

DRAFT 04/11/01

Cornell University
Distributed Learning/Technology Mediated Learning Program
Overview
2001–2002

Cornell University is launching a campus-wide program in support of faculty engagement to invent a new pedagogy that exploits the innovations inherent in broadband networks and multimedia technologies. The results of this program will enhance our understanding of whether and how these innovations actually improve student learning across the disciplines, in “traditional” classrooms and for students at a distance.

Cornell’s plan is to offer two types of support for faculty with an interest in pedagogical innovation. The first program is aimed at “narrow and deep” investigations funded by a series of grants to individual faculty and to schools that would focus the resources of a team of faculty, librarians, instructional designers, graphics and web experts, and other skills, as needed on a course or set of courses selected competitively. Each of these grants would focus on an instructional problem, suggest an innovation to address the problem, and also contain plans for assessment of outcomes. The Academic Technology Center will coordinate the development of teams to support these projects, incorporating expertise from other units on campus, including the grantee’s home department, libraries, teaching and learning center, media services, etc. Each grant recipient would be asked to attend a monthly seminar at which all recipients from across campus would share experiences and insights. At the end of the academic year a University-wide public forum would be held at which the projects would be demonstrated. In addition the fellows would be asked to give a departmental seminar to their home academic department. These elements are designed to spread the innovations among faculty peers and to build a community of interest in the new pedagogy. The grant program is aimed at focused support of the most promising innovations for educational improvement.

The second type of support is a “broad and shallow” approach, aimed at the more general support for faculty innovation across a broader range of activities. This program is designed to foster simpler and smaller scale innovations and to recruit faculty into the grant program. We plan to provide cooperatively funded graduate assistantships to individual departments and schools to assist faculty within that unit. The Provost will allocate these assistantships competitively across departments/schools. Initial training will be provided to the assistants on a basic set of tools and also on the specific physical environments within classrooms in their part of campus. We want to issue a “multimedia workstation” to each of the assistants to take back to their units for use in the program. The philosophy behind this part of the program is rooted in a belief that this type of work is greatly facilitated by the disciplinary bond between the graduate students and faculty in their area and the belief that distributed support, rather than a central resource center approach, will be more consistent

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with the culture of Cornell. (We also think the distributed model is the “right way” to empower faculty rather than make them dependent on a central unit’s ongoing support). Cornell Information Technologies’ Academic Technology Center (ATC) will provide training, monthly seminars, and consulting for the assistants. The assistants become an outreach arm for the ATC experts.

In addition to the programs described here, Cornell is committed to rehabilitating our communications and classroom infrastructure to ready them for delivery of the innovations produced.

In total, Cornell is committed to an investment of approximately \$10 million over a three year period.

The unique feature of this program is its focus on invention of a new pedagogy. It is not specifically about gee-whiz technology. It is not specifically about distance learning or course web sites. It is directed both at interdisciplinary exchange among faculty across campus through the seminars and forums and at tapping the strength of the disciplines through distributed support within the campus units. We expect it to advance our understanding of whether and how network and multimedia technologies can enhance learning and teaching effectiveness, but we also believe that it will ready our campus for the educational revolutions that we know are upon us. Last year Cornell created a separate for-profit company, eCornell, to develop and deliver non-credit distance learning programs. We believe that the programs outlined here are essential to building the faculty skills, interest, and enthusiasm necessary for us to supply eCornell the high quality innovative courses it needs to be successful.