Using a PT3 grant to move a giant: Mercer University’s challenge of successfully moving toward technology integration across its teacher education curriculum.

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Less than five years ago Mercer University’s Tift College of Education was a school where the majority of the faculty didn’t know ROM from RAM, there were no laptops for faculty let alone students, and technology integration was rarely a subject that arose in classroom discussions. Thanks to the assistance of a PT3 grant the Tift College of Education has transformed into a school where all faculty as well as student teachers have undergone InTech training, the faculty have been provided with laptops and students have access to laptops, digital video recorders, as well as LCD projectors, and technology integration is woven into every course’s curriculum. Mercer University’s teacher education program stands now as model for integrating technology across the curriculum.

Integrating technology into the preparation program of pre-service teachers reflects a comprehensive approach in developing a pre-service teacher education program that prepares technologically proficient teachers. At the heart of this effort is a consortium that was formed (Mercer University, Gwinnett County School System, DeKalb County School System, Douglas County School System, Bibb County School System, and a Georgia InTech training facility) to work together in the preparation of technologically proficient teachers. Each consortium member brings a crucial component to this important undertaking. Mercer’s faculty continues to transform its pre-service teacher preparation programs by developing and implementing comprehensive technology integration. In order to accomplish this, the faculty has committed itself to a major professional development experience by attending the complete InTech training component, other identified (individual and group) professional development opportunities, and faculty retreats to address program changes. InTech has vast training resources that play a key role in assisting Mercer faculty with their professional development commitment. Each consortium school district is committed to the preparation of technologically proficient teachers by providing a cadre of highly trained “Technology Mentors” (classroom teachers representing K-12) to work with pre-service students during their micro–teaching and field experiences. These "Technology Mentors" are modeling the use of technology as a tool in K-12 classrooms, consequently, deepening students’ understanding of technology's real-school applications. The consortium is sharing promising practices and lessons learned from integrating technology into a pre-service teacher education program by developing a dissemination web page, hosting a regional technology conference, and presenting at national education conferences. Finally, the consortium has been conducting systematic follow-up to assess lessons learned from this experience and the program’s impact on student development as technology proficient teachers. Some of the lessons learned so far from this assessment are as follows:
• Successful technology integration across the curriculum requires “buy in” from all teacher education faculty and administrators.
• There must be a commitment from the University to provide adequate technology to faculty and students. Faculty will not become excited with technology and it’s application in the classroom.
• Faculty can become easily frustrated with the expected stumbling that will occur during the technology integration learning curve. Technologically inclined faculty can be used to teach and assist faculty who are resistant to change. Relying solely on outside education media and tech support departments leaves the majority of the faculty disenfranchised from the technology integration experience.
• Finally, successful technology integration across the curriculum cannot be done in a vacuum. Networking with other Universities who have traveled similar paths is critical to program success as well as faculty moral.

A shared belief held by each of our consortium members is that only by working together and leveraging upon each others’ strengths and resources can systemic change in the way we prepare new teachers to utilize technology become reality.