

**NLII: FOCUS ON FACULTY**  
**Prepared for the CNI Spring 2000 Task Force Meeting**

**ABOUT THE NLII** – The National Learning Infrastructure Initiative represents a collective vision of a strategic response to the following challenges:

- **We seek systematic change for American higher education. While the benefit of change may be local or particular, change efforts must be collaborative. The systemic effects of these changes, we believe, will be cumulative.**
- **Our focus is on the learner. We believe that flexible, learner-centered, environments are essential. Because teachers are the key creators and facilitators of the learning experience, we seek to enable and engage faculty in order to transform their teaching in these new learning environments.**
- **We need an infrastructure to facilitate flexible, technology-mediated learning. We are not simply addressing the “new tools” part of the equation. We need new relationships and arrangements- among institutions, between institutions and corporations, and between corporations and public policymakers- to achieve the systematic availability of learning products and processes.**

The NLII’s activities are organized around six mission-critical issues, which are reviewed and revised by the membership annually. On-going NLII cooperative efforts (described below) are linked to each mission-critical issue.

- **Enhancing academic (learning) productivity**
- **Developing new tools and standards to support new learning environments**
- **Advancing our understanding of the virtual university by showcasing best practices in distributed learning**
- **Creating a market structure for development of interactive learning materials**
- **Providing evidence of the viability of the NLII’s vision, including outcomes assessment and cost/benefit analyses**
- **Articulating those public and institutional policy issues that inhibit the creation of a national learning infrastructure**

The NLII strongly supports a wide range of programs and activities that share our goals and objectives and recognizes that collective action will produce meaningful results. The NLII also seeks to collaborate with other organizations to communicate a consistent view of the issues and to ensure that our respective efforts are complementary.

**NLII FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM** – The Fellowship Program is a pilot program of two half-time, one-year fellowships targeted at teaching and learning support staff at institutions of higher education. The Fellows will study, analyze, and assess specific aspects of institutional transformation of relevance to the NLII and identify transition issues for implementation in the **Teaching and Learning Bridges Program**.

While the Fellows are working to advance the overall goals of the NLII, their activities will be focused on four specific areas.

- ***Community of Practice*** - NLII is involved in the development, support, and facilitation of a Community of Practice for individuals in higher education whose specialization involves the support and preparation of faculty in the integration of technology into instruction. By using the web and other communication tools (supplemented by face-to-face meetings at conferences, events, or pre-conference workshops) we can begin to create a community of practice. This concept is derived from a learning theory that one doesn’t become, for example, a physicist merely by learning formulae and absorbing experimental data, but by learning how to act, talk,

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culture. The community may be made up of astrophysicists, architects, or acupuncturists, but learning involves experiencing its cultural peculiarities.” Proponents of this approach argue that the best and most successful learning experiences result from deep, well-organized, and facilitated exposure to the particular community of practice. In terms of supporting faculty integration of technology into teaching, we want to build a communication structure that would provide practitioners with access to “specialists/experts”, and also to each other to identify common problems and solutions. An additional hoped-for result would be the development of an established base of accepted practice and principles for support of teaching and learning.

- **Readiness Criteria Working Group** – EDUCAUSE is establishing a working group to convert the readiness for change criteria developed by Carole Twigg at the Center for Academic Transformation to an EDUCAUSE Self-Assessment Tool. The Tool would have three tiers of assessment focus (the institution, the course, and the project) and three tiers of assessment process (self-assessment, submission of written self-assessment to other organizations, and site visit by evaluation team.)
- **Teaching and Learning Bridges Working Group** – EDUCAUSE is establishing a working group with representation by faculty members, librarians, technical staff, instructional designers, teaching resources center staff members, and administrative staff. The purpose of the group is to help develop models, tools, and guidelines that institutions can use to implement replicable, scalable, and transformational programs and practices that successfully make the transition from boutique-based instructional development to enterprise-wide systems. Those activities will be designed to bridge the visionary and leading edge activities of the NLII to the mainstream EDUCAUSE membership.
- **Regional Focus Sessions** – Up to four annual Regional Focus Sessions will be jointly sponsored by EDUCAUSE and other organizations and will result in the identification of future EDUCAUSE services and programs related to teaching and learning, and in work products such as white papers. These papers will describe new methodologies or tools for helping institutions transform, based on sound theoretical models for diffusion of innovation and organizational change.

The Focus Sessions are organized around the strengths and concerns of the representative host institutions. The first session was held at The University of Washington this February and dealt with faculty engagement and support. Starting from a white paper developed by the NLII staff, about forty evangelists, practitioners, strategists, and implementers engaged in breakout sessions and group discussions relating to the obstacles and opportunities involved in faculty engagement in new technologies. See: <http://www.educause.edu/nlii/fellowship/>.

There was general agreement at this conference that there was an important difference between first wave faculty adopters and the second wave. Second wave faculty are experiencing a stressful psychological environment of intimidation; faculty are grappling with what has to change in the teaching environment; they are rethinking how to use face time, they are interested in the targeted use of technology for specific purposes. e.g., to convey a concept; they are no longer focusing merely on presentation. While there is hope that a “contagion effect” (first waver success prompting second waver adoption) it only seems to occur under special circumstances and cannot be assumed to be automatic. One recommendation was to expand the white paper to include more best practices (in the areas of training, grants/rewards, technical support, assessment, and communication); but also to broaden the examination to also look at best **systems**. This white paper will become part of a series of white papers on selected topics relating to enhanced learning. Several participants also agreed to become part of task group efforts relating to faculty adoption. NLII hopes that efforts such as these will create ever-increasing communication circles, which will focus on a variety of transformation issues. The next Regional Focus meeting will center on the topic of assessment and will be held in Ann Arbor on June 14-17.



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