

Skin in the Game

Video Creation and Captioning at Northwood University





At Northwood University, faculty and administrators faced a growing hurdle. They wanted to expand online programs, but video creation was complicated to use and communicate to faculty. “We couldn’t make sure that it was a seamless process,” said Dr. Jeanna Cronk, Co-Director, Center for Excellence.

Complicated workflow

Although there were tools in place, the process was cumbersome for faculty. “It was dependent on multiple steps,” explained Jeanna. “The instructor couldn’t do it themselves. They had to give it to somebody else, they had to wait for that person to have time to put it on the server, convert it, send it back to them, and then that instructor had to put the link in the class.”

It was also tough for the close to 400 adjunct faculty at the university. “They were not on our physical campus, so for them it was even more difficult,” said Jeanna.

However, there were faculty who understood the importance of making the process work. In her fifth year teaching math and statistics at Northwood, Deb Steiner knew the power of video. “In my online class, I like to tell students exactly



what I would in a face-to-face class. The only way I can do that is through video.” To better reach her students, she wanted a more efficient process. “It was always time consuming because I would have to make the video, upload it to my YouTube channel, and then somehow get it into my BlackBoard course.” Deb assisted with professional development efforts designed to help other faculty navigate the multi-step process. “It’s a lot for other faculty members to try to take in if they’re not familiar with that technology,” explained Deb.

Other instructors would record voice over PowerPoints, or use the University’s video conference call tool, BlueJeans Network, but administrators wanted a better way. “What we were doing wasn’t necessarily serving our population like we wanted it to,” said Jeanna.

Rising expectations

The workflow was awkward for students, too. “It was much more time consuming for students,” said Jeanna. Since the media server wasn’t able to handle large file sizes, students couldn’t stream the videos. “They had to download it in order to watch the video,” said Jeanna, “this created a barrier for our students.”

Given students’ growing expectations for instructional video, Northwood’s current set of tools wasn’t able to grow engagement as much as administrators wanted. “They didn’t have the rich material that students of their generation absolutely require,” explained Ron Browne, Associate Director of Instructional Technology. “Many of the students don’t even buy textbooks anymore. If we don’t have the ability to provide [a simple video creation process] for faculty, that somewhat limits what we can do as far as instruction in a lot of different areas.”

Accessibility goals

The awkward workflow didn't make captioning easy, either. "[Faculty would] either have to post their script or post their notes, or whatever they were including with their video file, to make it accessible," said Jeanna.

Given the University's commitment to accessibility, administrators wanted more powerful metrics to measure compliance. "We didn't really have a simple way to gauge how they were putting captions on their videos," explained Jeanna. For any videos not on the University's system, someone would have to manually go into each video, click, and look to see if captions and transcripts were there. "There were no metrics that I could have pulled before, easily," said Jeanna.

The measure of a video

A final concern was that administrators and faculty were looking for a better way to measure video success. "With YouTube, I could see the 'watch hours,' but I could never see which students were watching which videos, and for how long, or what percent of the video they were watching," remarked Deb.

Despite the difficult workflow, video was still highly requested on campus. "I think once students see it in a different classroom, they really like video in the class, especially for online courses," said Deb. "They expect other faculty members to do it as well." Instructors kept asking for help with video, too. "They were seeing other instructors using it," said Jeanna. "The more tech-savvy early-adopters were out there grabbing those pieces and putting [videos] on." When video best practices showed up within professional development, interest increased, but expecting already-busy faculty to do an overly-complicated series of tasks in order to create video was not ideal.



Time for change

As their legacy media product reached end-of-life, they saw a catalyst to update their video tools. “It was an ideal opportunity for us to say ‘Let’s move beyond what we’re currently using and let’s try to find something that’s going to be a better solution,’” said Jeanna. “We needed something that was going to be incredibly user-friendly. We needed to make it easy enough that an instructor could get started in a matter of a few minutes.”

From the start, the Chief Academic Officer made a conscious decision to avoid solutions for old-school lecture capture, as it’s not a best practice for learning. Instead, the goal was to enable smaller, topic-based, personalized videos. With that goal in mind, TechSmith caught their attention early on. “We had some experience with TechSmith products in the past,” said Ron. “We knew they spend a tremendous amount of time making their products easy to use.”

