

# Faculty Showcase '08

Sponsored by Academic Technology at Simmons College



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## Goals

- Create a culture in which students take a more active role in their own learning.
- Develop a course structure that supports and fosters student-to-student communication and peer learning.
- Create a course structure that supports and fosters my communication with students.

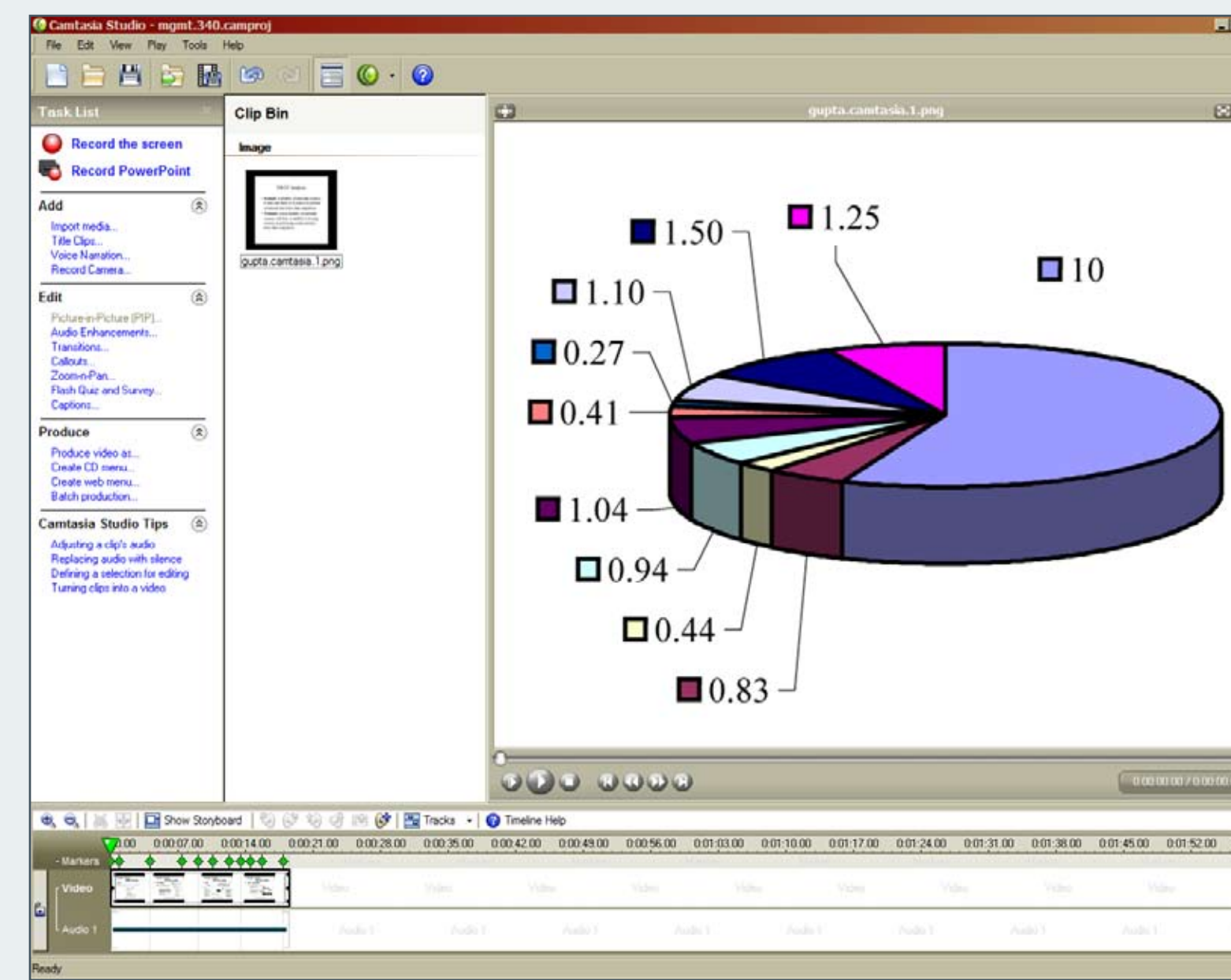


## Blended Learning: a Classroom Culture Shift

### Project Overview

Blended learning has significantly changed the way communication happens in my class. This mode of teaching allows for far more frequent communication with my students. At the beginning of the semester, I always tell my students to come to me if they meet any roadblocks. In the past, they would generally wait until our face-to-face class to speak with me. Now they perceive our class as something that is happening beyond a set time and place. Overall, students are using me more productively in my blended courses.

Class participation has always counted as 25% of my students' final grade. In the traditional classroom environment, this was frustrating for students because the evaluation of classroom discussion seemed arbitrary. With blended learning, however, online communication provides all of us with a way to look at the evidence of our participation more objectively. Whenever a student



Camtasia Studio is used to produce voice-over PowerPoints.

posts a reply to my discussion question online, or engages with a peer, the level of participation is visible for all to see.

I have discovered that the directions, deadlines, and details of the course's organization need to be more explicit and detailed in the blended format. At first, this difference created some challenges for me. Originally all my assignments had daytime deadlines; I quickly discovered that this didn't work for students' schedules, so I moved the deadlines to midnight. I've also found that it is important to give my students frequent low-stakes assignments instead of just two or three major papers or exams. These smaller assignments create additional opportunities for feedback, which in turn allow me and my students to change what we're doing and to make improvements well before the semester ends.

It's clear that my students don't want to just sit and listen to a PowerPoint presentation, but at the same time they don't necessarily know how to operate in a blended course either. I have had to coach them on how to function within my course. They quickly find out that they need to learn about how they learn, then use class materials to support the way that they learn. Through this process they take more responsibility for their own learning.

While these changes have created opportunities for many of my students, they have also created challenges for some of my non-traditional students. For those who come from cultural backgrounds that stress more teacher-centered approaches, I feel strongly that I need to provide additional coaching to help them understand the rationale for a student-centered blended approach and to ensure that they too thrive in this environment.

## Applications Beyond

Blended learning presents both an opportunity and a challenge for increasing diversity at Simmons College. If we value diversity, pursuing this format opens up a new range of options for our teaching and for our students' learning. However, the onus is upon us to help students find their footing in blended courses, regardless of their cultural backgrounds and learning styles.

