

# Building Learning Communities

Elizabeth A. Unger

Vice Provost for Academic  
Services and Technology

Dean of Continuing Education

Kansas State University

February 18, 2007



## Challenge of Community Building in Educational Institutions

# IT IS not about IT

## Challenge of Community Building in Educational Institutions

# IT IS ABOUT I

## Information

- Faculty, staffs and students
  - Everyone needs the newest information
  - Everyone needs information of integrity
  - Subsets of the university members need collections of data that are large and unique and need special IT to process it
  - Faculty and universities need to create university repositories of unique collections
  - Faculty need a research/scholars management system – “scholars desk” or “IT office”
  - Faculty and students need to form dynamic communities to support efforts

## Need to create community

- Early days of computing – 50 years ago
  - Builders and early programmers
  - First users
  - Programming knowledge evolving
  - Took forever to program in machine language
  - Had to team and help each other
  - Got to know those from other disciplines around coffee and soda as waited for turnaround or “debugged” the code

## First Commons

- Library and Information Technology
  - An area of computers loaded with digital library tools
  - Desk with librarians and IT support individuals
  - Center with tools to assist in the production and use of information
    - Language translation computing programs
    - Scanners
    - Photographic equipment
    - Video non-linear editing
    - Music production
    - Video production
    - Staff support
  - Library courses for users

## Elements in the first Commons

- A place with technology
- A place with information that can be used to produce knowledge
- A place with expert assistance
- Solve a set of problems – have IT and Library team
  - Provide help for the introduction of the digital library
  - Provide help for those wishing to create media for instruction in classroom or web

## Outcomes

- Library staff and IT staff began to know each other
- Some understanding developed
- Library users could now find information easier on the Internet and in the local digital library
- All Faculty, staff and students can use equipment to interpret, repurpose, add to or create new knowledge in digital formats.

## Libraries and Information Technology

- Formed community
  - Forge partnerships by solving common problems
  - Forge partnerships by providing tools to faculty and students
- Failed to allow many communities to form beyond library and information technology

## Extending the concept – decreased funding

- Challenges facing higher education
  - Information technology for teaching and research is expensive
  - IT is often replicated in several locations – silos in the university
    - Added personnel
    - Added costs
    - Inefficient use of high cost resources
    - Enables isolation of those with common interests

## Extending the concept – interdisciplinary and new disciplines

- Grant funding is focused on problems at the intersections of several silo disciplines
- Robust communication
- Information
  - Access
  - Creation
  - Sharing, in many formats and to many types of devices
  - Dynamic repositories
  - Permanent archives

## Extending the concept – new organizational structures

- Universities are not organized to easily or quickly react to new disciplines
  - Virtual faculties for instruction are in their infancy
  - Require robust communication via internet for faculty members
- Virtual faculties for teaching or research need common repositories

## Challenges to Universities – changing student generational needs and changing perceptions of types of faculty

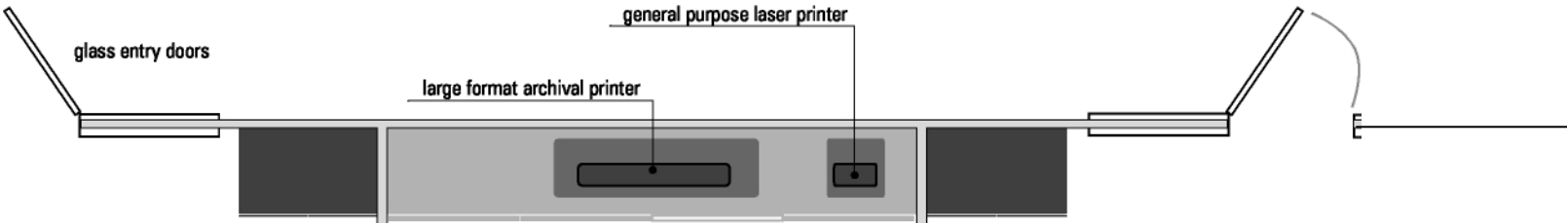
- Students from several generations
  - Gen X
  - Millennial
  - **Digital natives – born after 1985 – young faculty**
- Faculty teams from several universities
  - Research
  - Teaching
    - virtual faculties
    - Non-tenure track professorial faculty
    - Part time faculty especially at a distance

## Commons to form community

- Physical
  - Provide a place for discussion with white boards, glass walls
  - Comfortable places to sit
  - Tables
  - Refreshments
- Virtual

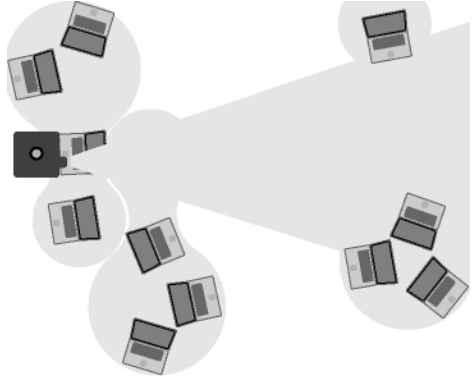
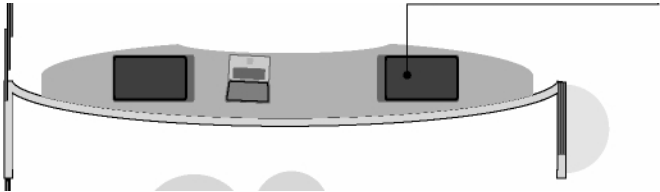
## Commons

- Information – Library
- Geospatial systems – university
- Humanities - university



**Tables**

**Large format flat scanners**



**glass doors that swivel**

**workstations w/3 keyboards per station**



1mons  
1 square foot sp

## Commons

- Designed by faculty
- Governed by a board – including outsiders
- Supported by
  - One or more IT experts
  - One of more subject matter experts
  - For instance GIS
    - ½ computer technician
    - 1 IT geospatial systems expert – ESRI
    - 1 GIS database specialist and problem solver

## Results

- Now can afford a campus site license
- Have experts available to help
- Many grant proposals, over \$2 million in grants
- New research groups are forming
- Business has incorporated GIS into their curriculum
- One grant provides money to create modules to teach GIS as the 4<sup>th</sup> "R"

## Commons to form community

- Physical
  - Provide a place for discussion with white boards, glass walls
  - Comfortable places to sit
  - Tables
  - Refreshments
  
- Virtual
  - Empower user with point and click
  - Access to communication tools
    - Breeze or Wimba
    - Video conferencing
    - VOIP, cell phones, pods
    - White boards, etc
    - D-Space, repository
    - Archives
    - Remote control of research equipment

## Virtual research groups and faculties

- Virtual commons eventually with the features on the last slide.
  - Common set of repositories
  - wide variety of communication tools
  - Now have repositories that belong to creator and can be shared
  - White board
  - Wimba
  - Threaded lists
  - Audio conferencing/IP video conferencing

## Conclusion

- Community is important
  - Staff, faculty, students – virtual international
- A commonly needed high cost IT technology can be used as a tool to develop community
- Community is dynamic and users must be empowered to manage it themselves but have ready assistance
- Community has to involve those at a distance