Captioning at the forefront

As they reached out to different vendors, they began to realize that the biggest deciding factor was captioning. With flexible, robust captioning options, TechSmith Knowmia (formerly TechSmith Relay) soon became the leader. “At one point we were inspecting three or four viable candidates,” said Jeanna. “All the other competitors were charging based on captioning as a separate price. They’d say ‘Here’s your price. Oh, by the way, it’s this extra amount per minute, and this is how long it takes us to get back to you.’” Considering Northwood’s accessibility goals, inclusive captioning was crucial. “We have to have every single video captioned in order to be compliant, so those other options are not going to fit.” They didn’t want to add extra budget items for captioning alone. “We wanted to be able to roll this into one tool.”

Editing captions was easy with Knowmia as well. “I don’t think we realized how easy it was to edit until after we had already had the product,” said Jeanna. “I mean, we had seen it in the demonstration, but until you really got your hands on it and say ‘Oh wow, this is really user-friendly!’ you don’t realize how nice it is.”

Knowmia also provides the seamless workflow that they wanted. “We also like the fact that it integrated with our learning management system,” said Jeanna. In the end, they chose Knowmia as a full-package solution to enhance their video initiatives across campus. “We collaborated on what would work best for our needs with our students and faculty,” said Kerry Hannah, Co-Director, Center for Excellence.



Spiraling up training

When administrators rolled out Knowmia in the spring session, the university was ready. Selected as an early adopter, the first instructor's reaction to Knowmia was a good indication of how the rollout would go. "We just gave him not even a three-minute demo and said 'Take a look at this - what do you think?'," related Kerry. "Before the three-minutes was up he said 'Sign me up, I'm ready to go.' By the end of spring session we had so many faculty hooked on wanting to use it," said Kerry.

Training began with just the basics, including announcements to let faculty know there was a new product and top-level highlights of what it can do. Faculty could attend webinars and face-to-face sessions, and were encouraged to just get started with making videos and adding them to BlackBoard. "In terms of software-style training that I have done, it's probably the easiest product I've ever had to train faculty on how to use," said Jeanna. She rarely received follow-up questions. "We don't get a lot of tech calls for things that are going wrong, or things that they don't know how to do. Once they've recorded one or two videos, they're up and running, and it's kind of all on them at that point. They've got it, and they're comfortable with it."

Once it was clear that the initial training was successful, they slowly ramped up from there. "That spiraling up path that we took really helped," said Jeanna. "Things really clicked when faculty saw quizzing and other engagement features. Some of the biggest 'a-ha' moments in the training sessions were when we showed them the analytics and how it integrated with the grade center. Faculty were saying 'Oh, now there is some skin in the game. Now when I put a video out there, I know students watched it, and I know which students watched.'"

The technical integration was smooth, with minimal technical support. "It's very easy to integrate into our systems," said Ron. "We do not get as many calls for assistance for creating a simple Welcome video. They are able to read a short set of instructions that we have in our FAQ online, and within 15 or 20 minutes they have their project done. We just don't get the technical calls for support that we have in the past." With some tutorials already provided by TechSmith, the onboarding support was minimal. "It's just been a very hands-off couple of years since we've implemented Knowmia."

Compared to some other solutions they had looked at, Knowmia is much more plug-and-play. "It's so easy to use and it doesn't take us a lot of time to train the faculty," said Kerry. "Faculty are busy. They need something that's going to be easy for them to use in the classroom. It seemed like it happened overnight to be honest with you." Jeanna agreed. "They can see it with a couple of clicks, and are definitely willing to try it. Once they see how easy it is, they're sold."

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DR. JEANNA CRONK
Co-Director, Center
for Excellence



Easy to create and share video

Having a dedicated solution for video made the process much easier, and saved time. “Now the instructor can own that process,” said Jeanna. “They can record it, they can upload it on the fly - it’s a matter of clicks, and it’s in their class.”

Instructors were beyond grateful for the improved workflow. “When I used to upload videos to YouTube it would take an extremely long time,” explained Deb. “And sometimes the quality, once it did get uploaded, wasn’t the best. So I’d delete it and reupload it. Having Knowmia and doing it right there and putting it into my BlackBoard class is very quick.”

