
Building a Faculty Development Institute: A Case Study

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Lights, Cameras, Action

Auburn University Montgomery (AUM) is the metropolitan campus of Auburn University, a land-grant institution. AUM offers undergraduate and professional graduate programs aimed primarily at the Montgomery, Alabama region. AUM enrolls approximately 5,400 students and employs about 200 full-time faculty members. AUM first began its Faculty Development Institute (FDI) in 1999. By its second year, the FDI provided technology training opportunities for more than twenty percent of the faculty and has become a catalyst for change in how the institution views both technology and faculty development.

Best Intentions

The genesis of the faculty development project was AUM's participation in a national benchmarking study, "Benchmarking Best Practices in Faculty Instructional Development: Supporting Faculty Use of Technology in Teaching," sponsored by the Institute for Education Best Practices of the American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC) and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO). Participants in the study reviewed "best practices" at a number of higher education institutions, focusing on seven institutions: Arthur Andersen Performance & Learning, Bellevue Community College, California State University, Collège Boréal, University of Central Florida, U.S. Air Force Air Command and Staff College, and Virginia Tech.

In a two-day program in Houston, all seven "Best Practices" institutions gave presentations explaining their faculty development programs. We selected two institutions, Virginia Tech and University of Central Florida, as having programs which were suitable for adaptation for use at our university, although both schools are considerably larger than our own. As a result of experiencing cuts in state appropriations in the early 1990s (as we experienced in Alabama a few years later), Virginia Tech made a strategic decision to emphasize instructional technology. Virginia Tech also developed a number of innovative programs, most notably a "Math Mall," to improve efficient utilization of resources. The University of Central Florida, on the other hand, turned to technology to help solve difficulties caused by sudden large enrollment increases. Our own classroom shortage led us to believe the UCF experience might be valuable for our campus. We also thought that UCF's adoption of WebCT as a comprehensive package for providing support for technology-based and technology-enhance courses was worthy of emulation.

The University of Central Florida offers a number of Web-based courses, as well as other "media-enhanced" courses. UCF developed a Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, which

provides workshops, presentations, formal and informal discussions, institutes, and individual mentoring sessions. UCF offers a 10-module graduate-level course, Interactive Distributed Learning (IDL 6543), for its faculty members. UCF also provides considerable support in instructional design, software engineers, a digital media team, and UCF students serve as "Tech Rangers" for faculty support. UCF's Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning developed a Summer Institute, which has spawned a number of workshops and other programs, as well as pedagogical research on technology in instruction.

Virginia Tech established a Faculty Development Institute with an intensive summer session as well as a number of shorter workshops during the academic year. Participants in the summer program receive new desktop computers, standardized software, and ongoing user support. The Virginia Tech program uses faculty members as instructors to leverage limited resources. Both the UCF and Virginia Tech models provided excellent examples as we built our own program.

The Money Pit

Most faculty at AUM are on 9-month contracts, but can earn an additional 20 percent of their 9-month salary for teaching two courses in the summer term. Prior training programs and efforts to incorporate technology in the classroom achieved only limited success, in part because they were perceived to be "add on" responsibilities piled on top of already overworked faculty.

We believed a program would succeed if it considered professional development in instructional technology as an important part of teaching responsibilities and compensated for it accordingly. We proposed a model which would release faculty from one of their two teaching assignments in the summer term in exchange for weekly participation in the Institute, with funding provided to the academic departments to retain adjunct faculty to cover the full-time faculty assignments. The Institute would be staffed by its participants, with individuals who had stronger technical skills serving as instructors. Essentially, we proposed moving teaching faculty from the front of the classroom as instructors to being students, as one of their summer teaching assignments. Our hope was to create a cadre of technologically-savvy faculty who could form a core group of advocates for infusing technology across our curriculum.

