



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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A CULINARY PROGRAM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: A SUCCESS STORY

In spring 2008, the Professional Cooking (PCK) program of the SAIT School of Hospitality and Tourism undertook a major redesign initiative, prompted by several factors. It had been over five years since the program had been reviewed, SAIT was implementing a program to ensure credential alignment, and the program was beginning to identify areas that needed consideration. The Program Advisory Committee recommended that any changes should be made to ensure alignment with the Alberta Cook Apprentice Outcomes—a significant recommendation, as Cook Apprentice and Professional Cooking students must write the Journeyman's examination at the end of their programs.

Program redesign had several goals—to align the program with the SAIT credential alignment initiative, to move the program from face-to-face delivery of theory content to blended delivery using a learning management system (LMS) and some computing device, and to provide greater access for the professional cooking students to their courses and course information.

In fall 2009, curriculum work began with the development of learning designs for each of the courses in the program. Work was done in two phases throughout the 2009-2010 academic year: learning designs were completed between September and December 2009, and course development projects between January and June 2010. Government approval for the delivery of the first year of the new program was received in fall 2010. In 2010, final approval was granted for the delivery of the second year of the new program, and the first year of the new program began.

Part of the program redesign project involved changing from two intakes of up to 80 students each to one intake of 170 students. The change contributed to the program's current waiting list.

Key Questions

What are the required curriculum change processes and timelines? Redesign of a program can involve a series of approvals within an institution and final approvals from a government agency such as the Department of Education. It is important to understand and meet the approval deadlines. Failure to meet a curriculum process deadline can result in a year's delay or cancellation. The plan for program redesign was based on and began with an understanding of the required curriculum processes and deadlines.

What capital expenditures are required, and what is the timeline for accessing capital funds? Program redesigns can involve the move to new technology or the adaptation of classroom spaces. Capital expenditures happen on a scheduled cycle and are based on institutional priorities. It is unlikely that the curriculum process and capital expenditure cycle will align. Knowing the budget cycle of your institution can help you prepare for and obtain the requisite equipment and facilities. The redesign plan included the need for wireless classrooms. As this need was identified early and fit within institutional priorities, wireless classrooms were in place months before they were required.

What are the technology needs of the program, and what technology fits those needs? We often think of technology first and then look to situations or problems where the technology fits. In moving forward with program redesign, we focused on increasing student access to courses and course information, and identifying the realities of the culinary environment that would pose challenges to the technology. We looked at computer pens and iPods, and finally decided upon netbooks. Netbooks provided the functionality and durability we required. The focus was on the problem of providing greater access to our students, not on a specific technology. The result was that we were open to considering all possible technologies and able to select a technology that fit the problem we were trying to solve.

What is the best way to introduce instructors to new technology, and what training is required for using this technology in the classroom? The chef instructors had a broad range of experiences with technology. To



provide them with opportunities to be successful in working with WebCT—the selected LMS—instructors were involved in reviewing and previewing content as it was being developed for use in the WebCT shells. An information session was held several months before scheduled training to preview the courses and address questions about what the courses would look like, how they would work, what it would mean for instruction to move to WebCT, what copyright implications existed, and what help and support would be available. Instructor training was arranged in May/June; review sessions were scheduled in August.

The new PCK program was launched September 2010. Student response was immediate. Even before courses began, students were logging in to see what they were about. There were some technology glitches, but they were minor and resolved fairly easily.

Students in the first-year courses are using netbooks to access course content. Each course shell contains links to the course module, PowerPoint slides relating to the course, learner activities beginning with a glossary of terms, and a set of video segments about specific elements of the course. The elements included in each course provide instructors and students with a substantial base of information.

What processes are required for purchase and support of technology? The School of Hospitality and Tourism and other programs at SAIT have offered programs using laptop computers. As a result, processes were already in place for ordering and supporting laptop computers. Students already were paying a fee to use a laptop computer for two years. At the end of the program, they were given the opportunity to purchase their laptop at a reduced price. When the PCK program decided to move to netbooks that cost less than laptops, student fees were reduced.

What do instructors and students say? It is estimated that 70% of all instructors in the PCK program are using and developing materials for their WebCT courses. The remaining 30% use WebCT to support their courses. As instructors become more familiar with a learning management system, training and support will be provided to promote greater integration of the technology.

Students engaged with the technology early on, many logging into a course before it began. Some students were taking the initiative to begin familiarizing themselves with content right away, so instructors were able to move from the usual information presentation stage to discussion and analysis of concepts stage more quickly.

What is next? In 2011, the PCK program will move from WebCT to Desire to Learn (D2L) as the LMS.

Instructors will be provided training to accommodate this change.

The successful transition of the PCK program from face-to-face delivery to blended delivery, using netbooks and WebCT, was the result of integrating key questions, processes, and significant timelines into the development cycle. The project was completed and implemented on time, with few difficulties.

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