Already, administrators noticed that it saved time and resources. “The return on investment for TechSmith Knowmia has been as much human as it has been monetary,” commented Ron. “Faculty are able to do things that they haven’t been able to do in the past, without a lot of technical support. More than saving money, we’ve leveraged the time of our faculty and our technical people. It frees us up to do the creative things that we’re here to do for students.”

Based on saving fifteen minutes per video compared to the old, clunky workflow, Deb alone has saved about 75 hours over the past year making more than 300 videos - that’s just one instructor. Support staff see time savings as well. “I’m estimating we’ve saved about 125 hours of support staff time in the first year that we’ve had Knowmia,” said Jeanna.

With the new video solution, it was finally easy to get videos to students. “I feel more comfortable being able to quickly answer students’ questions,” said Deb. “They can send me an email and I can create a two-minute video very quickly, versus trying to type the email back to them.” Especially in math and science courses, students like to see step-by-step instructions and have someone walk them through it, versus reading it on their own. “Just the time that it has saved me and just the ease of use of getting information to my students has been a big benefit.”

Captioning matters

As part of the rollout, Jeanna showed faculty how to auto-generate captions. “I know when I do the video captioning, it’s very quick,” commented Deb. “It comes back within usually half an hour - I get an email back that says the captions have been generated.” With a more than 90% accuracy rate, faculty find auto-captions to be overwhelmingly successful. “Very little editing needs to be done on that closed captioning,” said Kerry. “It’s a time saver for us.”

When captions do need fixing, the web-based caption editor makes it simple. “I can go in there and easily edit them,” said Deb. Knowmia also checks for ADA compliance, and highlights any sections that need attention. “It’s been a true life saver for us and being able to edit closed captioning so easily,” said Kerry.

To ease the process even more for busy faculty and track progress, Jeanna began to push the idea of helping faculty edit captions. “We knew that they were recording their videos and uploading them,” said Jeanna. “We knew that they were generating captions, but we had no idea if they were actually going back in and editing. If they’re not accurate, you’re still in the same boat you were beforehand. It made for a tough conversation to tell an instructor ‘Hey you just recorded this 40-minute video of your math lesson. Now you’ve got to go back and spend another hour - or however long it takes - to sit and edit your captions.’ I’ve worked with faculty for 18 years now, and I’ve never seen any of them act happy when I’ve given them more work. So if we can take something off their plate, they’re usually grateful.”

To harness Knowmia’s built-in caption editing approval process, Jeanna started her quest with the IT department’s dedicated cache of student worker talent. “There are multiple students that sit in front of a computer while waiting for support calls to come in, and also we have PC lab students who wait for the printer to run out of paper.” If these students could help edit captions, it would be a win-win for everyone. Faculty wouldn’t have to edit captions, and students would get more accessible videos, all from idle time student employees had already.

The IT dept didn’t necessarily want to own the process because they don’t claim to be experts in accessibility. “It kind of got bounced around from department to department at that point,” said Jeanna, going next to the Academic Office and ultimately to Disability Services, which was very enthusiastic. “It was basically a one-person office because we’re such a small university,” explained Jeanna. “So anything they could do to help, they were willing.”

Oh caption, my caption! - Student workers help out

Given annual student worker turnover, Jeanna needed a quick process to show students how to edit captions. She went with a simple online intro, consisting of a few tutorials from the TechSmith website and two more that she created herself. “I don’t train the student workers on it,” said Jeanna. “I give them the link and say ‘Here are four videos that I’ve made that show you the step-by-step on what you do’. Within ten minutes they’re trained and they know how to edit captions for our faculty.”

The online self-training has been working well. “So far, so good,” said Jeanna. “We’ve had about five different student workers involved at this point. None of them had any follow up questions for me. None of them had to come back to me to ask ‘What do I click on?’ They all got it after that ten-minute training, which was amazing.”

Write-out math symbols

One student wondered how to best caption math videos that included long formulas. “I see that a lot in my stats class, because we use letters of the Greek alphabet,” said Deb.

Instead of hunting around on the keyboard for a symbol, Jeanna let students know that they can just type out the word. “Just put the actual word. If you were talking to Siri, just put what she would write. You don’t have to know the symbols.”