The Institute budget included funds to hire adjunct faculty to replace full-time faculty during their course release time, hardware and software, and miscellaneous supplies. A separate account set up for the institute allowed flexibility. The budget for the first institute was \$51,590. We budgeted \$14,000 for adjuncts to replace teaching faculty, and \$37,590 for acquiring a video server, a server for WebCT (the course management system we selected) related software, and other equipment. Faculty participants were paid out of their departmental salary accounts, with the adjunct funds transferred to the academic department for replacement faculty.

War of the Roses

We pursued several strategies for obtaining administrative approval. First, we carefully tied our proposals to our institution's stated goals. In the 1998-99 academic year the university spent considerable effort identifying six institutional priorities, of which one was developing use of instructional technologies.

Second, we tried to tie our proposal to the personal aspirations of institutional leaders. We were fortunate that the goals of our top leadership complemented our intentions. Our Chief Executive Officer viewed technology as a priority but did not have a comprehensive plan or vision about how to achieve the goal of infusing technology into the curriculum. Our Chief Academic Officer

has placed heavy emphasis on improving the "faculty career," reviewing policies and practices from hiring to emeritus status, so our emphasis of professional development was a logical fit with his aims. And our Chief Financial Officer, as one might expect, wanted to achieve the institution's goals in the most cost effective manner, so our "home grown" efforts using our own campus resources fit with responsible fiscal management.

We were also fortunate to have a strong advocate in administrative councils in the person of the Dean of Continuing Education, who had been charged with responsibility for developing distance education courses. Although our proposal was a bottom-up, faculty/staff developed program, we believe his support from an administrative level was critical.

Finally, we proposed an aggressive timetable for action, noting that if a summer program was to take place, quick decisions were required. Little time was left for discussion and deliberation if the program was to succeed, so few obstacles were raised at any level. Much to our pleasant surprise, we received enthusiastic support from our administration, who were genuinely excited about a professional development proposal originating "bottom-up" from faculty and staff, rather than "top-down" from the administration.

Stand and Deliver

Our proposal called for a competitive selection process, with participants submitting short proposals for participation to a peer review panel. The proposals ranged from detailed descriptions of projects faculty would like to undertake, to vague assertions that can be paraphrased as "I know there is that technology stuff out there, and I think I should learn about it." The Institute steering committee reviewed all of the applications, using such criteria as what the applicant hoped to learn, how that knowledge would be applied to enhance instruction, and how the participant's goals fit with departmental or school technology plans. Each proposal had to contain the signature of the respective department head and dean to ensure support from the participant's supervisors. The committee was careful to include a diverse group of faculty from each of our five schools, ranging from "early adopters" to "faculty skeptics."

The steering committee recommended that twenty participants be selected, doubling our original estimates. The Chief Academic Officer reviewed the proposals and because of the excitement generated in our initial proposal for the institute, concluded that all twenty prospective participants supported by the steering committee would participate in the first Institute.

In early May 1999, the Chief Academic Officer hosted an orientation session for Institute participants, introducing participants to the summer program. The orientation session gave the faculty a chance to ask questions and get to know one another. Many participants commented on how this session helped to set the tone for the summer Institute, giving faculty a chance to get to know colleagues with whom they rarely interacted.

The summer Institute began with a keynote session open to all campus faculty and staff. This keynote session centered on the appropriate use of technology in the teaching and learning process. After the keynote session each participant received a notebook with handouts, tutorials, and a schedule of the summer institute modules. In addition, we unveiled the Institute web site including all selected proposals, faculty e-mail and phone numbers, and information about the mission of the Institute. A steering committee member updated the web site weekly to include pictures from the Institute and links to other sites containing information on instructional technology.

The center of Faculty Development Institute was the curriculum. The steering committee

formulated the curriculum based on the selected proposals. We sent each participant a form assessing skill levels with various instructional technologies. Using this information and the original proposals, we structured the curriculum to best meet the participants' needs. The steering committee selected six facilitators, campus experts in instructional technology, to lead various curriculum units.

