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L S. LaRoche

Julianne Miranda
Butler University, jmiranda@butler.edu

A Smock

T A. Noble

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Computing Labs and Technology Classroom (CLTC) Initiative: A Model for Distributed Support

Lynda S. LaRoche  
DePauw University  
Faculty Instructional Technology Support (FITS)  
Specialist and Blackboard Support Coordinator  
Greencastle, Indiana 46135  
765-658-6600  
laroche@depauw.edu

Julianne M. Miranda  
DePauw University  
Associate Director Faculty Instructional Technology Support (FITS)  
Greencastle, Indiana 46135  
765-658-4389  
jmiranda@depauw.edu

ABSTRACT
DePauw University is a small, liberal arts institution with 2200 undergraduate residential students and 222 faculty members, located in Greencastle, Indiana. The challenges of supporting a campus with multiple and diverse facilities are further amplified by limited staff support resources. One of the strategies for addressing these challenges led to the formation of the Computing Labs and Technology Classrooms (CLTC) initiative. The CLTC recognizes and draws on the strengths of support specialists with a wide variety of professional training and experience, who regularly collaborate in the support and management of campus-wide labs and technology classrooms.

2. HISTORY OF CLTC/PRESENTATION OF DISTRIBUTED SUPPORT MODEL
While additional support staff with increased specialization was gradually added to the support infrastructure, the growth of
computing continued to escalate beyond the support capacity of the Information Technology staff. This was further complicated when departmental technology purchase decisions were made without consulting with computing services. This led to Information Technology staff being expected to support unfamiliar or incompatible hardware or software. Decisions made in one area were not shared with those who were expected to support the decisions in other areas. Not only did this lead to widely diverse hardware and software resources across campus, but it also made inventory tracking a nightmare and created an environment of competition rather than collaboration.

The Computing Labs Committee originated in the early 1990's but its focus was very broad and membership was constituted primarily by support staff. The current Computing Labs and Technology Classrooms (CLTC) committee emerged from a group of individuals interested in supporting campus computing, many of whom were faculty members responsible for supporting discipline specific labs. The committee is appointed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and reports to the Coordinator of Information Services and Technology. The committee includes faculty, support personnel, administrative computing staff and administrators who work together to provide a holistic view of the campus computing environment. The committee recognizes the challenge of trying to maintain a significant diversity in facilities and academic/administrative needs without adequate support.

The goal of the committee was to develop a centralized model for communication and support that would more effectively foster the sustainable adoption of curricular and administrative technology. This model had a two-fold purpose. First, it served to bring the committee together in the spirit of shared knowledge for the purpose of developing efficient and consistent support of public computing facilities. This was an important step in making sure that individuals responsible for public computing facilities were adequately informed and had an opportunity to reach a mutually agreed upon philosophy of support. Secondly, once this level of agreement was in place the individuals involved could more effectively disseminate needed support and information in their respective areas of responsibility and/or nearby departments.

3. COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

The first responsibilities included consideration of models for a centralized budget mechanism and processes for standardizing computer lab and technology classroom configurations as well as managing decentralized resources. As the committee experienced growth, it began a process of maturation. In addition to sharing knowledge related to the support of public computing facilities, the committee developed a mentality of collective problem solving. An outgrowth of this process was a streamlined approach to responding and tracking helpdesk calls and training opportunities for the members of the committee. The committee members were, in turn, better able to support a wider variety of needs by having the necessary information to direct the client to the appropriate source of service. In its present form, the committee is now responsible for developing planning and policy recommendations for the administration. Furthermore, the committee devotes much of its time to collaborative research initiatives.

4. CONCLUSION

An effective model of support does not present itself overnight. Through trial-and error, collaboration, a great deal of reflection and sheer determination to meet the needs of our clients, the CLTC has evolved into a committee that is beneficial to all members of our campus.

Because of the breadth and depth of perspectives the committee holds by virtue of its diverse membership, we are better able to consider and share a wider view of the overall campus computing needs. We bring our diverse expertise and knowledge of specific technology resources together, enabling us to plan and prioritize with both an eye for the specifics, as well as, a view of the campus-wide picture. We believe that this model would be highly successful in a variety of implementations.

5. FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information about DePauw University’s Computing Labs and Technology Classrooms Committee is available at http://www.depauw.edu/it/cltc/.