Final Report: NLII Community of Practice Project
University of Memphis: Technology Fellows Teaching and Learning Collaboration
(April 22, 2004-January 14, 2005)
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Setting This report documents the Technology Fellows Teaching and Learning Collaboration (TFTLC) at the University of Memphis (UoM). The project involves both a Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP) element (the NLII sponsored project) and a significant face-to-face element. The project was conducted by the Advanced Learning Center (ALC), FedEx Institute of Technology at the UoM and sponsored by the Provost and the Vice President of Information Technology/CIO at the University. NLII provided access for Fellows and staff to iCohere (online collaboration software), engaged the ALC staff in significant training sessions with other NLII VCoP project participants, and gave specific, meaningful consultation throughout the project. The TFTLC is envisioned to be an annual program with the VCoP growing each year as new Fellows are selected and trained.

Participants/Purposes Ten Technology Fellows were selected from 22 applicants across the institution for a one year involvement from May 2004 through May 2005. All applicants were endorsed by their Dean and Department Chair, and the selections were made by a committee consisting of senior faculty, administrators, and ALC staff. Each Fellow received a laptop computer, software specific to their project, training and consultation for the year. The selected Fellows represented ten different disciplines and came from four different schools and colleges of the University. The primary purposes of the project were to support Fellows in gaining knowledge about and utilizing IT and different learning techniques in the classroom and to utilize various mechanisms to link individuals with common interests to pursue. The ultimate goals were: (1) to produce a diverse community of practice who become recognized as leaders in technology integration for improved instruction in their fields; (2) to promote the use of collaboration techniques in teaching and learning; and, (3) to insure that students attain a reasonable degree of IT fluency for their discipline in the impacted classes of involved faculty.

Program assumptions and objectives The program was developed under the following assumptions: (1) everyone has different skill levels. (2) Everyone is busy and does not have time. (3) Most faculty members want to accomplish a task—not learn a technological skill. (4) Several faculty members are not comfortable taking risks and/or making mistakes in front of others. And, (5) Assessing technology use is difficult for many faculty members.

The assumptions led to a skills development methodology based on: (1) just in time technology. (2) Help with the task, not the skill. (3) Find out what they really want to know. (4) Empower people to make change. (5) Give opportunities for self-learning. And, (6) Train faculty members how to conduct their own action research.

Thus the general expectations of the program were to: (1) have each technology fellow plan a project that will be showcased at a conference in the spring semester. (2) The project and plan are tailored to each individual's technology level and needs. (3) There is an expectation of data collection, assessment, research and dissemination. (4) The plan and program are continually monitored and modified as different concerns or needs arise.

Summer Activities The training began with a week of half-day sessions conducted by various ALC staff which provided an overview of the IT facilities, software, and instructional technology available across the institution (and specifically within the ALC); an introduction to various pedagogical elements and teaching techniques; initiation to iCohere; and discussion and consultation regarding the individual project proposals to be developed and implemented by each Fellow over the year. During the summer months when many faculty members are away from campus the Fellows developed the initial proposals for their projects and made them available via iCohere to their peers and the ALC staff for feedback, suggestions, and consultation. Each week two Fellows were declared "stars of the week" and submitted proposals for analysis; they then applied the advice received to modify the final proposal. The iCohere collaboration software enabled Fellows to critique each others work, exchange ideas, receive guidance from ALC staff, and examine similar projects from other NLII VCoP pilot groups. Additionally, NLII staff provided helpful suggestions and access to additional resources to ALC staff through feedback to the periodic progress reports and the consultation session. The modified proposals were submitted to a College of Education faculty member with expertise in instructional technology and curriculum design, who is an AT&T Fellow in the ALC, and to an ALC staff member who is an instructional design specialist for final analysis and further modification before project implementation was begun.

