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Taking Instruction to Where It Will Be Used:  
Tutoring Faculty in Their Offices  
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Abstract  
If college faculty are to keep pace with the phenomenal increases and rapid changes in 
the technology available for instruction and learning, Academic Support Services must 
be prepared to enter the breach and do their share to provide training faculty 
development opportunities. This paper reports on the experience of one small private 
college and the practical and philosophical considerations behind the decision to add 
tutoring faculty and staff in their offices to the menu of other training and development 
services offered. Benefits of the program for the faculty and for the support staff who do 
the tutoring are presented.
Taking Instruction to Where It Will Be Used: Tutoring Faculty in Their Offices
by Eugene A. Engeldinger and Michael G. Love

Introduction
One of the most difficult issues facing higher education is the extremely fast pace of change, particularly in the type and amount of new technology available for teaching and learning. With these changes come some faculty frustration with their inability to keep pace with the instructional technologies and incorporate them into their classroom repertoires and pedagogical styles. The result for some of our faculty colleagues is insecurity and defensiveness regarding the value of their current teaching methods, withdrawal from opportunities to learn more about them, and denial that the new technologies might be preferable to what some now are doing in the classroom.

The solutions to these reactions lie in the provision of a variety of services to support faculty and staff development and training. Whether one sees the question raised while reading the professional literature or while discussing these matters with faculty colleagues, the answer is the same--classroom instructors need and desire help learning how to use these new technologies, and incorporating them into classroom instruction.

An institution can provide the necessary training in a variety of ways, but a central element of success on all campuses must be the enthusiastic involvement of campus support services, including the library, media services and the computer center. Like some other campuses, this is the route taken by Carthage.

Carthage is a four year liberal arts college affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, with an enroll of 1688 FTE and about 90 faculty. The college has a campus-wide network, with a fiber backbone and twisted pair to the desktop. All faculty offices are completely networked, as are all student residence hall rooms, student computer labs, and most classrooms. The College supports both PCs and MacIntosh platforms through a client server, token ring architecture with a Banyan network operating system. In early 1993, the Computer Center was merged with the Library thereby creating Academic Information Services (AIS), headed by a newly created vice president position reporting to the President of the College. The following year, Media Services was added to AIS.

Because of the strong belief in the ‘electronic teaching library’ concept, and that the ‘network is the library’, a holistic computing philosophy prevails. This means, in essence, that virtually all staff and public access computers should be networked and that as much as possible, all information and general applications should be accessible from anywhere on campus. As we all know, distributing this much access capability to all desktops is one thing, ensuring that it can be put to most efficient use by the college
community can be quite another. In our case, it soon became apparent that increases in user services and training were imperative. Some positive action was required to increase computer literacy, more importantly, the ‘information literacy’ of the college community.

Traditional Approaches and Their Deficiencies

Carthage like most other institutions has been wrestling with the problem for several years and has gradually settled on what we would consider a holistic approach. And, like many other colleges, we use several traditional approaches to teaching our faculty how to use new hardware, software, databases and information resources.

* Special classes and workshops are conducted for groups of interested individuals.
* Point-of-use aids and documentation are created that can be kept alongside equipment and used as needed.
* ‘Wild card’ e-mail messages called ‘help yourself’ bulletins, are distributed so computer literate or adventurous users can configure their computers for special applications themselves.
* Special technology events are conducted, such as our Faculty/staff Technology Day at the beginning of the fall term each year. Each April we hold Computer Awareness Week which encourages students as well as faculty to participate in educational technology events.
* To help computer users in the computer labs and in the library, we schedule specially trained students called ITAs (Information Technology Assistants).
* In addition, we maintain our technology HelpDesk with computer, library and media services staff.

The traditional approaches provide much needed assistance to many faculty, but our experience suggests that they are not satisfactory for every individual, nor every situation. In-service sessions and workshops are usually held in the library, in computer labs and in our electronic classrooms. In many cases, these locations utilize equipment with which our faculty is not familiar. The workshops and demonstrations usually are attended by individuals who are at different levels of proficiency with technology and who, in all likelihood, learn at different rates. For a few, the pace of instruction will be too fast, for others too slow. For some, the examples demonstrated will be very helpful, for others totally irrelevant, and perhaps even a barrier to their learning. In some cases, the workshops take too much time for what the attendees feel they benefit. And also, the timing of the workshop might not be most conducive to the person’s learning readiness. The workshops were often scheduled with the convenience of AIS staff in mind, rather than at times better suited to faculty/staff schedules. For these reasons, many individuals failed to take advantage of the sessions offered. But even when they did, the lessons
learned were probably forgotten by the time they were put to use by the workshop participant.

The real solution, it seems, was there all along. As we observed our staff assisting students in the library and computer labs, we came to realize that one of the reasons reference librarians and lab assistants are successful is that we are tutoring students at their greatest readiness to learn. We are helping students when they have assignments due, thus they are highly motivated to assimilate the skills we impart. Applying these lessons to training faculty (whose workshops also are sparsely attended) seems a logical step. In both cases we find the hands-on training to be clumsy because of the lack of uniform computing skills among the participants. Indeed, the participants in these workshops (whether students or faculty) rarely constitute a homogeneous group. The level of computer skills is too diverse for instruction to satisfy all participants equally. One thing does appear to be true, however. Students seem most ready to learn when they come to the labs and library with assignments coming due. In those cases motivation to learn is high. Faculty, on the other hand, rarely use the labs, though they might make more frequent use of computers in the library.

