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Adapting to COVID-19: The Technology Toolkit (Main Session)
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Pan Luo:

Question?

Q&A Question 1

Speaker 2:

Well, I've got a general statement maybe everybody else can relate to and tag a question onto it. Of course, I'm not in control of the institutional technology choices where I work. That's natural. That's a big institution decision and I recognize that. Part of my job is to help people make the best use of the technology that the institution has. I guess my question is, there are lots of other tools that faculty are interested in using but they don't pass FIPPA requirements or they don't know if they pass FIPPA requirements because they don't have the expertise to tell. Do you have any suggestions in that regard?

Pan Luo:

I'm really not the one to make the decision but we do have some very similar requests from faculty to our unit. One of our responsibilities are to investigate the tool and make the decision for the recommendation. For example, we are running different, a lot of learning applications and different applications can be hosted in different places. If some tool can be hosted locally, then we probably will go with the local option if the cloud version is hosted outside of Canada. Also, we are working on some of the tools. We are trying to get the tools to work with our learning management system, through LTI. I don't know if you are familiar with LTI. It's a learning tool inter-operability. It's an open standard so a lot of learning tools support that protocol. It makes the tool very easy to integrate with the learning management system.

Pan Luo:

The problem still if this when it comes to the privacy and FIPPA. We're working on a tool called LTI scheme which is a tool system between our learning management system and the LTI tool. In order to use a tool that doesn't comply with FIPPA, we are using LTI scheme to filter the information that we don't want resent to the tool. Basically, anonymize student information so the student can still use the tool but we don't send out personal information. That's something we're working on. We've come out a lot of different ways to get around the restriction we are dealing with. This is one of the example.

Pan Luo:

The other example is we host the tool locally. Something like Mattermost. It's an open source application. We run it inside of UBC so that we don't have that kind of restriction.

Q&A Question 2

Speaker 3:

When you're making decisions, do you have a rubric that you're using in order to justify whether or not you adopt it to or not?

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Pan Luo:

Well, we don't have a rubric but we have a working group. For example, we are giving a lot of peer evaluation tools, probably six or seven of them. We have a working group. There are faculty members, there are students, and there are staff. They evaluate different tools and eventually evaluate making their decision. I guess, they probably have some kind of rubric but-

Speaker 3:

You don't have a standard one that you adopt depending on the tool.

Pan Luo:

Yeah, probably not.

Troy Welch:

Sorry, I got in late everyone. It booted me out of the Zoom when I tried to enter the breakout room.

Q&A Question 3

Speaker 2:

I guess another question, maybe everybody might have some input for this one would be: What are you seeing faculty use most effectively at this time from the tools that you have available at your institution?

Troy Welch:

Well, we're seeing them use synchronous sessions quite successfully. Also, video tools such as Kaltura and things like that. To some extent our support team is a little dismayed. Now, mind you, we only have the remainder of last term and the summer term withdrawn and people really didn't have that much time to prepare for those terms. To a large extent, they were trying to recreate a classroom experience online and we're hoping as we go into the fall that people will try to shift more to have online modes and ways of proceeding.

Pan Luo:

We see a lot of synchronized tools being requested as well like Mattermost, Piazza, Online Discussion, and just SMS. That's why we have a lot of requests for moving digital courses online so we're leveraging the Canvas and different integrations we have for Canvas.

Speaker 2:

Did you say Piazza? What's that? I don't know it.

Pan Luo:

It's an online discussion forum you can integrate with a learning management systems at LTI and students will go there and do their discussion. It's asynchronous, async discussion form.

Speaker 2:

Probably your learning management systems already have discussion forums in it because almost every system includes that feature. Why are people moving to external tools for that?

Pan Luo:

I guess it's not as good as external tools. They have a kind of all-you-want, but the feature-wise is not as good. It's not very easy to use so people sometimes opt to different external tools.

Speaker 3:

I think they're used more for the chat features because usually the LMS chat is so bad. This is something that's they're more effective.

Speaker 2:

I noticed on the UBC site that Flipgrid was recommended, but I didn't think Flipgrid passed FIPPA requirements because don't they host student information in the States? Has anybody seen any information about that?