Fall Activities Part of the analysis of the proposals from Fellows resulted in determination of further training needs so that each Fellow had appropriate skills and concepts to successfully carry out their individual teaching and learning project. During the Fall Semester ALC consultants worked with Fellows individually and in groups to provide additional technical training and to begin developing and implementing the technical and curricular aspects of each proposal. The Fellows continued to post their progress updates on iCohere while getting feedback from the ALC consultants and their peers. As an incentive, the ALC provided a small gift for two Fellows, selected randomly from all who posted to iCohere by the 15th of each month. Fellows also worked with the ALC AT&T Fellow to develop surveys to be used in their respective classes to help assess success of the Fellow projects and the over all TFTLC program. The ALC staff began planning for a "Wall of Fame" to showcase the individual Fellow projects online as well as having them conduct a Faculty Symposium at the end of the Spring Semester.

Lessons Learned Although the overall project will run for another semester and final assessment will not be finalized until it is complete, some lessons are already evident. (1) Utilizing a blended approach of face-to-face and online collaboration is a strategy well worth considering in such endeavors. This enables each mode of communication to be maximized, allows for individual preferences to be met, and promotes a greater exchange

of ideas than would be likely using only one approach. (2) The largest barrier to be overcome by the Fellows appears to be narrowing the focus of the initial proposal to one that is doable. Utilization of the "Star of the Week" strategy via iCohere proved to be very helpful in attaining the necessary narrowing of focus. (3) The incentives of providing a laptop, software, training and consultation for a year, and designation as a Fellow associated with the ALC and the FedEx Institute are sufficient to attract the participation of faculty with open minds and ample technical skills, who are committed to improving their teaching and student learning in the program. (4) The program appears to be sustainable and scalable. It seems that nine of the ten Fellows selected will complete their projects in the assigned timeframe (the one who will not experienced a serious illness requiring hospitalization for several months but remains very interested in eventually finishing). Providing ten Fellowships each year enables the ALC staff to meet their routine duties and to provide necessary support to the TFTLC. It is expected that retaining the Fellows from the first year as part of the ongoing VCoP will enhance the already successful aspects of online collaboration. (5) The variety of teaching and learning projects and the anticipated success of these should provide a great showcase for other faculty to see first hand what is feasible and to entice more of them to seek to adapt their own approach to teaching to provide deeper learning. (6) The TFTLC has been a meaningful learning experience for the regular ALC staff and the AT&T Faculty Fellows who work with them in ways such that the community of practice will provide future positive teaching and learning outcomes beyond this specific project.

Benefits Beyond the Initial Proposal It is believed that the TFTLC will meet almost all of its initial purpose and goals pertaining to teaching and learning, but additional benefits to the UoM, NLII, and the higher education community in general will also be realized. These include: (1) the UoM has joined the Vanderbilt University Faculty Innovation Profile Program (FIPP), a community of practice with an online collaboration system which will possibly enable the UoM VCoP to be maintained without purchase of additional access at the end of the NLII grant period. (2) ALC members have gained valuable new expertise, as already noted, that will be useful in all aspects of their work. (3) Presentation opportunities for ALC members have been realized in an NLII online workshop, at the NLII January meeting, at the EDUCAUSE Midwest Regional meeting in the spring, and others are anticipated. (4) A UoM research project involving an English class was included in an NLII project to develop an e-book on Educating the Net Generation. (5) The ALC developed a Microsoft Producer presentation about creating a VCoP now on the NLII web site. (6) ALC members helped facilitate communication between the Vanderbilt FIPP and NLII Bridging Community resulting in collaboration between them. (7) ALC members and NLII staff are discussing the possibility of fully documenting the details of this model and making it available through NLII to other institutions. (8) The FIPP consortium, with the ALC as a key partner, is in the early stages of investigating external funding sources and proposal ideas around the idea of further understanding and expanding the VCoP approach to faculty development. (9) The ALC is investigating participation in the H20 VCoP project through Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society (http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/home/) which will benefit significantly from ALC's concrete experience through the NLII COP project.

