Chapter 5.4
Organizational Models for Faculty Support:
The Response of Canadian Universities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter delineates changing organizational responses to the provision of faculty support for teaching and learning in six large Canadian universities since 1997. Various models from centralized to decentralized and from integrated to parallel units are described and their advantages and disadvantages identified. From the analysis, several recommendations pertinent to senior administrators involved in the enhancement of teaching and learning through the integration of digital technologies are provided. In particular, issues concerning the goals and culture of the institution, the integration of pedagogical and technological approaches, as well as involvement of faculty and the role of policy are reviewed.

INTRODUCTION

As large Canadian universities moved to deal with the emergence of e-learning and to encourage the integration of digital technologies in teaching and learning, what structures did they put in place to provide support? What was the focus of these organizational units? What was the rationale for their placement? How were they positioned within the institution? How did they link with other units? How have these units changed over time? These questions are the focus of this chapter.

In investigating these questions I have used a time series model, comparing faculty support structures in place in six large universities across Canada in 1997 and then in 2005. From this exploration comes guiding questions for any institution involved in developing faculty support for the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning.

MODELS FOR TEACHING, LEARNING, AND TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT, 2005

Traditionally, universities have had a large service architecture targeted at the provision of support for teaching. These services range from scheduling and timetabling for the allocation of rooms and bookstores principally for the sale of textbooks, to technical services for the maintenance of appropriate instructional equipment and janitorial services for the servicing of classrooms. There was often a media unit where actual production of instructional materials could occur. Depending on the services provided by the institution, there might be a separate unit for the provision of distance education, and most institutions had a small office whose mandate was the enhancement of instructional services (Cuneo et al., 1997). The large-scale introduction of computing technologies in the mid 1990s, coupled with the economic downturn that brought increasing pressure on university budgets, transformed this situation.

Bates (1995) encapsulated these pressures in his exploration of the future of learning, noting government pressure on universities and colleges for greater efficiencies, requiring them to increase enrollments while also reducing funding; government use of earmarked funds for targeted innovations; increases in student fees necessitating many students to be part-time; and the trend toward lifelong learning that was bringing people from the workforce back to university. He concluded that it was not surprising that many postsecondary institutions were turning to technology-based learning as a way to deal with these pressures.

The integration of digital technologies, then, was initially seen as a means to administrative efficiency that businesses had adopted and benefited from. Universities, under pressure to meet escalating costs but with reduced allocations from government, were encouraged to adopt digital technologies as much for the efficiencies they would bring as for any direct benefit to the core mission of the university: research, teaching, and service.

Profiles of six large Canadian universities help provide a description of various universities' responses to the pressures they faced in 1997. They are based on the work of Cuneo et al. (1997) who reviewed the Web sites of 13 major universities across Canada in terms of their technology and teaching support.

University of Toronto (UT)

In 1997, at the central campus of the University of Toronto all technology and teaching support services except computing were organized under a single unit, the Information Commons, and located in the Robarts Library. Operating under this umbrella was the Instructional Technology Support Group, which provided support with computing software, computing labs, and multimedia tools, including sessions on instructional technology. It operated a multimedia lab that faculty and students could use for course and materials development. Other units provided classroom technology support, video production, and adaptive technology resources. The Information Commons also offered a wide range of workshops related to software applications. UT did not have a separate faculty development unit.

Queen's University

In 1997, Queen's University had integrated its computing, media, and instructional support under an umbrella organization, Information Technology Services, located in the Stauffer Library. It included a Learning Technology Unit focused on use of technology in classes; an Instructional Development Centre supporting quality classroom teaching but also providing workshops and advice about technology integration in cooperation with the Learning Technology Unit; Queen's Television, geared to video and multimedia production and video-conferencing, especially in relation to Queen's MBA program; Audio and Multimedia

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