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## College News

### Putting Technology in its Place — in the Classroom

*USC College historian and writing teacher thoughtfully harness technologies to enhance learning in the humanities*

By Suzanne Menghraj  
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An hour into a lecture on notions of the origin of species, historian Philippa Levine instructs her students to take out their clickers. As students retrieve from their bags small, remote control-like devices, the following prompt appears on a large digital projection screen at the front of Taper Hall 101: “Given what you know of Linnaeus, do you think he’s: 1.) A monogenist; 2.) A polygenist; or 3.) I’m not sure I can answer that.”

Each student uses a clicker to register a response and within seconds, Professor Levine knows not only how well the 167 students in “The Evolution Debates” have absorbed the day’s material but also how readily they can draw connections between concepts. Given what they’ve learned about Linnaeus, monogenesis and polygenesis, 60 percent of Levine’s students think Linnaeus’ ideas are in keeping with monogenism — in other words, Linnaeus might have believed that human beings are descendants of a single pair of ancestors; 31 percent think his ideas are polygenist — these students find it likely that Linnaeus believed human beings to be descendants of multiple, independent pairs of ancestors; and 9 percent of the students in the course aren’t too sure to which camp the early 18th century botanist and pioneering taxonomist might have belonged had he not predated the theories in question.

Otherwise wary of multiple-choice questions for tests and quizzes in humanities courses, Levine values the ways in which clickers help her informally assess student learning and rescue those who might be falling behind.

“It’s an opportunity to find out really, really fast whether you’re getting through to students,” Levine said of the clicker, or Personal Response System, technology.

“Some students are shy. Clickers give them an opportunity to say what they think without saying it. They give students in big lectures a sort of comfort — and it’s fun for them. It’s almost like being on a game show.”

Levine is one of two College faculty recipients of funds provided by the Technology Enhanced Learning Incentive Program (TELIP) to nine USC faculty



USC College historian Philippa Levine has found some technologies — such as so-called clickers — extremely useful in her history course “The Evolution Debates.”

*Photo credit: Phil Channing*