

# The Award for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Technology: The Road to Realization

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to describe the creative and operational processes involved in the creation of the Award for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Technology, an innovative faculty award established at the University of Richmond in 2000.

## Keywords

Faculty, support development, technology, recognition, award.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Computer technology has invaded college campuses from networked dorm rooms to online registration. In fact, one of the most sacrosanct locations on campus has begun to feel the touch of technology—the classroom. The space where teaching and learning work in tandem has been re-invented. No longer can teachers be guaranteed the safe harbor of chalkboards, overhead projectors and podiums. Now their world is inhabited by PowerPoint presentations, Elmos, wireless networks and websites. Classrooms exist virtually, outside their physical space. Students continue classroom dialogue well past official class hours. All faculty, even those who do not wish to integrate computer technology into their teaching, are affected. This integration can be as simple a change as replacing chalkboards with whiteboards or as complex as using laptops and webboards during the class period.

Academic Technology Services<sup>i</sup> at the University of Richmond was given the task of finding a new way to encourage faculty to enhance their teaching with the use of technology. In the past we have offered workshops, tech fairs, classes and one-on-one sessions with faculty. While having been quite successful with these efforts, we continued to struggle with a sense that faculty perceived a lack of recognition for their efforts. The idea for the Award for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Technology was conceived during a conversation about recognition. It was our hope that the award would have the same significance in our community as the Distinguished Educator Award—a prestigious teaching award which is presented each year. To ensure this, we sent our proposal to President Cooper and the academic deans and received enthusiastic support. Dr. Cooper, in fact, presented the first awards at a reception on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2000. In total, ATS honored seven faculty members and awarded \$10,000 to be used in their teaching. The process that was used to create and legitimize the award, as well as the selection process, were very interesting and unique.

## 2. PURPOSE

The award honored those, working individually or in teams, who demonstrated excellence in teaching by extending the classroom

with integration of instructional technology into course delivery. The primary criterion for the award was innovation and leadership in the integration of teaching, learning and technology.

## 3. NOMINATIONS

An individual or team could be nominated for the award by his or her department chair or dean or by members of the Academic Technology Services team. We established three categories of awards:

- An established, tenured or continuing faculty member (three or more years of service)
- A tenure-track faculty member who has been with the University for three years or less
- A faculty member who serves in a non-continuing capacity

## 4. SELECTION PROCESS

The selection committee consisted of all members of the Academic Technology Services team. The selection committee reviewed candidates' evidence of integration of technology into teaching and learning using the following guidelines:

- Demonstrated use of technology that supports accepted practices and principles of pedagogy
- Demonstrated commitment to using technologies in teaching beyond a single project
- Demonstrated effective use and dissemination of technology that is applicable to a broad spectrum of the University curriculum
- Demonstrated a positive change in the way students are taught by expanding the classroom
- Demonstrated commitment to assisting peers in the effective use of technology
- Demonstrated commitment to articulate and share with peers successful implementation of technology from concept to production
- Demonstrated effort to share the final technology application with other faculty

## 5. TIMETABLE

The idea for the award was conceived in November, 1999. Nominations were accepted until February 1, 2000. The selection committee met during February. Final decisions were submitted to the president by March 1 and were announced at a reception March 15, 2000.

## 6. 1999-2000 AWARD WINNERS

In its first year, the award was given to 7 faculty members along with a total of \$10,000 in prize money.

### 6.1 Michelle Brown Management Systems (\$2000)

**Category:** *An established, tenured or continuing faculty member (three or more years of service)*

Michelle Brown has consistently encouraged life-long learning about IT through students' personal research and knowledge acquisition. Because she recognizes that new ways of learning are necessary when learning about IT, she includes as much real-world problem solving and hands-on learning as possible.

Some of the projects in which Michelle's students have collaborated include:

- Automated Applicant Tracking System for Coca-Cola's Mid-Atlantic Region
- Telecommunications Equipment Tracking System for Virginia Power
- Action Item Database for Capital One's HR Department

Michelle has supported her colleagues, shared her ideas and expanded the awareness of technical integration within the business school community.

### 6.2 Catherine Bagwell Psychology (\$2000)

**Category:** *A tenure-track faculty member who has been with the University for three years or less*

Catherine Bagwell is only in her second year at Richmond and has already done a fantastic job of integrating technology into her teaching. Her use of threaded discussion, web site development projects and class modules using PDFs has moved her courses well outside the boundaries of Richmond Hall. Her students are engaged in learning all week, rather than for the few hours that they are in class. Catherine has even removed some of the walls in Richmond Hall by pioneering wireless classroom technology with the use of Apple AirPorts and iBooks. Her students can now access their class projects through the web and bring them into the classroom, keeping them actively learning rather than passively taking notes.

