

Video captions improve comprehension, professor finds

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A simple change—switching on captions—can make a big difference when students watch educational videos, an SF State professor has discovered.

Robert Keith Collins, an assistant professor of American Indian studies, found that [students](#)' test scores and comprehension improved dramatically when captions were used while watching videos. The tool is often utilized for students with [learning](#) disabilities, but Collins says his results show captions can be beneficial to all students.

Collins developed the idea while he was a member of a faculty learning committee focused on ways to make the classroom more accessible to all students. During the first year of a two-year case study, he showed videos without captions to establish a baseline of student comprehension. Once that baseline was established, he turned captions on and began to see improvements. Those improvements continued into the second year of the study.

"Not only were students talking about how much having the captions helped them as they took notes, their [test scores](#) went up," Collins said. "During the baseline year, there were a lot of Cs. In the second years, they went from Cs, Ds and Fs to As, Bs and Cs. It was really significant improvement."

That improvement didn't just manifest itself in grades. Class discussions also became livelier and more detailed, with students recalling specific

information shown in the videos such as names of people and places.

"We're living in an age where our students are so distracted by technology that they sometimes forget where they should focus their attention when engaged with technology or media," he said. "Turning on captions seems to enable students to focus on specific information."

The study was unique, Collins added, in that it explored [captions](#)' impact broadly, as opposed to other studies that examined their effect solely on students with learning disabilities.

The study has particularly important implications for his academic field, American Indian studies, he said. Addressing the needs of Native American students with learning disabilities has recently come into greater focus at the same time as the field is beginning to move beyond the impacts of colonialism on Native American students and toward asking more specifically what those students need in higher education.

The results of Collins' [case study](#) were published Aug. 9 in the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* in the article "Using Captions to Reduce Barriers to Native American Student Success." In addition to contributing the article, Collins also guest edited this edition of the journal, which was focused on reducing barriers to Native American student learning.

Provided by San Francisco State University

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