

Center for Instructional Technology: A Strategic Imperative

Debra Volzer

Director of eLearning and Coordinator for the CIT

volzerd@ohiodominican.edu

Mark Weaver

Digital Media Designer and Telecommunications Analyst

weaverm@ohiodominican.edu

Ohio Dominican University

Columbus, Ohio

(614) 253-2741

Abstract

Ohio Dominican University, a small traditional Catholic Liberal Arts University steeped in the Dominican tradition, is in the midst of a technological metamorphosis. At the forefront of the change is the Center for Instructional Technology. Charged with supporting the development of technology enhanced, hybrid, and totally online curriculum, the CIT wishes to showcase our web-supported (intranet) resource and the steps taken in the creation of this faculty portal. Provided will be the strategic plan, developmental stages, testing process, full implementation, faculty and administrative assessment and lessons learned. Using our Course Management System, WebCT CE, we have created a dynamic, interactive learning community with the specific intent of providing a repository for the sharing of best practices, helpful hints, training and development resources, online-faculty orientation tutorial and access to our CIT staff.

Introduction:

Technology enhanced education is the fastest growing and most controversial phenomena facing higher education. Small liberal arts institutions are not immune. Ohio Dominican University, a small urban liberal arts institution steeped in the Dominican tradition is in the midst of a technological metamorphosis. The impetus for this metamorphosis was to support not only the departmental mission but the overall strategic initiative identified by our leadership. Currently Ohio Dominican University has embraced web-enhanced courses but is hesitant to expand into hybrid or distance education. The mission of the CIT is to focus on the effective design and application of instructional technology in the learning environment to leverage our faculty expertise. Thus, we set out to provide faculty with alternatives beyond standard workshops for accessing resources to accomplish this mission. A second focus of our mission is to become the driving force behind the understanding, adoption and implementation of hybrid and fully online courses and degree programs. Due to limited staff and resources, we had to move in a purposeful and efficient manner. Described in this paper are the steps involved in this journey, including the development of our strategic plan, design and implementation process for our faculty portal, testing process, faculty and administrative assessment and lessons learned from our endeavor.

Strategic Plan:

Our team set out to define our mission, goals and strategic objectives with the understanding that it must first advance the university strategic plan but also incorporate individual job expectations and leverage our professional expertise. Each member of the CIT staff provides a unique perspective on faculty development and training. Our small department has experience as faculty, student advisor, curriculum developer, instructional designer, certified technology trainer, audio/video production specialist and digital media creation in all delivery forms. With such a wealth of experience coupled with a conscious effort to continue our own professional development and training, the questions of how to engage and provide faculty access to our expertise beyond the traditional venues needed to be answered. With guidance from our Executive Vice President who was also serving as our Vice President for Academic Affairs, we crafted our strategic plan to incorporate traditional means of delivering faculty training and professional development with an online component.

Developmental Stages:

In order to fully support the needs of our audience the CIT developed our faculty portal using three metrics. First, what do we, as Instructional Technology professionals, believe our audience needs to know to be successful using technology in enhancing their courses and programs? Secondly, identify, describe and demonstrate technologies that are currently available to our faculty. And finally, assess through a survey the needs articulated by our faculty.

In addition to the identified metrics for content development, the site also took into consideration our faculty level of comfort with technology. The goal of this site was to provide non-users the opportunity to experience the benefits of technology in a non-threatening manner. Thus, we spent an extensive amount of time discussing navigation to ensure our audience success in locating information of interest and need. For our novice and moderate users we provide access to resources, learning objects and exemplary courses to encourage continued development in their own courses. Finally, for our advanced users we provide access to trial accounts of new technologies, helpful hints and best practices from experts in the field and encouragement to utilize our staff to develop and incorporate advanced multimedia in their courses.

Website Design:

The architecture of the CIT site was chosen after research and review of similar institutional (size, scope, mission, demographics) resource sites and consultation with our Campus Web Master. The CIT site is comprised of an ASP (Active Server Page) application page that will dynamically display content based on user choice. This then dynamically displays information on the page based on the viewers' selection. This method allows the CIT staff to create content in their specific area of expertise by following a template without disrupting the overall design of the site. A Cascading Style Sheet is employed to ensure a uniform look specific to fonts, colors, and hyperlink styles. Once the page is completed, a UNC (Universal Naming Convention) encoded string is written. These strings pass a variable for the content to the ASP application.

