

Communication Technologies in the Faculty of Education

Guiding Principles (Revisited 2011)

Introduction

This document outlines guiding principles and strategies for communication technologies in the Faculty of Education. The purpose is to create a reference point for making policies and decisions related to technology. This is a discussion paper and should be viewed as a starting point for further dialogue. This does not reference specific applications or initiatives but tries to provide a more generic perspective since the technology and the way we use it is constantly evolving.

The Vision

Students enrolled in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge will participate in a variety of courses that exemplify the appropriate use of current communication technologies. Courses will integrate technology in activities and assignments that contribute to students' future roles as teachers and counsellors who are competent in, confident with, and critical about technology.

Students graduating from the Faculty will be comfortable with the current technology. They will have substantial number of occasions to experience communication technologies through hands-on-activities as well as in-depth discussions of relevant issues.

In order to address the knowledge, skills, and attributes that describe Quality Teaching by Alberta Education, students within our teacher education programs will become informed users able to integrate technology across the curriculum and address Alberta Education's Information and Communication Technology Outcomes. This knowledge will be enhanced by knowing when, where, and how to apply technology. They will understand the functions of traditional and electronic teaching/learning technologies. They will learn how to use, and how to engage students in using, 21st century skills: media literacy and Information, Communications & Technology (ICT) literacy. These experiences will come at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, through practicum experiences and on-line learning opportunities.

Students within the counsellor education programs will become informed users of communication technologies that allow for ethical access to counsellor training and enhance student learning processes. Further, students will capitalize on the opportunity to understand the function of and issues related to the use of communication technologies in counsellor training and practice.

Guiding Principles

Communication Technology as a Tool for Learning

Teaching is learning. Teachers and counsellors should be sophisticated learners and modelers of the learning process. Technology then becomes a tool to enable/support learning. It is merely a tool, not a panacea. Technology can help accomplish particular tasks but in a more efficient way, change the way tasks are accomplished and help us learn. When it comes to technology we are all learners, and expertise is an illusive concept.

Strategies:

- model the concept of teaching as learning by Faculty members becoming familiar with useful technological tools and exploring the implications
- establish a free and open environment that fosters creativity and risk taking with communication technologies; this can be enabled by financial and logistical means

Students First

One of the Faculty's top priorities is to students and this is reflected in technology acquisition; providing students with the newest equipment and resources possible.

Strategies:

- maintain a budgetary and purchasing priority for those technology items that will impact student access and learning

Budgetary Commitment

The Faculty has become entrenched in using communication technologies to carry out its day-to-day operations. This use of technology requires budgetary support.

Strategies:

- maintain a budgetary line item for technology from base budgeting
- optionally bolster technology resources when soft monies are available

Ready Access

Faculty as well as students need ready access to current technologies so that they can integrate it into their work.

Strategies:

- maintain an evolving evergreen plan to maintain and refresh hardware, software, Internet services, and network connectivity

Technical Support

The Faculty has phenomenal technological support. This is due to hiring key people with appropriate skills, knowledge, and attitudes. The level of communication technology use needs to be maintained by employing human support to trouble-shoot problems, install new software, research new options, set up hardware, and educate users.

Strategies:

- employ personnel devoted to maintaining, upgrading, investigating technological options, and educating users
- make use of technically skilled undergraduate and graduate students to assist research, teaching, or service

Professional Development

Keeping up with technology is important and is often accomplished on an individualized basis, via individualized help sessions, or through focused workshops to address diversified needs. Professional development with technology is not a one-shot experience. There will be a need for ongoing training and support as roles, knowledge, and skills evolve.

Strategies:

- provide Faculty with one on one support as needed
- provide timely workshops and tutorials to help Faculty with current technologies or make them aware of emerging technologies through individualized help sessions or through a workshop approach

Ownership/Control of Resources

The Faculty has long been at the cutting edge of technological developments within the university community. Much of this success has been due to the degree to which we were able to embark on interesting ventures independent of the University computing bureaucracy. However, this is becoming more difficult as access becomes controlled by the central technology department which means working closely with central computing on many technological initiatives.

Strategies:

- continue to maintain control and ownership of key technological resources that are useful to the Faculty that would not otherwise be supported by general University services
- actively explore ways to make efficient use of human and technical resources within the Faculty
- collaborate with central computing department to leverage their human and technological resources

Technology Integration Infused in Program

Where do students get experience with technology in our program?

In the undergraduate program, there is an introductory module taken by all students to raise their skill levels and introduce them to integrating technology in their classes. Many of the instructors in core courses and electives integrate technology and there are also opportunities in the senior level for taking technology electives. In addition, there is an optional technology specialization that includes an emphasis on technology integration in student practicums.