Potential for Adoption at Other Institutions The following items are considered critical success factors should other institutions wish to adapt this model on their campus. (1) The program needs to be sponsored by one or more executive offices (at the UoM the Provost and the Vice President for Information Technology/CIO) This provides the right message that it is a program that will be supported and is expected to produce results. (2) The size of the undertaking needs to be carefully evaluated so that it will not drain too many resources from other ongoing programs (the UoM limits selection to ten Fellows annually). (3) A specific commitment needs to be secured for the additional, non-routine resources such as incentives and for "assigned" time for support, not an add-on without recognition that it requires prioritization. This is another reason for executive level sponsorship. (4) The "right" mix of existing expertise within the support unit (IT training, instructional design, good teaching methodology, etc.) and willingness to acquire additional expertise (appreciative inquiry skills, familiarity with a collaboration system, VCoP concepts, etc.). At the UoM this was accomplished via the regular ALC staff plus the addition of two senior faculty members who were appointed as AT&T Fellows. (5) A selection process for Fellow participants that includes endorsement from the department and the school or college (thus some initial screening of applicants and buy-in from local administrators for the merits of the program) and analysis of the applicants skill set, merit of the proposed project, and ability of the applicant to be a "point of influence" within their discipline. (6) Technology infrastructure support (beyond the Instructional Technology Support Unit) for such things as the network, collaboration system, etc. (7) Excellent communication processes and willingness to be flexible between the primary support unit, the Fellows, infrastructure support entities, and any other significant players involved in the project are essential components. (8) Finally, having a well thought out project plan and the willingness to amend it is crucial.

Assessment Different methods will be utilized for an overall assessment and will be provided as soon as available as an addition to this document. (1) The Director of the ALC has begun meetings with each Fellow and will provide documentation of their qualitative assessment as reported to him. (2) As mentioned earlier, surveys are being developed for student perceptions of increased learning in the classes where Fellows are applying the elements of their projects. (3) An IT fluency questionnaire was administered to the Fellows at the beginning of the program and will be administered again at the end to see if the Fellows gained IT fluency knowledge. (4) A survey will be administered to attain overall Fellow perceptions of the program. (5) Every class taught at the UoM requires a student evaluation; the evaluations of courses impacted by Fellow projects will be compared to prior evaluations in the same class taught by the Fellow previously.

Observations Creating a VCoP is not a simple undertaking, and combining it with an intervention program designed to enhance teaching skills and deepen student learning adds to its complexity. However, this experience tells us that elements of each add to the richness of the other and given application of the critical success factors the outcomes will be positive for participants, support staff, impacted students, the University, NLII, FIPP, and, as time passes, perhaps to a broader segment of higher education.

Observations posed by Dr. Janet Siegel Robertson, the Technology Fellows Program Chair provide an appropriate conclusion for this report:

- It is the people, not the technology
- There are always covert agendas that need addressing
- All technology is "self taught". People need support more than instruction
- Technology fluency is addictive . . . It will continue to grow as long as it assists in reaching the goals of the university
- Faculty empowerment leads to faculty leaders. Change comes from within the existing university structures

Further information may be found at http://umdrive.memphis.edu/g-tfp/www/

Appendix I

The following provides two illustrative examples of rubrics provided by the AT&T Fellow to each participant.

TFP Project Plan Scoring Rubric

Name: Dr. LWZ **Total Score:___9__**

Plan Component	Meets Standards (2 points)	Needs Improvement (1 point)	Score
Goal Statement	Goal Statement is clear, appropriate and will improve student learning.	Goal statement is unclear. It may be unlikely to increase student learning.	___2____
Context and Rationale	Clear description of the students and the reasons for the project are provided	Clear description of the students or the reasons for the project are not provided	2 _____
Action Plan	Detailed action plan and a timeline are clearly outlined. Tasks and time allotted are realistic.	A detailed action plan and/or timeline are not clearly outlined. Tasks and/or timeline are not realistic.	1 _____
Data Collection	Data collection tools and methods of collection are identified. Timeline provided.	Data collection tools and methods of collection are not identified. Timeline not provided.	2 _____
Next Steps	Plans for dissemination are discussed.	Plans for dissemination are not discussed.	____2___

Comments:
Fantastic project.
Need to prioritize and narrow scope to 1-2 projects. (Item 2 is fine, but 1 & 3 are quite ambitious --- you may want to consider choosing one or the other for the first year.)
Timeline is vague.
Sounds like you're putting a lot of effort into helping your students learn! ☺

