

## Technology Lesson 2 Carl Stern 2/4/2015

In some years, I offer an extra credit assignment over the winter break. This assignment involves coloring a map of the United States in a way that maximizes some properties of the map. Most of the students who take it on find it to be interesting and enjoyable, and it exercises problem-solving abilities. To see the assignment, click on

<https://www.oncoursesystems.com/school/menu/2498>

and then click on either Algebra 1 CP or Algebra 1 Small Group.

Part of the assignment involves filling out a spreadsheet that I post on my teacher website. Although it is posted on the website, it requires that Microsoft Excel is loaded on the computer being used.

My feeling is that people are moving gradually away from installing Microsoft Office in favor of using cloud applications. So I thought this would be an ideal situation to try out Google Sheets. The main advantage is that if I make a Google Sheets spreadsheet, it can be used on any computer without needing anything installed on that computer.

Converting my existing spreadsheet to a Google Sheets spreadsheet was straightforward and easy. You can see the result here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzzFhtGLd-2hMVdEZkdwWWNrMOU/view?usp=sharing>

After this I started finding a number of problems.

First, when students click on this link, they see a screen that looks like a spreadsheet. However, they have to be directed to click "Open" again at the top to get the real spreadsheet. Little things like this can cause a lot of confusion. (Go ahead and try it to see what I am talking about).

Next, it seemed difficult or impossible to control the layout of the spreadsheet for printing. What would print on 1 page in Excel would print on two pages in Sheets. This is quite important in this case. For me to be able to grade the work, I have to scan then entire spreadsheet on a single sheet.

Next, if a student filled out the spreadsheet, how would they save it for me? It seemed only possible to save it to the cloud, and this seemed to require a number of confusing steps including setting permissions.

By comparison, with an Excel doc, you simply click once to open it, make changes, and use a simple "save as" command to save it to your computer. It can then be emailed and it will print exactly as it was originally formatted.

Ultimately, I decided that going to Sheets would cause more student confusion and I decided to stay with Excel.

Maybe as Google Sheets continue to evolve they will get simpler and easier to use.