

Challenge 5: Advancing IT in an Age of Budget Cuts
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Participant Comments and Discussion:

(Libby & Deb think that everyone must have lots of money, because there aren't too many folks here. Should we go down the hall and ask people what they think they're doing right?) :-)

Opening remarks

- Investigating moving to an open source LMS (away from proprietary) to save money on license and feel better about life in general
- Colorado College implemented moodle a few years ago, getting rid of e-reserves, using moodle for that; re-organizing course development "spaces" (academic courses, student groups, "top secret"). Advice for new LMS, do it, have a few years of implementation concurrent with continuing to make changes.

Does it save money to move to open source?

- CC unique: no online courses, new implementation
- Open source is free like a puppy, not free like free beer.
- Costs hidden

Look more at cloud computing, tools that are free or no-cost, especially in support

- Exploit tools in cloud, web 2.0 world that require little or no training, support
- But that's from a technical side, need to think about it from the academic side, still need training and support of faculty. Any change may actually increase the support on the academic side, so need to be careful about bringing up even low- or no-cost technologies
- E.g., WebCT --> Blackboard switch should have decreased technical support, but additional costs in porting, understanding new system.
- Yes, major change in complex system and not toward open source, even more difficult.
- E.g., anecdotal and very small: camtasia much training, new free product with little or no support as long as you can move and click your mouse
- Certain amount of trust needed; can you have an escrow agreement with a cloud provider

Share services

- We have trust in the cloud, but not necessarily in each other (each other's services)
- Also could share services and the costs
- OK, share our data center; where expertise exists, exploit it. Don't need to recreate all parts.
- E.g., online training, online documentation
- Ten universities get together and make a local cloud for a video services, for instance.
- Certain amount of trust needed; don't know that we really do trust each other, we put money into a tool, are sure that we are unique, are in love with our own infrastructures; difficult to share even within the same system.
- Some places (smaller schools) are very good at collaborating; larger schools, always looking within. Will continue to do so as long as there is no compelling reason to change perspective (budget cuts!).

- Online course system, developed locally, used across a system; that collapsed because the infrastructure to support the system became too large, too expensive.

Do more assessment; slow down; prioritize

- Do well at investigating new technologies, but need to assess what we already have so we can better prioritize by relative effectiveness.
- Do this to make wise cuts; cut back on exploration, commit the time and resources to do good evaluation
- Make sure you know what your main business is.

How can EDUCAUSE/ELI help? Identify low-/no-cost tools? Help us share training/documentation?

- Educate central administration, show that the use of tools are close to the campus mission; need communication/marketing, share stories with non-IT administrative folks, provide those persuasive materials to us so we can use them.
- Intervene and have our administrators talk to one another
- Have a branch of CDS have a survey of products/tools that campuses are using; look to this body as a pseudo-authoritative source, so when we say to our faculty that we have to move to open source, we can say, see? 80% of our peers are doing it.
- Work with SCUP, NACUBO to get the message through to them. Develop relationships with other professional organizations.
- Educate presidents and academic officers? No. Educate your CIO on the virtues of, say, moodle, and he/she does the job of persuading the president.
- Make good comparison of costs of ERPs vs. academic tools/systems, and of usage of ERPs vs. academic tools/systems to show value. Maybe not go after the holy grail of supreme integration of it all, but get T&L back on the top lists of CIOs instead of ERPs, security. Let EDUCAUSE and ELI continue its re-centering, then it will have a trickle down effect in the professional development of our community and in the outreach we do to our administrations. Focus on the core (academic) mission of higher education, and then we can convince our CIOs. Bubble a while ago, faculty didn't adopt, no assessment, and then the discussion moves on to the ERPs instead of T&L tools.
- Is what we're doing with T&L (tools) effective, if not, why are we doing it?
- Get IT professionals teaching courses. Have the content knowledge, and it allows us to do our jobs better because we're closer to the academic enterprise. EDUCAUSE and ELI could support a move toward using IT staff as adjunct teachers. At some places, if above a certain level, will be asked to teach. (Did they say what you don't have to do so you have time to teach?)

