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AUTHOR	Breeden, Sue Ellen; Ramsey, Ellen; Evans, Susan; Roche, Gene; Valliere, Michele
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ABSTRACT

Providing technical support to a large, geographically diverse population is a daunting task. Information technology (IT) organizations must contribute to the teaching and learning mission, while supporting complex and visible administrative operations. All universities and colleges face unprecedented challenges in providing effective computing support and training to their communities. The University of Virginia and the College of William and Mary are successfully confronting these challenges, but in a different manner. This paper describes the two distinct models and examines the role training has played in the overall effectiveness of each program. It explores the strengths each model brings to providing support and the challenges each faces to enhance communication and promote the exchange of knowledge. The paper concludes with several case study scenarios including: database conversion; rollout of Windows 2000; student with a bad disk; and faculty member wants to use PowerPoint. Each case study is followed by a discussion of each program's likely responses to common constituent needs. (AEF)

One Size Does Not Fit All: Models for Support and Training Partnerships in Virginia

Sue Ellen Breeden, Ellen Ramsey
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia

Susan Evans, Gene Roche, Michele Valliere
College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, Virginia

Panelists will discuss training issues of two distinct support models. The University of Virginia model provides technical resources to staff who report directly to, and are funded by, individual departments. The College of William and Mary's central information technology unit funds liaisons who reside in the departments they serve.

Presentation Outline

All universities and colleges face unprecedented challenges in providing effective computing support and training to their communities. The University of Virginia (UVa) and the College of William and Mary (W&M) are successfully confronting these challenges, but in a strikingly different manner. The purpose of this panel is to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the two organizational models and consider the conditions under which each is appropriate.

Providing technical support to a large, geographically diverse population is a daunting task. IT organizations must contribute to the teaching and learning mission, while supporting complex and visible administrative operations. In this presentation, we will describe two distinct models and examine the role training has played in the overall effectiveness of each program. We'll explore the strengths each model brings to providing support and the challenges each faces to enhance communication and promote the exchange of knowledge. The panel will conclude with several case study scenarios, where we will discuss our programs' likely responses to common constituent needs.

Summary of Comments:
The University of Virginia (Sue Ellen Breeden and Ellen Ramsey)

The University has implemented a distributed support model in which departments hire their own technical support professionals, rather than request day-to-day technical support from the central IT department. By working in and reporting directly to academic or administrative departments, these individuals -- referred to as Local Support Partners (LSPs) -- become specialists in their particular computing environment and thereby increase their intrinsic value to the departments they serve.

The LSP Program is an alliance between the University's Information Technology and Communication (ITC) department and computing professionals serving departments throughout the University, and is an element of ITC's Departmental Computing Support Program. Through certification-directed training, high-level access to ITC resources and services, and regular liaison activities, Local Support Partners are provided with the tools critical for success in their departmental computing roles. ITC's Departmental Computing Support team and many other support resources of ITC are available to assist with information technology needs and problems as they arise within LSPs' departments. Monthly meetings are held for groups of LSPs with similar departmental concerns, with topics targeted to each group's training and support needs. Semi-annual LSP conferences provide a forum for information-sharing and training which applies to all LSPs. Two other important resources are in the form of certification programs which provide LSPs with training skills and additional staffing for technical support needs, described below.

Local Training Partner Program: LSPs who regularly train their departmental users are supported through the Local Training Partner (LTP) program, a network of professionals around the University whose responsibilities include technical training. LTPs complete

certification through the "Training of Technical Trainers" Program. The LTP program began with LSPs, but has expanded to include others around the University who are tasked with technical training duties as part or all of their responsibilities.

Local Support Associate Program: LSPs in large departments find assistance for front-line technical support by educating existing staff through the Local Support Associate Program. While providing front-line computing support is, in theory, the responsibility of the LSP, they cannot always be the first point of contact when a problem arises. This is generally true in departments where LSPs support large numbers of users, and is also the case for departments that do not have LSPs. In both situations, users frequently turn to the staff members who are the most accessible --those across the hall or in the office next door--to resolve computer-related problems. To address this need, the Local Support Associate program was established. The Local Support Associate (LSA) program allows LSPs to identify and provide additional training to the users who assist them in day-to-day computing support. (ITC's Departmental Computing Support Team identifies LSA candidates in smaller departments that do not have funding for LSPs.) LSA candidates complete a certification program ("Computing Survival Skills") which consists of eighteen hours of training on base-level troubleshooting.

An new program which exemplifies the successful collaboration between local support personnel and central IT decisions is the Desktop Computing Initiative (DCI), a voluntary, University-wide program designed to curb the total cost of owning computers and to inc ease the efficiency and effectiveness of support for personal computing at the University. Goals of this program include easing the generic computing support burden and allowing a focus on a higher value support, improve sharing of electronic documents, fostering faculty-student collaboration and development of instructional materials, standardizing replacement cycles and the annual budget process, and reducing the use of out-of-date computers.

Summary of Comments:
The College of William and Mary (Gene Roche, Susan Evans and Michele Valliere)

The College of William and Mary leverages the benefits that distributed and centralized support models each have to offer in providing technology support and learning resources to its constituencies. We blend the right mix for the right solution.