These observations affirm a number of our suspicions as to why the workshops and classes are not as effective as we would hope. Many faculty and staff could benefit from the personal attention that we make available to students and others who use the labs, but at least two things militate against it--the labs are not accessed as conveniently as their office equipment, and the labs are not as private. In their offices, it would be more acceptable to have help, since no one (especially students) would observe the tutoring. And, of course, the fact that the labs are staffed by students, whereas the office tutors would be regular staff probably influences faculty responsiveness to the idea. It should be noted, too, that all faculty are not equally bothered by instruction from students.

It had become obvious that our traditional methods of staff development are not satisfactory for all users. Those methods do serve many, but for others a different approach is necessary. It had seemed to us that there should be a method of resolving these inadequacies, that we could provide the type of instruction that suits the learning style of the individual, on equipment with which the learner is familiar and at a time that is most opportune, i.e. close to the time of actual need. It is with this in mind that we initiated our Faculty/Staff Tutoring Program.

Implementing the Program

The possibility of implementing such a program was raised first at a weekly meeting of the AIS unit heads. As might be expected, initially there was concern regarding the ability of the unit to assume another service, particularly one that was potentially so labor intensive. Later, the idea was raised at a meeting of the AIS Advisory Group, the faculty group that provides us with advice and guidance. After a brief discussion they endorsed the plan. The early reluctance of both groups to the program was not because the idea lacked merit, nor was it thought to be unnecessary. Rather, both groups were concerned that staff resources might not be adequate and we might be stretching ourselves too thin.
To get the program off the ground, ‘wild card’ e-mail messages were sent to all faculty and staff, explaining the program and providing examples of what might be reasonable tutoring projects. Flyers were created and distributed to all mailboxes, and a short announcement was published in the campus electronic newsletter “Reality Bytes”. Again the idea was praised, but concerns were raised about our limited staff resources. Nonetheless, we moved forward with the plan and within weeks the program was in operation.

As might be expected, the tutoring sessions go beyond learning a few computing software packages. The various instructional technologies are converging, gradually eroding the distinctions between basic computing, communications between computers and data services, as well as, delivery and storage of digital, audio and video information, its creation and repackaging. Just as the convergence of these technologies makes more logical the merging of the organizational units in higher education institutions, the blurring of the distinctions at the desktop means that assistance from all AIS units would be required to make this program work. Computer staff, media specialists and librarians all would participate and act as tutors.

The Media Services Coordinator assumed the role of tutoring coordinator and became the focal point for communication by faculty/staff regarding tutorial needs. This is the person faculty are to contact if they want to schedule an appointment. Then an interview is conducted and the exact need explained, the technology needs of the requester are identified and an estimate regarding the amount of time necessary to conduct the session is determined. Usually from 15 minutes to an hour long session is scheduled at the mutual convenience of both learner and tutor.

**Benefits to the Faculty**

The most obvious benefits of such a program are the positive relations developed between the faculty and the AIS staff. In the first place, just implementing the program shows that AIS staff care and are sensitive to faculty needs, so the personal attention given promotes a closer collaborative reciprocal relationship as well. The faculty know who to ask for help, and what they can reasonably expect.

The majority of the tutoring is done on the faculty desktop since that is the equipment that the person will use most often. A few tutoring sessions are being done on specialty equipment, i.e. equipment that is not likely to reside in any particular office, but rather is housed at a central location. Examples of this are CD ROM burning and video editing in the Media Center, scanning documents in the computer center and library, and creating electronic portfolios in the curriculum library. Thus, anything mounted on the campus network and available in faculty or staff offices would be tutored in an office. If the equipment is not accessible in an office, tutoring would be done elsewhere, usually in an AIS work area.
Tutoring as a method of faculty and staff development has a number of aspects that auger well for success of the program. Pedagogically, the program does much better than many other methods at meeting the needs and proclivities of our users.

One important benefit is that the trainer uses the equipment that the learners are actually going to use when doing their real projects. The faculty are already familiar with the equipment on their desks. Tutoring in offices insures that the learners are not routinely seeing demos or doing hands-on workshops with AIS staff using PowerMacs, when their own office equipment is a PC. Nor will faculty be subjected to a demo using Win95 when the office equipment operates under Windows 3.1. While these might seem like minor issues to some of us, we should remember that the best learning takes place when learners have some knowledge onto which they can attach new information. The more information the learner confronts in an unfamiliar situation, the less likely it will be that learning will take place. In addition, it is unlikely that the office desktop machines are configured exactly like those in the labs or the electronic classrooms. Indeed, its not even likely that all faculty have the same brands and models of equipment, since normally it is purchased in different years from different vendors and often from different departmental budgets with different specifications. Thus, lack of uniform configuration or equipment can be a learning barrier for the novice and less sophisticated computer users. However, if the tutoring takes place on the faculty office equipment, none of the configuration irregularities or platform differences will present a problem.

