

Targeted Training: Hitting the Bull's Eye



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Abstract

At Wooster, we have developed different types of training, targeted at different groups of users. Some of these approaches include: 1 to 1-1/2 hour training sessions, course specific sessions, a brown-bag lunch series, self-paced modules and week-long workshops. These approaches also utilize different tools/technologies in order to be more effective. These include LISTSERV discussion groups, web-based training, classroom sessions and documentation.

We have also recognized the need for training that is targeted at "new" technologies - like the Web. We have been very successful with a "Web Workshop" that is one week long and has plenty of open lab time for assistance on web projects. This workshop, which is geared towards faculty, allows them to develop their own Web pages and discuss how they can be used in the curriculum. As a result of the workshop, many faculty members give their students the option of web-based projects instead of written papers. This, in turn, has increased our need for student training on Web authoring and has given us the opportunity to create more classes targeted at the Web.

This paper will focus on the different approaches to training that we use for faculty, staff, students, and our student employees. We will discuss what works,

what doesn't, and different "incentives" that can be used to promote training. The audience that we are targeting will be anyone involved in training, user support, or staff development.

Hitting the Bull's Eye

Training. What comes to mind when you think of it? Perhaps the "training schedule" that you supply to all of your users, then you sit back and wait for them to come. Think of all the times you've met with other User-Services staff and heard the same complaints: "No-one attends our classes," "Everyone waits until the last minute, and then they ask for help," "How can we get people to come to our training sessions?" There has to be a better way.

Remember one thing: It's impossible to train all of your users the same way. Faculty, staff and students are all on different schedules and they want to know different things. One single approach to training is not enough.

Different Ways to Train

At Wooster, we have developed a variety of approaches to train our users. Many of these are targeted at specific users; however, we still offer a full schedule of group training each semester. This section will discuss different types of training and how they have worked for Wooster.

Training sessions

For all of our users, we offer 1 to 1-1/2 hour training sessions in collaboration with the library on a variety of topics. Our classes include everything from learning to use email to a series of classes that teach users how to develop and create their own web

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pages. A complete listing of our classes, with descriptions, is available at <http://www.wooster.edu/acs/training>

Most sessions are hands-on because we feel that users learn more quickly by performing tasks along with the instructor; however we do offer two classes which are not interactive. "Fine Tuning your Macintosh," where we demonstrate how to tweak your system and troubleshoot potential problems, and "Web Design" where we discuss how to conceptualize a web site and discuss design issues.

Attendance at these sessions has varied. Our popular classes ("Creating Web Pages" and "Internet Research Methods") have been well attended. This fall we will be trying a new "incentive" program to increase the attendance at all of our sessions. At the end of each class, we will be raffling off an item (T-shirt, mug, software, etc.) to one of the users who attended. Vendors will donate these items.

Individual Training Sessions

Faculty and staff have the opportunity to set up individual "one on one" sessions with ACS staff. These sessions range from our standard courses to specific application questions. This type of training is useful for applications not covered by our standard training classes or for discipline specific questions.

Individual sessions require a large time commitment on the part of ACS staff and we are not always able to accommodate the requests. One strong argument for offering individual sessions is the comfort level of the user. Faculty and staff members who are "new" to technology are often intimidated at the thought of attending a group session with students.

Course Specific Sessions

In addition to the standard schedule of classes offered in ACS labs, we work with faculty members to target specific course needs. Faculty requests range from offering one of our standard sessions during class time to developing a class specific to their needs. All of this training has been "hands-on" in one of the campus computer labs.

These types of sessions have been especially effective for the First Year Seminar program at Wooster. The classes cover using email and

LISTSERV discussion groups. Other requests have included sessions on Internet research specific to a discipline and Excel training for introductory economics classes. These targeted sessions have increased over the past few years as faculty members include more technology use within their curriculum.

Brown-bag lunches

"Teaching with Technology" is a lunch series that we offer to present new technologies to the faculty. Topics have ranged from what's new with a specific application, statistical computing and even bringing in computer vendors to discuss the industry.

Most lunch sessions have been discussions and not "hands-on" sessions. We notice the same phenomenon here that we have experienced with our regular training sessions: attendance is based upon the topic. The challenge for ACS staff is to develop sessions that have academic merit, yet are not too advanced for novice users.

Another approach is to use other faculty members to lead the discussions. This works well when targeting faculty within a specific department or discipline.

Workshops

We have developed a five-day "Web Workshop" which gives users the chance to develop a web site for specific classes or for their department. These hands-on workshops have included a significant amount of open lab time to allow users to work on their projects. They are also interspersed with discussions like "Why the Web" and "Copyright Concerns." If they have not completed their sites by the end of the week, they are well on their way to a finished product. The schedule is available online at <http://www.wooster.edu/acs/workshop/>

These workshops involve a large time commitment for ACS staff members, both in the time involved preparing and the time devoted to the group for an entire week. However, once the initial curriculum has been developed it has been very easy to "tweak" the workshop to be even more effective the next time it is offered. Our "Web Workshop" has been offered four times and we have had wonderful attendance at all of the sessions.

It is important to note that training is not over at the end of the workshop. "Open lab time" has been offered to allow users to work on their projects with an ACS staff member available for questions. We do not limit these open labs to users who have participated in a workshop – anyone is welcome to attend.

