

SAIT Polytechnic

The SMART Podium shifts learning into high gear



Randy Paul points out the intricacies of a component using the SMART Podium.

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Randy Paul, Instructor, Automotive Service Technology Program

The 30 members of Randy Paul’s automotive service technology (AST) lab class wipe the grease from their hands and lean against partially disassembled cars, watching their instructor. Paul points with a pencil tip, showing how the intricate rings of a synchronizer fit between the gears of a clutch. The students nod in understanding. None of them is closer than 10 feet from the demonstration, but they see the complex machinery perfectly – on a large screen connected to a SMART Podium interactive pen display and Elmo magnifying device. A moment later, Paul touches the pen tool to his display and a video on clutch systems replaces the magnified component on the screen. He pauses the video and continues

his explanation, circling the clutch disc and drawing arrows. Once Paul is sure everyone has grasped the principles of the clutch mechanism, he clicks the video back to life and the class proceeds.

According to Randy Paul, the introduction of the SMART Podium to SAIT Polytechnic’s AST program has revolutionized the way courses are taught. The digital tool, which has now been implemented in both theory and lab classes, enables instructors to deliver course content much more quickly and effectively. As a result, the material can be presented in greater depth, giving graduates a vital edge in the job market.

The SMART Podium, in conjunction with a computer, projector, multimedia switch and screen, addresses the main challenges faced in an automotive lab, particularly the logistics. Instructors use the pen tool as a mouse to control peripherals, run videos using SMART Video Player, search websites and write in digital ink over applications on the display screen. When linked to an Elmo magnifier or a digital video camera, the interactive pen display is ideal for presenting and explaining concepts on a large screen. “Before we used this technology, we could only demonstrate to two or three students at a time,” says Paul. Now 20 or even 60 people can clearly see the annotated component. Consequently, a much smaller percentage of each lab is now spent on physically showing students how components work.

Not only are hours of class time saved each week through this efficient approach, but students learn more quickly when concepts are presented and explained using multimedia. Reinforcing ideas with digital resources, particularly when

instructors can manipulate material on the interactive pen display, enables instructors to be more responsive to their students’ needs. When a question arises, instructors can choose from an Internet site, a video or an Adobe® Flash® file and click on their interactive screen to bring up the most appropriate resource. Or if material from previous discussions or classes needs to be reexamined, teachers can easily refer to it with a touch of the pen tool.

SAIT instructors using the SMART Podium then have extra time to concentrate on developing their students’ diagnostic skills. “Because we can do the basics so much faster and in so much more depth, we can get on to the troubleshooting, which is the key to it all,” explains Paul. “Both skill levels and comprehension levels are higher now, particularly in the diagnostic area. Using the SMART Podium has increased marks on the lab and shop test by approximately 10 percent.” By enabling instructors to enrich courses with more analytical exercises, the product is contributing to a better overall education for AST students.

In the theory classroom, Paul can use the SMART Podium to easily coordinate his digital resources – from PowerPoint® software learning modules to Internet sites – and simplify his preparation process. “My prep time is decreased,” says Paul, “but what that means is I still use the same amount of prep time but I do more things – for example, I can prepare extra diagnostic quizzes.” Thanks to SMART’s product, instructors have more hours to concentrate on delivering material in a thoughtful, compelling manner.

AST classes now progress at a vigorous pace, with videos, projected images



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Randy Paul reinforces diagnostic skills by presenting multimedia using the SMART Podium.

and diagrams. The new technology products also keep instructors fresh and enthusiastic. “All the things I can do on the SMART Podium – the ability to switch between applications, show and expand images, draw on them and highlight on them – keep things moving at a speed that keeps the students’ interest level high,” explains Paul. “And maintaining student interest is crucial for learning. But because I’m teaching in a way that I find quite exciting, I also get enthusiastic about what I’m doing. So it’s rejuvenated my teaching.”

Randy Paul’s enthusiasm is infectious. As more and more SAIT faculty catch on to the AST department’s success with the SMART Podium, interest in the product is spreading across the campus. “It’s innovative instruction,” SAIT’s vice

president, academic, Gordon Nixon, says about the use of SMART products in the AST program. “Now other instructors from the trades programs are saying to their deans, ‘How do I get one of those?’”

Part of what makes Paul’s success with the product so appealing is the competitive edge it gives his students. “The bottom line,” says Paul, “is that our students will come out with greater understanding of diagnostics, thanks to the SMART Podium. If you’re starting off, and you have the experience of someone who’s been in the trade for 10 or 12 months, that’s a huge advantage for the employer and for the individual.” For the students learning the complexities of the clutch in Paul’s lab class, career paths are promising – fueled by technology, dedication and achievement.