
From: Crispi, Angela
Sent: Monday, March 2, 2015 8:40 PM EST
To: Gallagher, Stephen
Subject: RE: MBA projector changes -- analysis

Oh boy. Sort of wish I hadn't stuck my neck out. BTW, can I call you tomorrow rather than meet? I hope that's okay.

From: Gallagher, Stephen
Sent: Monday, March 02, 2015 6:39 PM
To: Crispi, Angela
Subject: FW: MBA projector changes -- analysis

Angela,

This is just an FYI.

Beth and I met with Felix on Friday to discuss our most persistent topic. Felix has asked that we bring together the 3-5 faculty who have raised concerns about the new projection strategy. He would like us to present their most dense and challenging slides in a side-by-side comparison -- likely between the updated Aldrich 209 pilot classroom and an existing classroom. Needless to say, I think we can pretty reasonably predict where this is going to go.

If Felix changes his mind on this, I am now inclined to capitulate or modify our approach. There is an alternate compromise approach that was dismissed by the Academic Technology Steering Committee that we may re-visit.

I will keep you posted.

-Steve

From: Oberholzer, Felix [mailto:foberholzer@hbs.edu]
Sent: Saturday, February 28, 2015 10:49 AM
To: Edelman, Benjamin
Cc: Gallagher, Stephen
Subject: RE: MBA projector changes -- analysis

Thanks, Ben. Steve will set up a demonstration meeting in one of the Aldrich classrooms so that we can see and discuss the issues. We will invite Arthur and Jim as well.

Best,
Felix

From: Edelman, Benjamin
Sent: Friday, February 27, 2015 9:55 AM
To: Oberholzer, Felix
Subject: MBA projector changes -- analysis

Felix,

Nice to bump into you yesterday. Thanks for making some time to think about this.



The core of my concern is that the proposed change will reduce screen space significantly. The "wide" label suggests that width is increasing bigger, and IT's August 2014 email to faculty and staff offered instructions that repeatedly show an image getting bigger in both width and height. That's inaccurate. In fact the change will keep screens the same width but reduce height by 1/6. Thus, a faculty member who uses the full screens gets a 1/6 reduction in screen space.

Even worse, a faculty member who makes no change -- who keeps files as is, as you said you think most faculty will (and I agree) -- only fills the center 5/6 of the newly-shortened screen. So existing content fills just 25/36 of the screen (that's $(5/6) * (5/6)$), a 11/36 reduction.

Since you think few faculty will convert existing material to 16:10, we can skip discussion of that process. Suffice it to say, it's time-consuming and error-prone. It cannot be fully delegated to FA's.

You indicated that you understood these changes to be necessary because spare parts are no longer available for current projectors. That does not compel the proposed reduction in screen size. A well-known technique called "overthrow" lets new widescreen projectors fill existing 4:3 screens exactly, with no reduction in screen size. In fact we are doing this now (on all MBA center screens) and have been doing it since August 2013 when I first suggested it. If the side projectors need to be replaced, the replacements can use the same technique to avoid reducing screen size.

One virtue of the proposed change is that it would provide standardization across the campus. I value standardization but don't think that justifies the proposed change in light of the downsides. I'd rather see us standardize on genuine improvements, rather than standardize on the lowest common denominator.

Steve Gallagher last month told me that this change is advisable in light of the upcoming campus upgrade to Office 2013. Steve is right that PowerPoint 2013 makes widescreen its default, but actually its default is 16:9, not the 16:10 we're slated to use. So every new deck will still have to be adjusted to 16:10. Furthermore, the default can be easily changed (including centrally by IT through "remote management" of our computers and through customization of the Office 2013 installation package). I don't see how this consideration calls for reducing screen space.

You mentioned, as Steve has, that there have been no complaints in the exed rooms where the change has been in place for some months. I am told that there have also been no complaints in Aldrich 209, where the change was put in place in fall 2015 as a trial. I have four thoughts on the lack of faculty complaints. 1) If my slides are hard to read, usually I'd blame myself (for bad design/layout), not the room or Media Services. That's usually the right instinct, but it is mistaken if rooms were in fact moving backwards in capability. Since we're all (rightly) acculturated to blame ourselves when our slides look bad, I wouldn't read too much into a lack of complaints. 2) I sense that exed material is, on the whole, less detail-oriented than certain EC courses. It's hard to generalize, but certainly some courses and programs are more focused on on-screen details. 3) The faculty who taught in Aldrich 209 in fall 2014 were instructors whose teaching style is particularly unlikely to flag this issue. We've always known that this issue affects some instructors more than others. 4) Classrooms vary significantly in their dimensions -- in distance from seats to screens, whether measured at the center, edge, or diagonally. I now have a table of measurements, which I'd be happy to send you. If the proposed change is made, the Aldrich 101-seat rooms -- our RC bread-and-butter -- will have the smallest screens on campus, both center and side, relative to room dimensions. (Comparison relative to room capacity is even more stark.)

Despite the “no complaints from those who tried it” argument, note that in 2013 and 2014, there were quite a few complaints from those who learned what was planned. (Indeed, you may recall that the widescreen change was tentatively implemented in summer 2013 without any notice to faculty and without approval from MBA leadership or faculty. Fortunately the screens were changed back after I and others expressed concern.) When faculty learned about the issue and saw an opportunity to influence the decision, they did. It would be interesting to survey faculty. I suspect if the question was framed as “How do you feel about making classroom screens 11/36 smaller for all existing content and 1/6 smaller for all new content?”, we’d get a resoundingly negative response.

I’m reminded of the term “dominated choice” from game theory and decision science. That term is apt here. The proposed change makes 4:3 content 11/36 smaller. 16:10 content stays the same size. By the crucial dimension of screen space, the most important dimension by which I judge projectors and screens, the change is all downside with no upside.

You asked about a demo of the change. For an easy version doable in your home or office, this three-slide deck shows the current setup (slide 1), the proposed change for instructors with 16:10 content (slide 2), and the proposed change for instructors who don’t change content (slide 3) (what you anticipate). Notice the 11/36 reduction in screen size. If you have a favorite slide of moderate complexity, I would be happy to produce a version of it that you can project on existing 4:3 projectors in order to see the change. Better yet, I can do the demo with you in person. (It is particularly powerful that way – can flip back and forth before-and-after, put one on each side screen, etc.) I will endeavor to adjust my calendar in order to accommodate your schedule.

Missing from our discussion thus far is the impact on pedagogy and distinctive impact on certain teaching styles. I have thought about this a fair bit and tried to talk to instructors with a range of styles. In short, the side screens – already small – seem to be particularly hard-hit, as the 11/36 reduction there pushes a fair amount of content over the edge into illegibility. Instructors who use center chalkboards and side slides/doccam/lpad notes/etc. will probably have to change their board plans. My unusual board work (always using all three projectors for notes, and never using chalkboards) is heavily affected for similar reasons.

I’m sorry this question has taken so much of your time. There’s much to be said about the process; I have thoughts on that, as I’m sure you do. But notice the high stakes – hundreds of hours of faculty time to rework material to widescreen; roughly a million MBA student-hours in Aldrich classrooms *each year* (and this change would be in effect for some time). So I suspect the question benefits from all the attention we can give it in search of a better option. I’m open to hearing a compelling reason to shrink the screens, but really I haven’t yet. I very much appreciate your willingness to revisit this with me.

Ben