The institute met on six Fridays over ten weeks, organized along the lines of the UCF "modules." The first module introduced the basics of PowerPoint and HTML. Participants left this session with a completed project using fundamentals learned. Information in this unit allowed faculty to enhance their institute project in subsequent sessions.

Early in the planning stages of the institute, the steering committee investigated web-based authoring tools and course management systems to convert existing courses online or integrate technology into traditional courses. We chose WebCT for several reasons. First, it was successfully used at both Virginia Tech and University of Central Florida, two of our model "best practices" institutions. Second, as an HTML-based tool, WebCT allows for greater flexibility for faculty, is easily used by both Windows and Macintosh users, and has a relatively short learning curve. Finally, WebCT was affordable.

The second and third modules focused on the deployment of WebCT. In "WebCT Boot Camp I," the facilitators introduced WebCT terms, set up accounts, and reviewed WebCT from faculty (designer) and student perspectives. Group instruction was used as well as one-on-one assistance. A data projector displaying the facilitator's computer screen allowed participants to keep up with instruction. In "WebCT Boot Camp II," course tools such as the bulletin board and chat room features were introduced. This material was more complex and required a more hands-on approach. With twenty participants, it was often difficult to give the necessary individual attention.

During Module Four, the FDI focused on other technologies such as video conferencing. In the first half of the session, we demonstrated the technology by dialing into a site on our state network, giving faculty who were not familiar with video conferencing a hands-on look at the advantages of this technology. Participants discussed ways to prepare effective video presentations and how to teach through two-way interactive video. A portion of the afternoon was devoted to copyright and technology as well as the future of the information technology infrastructure on our campus. We included a presentation from USAF Air Command and Staff College, a "best practice" institution located in our backyard. Our faculty found that pedagogy, curriculum and effective implementation of technology were common concerns at both our school and the military, despite the varying missions of the institutions.

Module Five introduced participants to the AUM digital media lab. A brief explanation was given on the technology of video on demand and how it can be used to enhance the teaching and learning process. We added instruction on the use of Real Slideshow software to create web presentations. Based on feedback from Module Two, faculty wanted additional time to work on the course tools of WebCT. We rearranged Module Five to give faculty additional time with hands-on instruction of WebCT. We also developed two programs for more advanced participants, based on feedback from them that for some participants the program moved too slowly.

I Know What You Did Last Summer

The final module was a technology "Show and Tell" for all faculty on campus. Each participant

demonstrated what had been learned during the summer-long program. Fifty-two faculty members attended this session. Although our Chief Executive Officer could not be present, he addressed the audience through video presentation software. The "Show and Tell" generated excitement between institute participants and their colleagues, spurring new initiatives from across the campus for participants and their colleagues.

Assessment was a vital part of the institute. Since this was the first program of its kind at our institution, we were anxious to know what worked and what did not. We assessed each module immediately following the day's instruction. Immediate feedback provided us the flexibility of revising the curriculum as needed. We modified modules where additional instruction was needed. Our addition of another session on WebCT was a direct result of the faculty surveys.

In the PowerPoint and HTML module, 83% of the faculty rated the session as excellent or outstanding. Participants commented on clear instruction as the best feature of this module. WebCT Boot Camp I and II saw 93% of the participants rating this unit as excellent or outstanding. Faculty comments included, "The best feature, across the board, has been the combination of learning then doing. The practice is invaluable in that some of this takes place under the supervision of the instructors has been very helpful."

We administered a final detailed evaluation at the last class meeting. Ninety-seven percent of faculty rated the overall program as outstanding with comments such as "This was a wonderful opportunity and I am delighted that I was included. The "staff" were great - patient, informative, and good presenters." "I was never bored. I needed to know how technically to use the equipment, but I also needed to know how to teach using the equipment. This institute helped me with both issues." Another commented on how "the time that was available for getting assistance from those with the knowledge and expertise to help those of us who so badly need it" was the best feature of the institute.

