Teaching, Learning, and Technology at Research I Universities

by Robert S. Tannenbaum

I have just returned from an excellent conference, better than most that I have attended in a long time. Together with the incoming Chair of the University of Kentucky’s Instructional Computing Advisory Committee, I participated in the American Association for Higher Education’s “Teaching, Learning, and Technology Roundtable (TLTR) Summit Seminar.”1 Every one of the hundred or so attendees participated and contributed, sharing our experiences and efforts to introduce and expand the use of technology in the instructional process at our institutions. We wrestled with problems that we have in common, sought feasible solutions, and planned ongoing activities to continue and sustain our mutual objectives.

We came to the TLTR seminar as teams with from two to ten or more individuals from each of our respective institutions, bringing different perspectives on our mutual efforts, but reinforcing each other’s planning and designs for what to do upon our return to our home campuses. As teams, we could spread out, making more contacts with others from other institutions, gathering more and varied ideas, and then come back together to plan for the coming months. It was through these multifaceted contacts with a variety of other individuals, each of whom brought the perspective of another institution, that we gained well beyond any planning that we could have done at home.

But the value of contacts with individuals from other institutions is limited by the degree of overlap and commonality of the institutions and their missions and difficulties. And at this seminar, I found very few of my colleagues from peer institutions. Are these issues of less concern to Research I institutions? I think not! I believe there are many issues that we need to address from our unique perspective:

• How do we promote and support the expensive and time-consuming efforts required to effectively integrate technology throughout the instructional process at an institution that is dedicated primarily to research?
• How do we educate, support, and reward our faculty members, who currently are oriented primarily toward performing research, to help them strengthen their teaching through the integration of technology into the instructional process?

- How do we deal with the political, social, and fiscal realities inherent in institutions that are as large as ours, have so many different subgroups (sectors, colleges, departments, divisions, institutes, etc.) with so many diverse agendas and missions, where one group may not even have heard of another, let alone know what the other is doing, and where we do not necessarily want to establish a single “institutional” approach to addressing issues?

And for those of us in state-supported institutions:

• How do we approach the mandate being pressed upon us by our legislatures and our state governments to focus on instruction and not “waste” resources on addressing obscure research questions?
• How do we continue to meet the obligations of a land grant institution and still devote the necessary resources to support instructional technology?
• How do we convince our legislatures and governors that our efforts in behalf of instructional technology are sound pedagogically and fiscally even if they are expensive and time-consuming and do not necessarily result in increases in “productivity” that are measurable and quantifiable in a manner analogous to business productivity?

I submit that we all—both Research I and other institutions—will benefit enormously by engaging in such discussions; we all have a great deal to teach to and learn from each other. In an effort to interest other Research I institutions in the value of such discussions, and to introduce the concepts of the TLTR seminar program, I have arranged for a special interest group session at CAUSE95 in New Orleans this fall, to discuss teaching, learning, and technology at Research I institutions. For further information, please get in touch with me at rst@pop.uky.edu.

Robert Tannenbaum is Director, Academic Computing Services, at the University of Kentucky, where he is responsible for supporting all instructional and research computing. Dr. Tannenbaum has over thirty years of experience using computers, teaching about them, and supporting computer applications in almost every academic discipline.

tst@pop.uky.edu

1 The conference, entitled “Teaching, Learning, and Technology Roundtable Program Start-up Workshop and Summit Seminar,” was conducted last July in Phoenix under the auspices of the American Association for Higher Education. For more information on this and upcoming events in the TLTR program, please contact Steven W. Gilbert at AAHE (202-293-6440 or gilbert@clark.net). See also S. W. Gilbert, “Teaching, Learning, & Technology—The Need for Campuswide Planning and Faculty Support Services,” Change, March/April 1995, pp. 47ff. That issue of Change offers many other articles related to the introduction and support of instructional technology.