To ensure consistency, Jeanna created a standard process for instructors to receive help with captions. The process helps decide which videos need captioning first. Some videos don't qualify, such as a two-minute demo for one particular student. "If it's a 15-minute video, mini-lecture, or homework demonstration, then absolutely, that definitely warrants assistance," explained Jeanna.

A shareable workflow was key, so that a student can take over where another left off, to turn captions around quickly. "That way when the next student worker comes in they can pick up the edits," said Jeanna. "It's not hanging out there while the student's gone on spring break." It's also important that the student isn't the one who publishes. "The instructor still has to give it a once-over and say 'Is it correct?, Is it accurate?, Is it saying what I want them to say?', and hit publish." That's where the student notes come in handy. A student might tell the instructor, 'From the 15:20 mark to the 17:20 mark I don't know what you said.' The instructor knows exactly which section of the video to review before they publish."

After piloting the process with the math department, the entire university is now able to submit caption editing requests. "I'm envisioning that everybody will take advantage of this opportunity," said Jeanna. And student workers benefit from adding the captions. "It's like they're getting a second education because they're learning everything from these videos, too," said Deb.

Accessibility on track

With a campus mindset that everyone 'owns' accessibility, the new workflows are extremely helpful. "Having TechSmith Knowmia makes it easier," said Jeanna. "You don't have to type your captions from scratch. You've got this product that will generate them with some pretty darn good accuracy." With student workers to edit captions, and a product to help with document accessibility, faculty are glad to have the resources they need. "We have somebody kind of steering the ship, and everybody is on board."

Most of all, everyone involved wants to meet the needs of all students. "We want to make sure that we're giving them the same level of content as our students who don't have a disability," said Kerry. "Having that closed captioning tool is very important."

Helping other types of learners is another benefit of captioning as well. "The increased accessibility obviously has been fantastic," said Jeanna. "We have a number of international students who come to our campus. For them to be able to watch the closed captioning and read the words in English at the same time that they're hearing them has been beneficial. Since English is their second language, I think that's great."

Finally, administrators are able to easily track caption compliance across campus, explained Jeanna. “With TechSmith, I can just click that little tab that says ‘Activity’ to see how many [captions] are published, and how many are in process, to see what kind of numbers we have in there.”

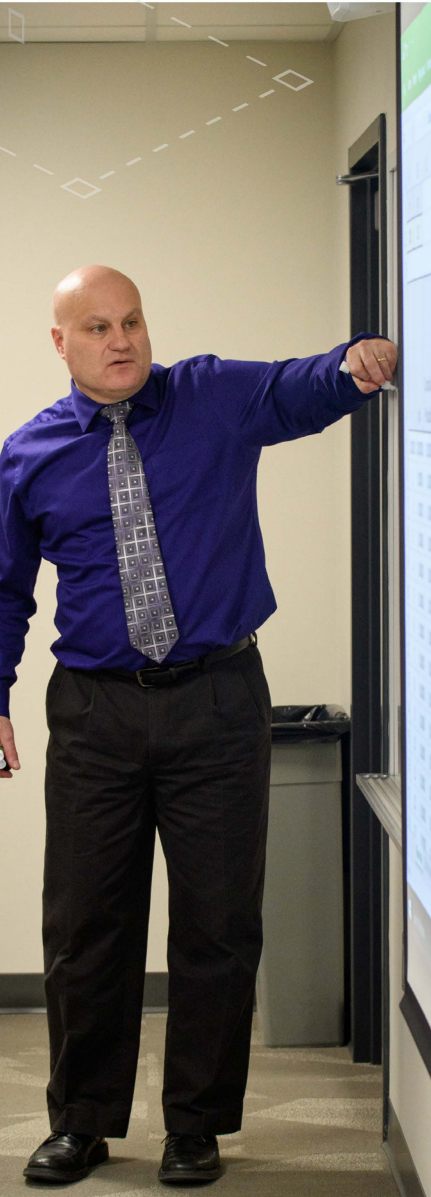
Watch and measure videos

Instructors can see the ‘watch hours’ and which students have watched which percentage of videos. “Now, being able to have the analytics right there is really nice,” said Deb. “Typically, if the student is going to start the video, they will finish it, especially in a math class. I highly recommend that they watch the videos because it will save them a lot of time when they do their homework. Usually 95% if not 100% of the video will get watched, if they do start watching it.” Those stats come in handy for predicting test success as well. “When students do very well, I can see that they are also the ones that watch the videos.”

