

## Liberal Arts Education in the New Millennium: Beyond Information Literacy and Instructional Technology

Networked information technology does two things at once: it opens up exciting new ways of thinking while it radically destabilizes organizational structures that have underpinned the way we teach and learn. It has engendered many apparently different responses. How many have heard this from faculty members: "My discipline is text-based." Or from the librarian or information technologist: "Let's do information literacy workshops." Or, from the student: "Do I have to do a web-page for this class?" Different as these reactions seem, they have in common the notion that the changes engendered by a revolution in the way networked information can be organized and redeployed can be domesticated into the patterns that seemed to have worked so well, the patterns of thinking that predate the revolution, that do not take into account or even allow for the opening up of new ways to approach old questions or to ask new ones. One of the most salient features of these standard responses is the ossification of the roles we all play in this drama: the professor decides what is useful knowledge, the librarian and the information technologist try to be service technicians and the student weighs in with a bottom-line mentality. The world didn't change much after all.

Or did it? For those who think of the life of the mind as one which questions assumptions, challenges authority and revises categories, the revolution that is networked information technology is revivifying. From building language learning communities to integrating text, image, sound and song into the study of philosophy to the building of a layered sense of group interactions in an introduction to psychological research methods class, the fusing of information technology with other learning technologies (the book, the discussion, the paper, the lecture) has resulted in the development of new ways of seeing and thinking and understanding. It is this promise that has been realized in several liberal arts colleges through a project called: Talking toward Techno-Pedagogy: A Collaboration across Colleges and Constituencies. This project has tried to work with, not against, the notions that a webbed world has brought with it. At its heart, then, is the notion that learning is neither a set nor an isolated activity, but rather a process that takes place within a community, among people who collaborate towards the shared goal of better understanding. This assumption, at the core of what networked information offers, has led to the shaping of a project which redefines roles, rethinks courses, revamps relationships and rediscovers the deeply moving possibilities that lie at the center of the small liberal arts learning environment.

Talking toward Pedagogy was a collaboration from the outset between three colleges, two libraries, two education programs and four people: Elliott Shore, Director of Libraries and Professor of History at Bryn Mawr College, Alison Cook-Sather, Assistant Professor and Director of the Bryn Mawr/Haverford Colleges Education Program, Susan L. Perry, College Librarian and Director Library, Information and Technology Services and Sandra M. Lawrence, Associate Professor and Chair, Education Division, both of Mt. Holyoke College. Funded by a grant we received from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for a series of three, four-day workshops: May 2000 (for social sciences), June 2001 (for humanities), and June 2002 (for natural sciences), we brought together this past May at Bryn Mawr College nine teams, each composed of a faculty member in the social sciences, a rising junior in the social sciences, a librarian whose area of expertise is the social sciences, and an information technologist. The colleges represented were Amherst, Bryn Mawr, Hampshire, Haverford, Mt. Holyoke, Smith, Swarthmore, and Vassar and the University of Massachusetts. Participants spent four days together planning how they would collaborate to explore the possibilities for revising one of the professor's courses through or with technology. Each of the four members of the team had expertise and a legitimate perspective in this collaboration and began to break down some of the divisions and hierarchies that structure teaching and learning in traditional college settings. They asked and answered such questions as: How does the role of librarian need to change given the rapid and profound changes in storage and retrieval of information? Who has the authority to make suggestions to professors regarding the appropriate use of new technologies in their teaching? Should an instructional technologist do the technology work for faculty and students or teach it to them so that they can do it themselves? Given that they are often more facile with using new technologies, what role should students play in integrating those technologies into the classroom?

The workshop struck a deep chord in many of the participants and has engendered other collaborations outside of the single courses that we focused upon. But the collaborations have made more visible a number of yawning gaps in our institutional structures: A collaboration such as this model proposes, embodies, and requires entails a culture change at our colleges. As one librarian put it at a reunion at Mt.

Holyoke College in November, "Individually we don't have a problem collaborating; institutionally we do." To support this culture change, participants stated again and again that they need new formal mechanisms, supports, and rewards for each of the members of the groups. But even more importantly, it requires some new thinking about what all of us do and how we do it. The faculty members came away from the workshop relieved of the sense that they must be able to know and do everything. Librarians and information technologists learned that the integration of their knowledge and expertise into the shaping and teaching of a course sharpens their own focus in providing useful and successful service. Most importantly, students made us all aware that this will only work well if they, the ultimate beneficiaries of our work, have a say in what happens in the classroom. So it isn't about information literacy or instructional technology; it is about learning and teaching together.