Pan Luo:

I'm not involved in the discovery of that Flipgrade tool so I can't say for sure. But sometimes if the tool doesn't comply, we negotiate with the vendor and they sometimes tend to [inaudible 00:09:25] in Canada. That could be the reason. But I don't know the detail so I can't say for sure. But if you need more detail I can find out and send it to you.

Speaker 2:

I'd love to know because I think it's quite a very popular tool. It's easy to use and it's very engaging. People really like it. The discussion forums and the learning management system that I'm using now are, they're not bad but they're not easy to use. They don't show a visual. You can add video and audio to the discussion forum items, but they don't show a visual the way Flipgrade does. Flipgrade is very visual. Much more interesting-looking tool.

Pan Luo:

Yeah, I can find out more information. Maybe if you can send me your email through the chat.

Speaker 2:

I'll put it in a private chat.

Troy Welch:

The other thing, and you may already be aware of this, most institutions provide a privacy impact assessment if there's some mutual. It's not offered by the institution if you want to use. I know in the case of Thompson Rivers, you could use a tool like Flipgrid without Canadian servers. You just require students to sign waivers. If the student doesn't want to sign the waiver, then you have to provide alternate activities and assessments. But I know in a few places around campus, people are using tools that way.

Speaker 2:

My institution offers that option, too. But for faculty members who, maybe you'd collect, etc. the waivers, it's kind of troublesome-

Troy Welch:

I know.

Speaker 2:

... especially if it's a big class. I mean, sometimes it can be quite a management issue if you have 80 to 150 students in a big class.

Troy Welch:

Certainly. Then, one of them objects and so now you've got two different streams to run. I could appreciate the difficulties of that.

Speaker 2:

People with smaller classes might be willing to do that, but I can't see anybody with a big class taking that. I wouldn't as a faculty member. I wouldn't do that.

Q&A Question 4

Troy Welch:

Then, it got quiet. It's like being on a radio station. You can't have dead air. I'm involved with the open ed-tech coop and one of the tools we're looking at bringing onstream this fall is called E-lab FTW which is an electronic lab notebook system. It's very popular in science and health science course and so we're exploring that and hoping to bring that to that UBC is offering this fall.

Speaker 2:

What are the features of that one?

Troy Welch:

It's got a number of embedded tools for drawing things like, I think, molecular models and chemistry equations and mathematical equations. The types of things that students would normally create by hand in a physical lab book and then submit and then take back. Then, of course, the student doesn't have the lab book while the instructor's grading the lab book. I guess the idea is to provide the online lab book as sort of a focal point for the lab experience. I must admit a good portion of the tool didn't necessarily make sense to me but quite a few science instructors are excited. We'll see if I can dig up a link.

Speaker 2:

Is it easy to use?

Troy Welch:

Supposed to be. A pop-up link here and I know they have a demo site up. If you're interested, it'd be worth popping through the demo site.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, I'd like to take a look. Ease of use is so important for both faculty and students. If the learning threshold is too high, most people won't spend the time on it.

Troy Welch:

Absolutely, yeah.

Speaker 2:

I know there's been a lot of change going on over the last few months, but I have to say I've been pretty impressed by the number of faculty where I work who have never really wanted to use technology before in their life, how they stepped up. They did. It wasn't easy for them, but they did.

Troy Welch:

It's pretty incredible. Then, the support teams. I mean, I'm on a team with their support people and I'm just amazed at the way they're trying to get people up to speed as best they can.

Q&A Question 5

Troy Welch:

Oh, H5P. Hi, Emily.

Speaker 2:

Oh, H5P is good.

Troy Welch:

Yeah, it's a great tool.

Speaker 2:

We hear that quite a bit.

Troy Welch:

They announced just recently a new content type that, I believe is called-

Speaker 2:

Book Creator?

Troy Welch:

Yeah, Book Creator. It enables you to collect other content types so you could have two or three presentation things and a self-diagnostic, and then a quiz related to a chapter. I think it's going to be a game-changer for people who are heavy H5P users.

Q&A Question 6

Speaker 5:

The issue for me right now ... well, one of the many issues, is trying to find, carve out time to learn how to use some of these tools. Because, I mean, the spring term was busy enough but I'm very worried what fall is going to be look like. Next week and the next couple of weeks, things start ramping up with people coming back from vacation and I just don't know what it's going to do to the time some of us have to really explore and to create materials. Because I create all the training materials for our e-learning area. Trying to carve out the time to do that, I just don't know. It's going to be quite interesting to see how things go.

