Innovative Faculty Development: Auburn University’s Summer Academy

Instructional technology is increasingly important in education and innovative faculty development is critical to enhancing both the teaching and learning processes. Auburn University’s Instructional Multimedia Group (IMG) is a University-wide unit dedicated to enhancing education and responding to faculty needs by developing and maintaining high levels of teaching effectiveness through the intelligent and relevant use of educational technology. This challenge is addressed by two complementary activities. First, the IMG offers multiple two-hour seminars on specific educational technologies, software, etc. throughout the year. Second, through collaboration with the Office of Information Technology, the Ralph Brown Draughon Library, and the College of Liberal Arts, the IMG coordinates an intensive five-week educational technology faculty development seminar known as the Summer Academy.

Auburn University’s Summer Academy began as a series of mini-sabbaticals covering specific areas of educational technology. The early sessions were instrumental in familiarizing faculty with rapidly evolving technologies including the Internet and graphical/multimedia software. The current Summer Academy includes intense instruction in topics such as PowerPoint, Photoshop, FrontPage, WebCT, audio and video production, instructional design, web-site evaluation, copyright issues, and ADA compliance. The staff consists of the members of the Instructional Multimedia Group, technology professionals from the library and College of Liberal Arts, selected participants from previous Academies, and guest presenters. Participants, who receive a stipend upon successful completion of the Academy, are selected based on the recommendation of their Dean, Department Chair, and/or Principal. A competitive proposal process follows, for which each applicant must outline a specific project related to a course they will teach within the next academic year.

When the Academy begins, the selected participants refine and present their individual project proposals, and receive feedback from fellow attendees and the Academy staff. This allows the staff to tailor the Academy topics and teaching methodology to faculty projects and skill levels. During the next four weeks, staff members provide group instruction in specific educational technology areas, opportunities for hands-on practice, and one-on-one assistance as the participants work toward completing their final projects. These activities culminate in a final presentation of each participant’s project with a discussion of long-term goals for implementation and further development.

Many of the Academy projects involve the development of web-enhanced courses that offer both instructors and students greater opportunities for interaction. Since the implementation of the Summer Academy, the number of courses with web enhancements has increased substantially. For example, only 100 such course sections were offered in Fall 2001. By Fall 2002, 844 were available. The number of students benefiting from this technology grew from 1,495 to 28,459 in the same time period. Other faculty
members benefit as well since Academy participants return to their departments and become resources for their co-workers.

The number of applicants for the Academy has increased every year. This demand has been met by adding an extra session of the Academy as well as planning an Advanced Summer Academy for next year. The Advanced Academy will be open to individuals who have completed a previous Summer Academy or have otherwise obtained comparable skills. The Advanced Academy will continue the education and training through additional focused instruction on more complex technologies.

Our presentation at SITE 2003 included an in-depth discussion of the most recent Summer Academy complete with participant survey data and comments from follow-up list serve postings; a comprehensive view of a completed faculty project for an Introductory Spanish course; and web access to other sample projects from various academic disciplines. We discussed how the Academy can be implemented at various educational levels and tailored to specific institutional needs. Additionally, attendees received Auburn University’s organizational materials and surveys that can be used to aid in their own innovative faculty development. These materials may be obtained by contacting Auburn University’s Instructional Multimedia Group at img@auburn.edu.

References