Sneak Preview: Outreach & Technology in the College of Education

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Introduction and current status

One of the first steps in strategic planning is assessing the current environment. Developing a clear understanding of the College of Education's technology initiatives and outreach programs therefore became a priority when I came on board in February, 2002. As Director of Outreach and Technology for the College, a new position, I have two related roles. My primary charge is to convene and coordinate our efforts in offering programs to neighbor islands. My second role is to assist faculty in making use of emerging technologies. In assessing our current environment, I am greatly encouraged.

Our outreach programs, those programs that are available to students living outside Oʻahu, involve varying formats of distance education delivery and necessarily tap our faculty's technology skills. The LEI Aloha project (Learning Enhancement through Innovations) has made significant and ongoing contributions to the technology skills of our faculty. This project is a result of a federal grant—Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers Today. Under the direction of Dr. Curtis Ho and Dr. Catherine P. Fulford, it has provided regular opportunities for faculty learning through professional development workshops, technology-intensive course creation, online resource development, mentoring, and access to the Technology Learning Center.

The College currently offers a variety of programs to neighbor islands. These include the Bachelors in Elementary Education and Special Education, in progress on Kauaʻi and Maui; the Interdisciplinary Masters in Education, in progress on Maui; the Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Secondary Education (PBCSE), starting Fall 2002 in Kona; and the Masters in Rehabilitation Counselor Education which is available state-wide. Additional courses are also offered through distance media as a result of funding from grants and as a result of individual departmental initiatives. The EdLeads (Summer Masters) Program offered by the Department of Educational Foundations, for example, offers education professionals a combination of intensive summer coursework at Mānoa with online-learning projects conducted during the Fall and Spring semesters.

A number of College of Education faculty members have already taken their first steps in learning to use web-based course tools or have delivered a course using interactive television. Even more have directly indicated an interest in training with new delivery tools and formats. The willingness to learn new technologies and adopt a proactive approach to program re-design is a significant asset to the College. I expect to see more faculty members accept the challenge of technology-mediated instruction in the next few years. Training, direct assistance, and, in some cases, overload pay is available to support and encourage course redesign for priority courses.

Commitments

Along with such encouraging signs, the College of Education faces some significant challenges. The first is the continuing statewide shortage of teachers, especially on neighbor islands, and scarcity of budget resources. In December 2000, a proposal to fund teacher education on neighbor islands was approved and funded. This has resulted in the implementation of our Outreach and Technology initiative. The proposal called for drawing students from all neighbor islands and enrolling over 100 at full implementation (College of Education, 2000).

The College's commitment includes continuous offerings of an elementary program, a secondary program, a masters program and a special education program on neighbor islands. The location of these programs will likely rotate between Kauaʻi, Maui and Hawaiʻi with services to Molokaʻi and Lanaʻi extended through statewide offerings. The availability of our programs to islands beyond Oʻahu is critical to meeting the state-wide teacher shortage. While recruitment of mainland teachers offers one solution, the radically higher attrition rate of these new-comers contributes to the continued staffing problems in our public schools (College of Education, 2000).

Aspiring teachers on neighbor islands have historically not had regular or consistent access to College programs. In June 2002, a poll of our Kaua'i B.Ed. cohort revealed that five of thirteen responding students would have enrolled three to ten years ago if the program had been available then. Availability of credentialing and professional development opportunities to neighbor islands enable local students, the population with the highest retention rate, to become teaching professionals.

Strategies

Addressing our state-wide needs will require rethinking and retooling the delivery of programs. Modern methods of delivery fall into one of four categories of instruction: face-to-face, online, video/interactive television, or hybrid (any combination of methods). The College of Education has traditionally delivered outreach programs face-to-face, by flying faculty to neighbor islands, or by interactive television through HITS (Hawai'i Interactive Television System). A few courses have been offered fully or partially online using course management systems such as WebCT or Blackboard.

Each delivery format possesses strengths and weaknesses. By taking advantage of the pedagogical strengths of multiple formats, hybridizing the delivery, instructors can offer greater opportunities for student success – the best of both worlds (Chamberline, 2001; Lago, 2000). Due to the clinical and interpersonal nature of teacher preparation, it is unlikely that wholly online programs will evolve. Hybrid courses and programs promise the convenience and access of online delivery without completely forfeiting the advantages of direct personal contact. Students enrolled in hybrid courses at other institutions have reported that they appreciate the combination of direct contact with decreased commuting time (Young, 2002). In order to capitalize on the strengths, efficiencies and opportunities that each delivery mode offers, we will continue to develop more courses and programs in hybrid formats.

The State-wide PBCSE program scheduled to begin in Fall of 2003 will take advantage of this multi-modal approach. Students in this program will experience an "executive MBA" format, in which they travel several weekends during the semester to meet in a face-to-face environment. These face-to-face opportunities will build rapport, allow for traditional group discussion, create a cohesive learning environment, and provide modeling opportunities. The balance of instruction, project work and interaction will occur online. Online components will capitalize on efficiency of content delivery, assessment, and asynchronous interactions. Practicum and student teaching experiences will be managed with faculty visitation. By approaching the program in this manner, we will address the state-wide demand for certification, meet the career objectives of neighbor island applicants, and, it is hoped, fill the cohort to capacity. A full cohort will maintain financial feasibility and allow us to schedule the program on a continuous basis.

Hybrid formats will create new demands to be addressed, including available Internet access, students' capacity for self-direction, and technological comfort. While the student body continues to demonstrate increased technological proficiency, hybrid programs will not be a "best fit" for everyone. It therefore makes sense to continue offering programs in traditional formats to specific neighbor islands while we add capacity with state-wide models.

Happenings and Things to Come

As part of the Technology Advisory Committee, I have played a role in addressing the top three priorities identified for the College. These objectives include the upgrade of network infrastructure, the replacement of outdated computers in our computer labs, and acquisition of Internet connectivity and projection equipment for instructors in University High School Building 1. The network infrastructures of several buildings are now in the process of an upgrade, our networked computer classrooms are undergoing phase-in of modern/mobile/wireless computers and Internet and projection equipment will be available in University High School Building 1 by Fall 2002.

The acquisition of mobile computing is of particular interest in today's educational setting. In recent months, increasing numbers of schools are purchasing mobile carts with wireless laptops as an alternative to desktop computers (Minkel, 2002). Mobile computing provides flexibility in location, classroom layout, teaching methodology, and multiple possibilities for improved learning (Weathers, 2001). Using special software (Apple Remote Desktop or NetOp School), our instructors can view students' work remotely,

control a student's computer for demonstrations, or even "sleep" the entire classroom to get students' attention. The teachers we prepare will likely use similar technology in the schools where they are employed.

Opportunities to implement technology-mediated strategies will continue. Several faculty members are currently working with me to expand their knowledge of online course tools with the intent of redesigning courses for hybrid delivery. In the next year, new learning opportunities will emerge for College of Education faculty using WebCT, Tegrity Weblearner, and other distance delivery tools. Planning and development of more outreach programs are also in process as we gear up to meet the commitments of our outreach plan. As we expand our outreach offerings and redesign courses to fit the needs of today's students, faculty will need to avail themselves of training and development opportunities. Mastery of technology-mediated instruction is a function of attitude over all else. By maintaining a positive outlook and actively learning new instructional methods, we will continue to meet our challenges and prepare educators for work in a technology-rich world.

References

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