For our academic departments, we have a model based upon a distributed 'specialty team' supported by several core teams. The 'specialty team' members are liaisons that report to Information Technology, but 'live day-to-day' with the academic department clusters they support. Although they are technically proficient, these individuals have advanced degrees in relevant disciplines and their priority is to provide the one-on-one support our faculty need to integrate the use of technology in the curriculum.

The liaisons also serve as the first point of contact for their departments when IT problems or needs arise. Core teams support this specialty team:

- **The IT Learning Team** performs learning needs assessments, defines desired learning outcomes, and deploys resources for different learning styles, including instructor-led workshops, and technology-based training.

- **The Technology Support Center (TSC)**, our help desk, tracks technical problems, dispatches hardware and software technicians, and maintains central on-line services such as web-based support and software repositories.

The liaisons perform 'triage,' escalating technical problems to the Technology Support Center, and technology competency needs to the Learning Team.

These core teams deploy campus-wide technology support services and respond to feedback from the liaisons identifying campus trends and needs. A recent example was the rollout of Blackboard Inc.'s CourseInfo, a web-based course management tool. Feedback from faculty and their liaisons indicated a growing need for on-line course support tools. A cross-functional team, consisting of learning consultants, software technicians, engineers, liaisons, and faculty, evaluated several tools in this category and selected CourseInfo for a pilot program. When this team decided to 'mainstream' this service after the pilot program, they developed a support plan that would provide the necessary centralized and distributed services, such as, the TSC providing server and account administration; the Learning Team providing workshops and on-line learning resources for the liaisons and their faculty, and the liaisons responding to the specific content development needs of their faculty.

Another example of this support model in action was our BEST (Building Enhanced Skills with Technology) pilot program, developed to complement a new equipment leasing program, which would provide several hundred new computers with new operating systems and software suites to our faculty. Just as UVa developed the "Computing Survival Skills" Program to respond to a computing support need, we developed the BEST program to address faculty support issues. We recognized the faculty support role the office staff in the academic departments often have to fulfill. The Learning Team worked with the liaisons, department chairs and staff representatives to develop a technology competency program that would enable the staff to assist the liaisons in providing competent, efficient faculty support.

A final example is a Faculty Institute designed for professors in our School of Education. Working with the departmental liaison and a School of Education faculty member, the IT Learning Team developed a program for faculty in the teacher education curriculum. This Institute offered sessions designed to establish a level of computer competency among faculty.

Currently our administrative departments are supported centrally through our core teams, but a similar model will be put in place as part of our enterprise resource planning project.

Scenarios

1. Database conversion

Doug is a technical support professional for the History department. About a year ago, Doug designed a Paradox database for a faculty member's research data. For the past 12 months, a graduate research assistant has entered and manipulated data for the research project. Now, a collaborator at another university is insisting that the database be converted to Microsoft Access. Doug has never used Microsoft Access.

The University of Virginia: As part of the LSP program, Doug could post a request for help to email lists on which LSPs actively participate, and also to a database special interest group made up of LSPs and ITC staff. In addition, for answers to more complex conversion issues, he can take advantage of the locally installed version of Microsoft Technet provided as an LSP resource. In addition to these special services for LSPs, there are several other resources available to all members of the UVa community. The Help Desk is one place to turn, and if Doug's question could not be answered there, it would be referred to the Desktop Computing Group, which has staff with database experience. On behalf of his faculty member, Doug could contact Robertson Media Center, which provides many types of support for faculty seeking to integrate technology into their teaching. Another faculty resource is the Research Computing Center, which provides help to faculty seeking to integrate technology into their research. As a long-term solution that would also benefit Doug's professional development, ITC also offers instructor led workshops on Fundamental through Advanced Access.

The College of William and Mary: Since all academic departments at the College of William and Mary have Departmental Liaisons, Doug will contact that person for assistance in converting his Paradox Database to MS Access. After a consultation, the Departmental Liaison will schedule as many sessions as needed to successfully convert to MS Access. If the Liaison is not proficient in using the MS Access software or has never done a conversion from Paradox to Access, the IT Learning Team will provide the second line of support to convert the data, using the conversion as a learning experience for the Liaison. This way the data will be converted by an experienced person, the Liaison will receive training for database conversions, and the College will be able to collaborate with another university.

Since the Administrative Departments do not currently have Departmental Liaisons, they will call the Technology Support Center (TSC). The TSC will open a Remedy ticket and assign it to the IT Learning Team to provide the second line of support to convert the data. As the TSC acquires more staff with database conversion skills, they will be less reliant on the Learning Team for administrative support issues.

2. Rollout of Windows 2000

The benefits of Windows 2000 have been widely publicized and faculty, staff and students are asking when conversion to the new operating system will take place.

