

Strengthening Student Capacities for Technology Literacy

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October 16, 2006

Technology literacy is essential in the 21st century. The World Wide Web has fundamentally changed the way business functions. Technology has become much more integrated into everything we do, and is essential to being productive in the workplace. The ability to use technology in at least a fundamental way is almost as important as being able to read and write.

In that context, Smith has an opportunity to help develop students' potential to utilize technology within the realm of their academic work. For example, students already are exploring the use of multimedia tools to enhance course projects. They frequently use Moodle to access course materials and submit assignments. They surf the web and use electronic library resources in their research.

Because of the high percentage of Smith faculty using technology in their courses, Smith students have the opportunity to engage technology regularly in a systematic way. Students, by and large, are much more technically savvy than most faculty. Many, however, lack a fundamental understanding of the underpinnings of these technological tools. This hinders their ability to apply technology to new tasks or challenges. By finding ways to combine and improve upon the basic technology skills possessed by students and the interest by faculty in finding ways to become more effective teachers, Smith students can enhance their skills, improve their understanding and learn to develop creative technologically sound solutions to the future challenges in their professional careers.

Initiative

- Develop a Student Technology Assistance Program, matching students with faculty in the area of their academic majors. Students have the opportunity to collaborate with faculty on exploring the use of technology to improve teaching and learning. The interaction with faculty provides an outlet for academic discourse, while providing students deeper skills in learning. Both faculty and students can explore new uses of technology that might enhance teaching, learning, and research in their discipline.

A pilot program is now underway this semester with the English department. An undergraduate will be spending up to three hours a week working with faculty in that department on technology needs directly related to teaching and learning.

- Building on the success of the Technology Learning Commons and the popularity of digital equipment checkout in the Center for Media Production, develop the

Smith Digital Initiative. This program would continually explore how emerging technologies can be used by faculty and students to enhance teaching and learning. Initiatives such as podcasting and social computing would engage faculty and students in collaborative projects. Smith would collaborate with other institutions with similar projects (Duke University), thereby raising the profile of the College.

Resources

Success of this project would require regular funding to provide resources to evaluate new technologies, as well as to pay students working with faculty. The technological support for this project would be leveraged from the professional and highly-trained student staff in Educational Technology Services.

Indicators of Success

As part of this project, a thorough assessment program would be put in place. The program would answer questions such as:

- Are Smith graduates more technology literate than their predecessors?
- Are faculty and students more engaged in matters related to teaching, learning, and technology five years from now?

Champions and Potential Partners

The lead for this project will be Educational Technology Services (ETS), led by Director, Tom Laughner. Other departments involved in technology literacy and teaching and learning are potential partners, include the Jacobsen Center, the Disabilities Office, and the Libraries. The academic departments would be an essential component of this project. The resources of the Committee on Educational Technology (CET) could be leveraged both in it's role in advising Educational Technology Services and as liaisons with the various academic departments.

This project would give students the opportunity to explore uses of technology in their chosen field, with the support of faculty from their discipline and the ETS staff. They would develop the skills necessary to effectively use technology, to envision new uses, implement them, and, perhaps most importantly, evaluate them effectively.