

EduCause CFP 2003

Title

Lessons Learned from a Two-Year Institutional Assessment of Educational Technology

Abstract

Higher education institutions must be alert to the constantly changing technology needs and desires of their communities. This session will present a two-year, four-part institutional assessment on educational technology at the University of Washington. One of the study's thirteen collaborators will describe methods, present findings, and discuss recommendations.

Presentation Content

Universities are faced with the problem of being aware of and responsive to continuous technological change. In Autumn Quarter, 2000, representatives from several units and groups at the University of Washington began meeting to discuss an institutional assessment of educational technology. The goal was to draw an accurate picture, one based on more than just anecdotal evidence, of how faculty and students experience educational technology at the UW. Collaborators could then design tools and services that capitalize on successes, meet challenges, and ultimately serve our community's needs and desires best.

The collaborators included:

- Program for Educational Transformation Through Technology (PETTT)
- Office of Educational Assessment (OEA)
- Office of Educational Partnerships & Learning Technologies
- Computing and Communications
- UW Libraries
- Office of the Provost
- Faculty Senate
- Faculty Council on Educational Technology
- Center for Instructional Development and Research
- Educational Technology Development Group
- Office of Undergraduate Education
- Student Access and Computing Group
- Student Technology Fee Committee

Collaborators developed two instruments: the 2001 Faculty Survey on Educational Technology and the 2002 Student Survey on Educational Technology. Additionally,

PETTT offered staff-led focus groups for faculty and student-led focus groups for students.

Researchers used advanced quantitative and qualitative techniques to treat individual data sets. They then paired data across sets to complete analyses and make recommendations. This session will present the findings of PETTT and OEA, focusing on educational technology expectations, perceptions, and uses.

Eight themes emerge from the data: university-level definitions of educational technology; student-specific educational technologies; less frequently used technologies; preferred methods of instruction; curriculum planning; technology adoption; faculty training; and assessing student abilities and expectations. We will present the most significant findings and recommendations for each of these topic areas.

To illustrate the level of detail PETTT has been able to achieve in reporting this data, we include the following selected findings on course Web sites:

36.5% of faculty survey respondents already use the Web to mount course materials, and another third of faculty (33%) reported that they would *very much* like to use the Web to post course materials if support and service were easily obtained.

Instructors are motivated to integrate course Web sites into their curricula by their perceptions of being able to provide more information to students; desire to meet expectations of the University community, students, and colleagues; and experienced usefulness in facilitating communication in large courses.

“I teach a class of 600 people, the course Web site is very useful for a group that size.”

-Faculty Member

Students also defined course Web sites as extremely useful tools, over 60% of students reported they are using them several times per week, and 26% of these respondents reported using them *every day*. 46.7% of students *strongly agree* that the University should require all courses to have a course Web site.

“It’s nice to see that some professors put a lot of stuff on the Web pages, it shows that they care whether or not you learn.”

-Undergraduate Student

Students reported that course Web site design should be consistent across the UW. Specific components identified in both student focus groups and the student survey as valuable to include in a standardized course Web site design were: anonymous feedback, homework solutions, grades/grading

criteria, discussion boards, and links to undergraduate research opportunities.

Students rated the importance of on-line materials significantly higher than faculty $p < .001$. Over half of students think it's *extremely important* to have course syllabi and course outlines or lecture notes on-line ($Mdn=3.0$).

This research has informed the development of tools and services that make a better fit with the desires and needs of the University. The UW community can use our findings and recommendations to make informed choices about how best to use technology in the service of education.

Thorough planning and preparation for the research yielded extensive, valid data within and between methods. In a small number of cases, the collaborating partners' inability to resolve differences in instrument design left us with incomplete or meaningless data. The challenges of collaborating with so many partners over an extended period of time were outweighed, however, by the overall quantity and quality of usable data.

In addition to hearing revealing data about the experience of using educational technology at a large, public university, participants in this session can learn:

- benefits and challenges of large collaborations,
- considerations for planning institution-wide assessment,
- strategies for combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, and
- techniques for turning research findings into institutional changes.

Suggested Audience:

Upper-level administrators, technology center directors, IT managers, institutional researchers and assessment units.