TFP Project Plan Scoring Rubric

Name: Dr. BJG **Total Score:___6___**

Plan Component	Meets Standards (2 points)	Needs Improvement (1 point)	Score
Goal Statement	Goal Statement is clear, appropriate and will improve student learning.	Goal statement is unclear. It may be unlikely to increase student learning.	___1____
Context and Rationale	Clear description of the students and the reasons for the project are provided	Clear description of the students or the reasons for the project are not provided	2 _____
Action Plan	Detailed action plan and a timeline are clearly outlined. Tasks and time allotted are realistic.	A detailed action plan and/or timeline are not clearly outlined. Tasks and/or timeline are not realistic.	1 _____
Data Collection	Data collection tools and methods of collection are identified. Timeline provided.	Data collection tools and methods of collection are not identified. Timeline not provided.	2 _____
Next Steps	Plans for dissemination are discussed.	Plans for dissemination are not discussed.	____0___

Comments:
Fantastic project – will make your department state of the art.
Your project was fine but your scores reflect that your proposal is following a different format:
Goal Statement is missing but was inferred.
No timeline provided.
Rubric needed for Phase 3 evaluation
Next steps are missing.
Great project, the comments are probably more helpful than the scores! ☺

Appendix II

The following provides two illustrative examples of periodic feedback provided by the AT&T Fellow to each participant.

Overview of meeting with Dr. XYZ:

1. We went over Dr. XYZ's proposal and the feedback. She had a well written proposal. The only issue was that Dr. XYZ needed to set priorities and focus on the main projects to be accomplished this fall.
2. Dr. XYZ already has the QuickPlace up and running and is making a web presence on UMdrive. Rather than measure the impact of the use of technology on the Freshman Composition courses, she really wants to use technology to help standardize how the compositions are graded from instructor to instructor.
3. Though there is a current rubric used by the instructors, there seems to be a wide range for interpretation and the instructors have not been well trained on the instrument. The plan for the future is to bring in the majority of the freshman composition instructors and training them on a new grading protocol that uses examples of excellent, satisfactory and unsatisfactory paper to illustrate appropriate grading and feedback.
4. The use of technology would be in the scoring protocol. Dr. XYZ is aware of an online version of a rubric used by another university. She is hoping to gather more information and see if that is a tool that can be adapted or purchased for her needs. She is hopeful that if the grading of papers is done electronically it is easier to monitor the instructors and the data may also be used more easily for research purposes. Dr. Robertson offered to provide feedback on the grading instrument.
5. Dr. XYZ may need technical assistance in developing this online tool. It may be similar to some of the survey instruments that have been examined but her needs may no be satisfied by the limitations of some of these programs. She is wanting a tool that will allow her to do holistic grading.
6. Dr. XYZ was happy to be a part of the TFP and felt this project would help the course she supervises to improve.

Overview of meeting with Dr. PQR:

1. We went over Dr. PQR's proposal and the feedback. He had a well written proposal. The only issue was that Dr. PQR was surveying his students often in his class but it was unclear how the use of surveying was to be assessed.
2. Dr. PQR has already located some good online interactive activities to go with his class and demonstrated one to the AT&T Fellow. He has an honor's student who will be compiling more online activities and resources and trying them out. Then Dr. PQR will be able to sort through them to select the best ones for his Physics 2 course.
3. Although the online activities and visual aids are important, they really are only for students that need additional assistance than what is offered in class. The

activities are not mandatory and are not necessary for students that have a solid understanding of the prerequisites of the course.

4. We discussed Dr. PQR’s survey instruments and it became clear that the purpose of these surveys is not to assess the effectiveness of the online activities, but to give the student and opportunity to reflect on the amount of time and effort they have put into the class. The main point is for students to self-monitor their progress on a regular basis. The AT&T Fellow offered to provide assistance or feedback with Dr. PQR's survey development.
5. Additionally, Dr. PQR may explore possibilities in not only collecting data for this project but also writing up the impact of self-monitoring on student motivation and learning in Physics 2.
6. Dr. PQR was pleased that he was involved with the TFP program and glad for the opportunity to improve his instruction.