

Faculty Summit Feedback

October 15, 2008

Background

Brian Roberts hosted the third Faculty Summit on Wednesday, October 15, 2008. In keeping with previous summits, around 30 faculty members invited from across campus met for a luncheon discussion about technology-related issues at the university. The overall theme for the summit was instructional technologies.

During the first part of the 90-minute gathering, small groups of faculty members worked with an ITS facilitator and recorder to discuss instructional technologies and related concerns. Roberts then opened the conversation to the entire group, saying he was interested in hearing more about how faculty are using technology in their classrooms, and any “pain points” they might be experiencing.

Feedback by Topic

A common theme throughout the summit was that faculty want to know more about what other colleagues are doing and which technologies they are using. One outcome would be more effective collaboration in research and teaching efforts. Faculty also showed a genuine and broad interest in exchanging information and expertise about instructional technologies, in comparing notes on what’s been tried, what’s working, and what hazards to avoid.

Within that context, the topics below reflect the general themes of the conversation. Comments are taken directly from faculty participants. Possible action items follow the topics, and are compiled from the discussion at the summit and a wrap-up session with Roberts and ITS staff after the event.

Use of e-textbooks

Faculty have interest in and curiosity about e-textbooks. A [pilot program](#) at the university hopes to see how faculty and students respond to e-textbooks. Though approximately 16,000 potential e-textbook sales were available this fall at the University Co-op, only about 55 were purchased. E-textbooks are less expensive, but licensing models are in flux and still a deterrent for most students.

Comments

- Students in my class who used only an e-textbook do not seem to be performing as well as students using traditional resources.
- The licensing model for e-textbooks is confusing to students and some students count on being able to resell their books after a class is over.
- Why are we only exploring one distributor? Are there other options besides those offered by John Wiley & Sons?

Course management tools

Generally, faculty reported that Blackboard is alive and well. Some questioned whether alternatives to Blackboard, including open-source options, might not be a better value.

Comments

- Why not use Moodle or other open-source options?
- If I am collaborating with colleagues in other countries, they often can't afford Blackboard.
- One of the biggest wins with Blackboard as far as students are concerned is that it is a single tool.
- It would be so much easier if Blackboard was a one-stop system like Clips.
- Overall consensus is that Blackboard is and remains cumbersome.

Classroom etiquette

Wireless access and the proliferation of devices have made multi-tasking common in the classroom. Many faculty feel unrestrained use of technology during a class is disruptive. While students are encouraged to use their laptops and the Internet, if they aren't considerate they can be distracting to other students and the lesson in progress.

Comments

- I want students to use their laptops but often feel like they aren't paying attention.
- When I am giving a lecture on accounting and look out at a class where most students have big smiles on their faces I know something is up!
- Do we want to control this kind of behavior? How is it different than when students read a newspaper or something else in class?
- There are some solutions that allow you to randomly display what students have on their laptops on the screen at the front of the classroom. This is a pretty good deterrent!
- Is there a technology solution or is this a classroom management issue?
- Are tools like Google apps and Skype good for classroom learning, and how do I manage them when I am teaching?

Classroom and Collegial Collaboration

Faculty showed ongoing and increasing interest in new and better ways to collaborate -- both within the classroom and with professional colleagues.

Comments

- Why can't faculty have something like Intel-pedia?
- When I talk about collaboration I don't mean e-mail and attached files. I want us to think differently about what we mean when we talk about sharing information.
- Whatever happened with Adobe Connect? A lot of faculty already use it.
- What collaboration platforms are we looking at for campus?
- People are doing good things in their classrooms and their research and we don't have any centralized way to learn about it.
- Google apps is a great solution. A lot of students already use it.

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- A faculty wiki is one solution. We could learn from each other instead of being lone rangers.
- Keeping pace with what's out there is an ongoing challenge for all of us.
- What open standards, collaborative platforms are available and useful?

Technology in the classroom

In many instances, buildings on campus cannot handle the power demands of the new technologies. Many students expect continuous access and are accustomed to multi-tasking in ways that faculty are not. Faculty prepare for classes with certain expectations of what technology will be available in their classrooms and this is not always the case.

Comments

- Newer devices will have better batteries. Do we wait for that to happen or go to the expense of adding additional power to buildings?
- Where would the money come from to upgrade campus?
- Our wireless network wasn't designed for the level of density we're experiencing. Solutions exist but rapidly become a budget issue.
- Faculty need to be consulted when changes are in the works for classroom technologies. Don't assume you know what we want or will use. Ask us!
- A campus-wide goal has been to provide faculty with a consistent set of tools they can count on in each classroom. This generally stays in place for 6-8 years. Technology changes so rapidly this timeline is becoming a challenge.
- I want every classroom to have what I expect and what I need.

Other topics

The discussion also touched on the following topics:

- **Computer-based testing**
 - We used instructional technologies throughout the class and then hand out a paper exam.
 - Can we move to a full multimedia experience?
- **Server space and digital repositories**
 - There are economies of scale with centralized storage. How do we take advantage of this on our campus?
- **Administrative overhead**
 - There isn't an indirect cost model to address IT on campus. The issue isn't unique to UT – it is happening all over the country
 - Not having an indirect cost model is a problem when it comes to applying for grant funding.
- **Distance learning**
 - When I saw this discussion was to be about instructional technologies, I expected conversation about distance learning. That hasn't even come up.
 - Distance learning is a way to advertise what a university does and build enrollment. That is not something we need here at UT.
 - Telecampus continues to thrive. It works totally on a cost recovery basis.
- **Feedback on IT related issues on campus**

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- There are multiple venues for providing feedback on campus technology issues. Tech dean meetings, ITAC and this event are examples.
- **iTunes U**
 - Why doesn't UT participate in iTunes U? It seems like a great place to put my lectures.
 - Most of what iTunes U provides is already available on campus.

Possible Action Items

After reviewing the group conversation and discussing what steps can be taken now to respond to faculty concerns and interests, the following actions items were identified:

- ITS will review FERPA requirements and identify any potential conflicts with the use of open-source collaborative tools in the classroom. Guidelines will be developed and provided through the "IT for Faculty" Web page.
- Existing resources such as Digital Measures and the OPA Speakers' Bureau Explore might provide an efficient way to create a database of technology interests and expertise among faculty.
- ITS is currently working with the Provost's office to implement a pilot of Adobe Connect Pro. This pilot should begin in December 2008. Adobe Connect is frequently cited by faculty as the tool of choice for collaboration.
- DIIA is working to establish guidance for faculty concerning classroom etiquette and managing digital distractions in the classroom. This information will be distributed through the DIIA Web site, in classes and on the ITS Web site.
- ITS will continue to explore and provide information on software licenses for campus, looking at the difference in value between volume discount purchases, site licenses, and so forth.

Summary

Personally and professionally, faculty need and want to use instructional technologies to the best effect in their classrooms. Familiar challenges include budget constraints, the pace of change, and the decentralized nature of both services and information on campus. Increasingly there is a tension between "digital natives" – students and younger faculty who have grown up with technology – and "digital immigrants" – those who have learned to use technology later in their careers.

Improving IT products and services on campus is not enough. Information about how others are using technology and sharing expertise and experiences is increasingly important. Quick wins include building on what already exists; long-term gains can only be realized by continuing the conversation with a steady commitment to what is feasible, actionable and in keeping with the standards of The University of Texas at Austin.