What is it?

A selective liberal arts college of 2,400 students, DePauw University has invested heavily in technology, most notably through a $20 million Grant of Distinction from the Lilly Endowment. In 2000, DePauw launched a series of e-learning initiatives to ensure that infrastructure investments are coupled with programmatic support for transformative teaching and learning practices. The university’s 361° Initiatives program is intended to prepare students to be technologically fluent in a changing world where information technology will permeate their professional and personal lives. At the core of DePauw’s 361° Initiatives lies the Student Technology Assessment, Resources, and Training (START) Program, a technology assistance program— for students and staffed by students—that is meant to serve as a replicable model for other liberal arts colleges and universities nationwide.

Since its inception, START has been providing students with training opportunities in general computing concepts, information literacy, presentations, spreadsheets, database management, Web authoring, digital audio, digital video, and other applications. During the 2004–2005 academic year, more than 700 students participated in 49 workshop events, and START consultants staffing service points distributed throughout campus worked with more than 350 student clients, advising them on everything from image and text scanning to the production of PowerPoint presentations. The START Program’s current suite of services includes:

- **Online assessment tools:** Using Tek.Xam, a suite of tests delivered online to assess and certify technology literacy, students are able to measure their technology fluency in seven skill areas: general computing concepts, knowledge and use of the Internet, word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, databases, and Web authorship.

- **Online computer training:** Students are provided with a Web-based learning platform (ElementK), which they may use free-of-charge to access more than 400 instructor-facilitated online courses, self-paced tutorials, and a comprehensive reference library. The online Learning Advisor helps students select online courses, provides feedback on target areas that need improvement, and helps students measure their progress in those areas.

- **Hands-on workshops and in-class instruction:** Students can choose from among the program’s menu of scheduled training workshops.

- **One-on-one consulting:** Students can improve their multimedia fluency by obtaining assistance from the START consultants, who staff service points at DePauw’s technology service areas in the student union, main library, and science building.

- **Course-specific training:** Instructors can call on START staff members to help students complete course-specific assignments involving technology. For example, an economics professor may decide to partner with START to help students develop Excel graphs for statistical modeling.

- **Skills certification:** Students can certify their technological literacy by taking a nationally recognized technology exam (Tek.Xam).

- **Career development:** Students are given the opportunity to foster their leadership and management skills by becoming consultants and student directors of the program, assisting their peers with class assignments and personal projects requiring technical expertise.

What problem does it solve?

Many institutions share DePauw’s goal of ensuring that students acquire the technical skills necessary to succeed after graduation. Larger colleges and universities often concentrate on Web-delivered distance education, but DePauw remains solidly committed to the face-to-face teaching and learning philosophy of the traditional, small liberal arts college. What makes DePauw’s approach unique is the way the university has stayed true to its mission and core strengths while integrating digital fluency throughout the liberal arts curriculum. Rather than narrowing the reach of its IT training initiatives to computer science majors or other selected groups, DePauw’s START Program is dedicated to comprehensive service that helps the entire student community understand the relevance of technology to every discipline.

The START Program frequently inspires students to seek more advanced IT training and professional opportunities through another initiative at DePauw, the Information Technology Associates Program (ITAP), which also supplies the START Program with some of its trainers and program leaders. ITAP is DePauw’s internship program for students seeking advanced IT training, close mentoring in the area of their choice, and real-world lead-
ership experience. Students who apply for this nonacademic program are offered IT internships, both on-campus in academic and administrative offices and off-campus with Indiana’s leading technology companies, which make more than 100 student internships available to the program each year. By matching ITAP students with alumni advisors and coordinating this IT apprenticeship program, DePauw is helping the state of Indiana hold on to its most creative and technologically sophisticated college graduates.

How did they do it?

**Departmental collaborations.** DePauw has a long tradition of supporting teaching and learning through programs that help students gain proficiency in three focus areas: writing, speaking, and quantitative thinking. Students can seek assistance from any of three help centers, each of which is dedicated to one of these focus areas. Rather than introduce technological proficiency as a fourth focus area with its own distinct help center, the university chose to underscore the pervasive role that digital media fluency increasingly plays in writing, speaking, and quantitative thinking across the liberal arts curriculum. Critical to the success of this student support program is the willingness of campus units, particularly the three main media centers (Music Instructional Technology Center, Digital Media Lab, and Pulliam Center for Contemporary Media), to collaborate with START personnel in providing students with the resources and training they need to become technologically proficient.

**Student staffing.** The START Program hires work-study students to staff service points at the union, library, science building, and media labs. The majority of the scheduled and customized course-specific training workshops, however, are led by a smaller number of students drawn from ITAP. First-year ITAP students rotate throughout campus to expose them to the widest possible range of IT projects. After this apprenticeship year, ITAP Associates can accept year-long jobs offered from on-campus employers, and ITAP third- and fourth-year students undergo a complete job search, application, and interview process before they can be hired by the START Program or any other nonacademic, academic, or administrative office on campus. In the START Program, ITAP Associates are given greater responsibility for managing laboratory spaces and project work and play a critical role in ensuring that the program is sustained over the long term. Of the 153 students currently participating in the four-year ITAP, 11 are employed by START, including 3 students in the third and fourth years of ITAP who serve as START Student Directors, working closely with the coordinator on program planning.

**Assessment.** Evaluation processes were put in place to measure the effects that digital technology was having on teaching and learning. The number of students who participate in the START Program each year continues to climb, as do the satisfaction levels among students and faculty. The goal of digital fluency for all DePauw students, however, is far more challenging to achieve. While the student interns in START and ITAP gain considerable digital fluency themselves and provide useful technical help to others, the vast majority of students are rarely called upon to use digital tools to complete academic assignments. But examples are emerging, such as the professor who commissioned START interns to develop a set of simple templates into which her students could place their visual and written content for a Web page assignment. The START Program assessment report reached the conclusion that faculty who are concerned about the academic quality of digital assignments might want to increase their engagement in the kinds of collaborations with START that DePauw offers.

**Why is it noteworthy?**

- **Digital fluency:** DePauw’s START Program transforms the traditional liberal arts college curriculum by integrating the goal of digital fluency into every discipline, classroom, and aspect of life on this residential campus.
- **Replicable:** In an effort to help other institutions incorporate the START Program’s effective student support practices, DePauw funds internships and sabbaticals for faculty members and information technology staff from other campuses and hosts national workshops, conferences, and symposia on transforming teaching and learning through instructional technology.
- **Sustainable:** START staff are primarily work-study students participating in the ITAP internship initiative. Therefore, personnel costs for the program are largely covered by federal allocations.

To learn more

Visit the START Web site at [http://www.depauw.edu/it/START/](http://www.depauw.edu/it/START/).

To share your innovation

If your institution has a practice that you believe would be of interest to the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, please share it with us. To submit your innovation for review, please use the ELI Innovations Contribution Form on our Community Exchange page [http://www.educause.edu/ELICommunityExchange/6797](http://www.educause.edu/ELICommunityExchange/6797). A panel will review your submission and make a recommendation to the ELI staff.

**About the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative**

The EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI) is a community of higher education institutions and organizations committed to advancing learning through IT innovation. To achieve this mission, ELI focuses on learners, learning principles and practices, and learning technologies. We believe that using IT to improve learning requires a solid understanding of learners and how they learn. It also requires effective practices enabled by learning technologies. We encourage institutions to use this report to broaden awareness and improve effective teaching and learning practice.