It is our hope that the numerous new hires at Richmond in the next few years will be able to see from Catherine's work and her receipt of this award that the use of technology in teaching will be recognized and rewarded.

### 6.3 Michelle Schmidt Psychology (\$2000)

**Category:** *A faculty member who serves in a non-continuing capacity*

Michelle Schmidt's use of technology has been broad in scope, innovative in design and first-rate in quality. She has used WebCT for online quizzing, WebBoard for student discussion and evening office hours, and has found ways to share data sets with students using password protected files and a web-based database. Her task was not an easy one--she had to find a way to engage students in a heavily statistical course, but she was successful.

Michelle shared her experiences within the Psychology department and in a University-wide forum last semester. She also documented her work and prepared and distributed a WebCT users' manual.

### 6.4 Ray Dominey, Emma Goldman, René Kanters, Bill Myers Chemistry (\$4000)

**Category:** *The Pioneer Award - The C-MoR Project*

The team that is responsible for the C-MoR Project (Chemistry Modules of Richmond) has done an outstanding job of introducing technology to the teaching classrooms and laboratories in the Chemistry department. René Kanters, Ray Dominey, Emma Goldman and Bill Myers found a need for more visualization of course material and created digital molecular models which are used by Richmond students and by faculty and students at other institutions. The team has effectively disseminated this technology to peers inside and outside the University.

## 7. Follow-up

As can be expected in the first year of any major award, we took a hard look at what we had accomplished and how we had accomplished it. We were very proud of the creation of the award itself, but recognized many areas in which we could change/improve procedures. Some of those changes follow:

### 7.1 The nomination process

In the inaugural year, we accepted nominations from chairs, deans and members of ATS. We had little time from conception to delivery, so asking for a written, 1 paragraph document was the simplest way to cull nominations. It required little work on the part of the nominator. Unfortunately, this also meant that some nominations were merely a few sentences with no supporting information and others were well thought-out and had supporting documents. For this coming year, we have designed a nomination form which will be sent to deans and department chairs with the list of selection criteria. The form will also be online, so that it is easily accessible. We will also be asking those nominated to send the committee some "evidence" of qualification. We have found that chairs and deans do not always have the most up-to-date information on their faculty's work. We are also going to ask that nominations come from a nominating committee, comprised of the previous year's winners and chaired by a member of ATS. Members of the nominating committee may not serve on the selection committee.

One outgrowth of this process has been that those nominated receive almost as much publicity and affirmation as the winners. We highlighted the work of the nominees in our awards program and asked them to present their work at our annual Tech Fair.<sup>ii</sup> Many complied with this request proudly.

### 7.2 The selection process

Last year, the Academic Technology Services team selected the recipients of the award. We used a grid to rank all nominees and selected winners based solely on the numbers generated by that grid. Once selections had been made, we notified department chairs and deans to make sure that there were no reasons that anyone in particular could not receive the award. As soon as we heard back from those sources, the names were sent to the

University president for his approval. Winners were notified so that we could amass some background concerning their work for program notes and the award presentation. This year we will follow roughly the same procedure, with the exception of eliminating members of the nominating committee from the selection process. We did make some minor changes in the wording of two of the selection guidelines:

### 7.2.1 Examples

**From:** Demonstrates commitment to assisting peers in the effective use of technology

**To:** Demonstrates commitment to assisting peers within the University community with the effective use of technology

**From:** Demonstrates commitment to articulate and share with peers successful implementation of technology from concept to production

**To:** Demonstrates commitment to articulate and share with peers, at the University of Richmond and elsewhere, the process that led to the successful implementation of technology.

## 7.3 Publicity

Because this was the first year the award was given, we had less support at the awards reception than we would have liked. However, since we had our nominees and winners agree to present their work at Tech Fair in the spring and had ATS create a website for the award itself<sup>iii</sup>, there has been quite a bit of interest shown in next year's award. Also, we are beginning the planning process much earlier this year and will be able to have notices placed on the agendas of departmental and all-faculty meetings much earlier than last year.

## 8. FUTURE

We foresee a gradual evolution with this award and the award process as technology and the University change. Already we have experienced change with the newly created position of Director of Teaching, Learning and Technology. The director will be creating a vision for the University and will be moving teaching and learning down new paths. As this happens, we will begin to see new and exciting uses of technology in the classroom. Our award will have to reflect and complement those changes. It is our hope that the selection process will become more and more difficult as our faculty steps up to the challenges of the future.

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<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.richmond.edu/is/faculty/techfair>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.richmond.edu/is/ats/techaward/index.html>