

## **Promoting Instructional Innovation Through A Faculty Incentive Program at the University of Arizona**

Several years ago the University of Arizona began addressing the myriad issues surrounding the growth of electronic media in instruction. Among the most consequential of these issues were those involving the balance to be maintained between teaching and research and the tension to be resolved between technical and academic interests. Strongly committed to becoming more learner-centered and to reforming general education, the University struggled with articulating the academic rationale for expansion of instructional technology and other technological innovations.

Faculty engagement in exploration of new technology is essential but cannot be taken for granted. With approximately \$940,000 in new state funding, the University began building a learning technologies partnership charged with supporting the faculty in developing new teaching practices in general education. An additional \$700,000 in new tuition revenues was available for instructional innovation projects. This is enough money to have a significant impact on the behavior of individual faculty and their academic departments. Deciding how to use incentive funds of this kind required thoughtful attention to the issues of teaching/research balance and technical/academic tension. A danger to be avoided was use of these monies to draw faculty into new practices at odds with the core values of the institution (e.g., to draw them into a teaching/research balance significantly deviant from their activity 'budget').

An immediate decision to commit significant funds to faculty-initiated projects was one part of the answer. The New Learning Environments/Instructional Computing Grants Program instituted in 1997 has been funded yearly at \$500,000. But since then, we have modified the grant process over and over to give more and more explicit attention to the value judgments inherent in any incentive program. Specifically, we have consciously shaped the grant process to function as an instrument for gaining consensus on strategic directions, especially those involving learning technology.

This presentation will focus on how internal competitive grant processes can be designed as tools for building consensus on academic values. Although the most visible result of such a process is the awarding of grants for a certain number of specific faculty projects, we consider the 'side effects' of the process to be equally important elements of an overall faculty development strategy. These include exploration (by faculty) of alternative ways of organizing instructional development, cultivation within the faculty and technical staff of ability to evaluate the quality of instructional innovations, and articulation--again by faculty and technical staff--of both short-run and long-run objectives for the institution.