

Encouraging and Assisting Faculty Incorporation of Innovative Classroom Technologies

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ABSTRACT

A comprehensive faculty technology training program not only provides a hands-on learning experience that addresses the question of *how* to include technology in instruction, it also addresses and provides innovative ideas and examples that encourage faculty about *why* these skills should be incorporated into the classroom. Whether the classroom is online or in a traditional setting, this paper will explore proven methods and avenues that assist and encourage the use of technology in pedagogical delivery of information to sustain learner interest and convenience.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.3.1 [Computers and Education]: Computer Uses in Education – *Collaborative Learning, Computer-Assisted Instruction, Computer-Managed Instruction, Distance Learning.*

General Terms

Documentation, Performance.

Keywords

Courseware, documentation, alliances.

1. INTRODUCTION

The benefit of teaching with technology needs to be identified, addressed, and incorporated into faculty technology training programs. The question “Why use technology” must be answered in training workshops to facilitate the application of technology after the initial faculty training workshop has ended. This “Why” can lead to developing alliances, expanding technology assistance, and leading by example to supply motivation and comfort in encouraging faculty to use technology both online and in the traditional classroom.

This paper will define and relay proven methods that assist and encourage faculty to utilize technology in any class setting, specifically Blackboard 6.0, various application software, and

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hardware such as Smartboards and document cameras. These proven methods empowered faculty at Valparaiso University to say “Why not” in utilizing technology in their classes.

2. ALLIANCES

Promoting technology usage takes multilevel collaboration and cooperation. Alliances are key factors in addressing support of technology use. Two key alliances were sought and developed to promote technology consciousness and usage among faculty at Valparaiso University.

2.1 Director of Teaching Resources

The first alliance was with the director of the Teaching Resource Center, Dr. Katharine Antammara. The focus audience of the alliance was new faculty. Technology classes were scheduled and incorporated in the new faculty orientation, specifically Blackboard 6.0. New faculty were not only trained on creating an online presence, but various application software packages were demonstrated to them for use both online and in the classroom. Those comfortable with technology received new ideas to incorporate it into their classes. Those not experienced with these other technologies were encouraged to attend scheduled classes in these applications or were contacted by User Support, Electronic Information Services to see if they would benefit from an individual consultation.

Technology classes provided another benefit—to acquaint new faculty with the Instructional User Support staff. All members of the staff introduced themselves and explained their areas of expertise along with how and when to contact them for assistance. So not only did new faculty receive technology training, they learned the who, what, where, and how to receive technology help.

This alliance proved invaluable in getting faculty members on board and comfortable with technology before their very first teaching day. New faculty appreciated the services offered by the Instructional User Support division of Electronic Information Services to ensure that they would receive technology training, assistance, and support before they began compiling their classes. This proactive approach in training gave the new faculty more technical knowledge and options while they were creating their curriculum.

2.2 Pioneering Faculty

The second alliance sought and developed was with technology-savvy faculty. Valparaiso University converted from using Prometheus Online Courseware to Blackboard Online Course in

May 2003. To deal with the challenge of creating and coordinating faculty training, we invited eight faculty members who had previously used Prometheus to preview and review the new online courseware and documentation. These “pioneering faculty” attended a three-hour training session in Blackboard 6.0. They were then provided with the documentation and given the task of creating an online presence using this documentation. In addition, they were asked to supply comments and suggestions to improve the documentation. Their suggestions were incorporated into the final documentation provided to all other faculty members attending training workshops.

Finally, the pioneering faculty were invited to showcase their courses to their colleagues at later scheduled faculty training workshops. Since these presenters were experienced with using technology, their showcase courses incorporated other useful teaching technologies besides Blackboard. Faculty attending the training workshops received insights from the pioneering faculty on pedagogically sound uses of technology and what technologies work. As a result, the pioneering faculty became mentors and additional resources to their colleagues just starting to teach with technology.

This alliance proved most effective for faculty attending courseware workshops. Instructors not only shared teaching ideas and experiences with their colleagues at these workshops, they shared concerns about using technology. These concerns were addressed and alleviated by the pioneering faculty who provided advice based on their knowledge.

4. SHOW THEM THE WAY

Faculty attending basic Blackboard instruction were introduced to using other application software in their academic courses through sample instructional training courses. State-of-the-art training facilities were used to demonstrate the use of classroom technologies such as Smartboards and document cameras. During the training sessions, the information was exported from the Smartboard and incorporated into Blackboard 6.0. This let the participants see how information created in the classroom using technology can then be referenced at the students’ convenience using other technologies.

