

# Building Non-traditional Collaborations Using New Technologies

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to describe and reflect upon the successful results of a new collaborative effort involving various departments at the University of Richmond.

## Keywords

Students, admissions, collaboration, printing, posters, support.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As technology invades college campuses, new and previously unheard of collaborations have begun to emerge. Bringing people, departments together for the purpose of creating a new product can be quite challenging. One such collaboration recently took place at the University of Richmond. It brought together staff from the Department of Admissions, the Academic Technology Services team, the Technology Learning Center, and the University Print Shop, as well as representatives from the Faculty Council. The purpose of this collaboration was to assist the Office of Admission, in their effort to enhance the experience of their Open House for Accepted Students. Through a series of joint meetings, workshops, and one-on-one brainstorming sessions the team successfully worked through a sometimes frustrating process, that proved to be invigorating for all involved. We begin our paper laying the foundation of the process, how it all began. We will discuss how during the process roles changed from service provider to client (i.e., how these two departments (Print Shop and Admissions) (which are traditionally service providers) now became clients). We will share our many successes and failures along the way, then wrap up with what we have learned about technology, ourselves, and one another

## 2. OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS

Each April, the University of Richmond, through the coordination of the Office of Admission, hosts *The Richmond Experience*, an Open House for Accepted Students. Students are notified of their acceptance by April 1 and then have until May 1 to notify colleges of their enrollment decision. These are common deadlines for schools that are members of the National Association for College Admission Counseling. The Open House is designed to present students, and their parents, with a detailed look into the programs,

people, and resources of the University and assist them in that enrollment decision.

One important aspect of the life at the University of Richmond is the student-faculty interaction. This interaction can be difficult to represent in a one-day open house setting with over 400 visitors on campus. In years past, *The Richmond Experience* included faculty panels. This presentation format had been well received, but merely introduced stories from a few faculty members, and did not address specifics about the many programs offered at the University of Richmond; nor did it provide a setting for personal interaction.

Over the course of the next two years, other attempts were made to optimize the effectiveness of *The Richmond Experience*. These have included setting a side a period of the day in which all departments invited students to meet with faculty in classrooms, labs, and offices. (The intention was to encourage the type of interaction that the student would experience as a student on campus, as well as present the opportunity to tour the facilities that they would utilize in their undergraduate studies.) While some visiting students took advantage of this opportunity, many found the setting to be very formal and often intimidating. After the first year of this format the Office of Admission and members of the faculty discussed means to enhance the student-faculty interaction in the university open houses while reducing the formal nature of the program. The idea of creating a poster session was born out of this meeting. The poster session, as it was envisioned, would be the first item on the day's agenda. It would afford each department an opportunity to highlight aspects about the programs of study, explained research and laboratory facilities, and presented examples of student and faculty projects. During the session a member of the department's faculty would be available at the poster site, to interact with the accepted students and their parents. With our idea in hand, we now had to find the people and resources to bring our vision to fruition.

## 3. ACADEMIC TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

When first approached by the Office of Admissions to create a poster for each major field and concentration at the University, our initial thoughts were ones of excitement. We were informed

that the posters were to be used the Accepted Student's Open House. Though excited about the prospect, we were also a little apprehensive. We would have to start from ground zero (no one on the staff had ever created such a poster, we did not have a printer capable of producing the posters (3'x5' prints), and many of the academic departments we had talked to could not think of any distinguishing characteristics.

A team, made up of ATS members, was formed to create three different style templates that could be used on the project. A deadline of April 15 was set. It was determined that the easiest program to use across the board to create the posters would be PowerPoint. Several draft templates were created and three were chosen from among them. This process was completed approximately two months before the deadline.

Problems did not arise until we went into production with the templates. Some of the problems we ran included printer compatibility, file format, and file size issues.

#### **4. UNIVERSITY PRINTING**

Printing Services became involved when it was decided that the wide-format printer should reside in their shop. Due to the short period of time we had to go from ground zero to finished product, we worked with the Technology Learning Center to come up with a workable procedure that we used throughout the project. There was no time to fully explore other viable options in the creation of the files. This created frustration for the poster designers who had to recreate their work in new formats. The role of Printing Services was to output the files that would be created by Academic Technology Services. Once the posters were printed we were to laminate them and mount them on foam core. All of these were new processes for us requiring the acquisition of new equipment and training.

#### **5. TECHNOLOGY LEARNING CENTER**

The Technology Learning Center was initially involved in the project at the outset. We were consulted about our knowledge of large-format printers and asked to give our opinion about the manufacturer and style of printer we thought best suited the project. After providing this, we were not really expected to play a role in the actual production of the posters. We became involved again in the project, however, about a six weeks before the project was due to be completed. Assistance was provided to Printing Services and Academic Technology Services in the area of printing requirements (resolution issues, image scanning, etc.). We worked closely with Printing Services to test various file formats (TIFF, PPT, JPEG, etc.) and file sizes to work with their printer. After much trial and error, a procedure was found that produced the desired output.

#### **6. FEEDBACK ABOUT THE POSTERS**

The addition of the poster session proved to be one of the most exciting additions to the Open House since the program was founded ten years ago. From the faculty and accepted students reviews, the session was a success. All reported greater interaction than in past open house programs. The student reviews consistently pointed to the session as one of the highlights of the day's events. (Of the 430 students that visited during one of the three open house days, 65% decided to enroll at Richmond. Incidentally, the enrolled class exhibits some of the strongest measurable academic credentials in the University's history.) The faculty response was perhaps even more enthusiastic. Many commented that the poster session provided a means to engage the students early in the day and helped lead to a greater quality of contact and depth of conversation in the program's other sessions. Many also reported that the creation process of the poster was an exciting (if at times frustrating) exercise in departmental evaluation.

From the Office of Admission perspective, the poster session was more successful than anticipated. Yes, a strong class was enrolled, but the poster session had an even greater impact on our own campus than it did with prospective students. The session was able to actively involve many departments into process of preparation for the program and provided increased involvement throughout the event. As a result, many people began to realize that *The Richmond Experience* is a campus-wide event. The program is truly becoming the University of Richmond Open House and not the Office of Admission Open House.

#### **7. SUCCESSES/FAILURES**

We were successful in that the project came together on time and was well received. Our failure was only that we didn't have enough experience or insight into the capabilities of the equipment and so spent a lot of time pulling our hair out to come up with a workable solution.

#### **8. LESSONS LEARNED**

We have learned that technology offers us many options and that those options are ever-changing; growing in scope and in the ability to allow us to do almost anything. We must be ready to work in areas and ways we never thought possible. New technology continues to open the doors to new possibilities. By pooling all of our various backgrounds and abilities we can and will come up with ways to accomplish the task – to reach the goal.