We expected increased numbers of technology-based and technology-enhanced courses to result from the Institute, and we have not been disappointed. Nearly 900 students have participated in online course activity in 26 courses. Several courses have been offered entirely online, and a number are in development. Our School of Nursing plans to move its entire R.N. mobility program to the online environment, and faculty are using WebCT materials provided by textbook publishers to enhance biology and criminal justice introductory courses.

Same Time Next Year?

The steering committee made a number of changes to strengthen the program based upon what we learned from our assessment. First, prospective participants indicated that they needed guidance about the form and content for their proposals, so we added an optional lunchtime workshop for faculty who wanted to submit proposals, at which we discussed the format of proposals as well as the criteria by which they would be evaluated.

FDI participants suggested that many of the advanced users did not gain as much from participating in the Institute as they had hoped, though they did benefit from using the teaching release time to work on individual projects. Many sessions were slowed by the presence of beginning or intermediate users who required one-on-one assistance. Although we had some separate programs for advanced users, the steering committee decided to pursue a two-track program for the second year. Five to seven "advanced" faculty will participate in a spring term session, designed to meet their individual needs, and will participate as instructors or tutors for the summer session of ten to twelve faculty. We further refined the technology assessment

instrument to more clearly distinguish beginning, intermediate, and advanced users.

The first Institute provided teaching release time for participants, but because of scheduling difficulties many participants had to bank that release time for use in subsequent terms. Unfortunately, this meant that some participants felt they did not have sufficient time during the summer term to complete the course work. Consequently, we strongly encouraged participants in the second Institute programs to take their release time during the term they will be participating, and we announced the selection of participants much earlier to allow departments to make their teaching scheduling arrangements. In addition, the faculty evaluation proposed assigning a "learning buddy" so faculty members would be paired with another participant possessing similar technology skills to foster faculty collaboration, and we are implementing this suggestion in the second Institute.

Finally, rather than scheduling Friday programs (when most classes do not meet), we scheduled Institute programs as a regular class period during the week. The new schedule should provide additional time for more but shorter sessions, and encourage participants to complete their "homework" just as they ask their students to do.

Great Expectations

We found that the Faculty Development Institute has been an important change agent on our campus. The funding for equipment we included in our original proposal was quickly used, for equipment which is now fully used for instructional purposes. We found that we created a number of "squeaky wheels," faculty members who were trained by the Institute in the use of technologies but did not have the computing horsepower needed for the new applications. These "squeaky wheels" succeeded in obtaining one-time funding for upgrading some dated machines, but just as important, they are raising campus awareness of the importance of establishing planning to meet our rapidly changing technological needs.

Before the creation of the Faculty Development Institute, our campus could be categorized as having "islands of innovation" in instructional technology where great things were happening but in isolation. The Institute has done more than provide training for its faculty participants. It has generated considerable excitement about the use of technology, and has been a catalyst for change on our campus. It has resulted in increasing faculty use of technologies, as well as creation of a number of smaller training programs. It has led to the development of a number of on-line courses, and even more courses that are enhanced by technology. The Institute has increased institutional sensitivity to technology issues, and led to the beginning of establishing a technology plan for our campus. Our institution's investment in the professional development of its faculty will pay dividends for many years to come.

Related Web Sites

Air Command & Staff College, Air University, U.S. Air Force <<http://www.wacsc.au.af.mil>>

American Productivity & Quality Center <<http://www.apqc.org>>

Auburn University Montgomery Faculty Development Institute web site
<<http://faculty.aum.edu:8080/FDI2000>>

University of Central Florida, Office of Instructional Resources <<http://www.oir.ucf.edu>>

Virginia Tech Instructional Development Institute <<http://www.edtech.vt.edu/idi>>

WebCT (Web Course Tools) <<http://www.webct.com>>

Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, Volume III, Number III, Winter2000
State University of West Georgia, Distance Education Center

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