Technology Planning Strategies

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Abstract

Effective planning strategies drive achievement of an overall technology goal to increase **access** to electronic information in real time in order to increase **efficiency**, productivity, and communication across campus. Planning relies on providing access, 'Anytime Anywhere' to student information, calendar, email, course management tools, and the Intranet to improve services and support to students, faculty, and staff.

Eight strategies form the framework of our plan.
1) **Student** services drive project priorities.
2) **Administrative** support leads to technology innovation.
3) **Teamwork** builds on collaborative decision-making.
4) **Innovation** relies on informed research.
5) **Adaptations** evolve as technology changes.
6) **Standards** determine purchasing.
7) **Projects** are phased-in according to specified timelines.
8) **Communication** promotes successful implementation.

Planning is initiated, explored, and promoted through members of the Technology Learning Roundtable, Academic and Administrative departments, and Information Technology Services. Implementation and maintenance of a highly reliable technology enriched campus focuses on resources, training, support, innovation, and communication.

Introduction

This paper describes technology planning strategies implemented at a small school. These strategies are explained in relationship to the goals and objectives of the Technology Plan. Input from various college areas is important to achieve successful outcomes. Planning is key to the implementation and maintenance of a highly reliable technology enriched campus. The focus areas of strategic planning are: resources, training, support, innovation, and communication.

"Strategic Technology Issues: A Checklist for Liberal Arts Colleges" emerged from a 1995 EDUCOM workshop where Clarke was among the eighty colleges represented. The workshop was lead by Dr. Martin Ringle, CTO, Reed College (recent recipient of the 2003 EDUCAUSE Leadership in the Profession award). Workshop attendees focused on the impact of new technologies and financial priorities of liberal arts and small colleges. The checklist still valid today can be found at http://www.reed.edu/pcw. The questions remain the same but different answers have evolved.

Technology Planning Strategies

There are eight strategies guiding our technology planning process:

1) **Student services drive project priorities.** Every effort is made to meet student needs. These needs include anytime anywhere access, seamless services, and smart classrooms where faculty engage students in interactive learning.

2) **Administrative support leads to technology innovation.** The Clarke community recognizes the value of technology as a tool, the competency of the Information Technology service area, and the need for replacement cycles.

3. **Teamwork builds on collaborative decision-making.** Planning, decisions, and implementation are accomplished with input from various campus groups. Project-based teams help in the decision-making process and participate in the implementation of decisions. A team approach is key to the implementation and continued support of Datatel, Clarke's ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) solution. Datatel's integrated information management solution assists in efficient operations and best leverage of resources enterprise-wide. Additional team implementations include the campus card system and a collaborative email and calendaring system.

4) **Innovation relies on informed research.** The Technology Learning Roundtable committee along with the Information Technology Service area gathers information on new technologies and processes from listservs, conferences, webcasts, scholarly research journals, vendor demonstrations, online demos, and peer networking.

5) **Adaptations evolve as technology changes.** As plans are designed and implementation is carried forward ongoing changes are made to produce a stronger project. As a result of innovation and investigation final products produced are enhanced.

6) **Standards determine purchasing.** Hardware and software purchases that adhere to common standards produce better support and training for users as well as aid in efficient deployment. Standardized operating systems allow maximizing time and talents of support service staff.

7) **Projects are phased-in according to specified timelines.** This acquisition and implementation approach allows for manageable project timelines and regulated monetary expenditures.

8) **Communication promotes successful implementation.** Technology plans and implementation are communicated through multiple venues. Faculty forums, committee representation, newsletters, presentations, and the web are vehicles for communicating with the Clarke community.

These planning strategies assist us in achieving our overall technology goal to increase access to electronic data for retrieval of up-to-date information to increase efficiency, productivity, and communication. Key words are access, up-to-date, and efficiency. The Clarke Intranet and web facilitate Anytime, Anyplace access for students to schedule classes, register, view grades and transcripts, pay bills, utilize campus calendar, and email. Enabling access for our faculty and staff help them better support the students and work more efficiently.

Overall Technology Goal and Objectives

The overall goal is to increase access to electronic information in real time resulting in increased efficiency, productivity, and communication.

Objective 1: Increase the use of the Internet for teaching, student recruitment, public relations, database information, and dissemination of e-forms. Our vehicle for access is the Internet and Clarke Intranet.