Instructors across campus appreciate how analytics help show online student performance, including Brian Rang, Finance Department Chair. “It allows me as an instructor to be much more in tune with how engaged my students are,” said Brian. “In an online course it’s difficult because I don’t have the ability to perceive when they may be falling behind. Knowmia gives me a little bit more insight into how well they are engaging with the content. Without it I never had that ability.” Adding quizzes throughout videos are another way to make sure students engage all the way through. “I can make sure that they’re not just simply turning the video on and having it in the background,” said Brian. Also, the watch percentage helps figure out where a student got lost. “If I have a student who is telling me they’re struggling, we can see how far they made it in the content before they said ‘I’m having problems.’ That allows me to key in on where that student is struggling so I can adapt my feedback and give them much more useful information.”

In a training session that introduced quizzing, faculty were overwhelmingly receptive. “The built-in quizzes are a phenomenal feature,” said Kerry. “They were wiggling in their chairs saying, ‘Oh my goodness, I didn’t know that was possible! We can take our course to the next level and make sure our students are actually watching those videos.’”

As word of mouth spreads, they see more faculty using quizzes in their course videos. “How it integrates so well with BlackBoard and the grade book makes it easy for faculty,” said Kerry.






Students love video from instructors

Administrators see increased use of video creating a better learning environment for students. “It makes them feel like they’re not as isolated,” said Deb. “They don’t feel like they’re learning the material on their own.” Students also tell her that the videos help them understand the concepts. “Students every semester tell me just how valuable the videos are in an online class and how it really helps them learn and retain the material. A lot of times in my videos I’ll go into more detail than the textbook does.” At the end of every semester, Deb asks students for words of advice for future students, which now lean toward video. “The biggest thing I always hear is, ‘Make sure you’re watching the videos, because they help you be so successful in the class.’”

Jeanna sees the importance in giving students extra opportunities to choose how they want to engage with content beyond reading the textbook or looking at a PowerPoint slide. “Most of the students that we have in our courses - especially Generation Z students - they’re used to finding videos that answer questions for them. So if we’re able to produce course content in video format, it gives them a chance to engage with a tool that they’re comfortable with.”

Without an easy way to share video, it took a lot more steps to walk online finance students through complicated problems. “What TechSmith Knowmia allowed me to do is deliver content at a pace the student could follow, at their own speed, and as much as they would like,” said Brian. “They can see my spreadsheet. They can see me write it on-screen. It’s the ability to narrate as I walk them through a problem that really helps their level of understanding. It moves at such a faster pace with much less frustration. They now can look at a complex scenario and understand it that much faster and really improve the overall quality of education that we can deliver.”

In software courses, Jeanna notices how thankful students are to have videos when she isn’t available. “When they’re working on their homework at 11:00 p.m. on a Sunday night and they get stuck, they can watch [the videos] right then. It’s that just-in-time teaching availability that I can’t give them any other way.” Deb also sees video as invaluable for helping students get un-stuck on homework. “They can watch it multiple times, if they need to,” said Deb.



In addition to words of advice, students call out video in course evaluations. “That’s one of the big things on my course evals at the end of the semester is just how much they appreciated the videos and how helpful the videos were,” said Deb. “They wish every every instructor was doing that.”

Students are creating their own videos, too. “The students love it,” said Kerry, “especially being able to record their presentations and projects and share them not only with faculty, but with possible employers.”

More faculty use video

With each semester, usage grows. “The adoption of Knowmia has been contagious,” said Kerry. “We haven’t had to do much ‘selling’ of the product; the faculty sell it. For me, it’s been priceless. It’s saved me a lot of time in my job and in being able to provide that support for the faculty.” Instructors see others using video, and want to include it in their courses, too. “As we’ve progressed, we’ve seen the numbers grow. How many videos we have out there is just growing. If it’s easy for them, they’re going to use it.”

Even reluctant faculty are getting on board. “Now that we have Knowmia, it’s a lot easier for faculty to use it, and therefore it’s being implemented more,” said Deb. Beyond core video lessons, instructors use videos to connect with students. “It’s so natural,” said Jeanna. “We find more and more reasons to record videos now that we know it’s so easy. You can send a two-minute video to a student instead of typing out a five-page email. It’s going to feel like more of a personal connection than anything I could type.”

