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"Collaborative Support for the School of
Education: A Joint Instructional Technology and
Library Needs Assessment Program."

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Abstract: DePaul's School of Education was the first implementation of a Needs Assessment designed jointly by the university's Instructional Technology Development (ITD) area and the University Libraries. The goals for the Needs Assessment were to identify areas in which an expanded, unified and comprehensive faculty development training and support package would both address faculty's perceived needs while also improving adoption of existing instructional technologies and/or services. The Library's education bibliographer and the ITD consultant for education interviewed faculty representing a cross section of departments and programs as well as technological expertise. The results were analyzed; issues were sorted according to faculty priority and by length of time and resources needed to address them.

Introduction

In the months following a reorganization, two units in the newly combined Office for Teaching and Learning Resources – the General Library and Instructional Technology Development (ITD) – examined ways in which to deliver course management software training for faculty. In the first year, the two support areas established a successful working relationship by collaborating on faculty training for Blackboard, the course management system adopted for use at DePaul. The introductory Blackboard training session – led by instructional librarians – combined both an introduction to Blackboard as well as an overview of web-accessible library resources such as online journals, databases, and electronic reserves. From these initial collaborative efforts the need to identify and deliver an expanded, unified and comprehensive support package to specific academic units became apparent. The School of Education was the first implementation of the resulting Needs Assessment process.

Goals and Process

In planning for the Needs Assessment, four goals were identified: first, to ascertain opportunities, unique to the School of Education, to enhance faculty skills in instructional technologies and in online library resources; secondly, to design a training plan for the School of Education, based on results of the needs assessment; and thirdly, to provide an opportunity for Education faculty to become aware of the

services and tools available to them through these two offices. Lastly, the process developed would become a model for training needs assessment that could be applied to other DePaul academic units in the future.

Twelve open-ended questions were designed to stimulate critical reflection on the possibilities of electronic resources and instructional applications. Some questions referred to specific features of existing applications (i.e., “Education faculty could use the assessment features – online surveys, tests, and gradebook -- in Blackboard to ____”). Other questions were more general in nature (i.e., “What have you seen others do that you'd like to do?”). Eight SOE faculty were selected to be interviewed; they represented a cross section of departments and programs as well as technological expertise. The Library's education bibliographer and the ITD consultant for education met with each faculty member in individual sessions lasting approximately one hour. The results were analyzed; issues were sorted according to faculty priority and also – on the part of the Libraries and ITD – by length of time and resources available to address them.

Process Issues and Suggestions

Suggestions for future Needs Assessments fall into four categories: when to perform a needs assessment, what questions are to be asked, who is to be interviewed, and who will perform the interviews. In terms of when, the DePaul Needs Assessment was performed soon after an accreditation report that suggested improving technology integration throughout the school. It was found that by timing such a venture to coordinate with the school's program review or accreditation cycle, faculty members were ready – and in some instances, eager - to comment on technology adoption issues. Questions referring to specific functions or applications may need to be altered for faculty who are not acquainted with that function. So a question such as: “If all Education courses had a Blackboard web site then____” might be altered to: “If all Education courses had an easy-to-access web site where students could access resource materials, assignments, and hold discussions then...” Adding a question that could elicit suggestions on how to operate most effectively within the School's unique culture might assist academic support areas in formulating successful training and support activities.

Faculty members in DePaul's School of Education vary widely in their adoption of technology. It was, therefore, important to include among the interviewees as wide a range of users as possible, also making certain to include representatives of the various departments within the school. This meant that several faculty who were interviewed were previously unknown to the Library and ITD interviewers. The combination of using, for interviewers, the Library bibliographer for the academic area and the ITD consultant for the school or college seems best suited for DePaul's unique academic support situation.

Conclusions

The process of meeting with key faculty members and hearing their input while introducing them to the work and services of these two support areas immediately strengthened the working relationships between the Libraries, ITD and the School of Education. The professional staff participating in the interviews became better acquainted with key faculty members. These faculty members, in turn, are more fully aware of the central services available to them from these two academic support units.

Short-term goals, which can significantly affect the current level of faculty understanding and application of currently available services –such as Carl UnCover – include simple-to-implement paper and e-mail communications specifically tailored for School of Education faculty. Workshops and Brown Bags on specific topics also provide immediate impact with minimal additional resources. It will be important to work closely with the School of Education in developing and advertising these sessions. In addition, success rates may increase if these sessions can be held either in or near School of Education offices.

In the long term, ITD and the Libraries can benefit from a continuing alliance with Education faculty on several issues and resources, including design of online versions of induction and continuing education courses, the curriculum materials center, redesign of computer classrooms, research and advocacy toward streaming video and audio, as well as applications to support streamlined administrative processes (e.g., Syllabi on line) and improved learning (e.g., database of case studies with video examples).