

8-1999

Planning for Technology-Enhanced Learning on Residential Campuses

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Planning for Technology-Enhanced Learning on Residential Campuses

Abstract

While many institutions are feverishly designing and assembling distance-learning courses for delivery of off-site degree programs, even more are wondering how best to create and execute technology plans for their residential campuses. Planning and implementing a sustainable infrastructure requires a widely shared vision that speaks directly to your mission, plenty of money and strong leadership that ranges from student ranks up through your board of trustees.

Disciplines

Adult and Continuing Education | Communication | Education | Online and Distance Education

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Planning for Technology-Enhanced Learning on Residential Campuses

by Thomas Skill, Ph.D.

While many institutions are feverishly designing and assembling distance-learning courses for delivery of off-site degree programs, even more are wondering how best to create and execute technology plans for their residential campuses. Planning and implementing a sustainable infrastructure requires a widely shared vision that speaks directly to your mission, plenty of money and strong leadership that ranges from student ranks up through your board of trustees.

Develop a Compelling Vision

Installing technology without having widespread support for a driving vision that speaks to the goals of your institution will likely be greeted with cynicism and criticism. Develop a compelling vision that demonstrates how technology will help achieve mission-centered goals. Our vision at the University of Dayton, Ohio, focused on using technology to enhance and sustain our residential learning community.

Use Credible External Endorsements

Involve community and alumni experts in making the case for needed technology. Your vision for technology is more likely to be entertained if it is supported by respected outsiders. In addition, internal promoters tend to increase the anxiety levels of some financial administrators, while outside experts can soothe those concerns. We began our vision and planning process with one of our alumni advisory councils, which became a proactive force for change.

Stories That Touch Home

The difference between good planning and great planning is that

great planning ties examples to both the project vision and implementation. Collect examples of how students and faculty on campus have been personally touched by a technology-enhanced learning experience. When critics begin to point out flaws in your vision or logistical missteps, the examples are powerful allies that help motivate folks to "stay the course."

Bold change, no matter how important or consistent with your institution's value system, is a disruption. Stories about people surviving or thriving on change can ease the stress. In our campus media and presentations, we told technology success stories. One of our most powerful is the story of a history professor who created an electronic discussion list that connected his students with alumni who were veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Few would question the value of this form of technology-enhanced learning.

Avoid the "Big Technology Solution"

Enhancing learning, building career skills, increasing productivity and reducing costs using technology are components of most visions. These are not one-size-fits-all concepts. The solutions for your campus will vary by departments and by faculty. The greatest effects of networked and distributed computing technologies are found in the cumulative impact of many small uses by individuals for different purposes.

Many of the most useful and powerful applications of networked computers are also rather simple — e-mail, Web sites, discussion forums. Some faculty use Web-based resources to develop students' research skills. Some use discussion

forums to initiate classroom debates or as a means of bringing experts into the classroom.

You Can't Over-Train

Getting people up to speed on new applications is a huge challenge — much bigger than building the infrastructure. Faculty and staff need multiple methods and opportunities to learn how to use these new systems. One-on-one training is almost always the best. Group training, drop-in open access training, video, CD-ROM and Web-based modules also work well.

If you can get to the point where faculty and students can help each other, then you will take a lot of pressure off your help desk and training staff. We are developing incentives for faculty to become lead trainers in their departments. Student training is also a focus. We are creating a live cable TV call-in show that will blend humor with training tips. This system will reach 87 percent of our students.

Measure the Outcomes

Universities are places for critical evaluation. As you launch the technology, welcome a variety of evaluations — from narrative experiences to metric-based assessments of learning outcomes, productivity changes and cost comparisons.

Technology champions swim against the current until they run out of energy or you run out of money. The technology planner's mission is to facilitate the appropriate integration of technology into the curriculum so that it becomes self-sustaining before that happens.

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