Web-based creation and sharing has made video much easier for the more than 400 adjunct faculty. “They’ve been able to do this at their own computer, wherever they are,” said Jeanna. “They haven’t had to rely on external pieces to say ‘Yep, let’s get this up and running in my class.’ They’re able to do it themselves, which has been great.”

Create and watch on a smartphone

The ability to create and share videos directly from a smartphone has definitely made the transition easier. “When we first saw Knowmia we were absolutely amazed because we could show it to somebody who really didn’t want to have anything to do with video,” said Ron. “After showing it, they say, ‘Yeah, that’s easy.”



I could do that.' They can do it on their phone. They can do it on their iPad. They can do it on their laptop. Being able to snap the little code with your iPhone and directly connect it to the [Knowmia] account was really amazing."

One speech instructor uses the TechSmith Fuse app on their mobile device to record student presentations. "She plans to make a best practice compilation video, where she'll have students watch to see what they did wrong and what they did right, as teachable moments," said Jeanna. Students are also using phones to create their own videos. "They have to create a marketing video for a service project," related Kerry. "I got my phone out, showed them my app, and they were just blown away. They said 'Wow, that was easy, that was quick!' I said, 'Now you guys can not only create a video for this class, but think of what you can do with the rest of your career here at Northwood.' They were all downloading the app onto their phones and thinking of other ways that they could use it. It was exciting."

Valuable resource for face-to-face classes

Videos are making their way into in-person courses as well. "Especially if an instructor teaches an online version and a face-to-face version of their class, they will oftentimes put the exact same video in both sections," said Jeanna. "That way if a student in their in-person class wants to study or reexamine a certain piece, they can go back and watch that video when they're working on their homework or their studies."

Deb also posts videos as optional resources for traditional courses. Since I already have the videos made for my online classes, I post them in my face-to-face classes as well. If [students] want to watch them, they can." This extra lesson format especially helps in the Adult Degree Program, where classes meet for a lengthy session once per week. "If they miss a class, then they've missed a lot of information that night. By watching the video I've already posted for them, they can pick right back up, which is really nice."

Brian also sees video as a value-add for in-person courses. "Knowmia lets students be prepared to be able to perform better on case studies, quizzes, and exams. Not just in online courses, but also in our face-to-face courses, it adds additional value for our students. We've really seen an improvement since we've implemented it."

Snow days and athletes

Posting video lessons online also helps classes stay on schedule during bad weather. “This past winter we missed two weeks in a row for a face-to-face eight-week stacked class,” said Deb. “Missing two weeks in a row out of eight weeks is a lot, but I just posted my videos and students watched them and we kept right to the syllabus. We didn’t fall behind, so it is a very good feature.”

Online video lessons are beneficial for student athletes as well. “When they have to travel to their athletic events and they miss classes, it gives them an alternative way to get their information instead of trying to get notes from a classmate.” explained Jeanna.

As they get used to having access to video, instructors are using it in new ways. “It’s been really interesting to see how our faculty have taken it and run with it,” said Brian. “It’s a very intuitive interface. We’re still finding new ways in which we can actually implement it and deliver content to our students, and they’ve been very receptive to it. When you sit back and look at the benefits that it delivers, it’s an easy choice.”

Moving forward to increase engagement

Next steps for Northwood include continued accessibility across campus. “We want to get 100% of our instructional videos closed captioned accurately. That’s kind of the big one,” said Jeanna. Another goal includes every instructor posting at least a Welcome video in their class. “Whether it’s an in-person class, a hybrid class, or an online class, post some sort of an introduction where the student is getting some engagement right at the beginning.”

Jeanna also wants to encourage students to create more content, such as recording assignments and class activities. “They can record presentations, or their own introductions, and post them in the class,” said Jeanna. “Or maybe they go further and make a digital video portfolio to explain what they learned for this unit, or ‘What do you wish you could tell your past self? or future students?’”

For any instructors not already using Knowmia, the advice is to definitely give it a try. “Go in with an open mind,” said Brian. “The amount of applications and the ways that you can find to use video is going to be tremendous. What I find is that I have more ideas than I have time to implement. Just have fun with it and get creative in terms of how you can add value for your students going forward.”



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