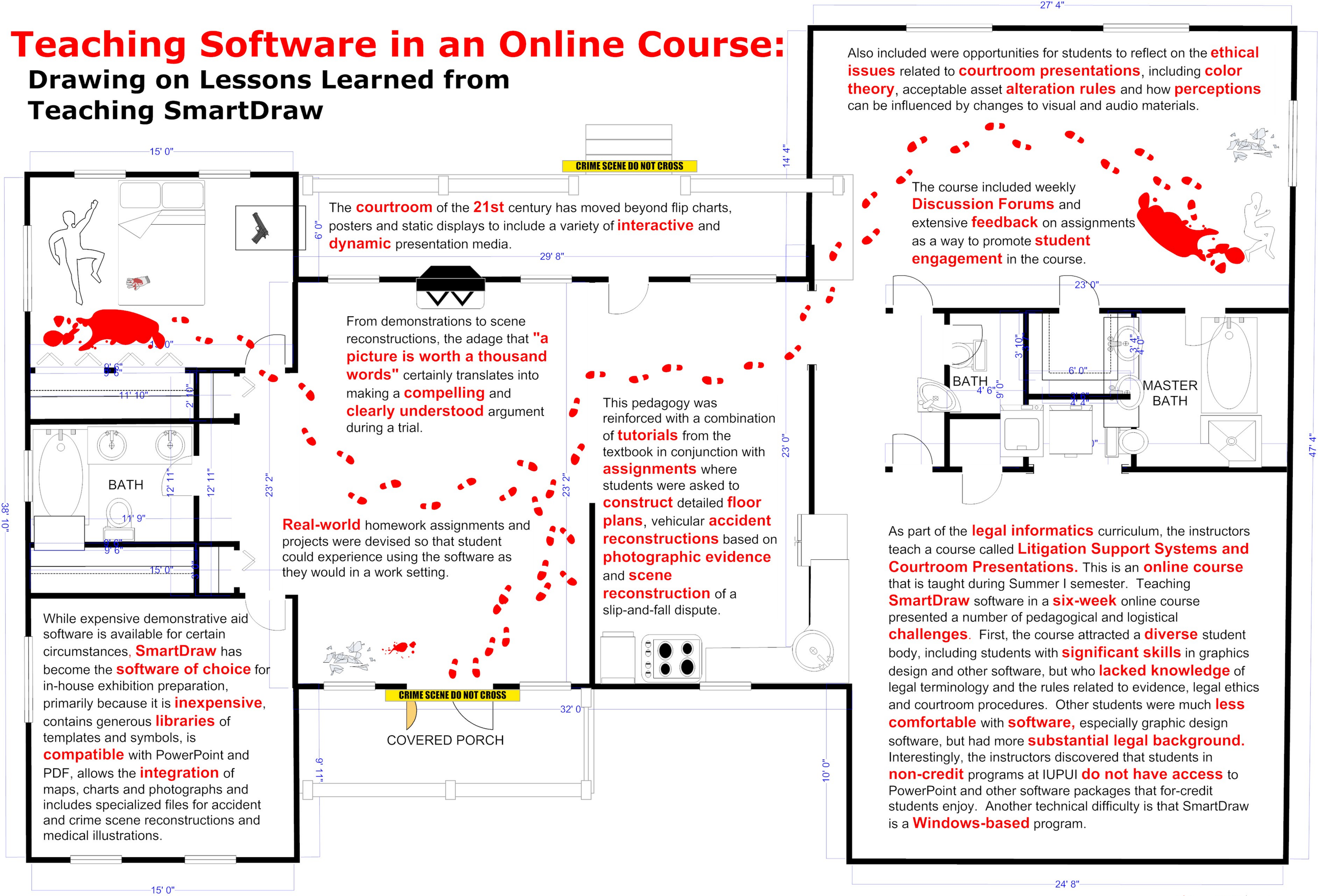
Teaching Software in an Online Course:

Drawing on Lessons Learned from Teaching SmartDraw



The **courtroom** of the **21st** century has moved beyond flip charts, posters and static displays to include a variety of **interactive** and **dynamic** presentation media.

From demonstrations to scene reconstructions, the adage that **"a picture is worth a thousand words"** certainly translates into making a **compelling** and **clearly understood** argument during a trial.

Real-world homework assignments and projects were devised so that student could experience using the software as they would in a work setting.

This pedagogy was reinforced with a combination of **tutorials** from the textbook in conjunction with **assignments** where students were asked to **construct** detailed **floor plans**, vehicular **accident reconstructions** based on **photographic evidence** and **scene reconstruction** of a slip-and-fall dispute.

While expensive demonstrative aid software is available for certain circumstances, **SmartDraw** has become the **software of choice** for in-house exhibition preparation, primarily because it is **inexpensive**, contains generous **libraries** of templates and symbols, is **compatible** with PowerPoint and PDF, allows the **integration** of maps, charts and photographs and includes specialized files for accident and crime scene reconstructions and medical illustrations.

Also included were opportunities for students to reflect on the **ethical issues** related to **courtroom presentations**, including **color theory**, acceptable asset **alteration rules** and how **perceptions** can be influenced by changes to visual and audio materials.

The course included weekly **Discussion Forums** and extensive **feedback** on assignments as a way to promote **student engagement** in the course.

As part of the **legal informatics** curriculum, the instructors teach a course called **Litigation Support Systems and Courtroom Presentations.** This is an **online course** that is taught during Summer I semester. Teaching **SmartDraw** software in a **six-week** online course presented a number of pedagogical and logistical **challenges**. First, the course attracted a **diverse** student body, including students with **significant skills** in graphics design and other software, but who **lacked knowledge** of legal terminology and the rules related to evidence, legal ethics and courtroom procedures. Other students were much **less comfortable** with **software,** especially graphic design software, but had more **substantial legal background.** Interestingly, the instructors discovered that students in **non-credit** programs at IUPUI **do not have access** to PowerPoint and other software packages that for-credit students enjoy. Another technical difficulty is that SmartDraw is a **Windows-based** program.

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