Speaker 3:

I think that we, starting this summer is, at least, we started kind of using, creating community as a practice and using power users to create documentation and do, not training, but we can meet once a month or every other month to talk about what we're doing. If we can do a little demonstration, I think that it helps to get people excited and advances people's learning without them necessarily having to spend a lot of time using the tools.

Speaker 5:

We've just created a learning technologies community practice that was created over the summer while I was on vacation. I'm looking forward to kicking that off. I think it's a really good way to, at the very least, to have people show off to other people what they've been doing. Even if they're not creating the materials to actually build that support from the peers is a really good model.

Pan Luo:

We also hire some student. We call them academic continuity rovers. We do training for them and then they can help creating the materials and training materials, and also they can help faculty members when they need it.

Speaker 3:

We've been done that as much. We have used [inaudible 00:18:51] start captioning videos because that's been kind of a barrier. A lot of instructors don't want to do that themselves. They don't have the time or the skill. But, I mean, it's not difficult so we've been able to harness students to do that.

Q&A Question 7

Speaker 6:

I was going to ask, because we're also starting H5P and e-portfolios. Yeay! Every faculty member has a different platform that they are in love with. I was wondering if you guys have any advice on where to start. Just getting people going, tales from the trenches, things to avoid.

Speaker 2:

Well, I have to say, over the years, most of the users I've seen of e-portfolio were not well-thought out at the beginning. They were kind of an add-on to a course. It wasn't motivating for the students to use it

and it wasn't motivating for the faculty to keep tabs on it because it didn't really contribute well to the course. I would say if people are going to use e-portfolios, they can be a great tool, but it has to be integrated right into the course. There have to be course assignments that are put into the portfolio in some way and count towards the grade, and are reviewed and shared by the students amongst themselves as well as perhaps to other audiences. It has to actually be well-thought out in advance because all kinds of stuff looks cool but if it's not integrated, it's just a lot of work.

Speaker 2:

When I was a faculty member, I took over a course that had an e-portfolio. The students had to submit stuff to it every week. Every student. And at the end, I have to mark them and they were massive. I didn't really feel that they added value to the course because it was just, "Here's a cool tool. Let's use it." What they should have done and what we did later on was we made the portfolio into something that the student could use to show evidence of their learning to somebody who might be a future employer or something. Some future use for their next core constructor or fulfill their family, depending upon what kind of course you have. Something that would add value to student going forward, not just as an end product for that course.

Speaker 3:

I think it has to be a program-level adoption. It's going to be integrated. In every course, it's going to be a learning outcome associated with that e-portfolio. But I also think, I mean, one issue that we run into is that we support faculty, we don't support students, but somebody has to be able to support the student in using that technology. If you don't have that, it's not necessarily going to work out for a lot of students.

Speaker 6:

I do both so I also support everybody. It's fun.

Troy Welch:

There's a few really important points in there. One I think is the process is creating a portfolio in addition to giving something that students can show potential employers. We use WordPress a lot for portfolios. The reason is that once students are done that process, then they know how to build a website in WordPress. We've heard of students where they've been applying for jobs and two candidates have been equal, and one of them had experience building stuff in WordPress, and that was the game-changer.

Troy Welch:

The other thing to be careful of, because this happens a lot where five different courses will have five different requirements for the portfolios associated with that course. The student winds up creating five different things. This is where the program level portfolio is really important because then it becomes a cumulative portfolio for the student.

Speaker 6:

That's something I've been trying to get everyone to understand. That this is an institution-wide, program-wide thing if we take it on. But I'm dealing with a boss who saw some at another school and now he's all about this. We're trying to see if we can make it happen.

Speaker 2:

I think that point that Troy just made about the fact that it's available to the student after graduation is important. At my previous institution, they made the portfolios open to the students indefinitely. They didn't lose access to their portfolio after they graduated. But most places don't do that. Students spend a lot of time on an internal portfolio that they can't use after they graduate, it loses a lot of its value.

Speaker 6:

That's a good point.

Speaker 2:

The WordPress idea, external idea, I can see the attraction of that because students can keep it forever.

