

# Stop Calling College Teachers ‘Professors.’ Try ‘Cognitive Coaches,’ Says Goucher President

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## EXCERPT

**What do you think about [Lecture Capture](#). Do you not do that at Goucher? It seems to send a message to students that you can go to class, or you can just watch it later.**

We don't do it here. Partly because we have mostly small classes, and we only have the one lecture hall, which we rarely use because we're a small liberal arts college. But also, Lecture Capture is like watching a video of Spiderman the musical. Nobody wants that. I either want to watch Spiderman the movie with all the special effects and all the cool stuff it can do, or I want to go to the theater, on Broadway, and watch Spiderman and say, "Okay I can see the wires, but I'm at live theater and I don't care." A video of Spiderman the musical is not of any interest to me, unless I want to study the costumes or something.

**But Lecture Capture is big business. It's pretty mainstream these days.**

Yeah, but part of that is that it gives the illusion of doing something new and innovative and high tech without really doing it. The truth is, video capture does give an incremental improvement on learning in a lecture class. If I have a lecture class, and I videotape all the lectures, students can now skip class and they can also go back and watch the video and listen to the same parts over and over again. The one thing I can't do in a live class, I can't press the rewind button and say, "Say that again." So there is some incremental increase to learning that comes from making a video of your lectures.

To me, the video capture is a halfway measure that really is the worst of both worlds but I'll concede that it does provide some small incremental increase over just lecturing and looking at your shoes.

## In Defense of Lecture Capture

Joshua Kim — July 12, 2017

*"...Lecture capture is like watching a video of Spiderman the musical. Nobody wants that. I either want to watch Spiderman the movie with all the special effects and all the cool stuff it can do, or I want to go to the theater, on Broadway, and watch Spiderman and say, 'Okay I can see the wires, but I'm at live theater and I don't care.' A video of Spiderman the musical is not of any interest to me, unless I want to study the costumes or something."*

-- Jose Bowen, president of Goucher College, as quoted in the June 28 EdSurge article [Stop Calling College Teachers ' \[1\]Professors.'](#) Try ['Cognitive Coaches \[1\].'](#)

Is President Bowen right about lecture capture?

First, I want to say that I think that Jose Bowen is amazing. He is highly respected across the postsecondary community. [Goucher College](#) <sup>[2]</sup> is also one of my favorite institutions. It's the sort of rigorous liberal arts college, built on close faculty-learner relationships and investments in learning, that higher ed people hope their own children attend. So if Jose Bowen is somewhat critical about lecture capture, **then we should listen.**



And in good liberal arts tradition, I hope that President Bowen's comments open up room for an open-minded discussion and debate.

What I would say to President Bowen is that yes, lecture capture -- like all educational technologies -- can be terrible. Bowen, who is the author a book called "[Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning](#) <sup>[3]</sup>," is unlikely to disagree. (By the way, the book is terrific.)

But...just because lecture capture (and all other technologies) can be terrible for learning, that does not mean that it has to be that way. Lecture capture is, after all, just

a tool. And all tools can be used poorly, or they can be used well.

I have seen examples where lecture capture systems are used brilliantly. Effective use of lecture capture requires a commitment to invest in course redesign. Recording and providing a video file for a traditional lecture enables, as Bowen states, only “an incremental improvement on learning in a lecture class.” Where lecture capture works best is when the technology is used to enable more classroom active learning.

How can this be done?

First, we should recognize that there are many important strengths to the traditional lecture. Even at small liberal arts colleges that are committed to an interactive mode of instruction, lecturing is an effective pedagogical strategy in some instances. A good lecture will synthesize a range of information into a compelling narrative. A good lecturer will connect directly with each student in the room. Giving a lecturer one’s sustained attention -- developing one’s active learning capacities -- is as an important a skill for our students to develop as those learned in our seminars and labs.

Lecturing is, as most people who are trained or who follow the science of learning, a critical and valid pedagogical strategy. Having a system that can automatically capture the lecturing part of a teaching interaction will add value to that interaction. The knowledge that a lecture is being captured for later review can free students up from the belief that they must record every point in their notebooks (or their laptops), and instead put their energy into the work of actively listening.

We should keep in mind how stressful formal learning can be for many students. There are many reasons as to why the skill of learning how to learn from lecturing takes practice, supports and time. The availability of a digital lecture capture will enable many students to relax, put their energy into listening rather than worrying, and then go back later and spend considerable time watching (and re-watching) critical places in the lecture.

Another area where it is important to engage with Bowen’s critique of lecture capture has to do with student absenteeism. Bowen comments: “If I have a lecture class, and I videotape all the lectures, students can now skip class and they can also go back and watch the video and listen to the same parts over and over again.”

Again, this response tells me that President Bowen has not experienced first-hand instances where lecture capture is an effective tool. As I mentioned, the technology of lecture capture is valuable in direct proportion to the the institution’ investment in course redesign. One way that traditional lecture courses are being redesigned is to intersperse shorter lectures with hands-on and group activities. The professor lectures for the first part of the class -- say 20 minutes when the research shows that student attention and energy are at their highest. That lecture is captured.

Following an initial lecture section, the class then moves on to a structured activity. Research and writing is done in class. The professor moves around the room as a coach and a mentor to student groups. Formative assessment opportunities and

reflective journaling opportunities ensue. Groups of students give presentations, lead the class in discussion, and build physical or digital group or individual projects.

Following these activities, the professor reengage the class in some interactive lecturing. She may synthesize and reinforce points, building on what she heard from walking around the room. This lecture will also be captured, as the dense narrative and synthesis that the professor delivers will form the basis of materials that some students can re-experience once class is done.

The point is that a class that moves between lecture and activities is a class that can't be skipped. Lecture capture systems add value to a mixed modality course design, without the negative impacts of students skipping the class time.

The one critique that I'll offer in defense of lecture capture to President Bowen is around innovation. He comments that lecture capture "gives the illusion of doing something new and innovative and high tech without really doing it."

The reality is that lecture capture is far from a static technology.

Modern lecture capture systems are evolving to integrate classroom response, formative assessment, and technologies that enable classroom flipping. It may be that the entire term of "lecture capture" is outdated, as these platforms are evolving into much more integrated and multifaceted tools.

Every major platform provider is working hard to provide new capabilities around desktop recording, shared note-taking and annotation, and opportunities for interaction and collaboration. Lecture capture systems are being integrated with other platforms -- such as learning management systems -- to provide seamless interactions across platforms. And every major lecture capture provider is working hard to expose learning analytics in order to assist educators in designing for engagement.

Where President Bowen is totally correct is that badly done lecture capture is terrible. Any school that is not willing to invest in a robust program of course redesign, including hiring instructional designers to partner with faculty, should not install a lecture capture system.

Lecture capture is not a tool to save money, but rather to improve student learning. The real costs of an effective lecture capture program will go far beyond the cost of the platform.

At the same time, lecture capture can be an effective complement to an overall strategy to invest in active learning. Particularly in foundational/introductory courses -- courses that tend to have larger enrollments even at institutions with low overall faculty-to-student ratios -- the introduction of a lecture capture platform can be a catalyst for a progressive course redesign program.

President Bowen, in his critique, has done an important favor to both the lecture capture industry and all schools that have installed these systems. We need to collectively, both schools and companies, do everything we can to prove President Bowen wrong.