Title: ACEs’ in the hole – providing educational technology support for faculty

Abstract: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’ College of Arts and Sciences provides educational technology support using a hybrid model of desktop support and instructional technology program implementation. The program utilizes the skills and expertise of Academic Computing Experts (ACEs) to deliver on demand support that improves technology integration in the classroom.

1. Statement of the issue: Faculty require a unique type of information technology support. The demand for these services can range from a password reset issue to a query about creating content for a course or even a complete course redesign with a plan to integrate technology. Current support infrastructures include support desks and technology liaison programs that can provide a wide range of services. Often, these resources are provided by various departments with different contact points with several individuals having those responsibilities across units or departments.

2. Description of project and solution: UNC Chapel Hill’s College or Arts and Sciences Office of Information Services (OASIS) provide support to about 700 faculty across some 70 department in about 55 buildings. The previous model of support included a group of 6 computer technicians centrally located in OASIS’s main office and another 4 Academic Technology personnel located within specific departments. This model created confusion with faculty in terms of who to call with specific problems (technical vs. instructional) and provided no continuity with service or project requests. In 2005 OASIS reviewed the types of service requests by faculty and determined that a large portion of the requests were typical help desk support issues. These typical service call issues were often followed up with requests for additional support from faculty involving project work related to instructional technology development or implementation. These follow up calls were handled by someone different each time.

3. Outcome: The survey of service calls also identified that most requests were reactive in nature and provided little or no opportunity to teach faculty how to use technology. The assumption with the new model is that once faculty are able to learn about technology, they can begin to ‘repair’ some of the problems and beginning to be more familiar with the tools and become more reliant on the tools and be more comfortable in using the tools in a classroom setting. Furthermore, this service request review identified a need for a dedicated instructional technology resource for each faculty member located in close proximity to their home departments. The solution was to create a new hybrid group of professionals – Academic Computing Experts (ACE) that could provide two levels of service – technical and instructional support. This technology resource – the ACE should also be well equipped and skilled to address all types of issues including technical questions as well as those queries involving instructional technology projects in the classroom. The ACE program was implemented by distributing each person in various buildings across the College, supporting a group of common departments. The ACEs are well trained technical experts with
advanced degrees in specialty areas within the College and function as peers of faculty, establishing relationships, support technology and helping guide technology projects within each department.

4. **Importance or relevance to other institutions:** This type of program achieves two goals for information technology support departments in educational institution. First, it provides faculty with ready access to expert support familiar with their department’s needs and requirements. Second, it allows IT professional growth opportunities with the service sector. The service they provide under this model includes desktop support as well as instructional technology project based activities.