What would happen if there were such deep cuts that you have to cut something close to the mission of T&L?

- Maybe the idea of a centralized LMS is outdated; could pull together other tools together to get the same functionality.
- If we did that we were, demand for personal support to replicate what they're already doing on the LMS would be high, costs higher than license for the LMS
- Drop email, calendar, productivity software and go for free tools on the consumer side and use them. Preserve the LMS. Use google docs instead of Office, e.g.
- Need the central LMS to meet demands of FERPA, how does the law set up boundaries for when to use central, when to use free/cloud? "It depends." Some places told that they cannot yet outsource student email even, others can outsource student, faculty, staff. Where do the mandates play into our decisions?

What's your biggest worry?

- That the budget cuts will be permanent, that we're going to have to keep on cutting and something will break.
- Having people share in the budget cuts equally doesn't make sense. That is, if faculty are told they need to teach larger courses, online courses, then they need more support from IT. We're serving (ultimately) students, work harder, yes, but cuts not distributed equally.
- That the current economic model is unsustainable.
- Should faculty workload increase but not IT?
- Maybe student workload should increase; we provide a lot for students, spend a lot of money to make it easy for them, for instance, to get a transcript. Students take more responsibility for their own education. Perhaps cut things that make it easier for students, go back to old school way of doing things.
- Do we really want them photocopying everything again instead of just hitting "print" from within the e-reserves system?
- Back to assessment: this is a campus-wide problem. How to save money? Better cut whole programs and services rather than across-the-board, then some services can grow to provide needed support.
- Use content that is developed elsewhere, e.g., MERLOT. Want it easily searchable and adaptable. Create the teachable moment in the digital age. We just do it, but how much are we looking at how scalable what we're doing for them is. Stop looking at boutique services and more at sustainable practices, such as utilizing reusable learning objects.
- Generate revenue? No reusable in the general curriculum, e.g. MIT physics when lab is idle, other universities can use it, take advantage for virtual lab/simulations. But many say it's not a custom fit, so won't use it. With dwindling resources, need to look at different ways of doing things.
- Don't save money to do that. Biggest fear is that we'll still have large lecture classes in which professors still talk to students instead of having the seminar experience (under-girded by technology) even in large lecture classrooms. Fear that the lecture won't die.
- But faculty aren't rewarded to look for alternatives. Until faculty are encouraged and rewarded for teaching and learning, then we won't see the innovation we want, even in tight times.
- Part of being creative is reusing what's already out there.
- Are faculty at primarily teaching institutions more creative? Still have to balance excellence in teaching with research agenda.
- Biggest worry: staff layoffs.
- Biggest fear: domino effect; companies go under, federal grant dollars will disappear rapidly, etc.

Ways to Save

- Buy-out program, lost eight in central IT. Those people were multi-tasked and did everything. Lose that type of person, lose knowledge person and very hard to replace.
- Some institutions are already talking about lay-offs.
- Furloughs (unpaid) being talked about.
- Re-evaluation of open positions being talked about.
- All professional development, travel cut; charge students for printing; no software licenses
- About 1/4 snuck in under the wire to come to ELI.
- Corporate grant funding? Not an option outside of sciences. If the companies don't go out of business, maybe we could encourage them to make grants to higher education.
- Start charge-back for non-academic use of equipment; charge for streaming of campus events or get rid of those responsibilities.

- Focus on the mission of the university. Ditch whatever isn't core. Maybe that suggestion will be more palatable now.
- Get serious about telecommuting and alternate work like job sharing. Biggest costs are getting students and faculty to campus. Get in the game a bit more. EDUCAUSE and ELI could help with developing/sharing policies, documentation, etc. Save on heating, lighting, transportation at some government agencies with four longer hour days.
- Energy savings from computers being shut down; do it centrally. EDUCAUSE and ELI could provide some data about how that can have an impact on electricity consumption.
- Lower temperature in buildings from 72 to 68 degrees saved \$1000 a day at one institution.