The University of Virginia: Cross-divisional Projects (CDPs) are designed to test new services in various environments, assess costs and services, impact on the user community, risks to the user community, and design plans for maintenance. The Windows 2000 CDP has been created to answer just such issues raised by conversion to this new operating system. As the central computing organization, ITC is not necessarily the first to go to a new operating system--other pockets of the University have probably moved earlier. We ask LSPs from those cutting edge departments to participate on the CDP even though their problems deploying to a small group are somewhat different than a whole-University deployment. Various groups within ITC are also represented on the CDP. To date, the Windows 2000 CDP has identified issues with the rollout, and has provided education and resources to technical professionals and users on implementation, marketing, and advantages/disadvantages of installation and use of the new operating system. Training sponsored by the CDP has taken the form of knowledge exchanges, brown bags, demonstrations, vendor presentations, and recommendations for outside workshops. ITC also offers our user community a no-cost, pre-configured Windows 2000 desktop build that is configured to work securely in our network environment.

The College of William and Mary: Information Technology had already devoted a significant amount of effort to establish and broaden the scope and service of a Windows NT networking structure. We determined that our faculty are using the tools and support resources to make a difference with technology, our staff is more productive and proficient, and our students have come to expect the benefits of the latest technology. To deploy the new operating system, IT created the Windows 2000 Cross-Functional Project Team. The team immediately identified Windows 2000 "testers" throughout the campus. These testers were given a brief orientation to the new operating system after their install and asked to attend a meeting one week after install to discuss any issues that may have arisen. Next, documentation was created and linked to the IT Learning web site to inform the community of what to expect with this new operating system. The date was set for William and Mary to start using Windows 2000 Professional, which included stating that it would be the preferred operating system at William and Mary. The launch was then coordinated through the project team and benefits to the community were publicized. Following that, configuration standards were defined, including application locations and configurations which included making sure that it would be the operating system for the leased computers. Next we offered a discount on upgrades within three months after the start implementation date and required all upgrades after the three month cut off to be Windows 2000. Finally the team upgraded faculty and staff desktops in the order decided by the project team.

3. Student with a bad disk

It is 8:30 a.m., and Jen is completing a term paper. She has been working in a student computer lab since 10:00 p.m. the night before. She has saved the 25 page thesis onto a floppy disk and is now headed to her 9:00 a.m. class. After class, she returns to the lab and attempts to print her paper from the floppy disk. She gets a message that her disk is unreadable. The paper is due at the beginning of her 1:00 p.m. class that day.

The University of Virginia: The Help Desk is first place for this student to go, and the problem would be addressed, not referred, since the paper is due at 1pm. However, if Jen had already returned to the lab, the lab consultant on duty would be the first point of contact. The lab consultant would attempt to help, then refer her to Help Desk, (or call the Help Desk for the student) if the lab did not have the utilities necessary. Whether it is the lab consultant or Help Desk staff who ultimately solve the problem, the staff helping the student would also educate her on the need for creating backups and also the availability of more secure storage on our Home Directory Service.

The College of William and Mary: Jen will go to the College's full-service Technology Support Center (the TSC) for assistance with her bad disk. To benefit students and faculty, the TSC has expanded service hours, and is usually open until 11:00 p.m. Understanding that Jen has a 1:00 p.m. deadline, TSC staff would immediately scan and attempt to repair the disk using specialized utilities software. Staff at the TSC will also make sure that Jen is informed about network space that is accessible for all students in the computer labs.

4. Faculty member wants to use PowerPoint

Although a little skeptical about technology, Professor Clarke thinks her teaching might be enhanced by using PowerPoint during her lectures. She has never used PowerPoint and has asked her department's technical support professional, Betsy, about the logistics of getting a computer and projector into a classroom.

The University of Virginia: ITC's Labs & Classrooms group is the first stop to request portable equipment for each class that needs equipment. Betsy as an LSP also has access to check out a laptop and projector so that Professor Clarke can get familiar with the equipment and software. Long-term, the Professor Clarke could request to use a technology-equipped classroom, or could request that her regularly assigned classroom be transformed into a technology-equipped classroom (through the Provost). If they are in a participating department, Betsy can enlist the support of the department's Teaching and Technology Support Professional (TTSP) to get Professor Clarke up to speed on PowerPoint. Another resource is the Robertson Media Center, which is designed to provide assistance to faculty for requests to integrate technology with instruction. If department has an LTP or LSA, Betsy can point Professor Clarke to them for training/tutoring in PowerPoint. Another resource for training in PowerPoint for Professor Clarke might be the joint faculty training initiative currently being pursued by

the library and ITC. ITC also offers instructor led workshops on PowerPoint, although they are more popular with staff than faculty.

The College of William and Mary: Located within the academic departments they serve, Departmental Liaisons are experts at integrating technology into the classroom and Professor Clarke will talk with her liaison about her desire to use PowerPoint. A liaison has knowledge of the disciplines in various academic departments and will also be able to recommend ways to use presentation software to enhance teaching and learning. Further, the liaison will have access to all of the resources Professor Clarke will need to be successful. First, the liaison might offer to help a faculty member enroll in a PowerPoint workshop offered by the Learning Team. Next, the liaison will consult with Professor Clarke about the particular curriculum and the opportunities presented for using PowerPoint. Finally, the liaison will either secure a technology enhanced classroom or the computer and projection equipment needed.

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Abstract

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