Computers: Tools and Tyrants?

“In what ways have computers changed the way we think and live?”

Instructions for Teachers

“Disconnected” offers your students a great opportunity to view the power that personal computers exert on all of our lives. It provides teachers with the opportunity to both credit the experience and knowledge students have with computers, and to see if evidence can change their minds.

Level of Engagement: This discussion will work best with students, who are either first or second year college students, or computer-savvy juniors and seniors in high school. “Disconnected” is a fast-paced film, and students will have to zero in on one of the three main characters to answer the questions with detailed evidence. You should strongly encourage your students to take notes on Andrew, Caitlin or Chel as they are viewing “Disconnected.” This lesson will take at least two full class periods to do well.

First Step: Be sure to have your students discuss the five statements “Prior to Viewing” this documentary. Ask them to write out their answers in a few short sentences so you have a record of their initial answers to the statements. An important point of this lesson is to have students consider the possibility that “Disconnected” changed their minds—and to be able to articulate how and why that change took place.

What to Value in the “After Viewing” Discussion:
Since Andrew, Caitlin and Chel had different experiences when they turned off their computers, it is likely that you will get disagreement among your students as they discuss the “After Viewing” statements. If they disagree, it means that they have been observing carefully. Ask them to pin down their generalizations to particular quotes, or behaviors of each of the three Carleton students.

Wrapping Up: Back to Your Students Initial Answers
Once your students have discussed their interpretations of the experiences of Andrew, Caitlin and Chel, you will be well-positioned to return to your students initial answers. Who changed their minds about their own initial answers and why? It is important to the success of this lesson that there not be a “Got ‘cha” implication for students who change their minds. Changing one’s mind on the basis of strong evidence is one of the marks of a good student and an educated person. If you want to extend these discussions with an essay assignment at the end of Day 2, your writing prompt could be: “In what way are computers changing the ways we think and live?”