Implementation of Web tools include;

- WebCT as the standard online course management tool,
- My Info for web access to student information for students, faculty and staff,
- GroupWise for collaborative email, calendar, and document sharing,
- Intranet portal to access campus news, electronic forms, My Mail, My Info and My WebCT,
- Clarke website for student recruitment and information dissemination for our alumni and the community.

Objective 2: Support new administrative software initiatives.

Administrative initiatives include Datatel's WebAdvisor (My Info) for new and continuing web access to information database systems for students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Software releases and upgrades are applied regularly; the graphical user interface is the most current version. Work continues on enhancing reporting for all areas. Admission representatives use mobile tools such as Personal Digital Assistants (PDA) to download prospective contact information; a GroupWise "Hit-the-Road" feature is being piloted by counselors to explore the advantages of this feature.

Objective 3: Support the campus-wide technology plan.

- Work within limited financial resources and seek additional funding.
- Continue to inform budget planning and communication with individual departments.
- Support the current Title III student assessment and student success grant.
- Continue to update the detailed projected five-year campus technology budget.

Input

Input from three main college sources is important to successful outcomes.

- The **Technology Learning Roundtable** (TLR) is a campus technology advisory committee. This committee originated over ten years ago and has moved from initial planning for what a networked campus should be by placing a computer on everyone's desk to current issues of course delivery enhancements, ubiquitous access, and classroom building renovation.

- **Academic and Administrative departments** submit a three year technology budget request yearly to Information Technology Services area. This information is translated into capital

budget based on how it fits in with the campus wide technology plan. New projects are implemented through departmental requests.

- The centralized **Information Technology Services** area promotes, demos, and pilots technologies to change and improve the way services are delivered and work processes are enhanced. The roll-out of collaborative communication software, Novell GroupWise, is a recent example of this approach. This area also studies new advances in technology through consultation with the TLR. Technology is adopted as a tool to reduce barriers for students, faculty, and staff not to simply acquire technology. One example of this approach was the decision not to promote a "laptop university" due to the fact that it was not the right fit for Clarke. Future policies may introduce the right type of wireless mobile and teaching access that fits the Clarke campus.

Implementation

The implementation and maintenance of a highly reliable technology enriched campus focuses on resources, training, support, innovation, and communication.

- **Resources** necessary to provide a state-of-the-art learning and teaching environment to facilitate student success are identified, resources obtained, and usage policies written. Computers, servers, printers, and network infrastructure are on a 3-4 year replacement cycle. Software is regularly upgraded to "proven" versions.

- **Training** and educational opportunities promoting the use of technology throughout the learning environment are identified and offered. Faculty training is accomplished through faculty development workshops and one-on-one guidance in the Technology Education Center. Staff training, including Information Technology, utilize in-house training, consulting, and self-study as a means of keeping up-to-date in particular applications. As budget monies become available off-site training will be offered.

- **Support** is available appropriate to technology needs throughout the learning environment. The Information Technology Services area and the Technology Specialists are available during working hours.

- **Innovation** relies on informed research. Innovative technologies currently being investigated are in the areas of blended courses, wireless technologies, electronic collaboration, electronic portfolios, and seamless integration of services.

- **Communication** concerning the use of technology is promoted and facilitated through the use of campus focus groups, faculty forums, brown bag luncheons, general staff meetings, and presentations to administrators and various departments.

Conclusion

To aid in the planning process the following issues are considered using guidelines noted in Ringle's report "Strategic Technology Issues: A Checklist for Liberal Arts Colleges" (http://www.reed.edu/pcw).

- Evaluate technology investments by how well they serve the institutional mission
- Use of the Internet to its full potential for teaching, student recruitment, campus information, public relations, and other purposes
- Make provisions to enable easy electronic communication with our students as well as with alumni, parents, prospective students, and scholars at other institutions
- Prepare faculty to take advantage of curricular opportunities provided by the web, multimedia, and other new technologies
- Explore consortia or collaborative relationships with other colleges and businesses to provide technology and information resources in the most cost-effective ways
- Assure campus-wide policy providing ethical and legal guidelines for the use of technologies such as the Internet, e-mail, peer-to-peer file sharing, and the Internet
- Address copyright and licensing issues as we broaden electronic access to resources such as library materials
- Assure a policy exists to cover ownership and/or royalties for electronic materials produced by faculty or other members of the college community, along with appropriate recognition of achievement during the promotion and tenure process
- Assure institution-wide policy for allocating, upgrading, and replacing computer equipment