The TLT Group

Teaching, Learning, and Technology

Fundamental Questions and Myths[1]

from

Portfolio of Strategies for Collaborative Change

Below are 6 sets of questions, myths & misconceptions, and recommendations. The 6 categories provide the framework of our **Portfolio of Strategies for Collaborative Change**. See: <http://www.tltgroup.org/gilbert/strategiesbase.htm>.

Contents:

---

1 Excerpted and revised from: TROUBLING IMPORTANT QUESTIONS
[and Myths, Misconceptions, and Recommendations] About Information Technology In Higher Education for Chief Academic Officers (And Others)
Revised March 28, 2002 -- After Presentation & Discussion at League for Innovation in the Community College, Boston, Massachusetts -- March 19, 2002

1. INSTITUTIONAL EDUCATIONAL MISSION

a. FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS: What do we most want to gain? What do we cherish and want most not to lose?
b. SHAPING THE VISION: What is our institutional vision for improving teaching and learning with technology? Who knows it? What is the process for revising, affirming, and disseminating it?
c. MATCHING LEARNING NEEDS AND TEACHING OPTIONS: What criteria or methods do we have for categorizing the learning needs of students, the teaching approaches of faculty, and then matching them to the benefit of both?
d. NEW PARADIGMS: Should we be urging or requiring faculty to embrace a new paradigm? What is it and why do its advocates think that it is new, different, and worthwhile? Are some of our faculty members already using a new paradigm for teaching and learning? [Note: How many of our faculty members are communicating with students in their courses via email? To what extent is this communication involving students who faculty previously would not have expected to communicate as actively with them? To what extent are students using email to communicate about course-related topics with faculty members AFTER a course has ended? Even when the classroom interaction appears no different from what it was for many decades, email communication may have already fundamentally altered what is happening in a course.]

Related Myths & Misconceptions[2]:

a. Running a college or university is just like running a business.
b. Running a college or university is nothing like running a business
c. The purpose of higher education is solely to deliver knowledge to students.
d. The purpose of all higher education is loftier than delivery of knowledge.

Recommendations:

Use the "Fundamental Questions" [above] as part of an ANNUAL process of reviewing and confirming or revising the institutional educational mission and vision for the role of information technology.

[2] These myths and misconceptions were developed by Stephen C. Ehrmann and Steven W. Gilbert of the TLT Group.

2. FOUNDATION

a. EVERYONE NEEDS: What is almost everyone already using, doing? What would be embarrassing to admit to a colleague at another institution that someone at your own institution does NOT have? What has "spread like wildfire" without much conscious effort? How do we decide what "almost everyone" really needs? How do we plan and budget to meet those needs? How do we revise our understanding of what everyone needs?
b. COMPASSIONATE PIONEERS: Who among our faculty and staff often explore new options AND HELP THEIR COLLEAGUES do so as well? How can we support these individuals? Avoid burning them out? Encourage everyone to engage in acts of "Compassionate Pioneering" at least occasionally?
c. COMPUTERS FOR EVERYONE? How, why, and to what extent should we require every student to have a computer and/or Internet access? What characteristics and capabilities should that computer have? To what extent are we obligated to PROVIDE those computers? What about the same questions for the faculty? Staff?
d. INFORMATION LITERACY: What do we mean by "information literacy" [or a preferred alternative label] and what are we obligated to do to help everyone(?) achieve it?
e. FACULTY REWARDS: What can we do about our faculty promotion and reward structure with respect to instructional uses of technology? Should we do anything at all? What about the adjuncts or "contract" faculty?

Related Myths & Misconceptions:

a. The "digital divide" doesn't apply to "us." All our students and faculty arrive equally well-prepared to use computers and related information resources.
b. All young people (students, faculty) are adept at using the Web, etc.
c. Older faculty all resist using computers.
d. Adjunct faculty can be ignored. They don't want to be included in new initiatives involving technology.
e. Everyone will be equally eager, receptive to getting a new computer every three (Two? Four? Five?) years.

Recommendations:

Develop a realistic "full cost " budget – including annual replacement of obsolete equipment, maintenance, training, etc. – for your "foundation" of information technology infrastructure.

3. WIDE/SHALLOW PROJECTS, PROGRAMS

a. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: How much money should we allocate for professional development in teaching, learning, and technology? [To what extent can we support "lifelong learning" for our faculty and staff vis a vis the ever-changing opportunities for educational uses of information technology?]
b. ENGAGE "ALL" FACULTY: How can we engage and support all the faculty in improving teaching and learning with technology? What do we really mean by "all"? "engage"?
c. ADJUNCTS AND "CONTRACT" FACULTY: What are we doing to encourage, train, and support adjunct faculty members to improve teaching and learning with technology IN WAYS CONSISTENT WITH OUR INSTITUTIONAL VISION AND CONSISTENT WITH THE EFFORTS OF THE FULL-TIME FACULTY?
d. SEAMLESS INTEGRATION: How much can we commit to achieving a "seamless integration" of all information systems in this institution? Can ANYONE provide realistic goals, cost estimates, and schedules?
e. SUPPORT SERVICE CRISIS AND STUDENT TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANTS: What is this "Support Service Crisis" and why won't it go away? Can we develop a "Student Technology Assistant" (STA) program that will help us meet our academic technology support needs while providing the participating students with valuable learning opportunities and resume-enhancers? Can an extensive STA program take on much of the burden for achieving (perhaps, even help defining) "information literacy"?
f. WEB PORTAL: To what extent does our institution have/need a customizable "portal" on the Web? With what features? What kind of initial/continuing outlay, budget, and staff increase will be necessary and worthwhile? Who needs to be involved in making decisions about this?
g. WEB-BASED COURSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: How can we decide whether or not to "standardize" on one Web-based Course Management System? How can we decide which one (or two or three)? How can we know when we need to change systems?