Also included in the CIT site are two WebCT course shells. One serves as our faculty orientation course and the other a faculty forum to share best practices, concerns, raise issues and questions and discuss pedagogy. Our faculty training course provides faculty an experience from a student perspective. We believe faculty, through this experience, will discover how their curriculum can be presented and learning outcomes accomplished through the use of tools available in our Course Management System and other instructional technologies. In this course we provide both synchronous and asynchronous activities as well as remind faculty that old technologies such as phone, blackboards and chalk are still viable tools in learning. Following the completion of the training course, we encourage faculty to participate in the faculty forum. Faculty who have participated in the online orientation then become faculty advocates and/or mentors responsible for encouraging continued faculty participation. The goal of these additions is to create a community of learners sharing resources and best practices across disciplines.

As the site continues to develop we will move to a database driven technology. This will enable us to manage site content such as text, images, audio, as well as PDF documents and training schedules in SQL tables.

The issue raised in the creation of a dynamic push/pull technology is who controls technology resources; IS (Information Services) or the Center for Instructional Technology? The debate then becomes how much access to technology resources a non-IS staff member should be given and are there programmatic and pedagogical reasons that would legitimize non-IS staff having full access to these technologies. This issue has not been resolved on our campus to date, however, the CIT has been granted access under the watchful supervision of our Information Services department.

Testing Process:

Initial testing was broken down into three main categories; layout/design, cross browser capability and content. For layout design we felt it best to seek input from multiple sources. We identified individual reviewers who were internal and external, vested and non-vested, novice and advanced technology users. The task of these individuals was to assess the overall look and feel of the site. Specifically they were asked to assess if the site was intuitive in navigation, quick to load, visually pleasing and engaging/interactive. Those who had experience or expertise in instructional technologies were then asked to provide feedback on missing components. Cross browser capability was tested by reviewers using multiple browsers and operating systems. The CIT site is specifically designed to meet current Web development standards. Content was reviewed by Ohio Dominican faculty as they are the primary audience. However, many of our external reviewers were experts in distance education and provided insightful recommendations.

Once the initial testing was complete the site was reviewed and approved by the Executive Vice President and acting Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Marketing and Enrollment and the LIS (Learning and Information Services) Committee consisting of Deans, faculty and Administrative staff.

Assessment:

Our assessment criterion is divided into three categories; faculty use, faculty adoption, and faculty retention.

- Number of hits
- Number of faculty questions and requests
- Number of requested appointments
- Number of faculty taking advantage of open labs
- Number of faculty taking advantage of CIT open office hours
- Number of faculty participating in the faculty forum
- Follow up survey for assessing effectiveness in the classroom

Faculty use will be measured by the number of overall hits and return hits to the site. In addition to number of hits, navigation effectiveness will be assessed by the number of faculty questions requesting assistance with the site. Continued development of the site will be based on requests and suggestions from ODU faculty. Adoption of the technology will be measured through the number of individual appointments scheduled for consultation with one of the CIT staff, participation in open labs and CIT office hours, as well as the increased number of requested WebCT course shells. Technology adoption will be determined through faculty's use of the requested shells with respect to number of tools and level of technologies utilized within each course. Retention will be measured by the continued participation and growth of the repository of best practices and the sharing of ideas in the faculty forum. Additional retention will be measured through continued use of the CMS and institutional faculty commitment to move to hybrid and/or completely online courses and degree programs.

Lessons Learned:

- If you build it, they won't necessarily come!
- IS versus CIT, who owns it?
- Change?
- Faculty frighten easily!
- Client/Consultant or Black Box system?

Our initial attempt to engage faculty has been disappointing. Our attempts to dispel the myths of the use of technology to leverage faculty expertise have not achieved the desired effect. Our open labs have been poorly attended but many faculty have expressed an interest in attending but can't seem to find time in their schedule. However, the faculty that have expressed the interest are the early adopters who are currently using technology. Thus, we have yet to expand the number of faculty adopting the use of technology in their courses. Even with the opportunity to have a CIT staff member build the course using the faculty's current onsite course as a model, they are reluctant to trust online learning as a viable means of education.

We have a new initiative in place for the summer in the form of a faculty development grant. This grant will provide ODU faculty the opportunity to work with the CIT staff to develop a completely online course in their specific discipline. It is our hope that this is the first step to moving into the online arena.