Troy Welch:

The other thing that's helpful, there'll be two kinds of students. Those students who get in to do a portfolio, they want to satisfy the assignment criteria and be done with it. Other students, they want to play around with the design and explore the fonts and really personalize it to themselves. We've also had great success using pre-built template sites with some prompts in place, "Here's how you change the menu if you want to change the menu. Here's how you do this." Kind of self-documenting. Then, those are just copied and cloned for individual students.

Troy Welch:

It may be useful to have a look at the OpenETC WordPress because there's a ton of portfolio work on there. You can pick through and look at them, open, roll in if you like. Wait a second. That sort of thing goes in there quite a bit. People will create the beginnings of a templates-type for the student and then the students carry them on from there.

Troy Welch:

There, that's the main site and there's a sidebar on the right that it collects the 20 or 30 ministries and site. It looks like some of them are portfolios.

Speaker 6:

Okay, thanks.

Troy Welch:

You're welcome.

Speaker 2:

Oh, yeah, thanks. That looks great.

Speaker 5:

I'm just going to put a shoutout to OpenETC because I use them all the time and I'm actually got myself into the community. I love what they do with OpenETC is amazing. They have WordPress, they have Mattermost, they have a lot of different tools that you can try out if you don't know about it. I highly recommend checking it out.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, that's great. Thanks. Why did I not know about this place? What?

Speaker 6:

Exactly.

Q&A Question 8

Pan Luo:

One thing I also want to know if they also have a Sandstorm which is a platform that you can draw on different applications so it's a good place to play different things. Very easy to set up and one click so you can have the applications ready.

Troy Welch:

Yeah, that's a great environment. The term we've been using is pop-up ed tech around Sandstorm. If you need a collaborative document for a meeting, you just pop it and away you go. It happens very quickly. We keynoted an e-TED conference in Cologne a few years back and tried to have a remote about a hundred people co-edit an inter-pad document. It was mayhem because the first thing everyone had to do is hit Enter to create a new line and the document was just ... It was pretty funny.

Speaker 2:

Sandstorm is an Etherpad document?

Troy Welch:

Sandstorm, no. Etherpad is one of the utilities that's available in Sandstorm.

Speaker 2:

Because I use a combo of sort of open Etherpad items that are temporary collaborative documents. They only last for 60 days or 90 days or something.

Troy Welch:

The nice thing about the Sandstorm environment, it gives us access to quite a few things that anyone of which would be hardest to set up for two or three people, but encapsulated in there, it works really well. There's the link to the ... but I think there is also a link forward chats, apps dot, at open dot CA, I think, forwards to that [inaudible 00:29:45] link too.

Speaker 2:

If students were to use Sandstorm, they have to have their own account, right?

Troy Welch:

Yes. The Open Ed tech coop stuff works on the basic idea is it's collaborative and various institutions if they're able to contribute infrastructure or person hours or assist, they do that. Other institutions contribute support materials. There is an anticipation that institutions will support projects somehow or another. There's quite a few institutions in British Columbia who are part of that cooperative. I don't

have a full list in front of me right now but there's about 15 or 20 institutions that are part of the Open ETC. Most of the logins were kind of the idea of the domain whitelist. If your institutional domain is whitelisted on various facilities, then you can create an account.

Troy Welch:

Let us check. There may be a list on the WordPress item. Not sure. Well, the Open ad link I dropped in there, it has a pretty good job of explaining how the organization works.

Q&A Question 9

Troy Welch:

What else is on people's minds?

Speaker 2:

I think the biggest challenge for me, that I work with both people who are going to teach online courses and people who are just temporarily teaching a course online, then it's going to go back to face-to-face eventually. They don't want to spend lots and lots of time developing a fully online course because they know that later on, they won't need that. They want a functional course that maybe they could use as a blended course afterwards. I think that's very practical and I support their idea, but a lot of people that have never done blended or online before have really a difficult time conceptually understanding not just technically but conceptually understanding how they're going to use the materials they put in there, how to choose what they're going to put in, and what tools they want to use, and how much work it will be for them and their students.