The timing of the instruction is extremely important. And the closer the instruction is to the time it actually will be used, the more effective the learning experience will be. In addition, with this tutoring program, the learning will take place with a real project. The learner might be operating under a schedule to accomplish the task within a particular time frame. Strong motivation prompted by time restraints and actual projects will increase the probability that the procedures will be learned and that the experience will be a success.

Privacy of the instructional session is important for many faculty, though, of course, not all. In the office, with only the AIS staff member observing and coaching, the learner is free to make as many mistakes as s/he wants without that lack of sophistication being widely known. As is often the case when we learn things serendipitously, it is possible to be quite skillful and proficient without knowing some things that others might consider ‘basic’. In tutoring sessions, the learner need not fear that these failings will be exposed. Indeed, another of the advantages might be the elimination of some of the deficiencies during the course of the tutoring. Additionally, it is convenient for the learners to ask basic questions of the tutor and expose their ignorance in ways that many might not be willing to do in a group instructional session.

There is little doubt that faculty who adopt new technologies and use them well can gain in status. Self confidence frequently is buoyed, and the technologically adept faculty are sought out to provide help and advice to colleagues. Technology receptive students also respond well and are probably more inclined to use technology in completing their assignments and projects.
Benefits to the AIS Staff

In addition to the benefits accruing to faculty, there are advantages in such a program for the college support team. At the very least, this service exhibits unquestionable proof that the AIS staff are committed to technical training that is relevant and individualized.

A major benefit for AIS staff is that the program provides a definite structure for delivering the services that must be provided given anyway. This program returns control of work priorities to AIS staff, since tutoring sessions can be scheduled at mutually beneficial times. The staff need not feel they must lay projects aside and immediately attend to a request for help, nor feel guilty if they can not handle a situation immediately. Since a tutoring time can be scheduled, the AIS staff can continue with their projects, and the faculty member will know when help will be available. In large measure, the ‘fire fighting’, crisis management approach, so common in many computing operations, can be reduced, if not eliminated completely.

These tutoring sessions allow AIS staff a chance to work more closely with individual faculty on their projects. AIS staff learn first hand the faculty members’ needs, as well as their technological strengths and weaknesses. Knowing these things allows the AIS staff to implement more generalized help aids and increases the probability that, as they review the professional literature and vendor catalogs, they can identify and recommend hardware and software that might benefit the faculty member. Individualized, focused help to faculty becomes more likely when this service is in place.

Sessions in the individual offices gives AIS staff a better sense of what hardware and software are in use by individuals throughout campus. Other useful bits of information include condition of the equipment being used, and whether there is a mismatch between resources that are in the office and the faculty members’ computing needs, skills and technological aspirations. If there is a mismatch, more appropriate equipment can be installed. Or at least, recommendations for upgrades can be made to the appropriate individuals or offices on campus.

Another benefit is the realization that not all machines are configured in consistent ways, nor necessarily in ways that best serve the user. Undoubtedly, there will be little uniformity of machine set-ups nor uniformity of equipment for that matter, among the faculty. This, in itself, is a major reason why instruction in groups using lab equipment is less successful than it could be. Tutoring sessions provide AIS staff with insights as to more general problems faced by the faculty as a whole. If only a simple fix is required (restoration of an icon, for example), this might be done during the tutoring session. If the reconfiguration requires more time, another appointment can be made to correct the difficulty.

During the tutoring session, the faculty member’s level of technical competence will become more obvious. This will be detected merely by watching the faculty member
work, and through conversation about the project underway. Awareness of general faculty technical ‘readiness’ is very useful for planning other workshops and for planning campus-wide technology upgrades.

In addition to their own technology needs, faculty expectations of their students, may become obvious as a result of the tutor and faculty member working together on the project. This knowledge provides insights into student needs and impacts the type of configuration of resources in student computer labs, the workshops given to students and faculty, and on the training we give to our lab assistants.

**Conclusions**

Our experience so far suggests that our earliest fears regarding our ability to meet the demands were unfounded. We have had a number of requests for service, but as it happens, we were not inundated. Indeed, we have found that tutoring in the offices has not created the great a drain on our staff resources that we originally feared it would. Perhaps the reason is because the tutoring service is not the only, not even the primary, service program. Because we have the workshops and special events, and probably most importantly, the HelpDesk, the tutoring sessions are easy to incorporate into our workflow. In fact, some tutoring results directly from queries originally directed to the HelpDesk. Because much of the assistance needed by our faculty proved to be manageable over the phone, it was not always necessary to schedule time in the office.

The major lesson learned so far, is that our users, being such a diverse group with different learning styles, need different training options. The tutoring program is a very personalized approach, and as such is much appreciated. Even better, done in conjunction with other training services, this pedagogical approach provides an alternative for those who do not learn as well in groups with more generalized instruction.

Last, but certainly not least, brush fires and individual user crises are handled in a fashion that allows better utilization of staff time, while providing a valued service to our users. Adding tutoring services in the offices to the other training activities, while originally a daunting idea, did turn out to be a wise decision.