University of Massachusetts Boston

ScholarWorks at UMass Boston

Brief 1: The Technology Challenge on Campus from the Perspective of Chief Academic Officers

New England Resource Center for Higher Education, University of Massachusetts Boston

Recommended Citation

NERCHE BRIEF

New England Resource Center for Higher Education
January 2000

_____

The following Brief from the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE) is a distillation of collaborative work of members of NERCHE's ongoing think tanks for administrators and faculty in the New England region. NERCHE Briefs emphasize policy implications and action agendas from the point of view of the people who tackle the most compelling issues in higher education in their daily work lives. With support from the Ford Foundation, NERCHE disseminates these pieces to a targeted audience of legislators, college and university presidents and system heads, and media contacts. The Briefs are designed to add critical information and essential voices to the policy decisions that leaders in higher education address.

****
The Technology Challenge on Campus from the Perspective of Chief Academic Officers

The wonders of the information technology (IT) revolution have landed hard and fast on college campuses bringing with them a myriad of challenges for academic leaders.

A group of Chief Academic Officers met to discuss the challenges of technology on their campuses. They identified three categories that have implications for organization and planning: 1) Finances and Economic Capacity, 2) Priority Setting and Assessment of Value and 3) The Role of the Faculty.

1. **Finances and Economic Capacity**

The rate of obsolescence in technology is exceedingly rapid, requiring constant outlay of dollars just to keep up with changing products. While the pace is likely controlled by software and hardware companies, institutions must continue to keep up. Increasingly, technology is used for competitive advantage in today's higher education market. But the notion that technology saves money is ludicrous. There is a large technology financial gap on campuses. Funding for technology typically will have to come from third party sources, from an increase in student fees, or through a decision to mandate purchase by students. If the latter two options are exercised, it is imperative that students perceive that their investment is worthwhile.

<u>Policy Implications</u>

- Set technological goals in relation to revenues and resources.
- Institute dialogues among those who demand new technology and those who pay the bills.
- Institute a multi-year planning process (capital, financial, and strategic) and link budgets to plans.
- Assess whether student market and/or state allocations will support costs.
- Create a mechanism to match future needs with current capacities.
- Develop mechanisms to determine which technology(ies) to adopt.
- Assess how and when to present new technologies to students.
- Assure access on- and off-campus.
- Develop means to determine trade-offs among financing needs, fees, computer prices and affordability.

2. Priority Setting and Assessment of Value

There is no choice but to invest in technology. But the real question -- and a difficult one to answer -- is, how can technology make education better? Most campuses are not prepared to measure the impact of technology on the quality of education.

<u>Policy Implications</u>

- Develop campus-specific means to measure the educational impact of IT.
- Create mechanisms for assessing competing academic and administrative needs.
- Connect the technology experts to the educational mission.
- Decide on the appropriate paradigm for organization: client or customer services on campus, functional area support, departmental support, and technological similarity.
- Assess current organization of the campus in relation to technological needs.
- Assess the need to consolidate all technology units (library, telecommunications, media).

3. The Role of Faculty

While technology may be helpful in conveying information, and some evidence indicates that it can help students master competencies. The real challenge for higher education is to teach students how to think critically. It is not clear what role technology can play in response to that challenge, but all indicators point to the fact that it can have a profound impact on how faculty teach and students learn. Technology will not supplant the need for teachers, though it seems likely that it will alter the role and function of teachers. Investment in technology by itself, without investment in faculty development, is not the answer. One cannot simply mandate faculty to incorporate IT into instruction.

<u>Policy Implications</u>

- If the use and application of technology is an educational goal, mechanisms must be in place to persuade, prepare and support faculty to adopt technology in the classroom, in advising and in scholarship.
- Balance protection of academic freedom with the need to act as responsible agents vis à vis the adoption, dissemination and administration of IT resources and academic applications.
- Create proactive planning and goal setting for faculty and/or academic units and include technology adaptation in faculty goal set.
- Develop an effective unit on campus to design, support and advance this agenda.
- Explore ways in which shared governance can be made to address the trade-offs between faculty autonomy and system-wide integrity.
- Use IT as a vehicle for encouraging faculty to develop more joint responsibility for academic programs.

Conclusion

IT is different from other innovations because it is all pervasive. Campus leaders need an understanding of what the academic applications of this technology are likely to be in the future. They will require a level of expertise sufficient to evaluate alternatives. Despite the compelling needs in the area of IT, it is critical to take the time to think about educational goals and objectives and their relationship to institutional type and the students being served. Technology must not realign institutional priorities. The challenge is to adapt our fundamental commitments to teaching and learning to the new pace and new opportunities associated with information technology. Rather than homogenizing higher education, technology should enhance respective missions.
****

For more information about NERCHE Think Tanks and other programs, or to respond to the issues raised in this brief, please contact us at:

NERCHE
Graduate College of Education
University of Massachusetts Boston
Boston, MA 02125-3393
617-287-7740
email us at: nerche@umb.edu
Or visit our website, www.nerche.org.