Speaker 2:

Sometimes they have very strange ideas. One group said, "Well, we'd like to create doable PDF documents that the students could print out. But they're not going to print them out and bring them to class. They don't have printers at home. Most students don't have printers at home. For the next number of months they're fully online so why would you want to do that? There's no point to do that. It should be either they're submitting their assignment through the learning management system or they're not. Because they're not going to hand it in any other way. Physically, there just isn't any way.

Speaker 2:

I heard, I don't know if it was just scuttlebut, but I heard that in some institutions they're asking teachers not to hand out pieces of paper even in a face-to-face class. There won't be any handouts whatsoever. It will all have to be in the learning management system, all the documents that they want to hand out, because of the contact and the danger that creates for everybody if things are touched all the time. They want to reduce the contact. So even if people are able to go back into the classroom, it may be kind of different than what they're used to.

Q&A Question 10

Speaker 2:

Also, another challenge I've noticed just that not all of our students were technically-prepared. I mean, they are not afraid of tech the way my generation is and was, but they do not have tech. They were

using the labs at the school, or coffee shops for internet, or all of that. We have some students who just have a smartphone. They don't have a laptop or a desktop. It's an economic issue.

Speaker 3:

We certainly encourage faculty, at least, ask students. Have a technology survey that they're giving students before class even starts, if they can, if not the first day so they ... It's short. Just to get some sense of the kind of devices students are using, whether they actually have reliable internet access or not.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, we do that.

Speaker 3:

Because it's going to shape the way you're going to teach your class. Or it should, hopefully.

Q&A Question 11

Troy Welch:

Another big consideration for distributing things online is everything is sent to a student now is assessed against the student's data plan. If you've got a gigabyte or at the movies and a bunch of large files loaded down with photographs, and then that could wind up costing each student an extra 50 or 60 bucks if their data plan doesn't go far enough.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, I heard some students were surprised in the spring. They were using their data for stuff they weren't expecting.

Speaker 5:

That question has come up quite a bit at our institution and so we are loaning laptops to students who don't have them. That is one of the programs that has gone through at our institution. But the question around internet keeps coming up so I know there have been funding initiatives to support students who don't have internet or they don't have the funding to purchase wifi, things like that. There has been some applications that students can make for funding, for things like that, but the bandwidth and the internet, that's the bigger issue for a lot of students, I think. At least in our institution because we are handing out laptops to people if they don't have them.

Speaker 5:

It's not just the students who are having issues, too. It's faculty, trying to make sure they have the right equipment. If they want to make videos, they need to make sure they have a working camera in their laptop at the very least; and ideally, a headset with a microphone. They're sometimes running into issues with their departments or schools not funding them to get the adequate equipment. That's been an issue for a while. Then, even just getting it, because a lot of places ran out of headsets with microphones.

Troy Welch:

Well, the other thing I hear about are families that are having difficulties. There's two parents working from home and three children doing various levels of schooling in university remotely. Now, you have five people all trying to do a Zoom meeting over the same small little internet connection. It wreaks havoc to some extent. See, we're trying to encourage our faculty to think about the personal situations that students may find themselves into as families are coping with issues like child care and parents have to be working one way or another all of those issues. Requiring everybody to be bright and sunny in the same place online for three hours each week is maybe not as practical as it once was.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, that's very true.

Q&A Question 12

Speaker 3:

Well, I think a lot of these issues will become more apparent in the fall than they were in those last couple of weeks in the spring when basically most of us were forced to be at home. Suddenly a lot of people were back at work and now they're trying to juggle all of being online and having the kids at school or at home, and trying to find a place they can work. I noticed, I went into work the other day and we don't have a lot of space open for students. A couple of computer labs were half the size and then to some open corners. It was all full of students. I mean, clearly, students are looking for a place where they can access the internet, bring in their laptop to work. I'd actually really like to see our institution, at least open up classroom space so that students can go in, have a place to sit and work and use the internet. Even if it's only five people who are allowed in a classroom, well, who cares as long as they have a place to actually work, it would be nice.

Speaker 6:

That's been a pretty big thing with our students because we go year round. Right in the middle of our full normal summer term. But a lot of them are in houses where they have four or five roommates or they've got a large extended family so they have no quiet place where they can listen or do their work. They're like, "Please, please, open the library. Let us back in the campus. Anything." Because they don't have that space to work. Sometimes it's not just the internet.