Related Myths & Misconceptions:

a. Lifelong learning is for "them" – not for us.
b. Everyone can learn new uses of technology in the same way at the same pace.
c. Anyone will enjoy the transition from current operations to a new seamlessly integrated institution-wide information system.
d. Most faculty will resist accepting technical help from students.
e. Most faculty will soon take advantage of most of the capabilities of a new Web-based course management system.

Recommendations:

a. In an institution-wide professional development program include elements that meet the needs of those who enjoy technological innovations as well as those who do not. Include Low-Threshold Applications and Activities [LTAs] See: http://www.tltgroup.org/ltas/home.htm
b. Provide a forum in which faculty and academic support professionals can exchange insights about what can/cannot be done better online or asynchronously than face-to-face (and vice versa).

4. NARROW/DEEP PROJECTS, PROGRAMS

a. PROGRAM/PROJECT REVIEW AND SUPPORT: How do we encourage and support innovative new educational uses of information technology? How do we publicize this process so that most will understand and recognize its fairness?
b. DISTANCE EDUCATION: WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT DISTANCE EDUCATION? For whom? Why? Which models (purely online? Blended or Hybrids?) Does it seem to be costing more, when we thought it was going to be our way out of the financial quicksand of technology investment?

Related Myths & Misconceptions:

a. Identify pioneers or "champions" (with respect to educational uses of information technology) and give them plenty of opportunity to show their accomplishments to colleagues, then most of the others will follow.
b. Pioneers don't need encouragement, support services, or rewards.
c. Most faculty won't notice or care about the special treatment and resources provided to faculty technology "champions".
d. Most innovative educational uses of technology enable a faculty member to teach more students equally or more effectively (i.e., increasing the student/faculty ratio).

Recommendations:

a. Develop (or modify your current) internal faculty grants program to favor those who demonstrate a commitment to helping their colleagues – in addition to making progress on their own innovative projects.
b. Use the TLT Group's Faculty/Professional Development Program. See: << http://www.tltgroup.org/profacdev/home.htm>>.
This program is designed for a cohort of faculty members (and possibly others). Each participant uses the TLT Group's "Course Improvement Planning/Description Template" and related "Exploration Guides" while working with at least one colleague (faculty member, librarian, tech support, instructional designer, ...) in each phase of this cycle:

- Select and plan at least one improvement in at least one course
- Make at least one improvement in at least one course
- Assess and further improve at least one aspect of that change [and prepare for problems]
- Help at least one faculty colleague make a similar improvement
- Identify and obtain additional resources

[Repeat cycle as needed]

5. COLLABORATION AND LEARNING

a. BUILD COMMUNITY: How can we use new technology applications and resources to further our efforts to build community? To keep our alumni actively engaged?
b. COLLABORATION AND LEARNING: How can we use new technology applications to support collaboration? Collaboration in planning and decision-making? Collaboration in learning? Collaboration in selecting teaching and learning options?

Related Myths & Misconceptions:

a. Effective collaboration is easy and everyone knows how.
b. "Every tub on its own bottom" [decentralization] is still a good way to organize a college or university.
c. Institution-wide standards (picking one type of computer, one software "platform", one Web-based course management system) are easy to develop and enforce.

Recommendations:

a. Prepare to work hard to achieve and maintain effective intra-institutional collaboration in support of improving teaching and learning with technology.
b. Acknowledge that some of the most attractive new educational/technology options cannot be implemented without greater collaboration among departments, offices, divisions – and individuals – than was previously common.
c. Explore ways of using new applications of information technology to facilitate collaboration – both intra- and inter-institutionally.

6. IMPLEMENTATION, ASSESSMENT, REVISION

a. PLAN & BUDGET: How can we plan and budget for educational uses of information technology?
b. DECISIONS & ADVICE: Who needs to be involved in the deliberations that shape major decisions in this area? How can we keep them actively engaged? If we recognize their contributions to successful decisions, will they share the responsibility for the failures? How can we be sure to be able to share the responsibility for failures?
c. TRUSTWORTHY ADVICE: Whom can we really trust for sound advice about these technology-related decisions – when we cannot get conclusive data, the hype keeps flowing, and many of our governing board members and alumni believe we must move ahead with technology to keep from falling behind in competition for…?
d. CIO ROLE: What is the best role for our top-ranking person with major responsibility for information technology resources (i.e., the "Chief Information Officer")?
e. STUDENT/FACULTY RATIO: How can we increase the student/faculty ratio? Dare we admit that we need to do so? Do we really? Would we brag about it if we could?

Related Myths & Misconceptions:

a. Technology saves money.
b. Technology increases revenues.
c. Technology cannot save money.
d. All important decisions must be made solely or primarily on the basis of solid data.
e. Most important decisions must be made solely or primarily on the basis of local politics and personal judgment based on experience and wisdom.

Recommendations:

a. Be patient. The pace of change in information technology is NOT characteristic of the pace of change in institutions or in human beings.
b. Do what you can to bring expectations into better alignment with resource availability, but don't expect to succeed. Expectations related to technology in education always rise faster than the availability of resources or realistic options.
c. Link your educational mission and your vision for the role of information technology with your resource allocation decisions, your implementation efforts, and your assessment activities.