The Eggs and the Bottle: Engaging Faculty in Technology-based Teaching

Laurie Trufant and Mike Giordano

Instructional Development Center
University of New Hampshire
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NERCOMP 2003, Worcester MA

Presenters:
Laurel Warren Trufant, Ph.D. 
Instructional Development Center 
Dimond Library Level G 
University of New Hampshire 
1-603-862-4394 
lwt@cisunix.unh.edu

Michael Giordano, Mgr. 
Instructional Development Center 
Dimond Library Level G 
University of New Hampshire 
1-603-862-3629 
mike.giordano@unh.edu

Abstract:
Last year, using the metaphor of the egg and the bottle, we explored the challenge of engaging faculty in technology-based teaching practices. We will report on the progress we have made and present for your examination some of the strategies we have implemented for our faculty eggs.

Summary:
Drawing faculty into the theory and practice of instructional technology requires that they think creatively, proceed proactively, and assume risks. The classic "bottleneck" in this process occurs when aspirations exceed available time and skills. Last year, the metaphor of the egg and the bottle – the old third-grade science project – helped us articulate that bottleneck. Our analysis helped us define new goals for the Instructional Development Center (IDC) – goals whose accomplishment would draw faculty into using a broad range of instructional technology tools in their teaching.

A careful assessment of the evolution of our recruitment, training, and support models, coupled with survey and evaluation feedback from faculty, had revealed some significant facts:

- Our faculty -- despite prevailing wisdom to the contrary -- were risk-takers. Our training population did not consist entirely of early adopters, but shaded rather heavily over into second-level adopters and even late-majority users.
- Contrary to our initial instinct -- which was to develop an exhaustive training program to diminish an anticipated intimidation factor -- we found that an
elaborate training model could, in itself, be intimidating. Faculty tended to extrapolate from the intensity of the training to the difficulty of the process.

- The training we offered was often perceived as an obstacle to participation rather than as an enabling experience, despite the fact that some of the information delivered was essential to success.
- Support trumped training for faculty beginning to integrate technology. They were willing to experiment, stumble, innovate, and even fail, if they knew there would be someone available to address their immediate concerns and ensure that their content was delivered intact.

The most important thing we learned was that the simplification of tasks accomplished through a course management interface clearly opened doors, raised awareness, and encouraged at least preliminary exploration of the possibilities of instructional technology. It was not, however, sufficient to encourage faculty to explore other instructional technologies proactively. The sheer simplicity of the interface, ironically, preempted inquiry into other ways to use technology to enhance the traditional classroom.

**Strategies:**

Blackboard helped define our constituency and demonstrated the need for new strategies. Based on our experience with it, we defined a prospective faculty development model that would move beyond problem-oriented support and application-based training, to a team-oriented design-and-development approach that could draw faculty more deeply into instructional technology theory and practice without a prohibitive investment of time. Our newly defined goal called for programs that would:

- Encourage faculty to explore the broad possibilities of instructional technology;
- Promote an awareness of instructional design and instructional technology theory;
- Allow faculty to concentrate on pedagogical issues and content;
- Provide skill-based design-and-development support;
- Reduce the need for large investments of faculty time.

With this goal in mind, we explored programs and services described in the literature and in place at other institutions. We sought models that would allow the IDC to be proactive in easing faculty through the “bottleneck.” Some of our specific objectives were:

- Project-driven instructional development;
- A clearly articulated set of "best practices";
- A summer instructional technology event;
- Faculty representation in the IDC;
- A mentoring program that paired faculty with student mentors;
- An ongoing evaluation strategy that assessed our services in relation to our goals;
- Partnerships with other multimedia service departments;
• Partnerships with the teaching excellence and faculty development programs on campus.

In pursuit of these objectives, we have implemented (among others) the following programs and services:

• **FITSI** – a weeklong Faculty Instructional Technology Summer Institute. The 2002 Institute was grounded in the widely acclaimed research of Chickering and Gamson detailing the “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” (1987) and Chickering and Erhmann’s subsequent work, “Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever” (1994), which further developed Chickering’s theory by applying the seven principles to the field of instructional technology. Through a combination of nationally recognized keynote speakers, videoconference sessions, and a variety of hands-on technology-integration workshops, FITSI introduced faculty to a broad spectrum of instructional technologies in the context of both theory and practice. Planning for FITSI 2003 is currently underway.

• **eTAP** – An Educational Technology Assistant Program that brings student assistants, academic technology professionals, and faculty together in instructional technology teams that plan, develop, and implement course redesign through the use of instructional technology tools and techniques. eTAP is project-driven, grant-funded, and focused on solving specific instructional problems or implementing specific classroom innovations.

• **TnT Fridays** – A regular program of informal Teaching and Technology workshops and seminars that present and discuss "best practices" to guide faculty as they begin to think creatively about the impact of technology on their teaching. This series included reruns of the workshops delivered at the previous summer’s Institute.

• **ATL Program** – An Academic Technology Liaison program that pairs IDC team members with representatives from each college. ATLs work closely with faculty at their desktops and report problems, trends, needs, and outcomes to IDC professional staff.

• **Partnerships** with other multimedia service departments on campus to allow greater integration of services. We have partnered with Photo Services to create online training modules for the Office of Sponsored Research, and with Video Services to create promotional materials for major IDC initiatives.

• **Partnerships** with the Teaching Excellence Program. The Teaching Excellence Program participated in planning and implementing FITSI 2002, as well as in sponsoring several other faculty development initiatives throughout the year.

**Looking to the Future:**

Some of our faculty eggs have been nicely incorporated into instructional omelets. A few Humpty Dumpties have been less successful in taking the plunge. We will continue our search for programs and services that generate just enough heat to draw our faculty into the principles and practice of instructional technology. Ideally, we seek just the right
combination of programs and services -- one that will encourage but not coerce, engage but not intimidate, support but not direct.

Specifically, we will pursue four strategies as we look to the future:

- **Faculty IT Fellowships** that support faculty members in advocacy roles to help promote instructional technology principles and practices;
- **Blackboard Enterprise Edition** to facilitate a better integration of academic technology services into the fabric of the campus;
- **Expansion of the Summer Institute** to include a regional audience;
- **Closer working relationships** with faculty across campus and more aggressive promotion of IDC programs and services

In order to facilitate dialogue about instructional technology for a campus-wide audience, we have adopted an holistic approach to faculty development, one that takes into account the primacy of pedagogic concerns, the expressed needs of faculty, and the collective knowledge and experience of our instructional technology professionals. We will continue to assess, plan, develop, implement, and evaluate many different strategies. Sometimes we will fail; sometimes we will succeed.

Our immediate objective is to minimize the barriers faculty encounter as they integrate technology into their teaching. Our longer-term objective will be to help faculty gain a deeper understanding of their own technology needs. Our ultimate goal remains to create an environment of development and growth that will underwrite the instructional technology vision we have for the campus.

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