The graduate programs within the Faculty of Education also offer opportunities for learning and integrating technology. In the Master of Education program, there are elective courses offered that focus on technology and education. Graduate students can specialize in communication technology through independent study, projects, theses, or through customizing assignments in regular electives. There is also an IT leadership focus in the M.Ed. program. In addition, there are increasing number of courses or components of courses now being offered on-line. The Faculty of Education operates the Master of Counselling (MC) program, which is the largest graduate program on campus that relies significantly on online interactive courses supplemented by blended learning opportunities with some blended programs. The program offers an IT online orientation program for MC graduate students before they start their online courses.

There is a Teaching and Learning with Technology (TLT R&D) center that documents ongoing technology research initiatives in the Faculty of Education and is accessible from the research centers section of the web site. This highlights exemplars of technology integration through video vignettes and reports.

Overall, the Faculty continues to support and encourage the effective integration of technology into teaching and learning.

Strategies:

- use appropriate technologies in courses that match pedagogical style and curriculum content
- offer electives in educational technology for students who want to explore this field further
- offer an educational technology specialization for those who want this on their credentials (undergrad)
- provide exemplars of Faculty or students integrating technology into teaching and learning (video vignettes on the web)

Encourage Exploration and Maximize Cost Effectiveness

There is a fine line between lagging behind current levels of technology, maintaining the status quo, investing in cutting edge, and experimenting with bleeding edge technology. Lagging behind is not all bad but quickly students and Faculty documents and skills become dated. As new versions of applications become the norm, it becomes important to maintain currency so that we can continue to share information with other universities, schools, and students. There are also competing demands: one is a need to make purchasing decisions based on experimental needs and the other suggests that purchasing decisions be made purely on tried and proven solutions. Both approaches should be supported, but the experimental approach needs to be tempered with good judgment and an eye for budgetary concerns. It is a balancing act; investing vast amounts of money into technologies that have a short life or have little impact on learning should be questioned, but at the same time thoughtful experimentation should be encouraged. Currently there are monies set aside in base budget to support required technology purchases and there is also a fund that Faculty can apply for through an adjudicated proposal process to explore communication technologies for teaching, learning, or research.

Strategies:

- continue to set aside a portion of the budget for experimental technology purchases to research alternatives and best practices (TIRP funding)
- assess purchasing decisions to determine what worked and what did not

Communication Technologies in Teaching and Learning Committee's Advisory Role

The Communications Technologies in Teaching and Learning (CTITL) committee will be a sounding board for Faculty technology initiatives and act in an advisory role to the Faculty on matters dealing with technology integration.

Strategies:

- review as needed these guiding principles and evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies
- make recommendations to the Curriculum Committee or to the Graduate Studies Committee regarding curriculum proposals related to communications technology
- make recommendations to the Executive Committee regarding Faculty policies related to the use of communications technology in the work of the Faculty (teaching, supervision, research, service, administration)
- make recommendations to the Dean regarding the Faculty's needs for facilities, equipment, or training in the area of communications technology

- adjudicate funding proposals for exploring communication technology possibilities (TIRP fund)

Closer Connections with the Field

In keeping with the Faculty's overarching focus of close ties to the field, there is potential for communication technologies to play a role.

Strategies:

- investigate collaboration with administrators, teachers, counsellors and interns in the field through communication technologies

On-line Course Development and Maintenance

The Faculty has embarked on a multi-pronged approach to developing entire courses or components of courses online (blended environment). Initial development of on-line learning experience requires time and energy, no matter how it is done and administration should consider this when making workload assignments. Online course development happens by individual effort or by a team working together. Both approaches are viable and should be supported.

Strategies:

- continue to assess the Faculty's commitment to on-line initiatives and setup support structures to maintain these developments
- provide encouragement and learning opportunities for Faculty to become more aware of the possibilities of communication technologies
- maintain a critical research focus on ways to enhance on-line pedagogy and course design
- take into account online developmental time and level of expertise for workload assignments

The One Constant is Change

Technology is quickly transforming the way we live and associate with each other. The impact of various technologies on our lives will only escalate. The Faculty needs to constantly reassess the direction and use of communication technologies. We need to be critical consumers of the technology; not using technology for technology's sake but able to discuss with our students the trade-offs, the benefits, and potential downside of using technology.

Strategies:

- learn together with our students the value and disadvantages of communication technologies through critical debate and exploration
- annually reassess our direction by reviewing how we use technology in the Faculty and how it might change the way we learn or the way we structure our lives

Conclusions

This document reassesses the Faculty of Education's position on Communication Technologies. Technology is a tool for communicating, problem solving, and portraying ideas. It can be empowering to both Faculty and students but we need to model a critical perspective; evaluating when, where, and how to use these tools. This document encourages this and provides direction and general approaches to facilitate the integration of technology in the Faculty of Education.