The Evolution of Engage

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Special thanks to Jane Terpstra for consultation and editing assistance.

Prologue

In the Spring of 1999, Chancellor David Ward invited DoIT staff Kathy Christoph (then Director of Learning Technology & Distance Education), and Jane Terpstra (then Senior Consultant) to discuss some news. After a brief, five minute conversation, Kathy and Jane walked out of the office with a decision to make – how were they going to spend one million dollars?

This welcome dilemma began when the Morgridge family decided to give a one-time gift of one million dollars to the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The Morgridges only had one request of how Chancellor Ward spend the money: to support "making a real difference in highter education using instructional technology." Kathy and Jane now had one summer to formulate a plan and present it to the Chancellor.

Kathy asked six faculty members (an initial Faculty Advisory Group) to meet at the Terrace once a week to discuss possible uses of the money on campus. Over the course of the summer, Kathy and Jane met weekly with to discuss and identify areas that could benefit from the Morgridge funds. Eventually, three challenges were selected. First was the challenge of teaching and learning in the context of large enrollment classes. Secondly, the "capstone certificate program" needed support, which offered post-bachelors students certification in a niche market. The third challenge had to do with language learning through technology (Slavic was eventually chosen because of challenging non-Western alphabet). It was decided that these three themes - large enrollment classes, the capstone certificate program (e.g. GIS program), and language learning - would benefit from the one million dollar gift.

Kathy Christoph presented the plan to Chancellor Ward, and he enthusiastically approved the plan, including the three faculty members recommended to lead these innovative technology grants. They named this award the Transforming Teaching Through Technology (T^4) award. Each T^4 project would be assigned three project assistants (graduate students working twenty hours per week) and one project manager.

Building Upon the Teaching & Learning with Technology (TLT) Grants
However, the T^4 plan did not start completely from scratch. DoIT's LTDE group had already been administering a faculty grant program on campus to build upon: the Teaching & Learning with Technology (TLT) grants. These yearly grants enabled faculty to do small-scale innovative projects with technology. A large interdisciplinary faculty group would meet yearly to review and select TLT applications.

Faculty with accepted projects received requested funds and were assigned to a Learning Technology Consultant to assist with their project. Faculty would often use money to fund their

graduate students to assist with the project. The faculty-consultant collaborations ranged from closely collaborative to non-existent. For those faculty who decided to work independently, there was little communication with the assigned consultant. It was challenging to obtain reporting from faculty on the project objectives, implementation and budget. While final evaluative reports were requested of each grant recipient, not all faculty submitted reports. The social dynamic of TLT projects led to little opportunity to share what was learned from the TLT projects with the campus community. Secondly, there was little sustainability of projects after graduate students completed their degrees and left the university. In the context of these lessons learned, the Morgridge funding gift presented an opportunity to make fundamental changes to the grant program.

The Transforming Teaching Through Technology (T[4]) Grant

DoIT learned from the TLT grants that faculty liked working with others familiar with their field. However, it was clear that these smaller, individual projects would not lead to "real difference in higher education using instructional technology". To address these challenges, the T[4] plan and DoIT leadership set a new course for the three initial T[4] grant projects. These projects would retain the most positive aspect of TLT grants: faculty hiring others familiar with the discipline to assist with project content. Thus, each faculty member, as project lead, would hire a project manager with knowledge and experience in the field and three project assistants, graduate students working twenty hours per week who were studying in the discipline. These five individuals per project would join a DoIT team that included an instructional designer, lead programmer, and graphic artist. A T[4] Program Manager, then Jane Terpstra, was assigned to manage the work of the three teams over three years to complete the projects.

Evaluation standards were implemented for T4 projects. There was an expectation for projects to follow a protocol of producing results in terms of formalized studies that the PI's would publish. However, the capstone certificate (GIS) project did not follow the encouraged protocol which encouraged project to show their progress to the faculty group, and ultimately funding was cut for that project for the third year. During the last year, there was a strong emphasis on evaluation for the remaining two projects. Project managers were involved with setting up testing and measurements.

Initially, budget management for the projects seemed most appropriately handled within DoIT to foster team partnership and to create and sustain design and development processes and practices. The final projects were to have applicability, replicability, and scalability for future campus instructional technology projects. The T[4] program continues to draw it's funding from the Madison Initiative state budget line item. This began a highly leveraged public-private partnership designed to strengthen UW-Madison's education and global economic impact. The state funding request was successful. This was no longer a stand-alone grant project, but now a long-term initiative. This new program was named *Engage*.

Phase 3: Engage

The first phases of this initiative, fiscal years 1999 through 2003, were largely focused on developing and testing the staff and technology infrastructures necessary to support significant and transformative change. Building on this unique private-public foundation, the Engage program became able to devote more attention to partnering with instructors to explore and evaluate innovative pedagogies and technologies that transform higher education, through award programs.

Lessons learned from T[4] were integrated into the Engage program. First, an official Faculty Advisory Group was formed to select and advise on the 3-tiered program awards (Impact, Adaptation, and Innovation)[1]. Secondly, project evaluations had become a top priority, and Engage hired a full-time evaluator. Third, iterative deliverables became standards for award projects.

Since 1999, Engage and T[4] have brought together over 250 faculty and instructional staff from all schools and colleges at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, creating a new and significant organizational infrastructure in support of ongoing and transformative change. Engage and T4 have impacted at least 872 courses and approximately 50,231 students between 2000 through 2011.

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[1] Past & current award topics include: podcasting, clickers, technology enhanced collaborative group work, simulations and games, and digital media assignments.