Due to the popularity of this workshop, we developed a three-day "Web Workshop Refresher" which was offered for the first time last May. Users were brought up to date on new techniques and advanced topics were addressed. We are also hoping to develop a workshop on Filemaker to assist our database users with time to work on projects and learn new techniques.

Self-paced modules

This fall we will be implementing a new approach for training our student consultants. In the past we have simply had new employees work with other students and hope that they can learn as much as possible. We have offered some specific sessions at our monthly staff meetings, but the bulk of their experience has been gained "on the job."

To complement this experience, we have developed a series of web-based modules that all consultants will be required to complete. Each module contains a brief summary of what they will learn and what is required to pass the module. The modules range from word-processing and email, to disk recovery and hardware troubleshooting. The modules are available online at <http://www.wooster.edu/acs/consultants/>

At the time of this paper, we do not know how effective this type of training will be. However, the incentive for ACS staff is the knowledge that our employees will have a solid base of information before they are asked to work a shift without supervision. These modules will also provide a "knowledge base" that can be used when assisting users.

What's next?

We have discussed a variety of approaches to target specific groups of users with different types of training. The main reason for offering variety is because we understand that everyone learns

differently and that different groups have different needs.

If your training program isn't working for you, take a look at your approach to the problem. Are you trying to target your entire campus with the same training? Look at your current program from the user's perspective and think about what does (or doesn't) appeal to you.

Use the User

Users are a great resource for feedback – take advantage of them! After every training session, no matter what type, ask for the attendees to fill out an evaluation form. In addition to the standard "How was the instructor?" or "Was this class what you expected?" type of questions, ask questions like "What would you change about this training session?" and leave room for comments.

In addition to evaluations, take informal polls of different groups on campus to see what they think about your current training sessions. Find out if they attend, and if not – ask them why. Don't just send out a form for people to complete and return, bring up the topic in casual conversation. Use your student staff to get feedback from the student population on campus.

Keep in mind that users may not know what they want or need when it comes to training. Think about topics that go beyond the basics and what the best forum is to present it to the user. Once you have the idea, ask around to see if people are interested.

Colleagues

Work with your colleagues at other institutions to see what works best for them. Share your experiences with them and see if new ideas are born. Conferences like SIGUCCS are great forums for this type of brainstorming – take advantage of them!

Learn from yourself

Don't be afraid to try different approaches in your training program; however, if you get negative feedback address it immediately. There is nothing worse than an unhappy user who tells others that the training sessions are not helpful. Let users know in

advance that this is something new and that you value their feedback. Remind them that the training is supposed to benefit them.

Measure your successes (and failures) and let people know what you've discovered. Use the information from evaluations and discussions to change your program and let users know that their comments helped to bring about the change. Attend your own classes or workshops and self-evaluate your training program. If you feel that something is not working, think about why from a user's perspective.

Facilities

An important factor with any type of training is the facility you are using. Take a look at the classroom set-up that you are using. At Wooster we have a variety of set-ups that are used for different types of training. For our workshops, we use classrooms with the computers arranged around the perimeter of the room with seminar tables in the middle. With this type of set-up, users can turn away from their computers for discussions. For standard training sessions, we use a "regular" computer classroom with all of the systems facing towards the front. This keeps users from having to constantly turn around to see what the instructor is doing.

No matter which setting you choose; take a look at the whole picture. Are the chairs comfortable? Is the room too cold or too hot? If people are not comfortable, they will be less likely to return, and their dissatisfaction may not be on a conscious level.

Set expectations

Make sure that your users understand what you're going to cover in the training session. In your advertising, include a brief description of what they can expect to learn. Reinforce this by stating it again at the beginning of the class. If your training session is a discussion group, let them know that you will follow up on any issues that are raised.

For workshops and classroom sessions, don't send your user away without documentation. At Wooster, we use our documentation as "outlines" for the classes that we offer and refer to them throughout the class. This also helps to raise awareness of other resources available to the user. If they have taken a class on Microsoft Word and later would like

information on Microsoft Excel, they'll know that they can refer to the ACS documentation for assistance. All of our documentation is available online at <http://www.wooster.edu/acs/documentation/>

Know your limitations

It's very easy to get excited about new ways to train and new technologies that are available, but don't set yourself up for failure. Keep yourself up to date about new things to try, but don't try to teach or inform about technologies or software that cannot be implemented on campus. Make sure that you have the funding available to accomplish your new ideas.

Know what your own limitations are and when you should look elsewhere for support. If you do not have the staff available for a workshop, see if you can hire student assistants or if it's possible to work with an institution close to your own. If the issue is funds, check into grants – both internal and external. The first time we offered the "Web Workshop" at Wooster, we used an internal grant to offer stipends to our faculty members for attending. We no longer offer stipends, but our workshops are still well attended.

Conclusion

Anything that exposes users to new technologies can be considered training, don't be afraid to try new things. An effective training program will build upon itself – our web workshops have generated an interest with our faculty who, in turn, have used the Web in their curriculum which has increased the need for students to be trained on Web topics.

Computers are no longer a luxury – they are a tool that is becoming more prevalent on campus. It is our job as user services trainers to see that the tool is used effectively and the capabilities are understood. Once users start attending training and use what they learn – they'll start coming back to you with more ideas of what they'd like to see... when this happens, you've hit the bull's eye!