Speaker 2:

Some of my colleagues, they're saying the same thing with their little kids.

Speaker 6:

Yes, we have a few faculty members, too, who are like, "Can I just come in to teach my class from campus?" It'll just be me, I'll be in a classroom, I won't talk to anybody, I won't see anybody. But I got to get away from the kids.

Speaker 2:

The challenges. Are you able to go back to your workplaces? I see everybody here is at home. At least, it looks like everybody is at home. I'm at home.

Speaker 5:

We have a new protocol at our institution where we have to, first of all, pass the COVID safety training course. Then, we can fill out a form. I'm hoping to go to the office next week just to pick up things. I just want to run in, run out, but I have to fill out a form to inform people when I'm going to be there, where I'm going to go, and what I'm going to do, how long I'm going to be in the office, whatever. Anybody who wants to come on, and that's staff, faculty, students, and anybody external who wants to come on to the campus has to pass this course and also fill out forms in order so everybody knows who's going to be where so they can make sure things are cleaned.

Troy Welch:

I think we have a similar protocol in place. I don't have small children so I'm in no hurry to quit work and get home. Sorry, I got to admit I haven't paid much attention to it.

Speaker 3:

We can't work at work. I guess I could if there was a specific reason to go in, but you have to have approval to go in and then you have to swipe your card so they know that you've been in a certain building. I mean, we get emails all the time that basically says, "Do not come in."

Pan Luo:

Our unit is still ensuring the options. I guess, one option might be rotations. Some could work on certain weekdays. But it's still not finalized.

Speaker 2:

I think my institution has the same kind of rules about the protocol. At the same time, each office within the institution has to be reviewed by the health and safety committee. They will tell the manager of the department what kind of things have to be put in place before anybody can return. So I don't think our offices are ready yet. I don't think that's been reviewed and completed because it's a massive job to review all of the offices and classrooms on a big campus.

Pan Luo:

We're discussing a lot of these challenges but something I would like to learn whether you have seen any new opportunities during this COVID situation.

Speaker 5:

Yes, I'm going to speak for our unit is actually getting bigger because we've been needing more support, but because of the pandemic we're actually getting it now. That's one good thing.

Speaker 5:

Plus I actually see a lot of faculty embracing this new technology. People who've never used the technology that we've had at our fingertips for years are now like, "I never knew this existed. I never knew what this could do. I'm so excited. I'm going to keep using this after everything supposedly gets back to normal." For my perspective, there's been some really cool and positive things.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, I would echo that same thing where I am. Another thing, I've seen is lots and lots of free PD opportunities over the last four months. I've never seen. I feel like it's just more than I could possible ever do. Free conferences, free PD, free events, like at my institution and BC campus, and big conferences that I've always wanted to go to but I couldn't afford to because they're far away or whatever, and they're three or four days of excellent, high-quality stuff available for free. Not paid. So it's been amazing. I've been turning a lot of PD. Yeah, that's been really a good opportunity.

Speaker 2:

I think, maybe, what Ally and Emily said, I think there's more recognition of the value of the services that we provide on campus. Because often, in the past, people would say, "So what are you guys doing at the department? Do you make tests?" They have no clue what we do. "Are you guys the people who do all the technology, who just keep it running?" Some of us do and some of us don't, but there's a lot more awareness of the value of that and a lot more people reaching out for assistance which is great.

Speaker 3:

Yeah, I've definitely seen, heard senior leadership acknowledge us, maybe for the first time ever. On the other hand, I don't necessarily see the funding for more staff that we are desperate for because people are getting really burnt out. I think people tend to panic more because we are getting close to September, when people are contacting us. Anyways, they're kind of at their wit's end, too. It's been really, really hard so I think our staff, having not seeing any end in sight is really starting to wear on people and making lives difficult. Hopefully, there will be some money to actually hire people and offer a little bit of relief. That'll be fantastic.

Conclusion

Pan Luo:

That's great. We have about one minute left. Any more questions?

Speaker 2:

I don't have a question. Just thanks for sharing your insights and thanks for the new tools.

Pan Luo:

You're welcome. Thank you for everyone joining. We had a great discussion.

Speaker 6:

Thanks everyone for the help and the suggestions.

Speaker 2:

Be back in the big room.

Troy Welch:

Sounds good.