This connection became clear to the faculty. Taking the time to expose themselves to diverse technologies can save time in the long run. This idea was further demonstrated by creating a group discussion in the workshop and documenting the key factors faculty needed to address about their particular course on a Smartboard. This information was then converted to text, saved, and uploaded to the Blackboard sample training course.

5. AND THE SURVEY SAYS . . .

The focus at any learning institution is the student. The student perspective on technology use in must be considered when helping faculty determine “Why use technology.” To impress this point to faculty, student surveys on class technology taken by faculty members in academic courses were summarized and incorporated into the faculty training workshops. During the testing and survey design supplemental workshops, sample surveys were demonstrated, printed, and given to attendees. These surveys included actual unanimous positive student responses to technology use on campus. Faculty not only received instruction on testing and survey tools, they got immediate positive feedback

on why this knowledge should be utilized in the classroom. The students felt that technology helps them feel more organized, absorb more material, and decipher the information with greater ease. The number one response from the student surveys was that they find learning with technology more interesting than sitting in a classroom with a dry erase board.

This immediate and positive feedback was a great encouragement to faculty to further their technology skills. Knowing beforehand that their efforts are preferred and recognized gives faculty more motivation to use technology.

6. SUPPLEMENTAL ASSISTANCE

Supplemental assistance is the expanded effort to encourage faculty to utilize technology; training doesn’t stop at the end of the workshop. To ensure greater faculty participation and comfort Valparaiso University’s User Support offers continued help after a workshop has taken place.

6.1 Open Labs

Valparaiso University’s open lab time for faculty is scheduled strategically after any training workshop and always before the beginning of any semester. Faculty do not have to sign up, they can just show up. User Support staff are on hand during these times in a designated lab area to assist faculty on an as-needed basis. Faculty enjoyed the convenience of dropping in and asking questions or requesting further technology instruction when their schedules allowed time. The open lab times are unstructured and informal, making the faculty feel comfortable attending. Faculty can get answers to what they want to know when they want to know it.

6.2 Consultations

Instructional User Support goes one step further to ensure faculty participation and utilization of technology by offering individual consultations. One-on-one appointments are arranged by either the faculty member or a User Support staff member. Valparaiso University’s proactive method of having staff contact faculty for additional technology assistance has been well received by the faculty.

For faculty, scheduling time to learn technology is a low priority. Instructional User Support once again takes a proactive approach. Instead of waiting for faculty to find time in their busy schedules to contact us, we take the initiative. Follow-up is very useful in motivating faculty to utilize technology. It can be as simple as an email or phone call to a faculty member inquiring about progress with some new technology, or asking if they have any further questions about applying something that they have learned from a workshop. Having an instructional technology department make the first move can curtail the number of panicked and frustrated user phone calls.

8. CONCLUSION

Obtaining faculty participation in teaching with technology takes collaborative efforts. A partnership can take many forms. Seeking alliances with those that will support and promote technology use in the class was the most valuable effort Instructional User Support at Valparaiso University has developed. The relationships developed by Electronic Information Services User Support with the director of Teaching Resources and pioneering faculty are just

a beginning of creating and developing alliances at Valparaiso University. Many other liaisons can be sought; at this writing other key alliances are in the development stages to gather further momentum to promote technology use in the class.

Supplying proven positive results during training workshops was a motivational tool for faculty that they carried with them once they left the training workshop. This approach took many forms. The most effective motivational tool was the use of student surveys to communicate to faculty how their main audience wants to learn.

Offering supplemental assistance after training workshops furthers faculty comfort zone when trying new technologies. Valparaiso University User Support takes a proactive approach on supplemental assistance. Electronic Information Services staff does not wait until faculty need assistance. Follow-up contact

procedures to increase technology usage among faculty have proven to be well worth the effort.

Lastly, Valparaiso University Electronic Information Services, User Support continues to create, develop, and implement other avenues to develop and maintain faculty utilization of technology. Technology is continually improving and changing. Training support of new technology advancements also need to be reviewed and modified by User Support to assure continual faculty participation. Faculty time constraints do not always allow for technology training workshops. Marketing the benefits of why faculty should take the time to update and develop their technology skills and usage will promote faculty participation in technology workshops.