surveys all with different skill levels and comfort levels that Larson must now take into consideration and construct one course around.

This is no easy task for one man to take on. Larson must take into account his most experienced students, to ensure that their learning something new in the class, while still considering his most inexperienced students who are just learning how to find a program on the desktop.

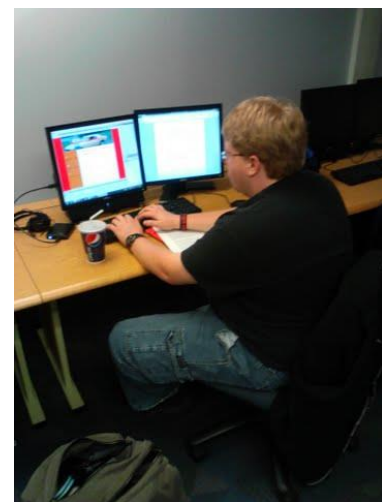
When asked what kind of struggles he has encountered in teaching the course Larson said, "teaching multimedia technology is always difficult for various reasons, but I'd say the most difficult part is negotiating the vastly different range of aptitudes and comfort levels that various students bring with them at the start."

As Larson works with the students he witnesses first hand their confidence and strengths building over the semester.

"My favorite thing is when we get to that turning point, a few weeks in, where the student who said 'I'm not really good with computers' starts to find the technology enabling rather disabling, and realizes that she or he actually is kind of good at working with the technology," said Larson.

What does Larson hope his students take away from his multimedia course?

As the last day of the semester approaches Larson can have but one thing on his mind, have these students learned anything? While he can't force students to retain information, Larson does hope that students leave his course with a new confidence in their abilities, and a higher level of consideration to the basic design principles that go into creating a piece of multimedia.



Student Ryan McLaughlin works on creating a webpage in Adobe Dreamweaver.

“My hope is that students leave, firstly, feeling more confident about their ability to learn and work with multimedia technology. This is a communications course, so the emphasis is also upon how to use the technology well to accomplish clearly identified goals. So, I hope students leave with a heightened attentiveness to basic design principles and an enhanced level of thoughtfulness about why they are making the choices they make,” said Larson.



Communications major Regina Cherish works on a photo gallery for her final project.

Multimedia production student Regina Cherish said that her experience in Larson’s class has been nothing short of exciting. “It’s exciting to see a project come together,” said Cherish. “Actually seeing the final product and knowing that you created the whole thing is a really great feeling.”

Eric Bennardo, another student currently enrolled in Larson’s multimedia production class, said the class has helped him tremendously in learning visual design basics. “Coming into this class I had no previous design experience,” said Bennardo when asked what he has learned over the semester. “I have learned a lot in this class and it has definitely helped me to develop my visual design skills.”

Despite the trials and tribulations of being a teacher of multimedia, Larson has been very successful in his teaching of multimedia production. Larson’s class continues to adorn the list of communication course offerings at the Penn State New Kensington Campus.

Any student looking to further expand their knowledge of multimedia production is encouraged to schedule Larson’s multimedia production class. The course can be found under the communication offering on the [Penn State New Kensington schedule of courses](http://www.pennstate.edu/newkenningscholarship/scheduleofcourses/). For more information on the multimedia production class students can also visit the course [website](#).

Resources:

[http://www.ragan.com/Main/Articles/Study\\_Multimedia\\_press\\_releases\\_garner\\_77\\_percent\\_44974.aspx#](http://www.ragan.com/Main/Articles/Study_Multimedia_press_releases_garner_77_percent_44974.aspx#)