

This Is Not a Computer Class

Catalyst Boot Camp is a sightseeing trip through the world of technology available for teaching.

By JUDITH TABRON

It takes time to put together a new class exercise. Devising a whole new class takes even longer. Often we want to take advantage of technology in our teaching – to save time, or to bring the rest of the world into the classroom, or to help our students learn to solve problems in ways they’ll be using for the rest of their lives – but it seems daunting just to get started.

You have to know what your options are before you can pick a tool that matches your goals for your class. But how do you find out?

Hofstra’s Catalyst Boot Camp is an in-depth, four-day workshop that exposes participants to every technological teaching tool offered at Hofstra or widely used in higher education. Already offered three times to small cohorts from HCLAS, the School of Communication, and the School of Education and Allied Human Services, the boot camp gives participants a chance to talk about the teaching purposes of all the possible tools and to see them in action.

It is not a computer training class. Faculty do not leave knowing which buttons to push in specific programs. Instead, they learn about the whole world of classroom technology, Web 2.0 and social uses of the Internet, and they help each other figure out ways to use them in their classes. The workshop is always different, and is a balance of the latest trends in technology with basic theory about teaching with technology that largely doesn’t change.

In the year following the boot camp, participants are encouraged to work with assigned FCS staff to make substantive

changes to at least one course that they usually teach, taking the best advantage of all the options Hofstra has to offer to reach the goals of their particular classes or programs.

Informal and fun, Catalyst Boot Camp is the place where Hofstra faculty are figuring out how to teach Hofstra students of the future.

Boot Camp alumnus David Weiss, in Health Professions and Family Studies, called the program, “A Stargate experience that transported me into new realms and possibilities in a supportive, encouraging, and motivating environment.”

The program helps faculty make substantive changes that really take advantage of the tools rather than letting the tools dominate the class. English professor Ethna Lay, for instance, collects in-class writing assignments in Blackboard over the wireless network in her classrooms, and discusses them immediately on the screen in front of the



Judith Tabron, director of Faculty Computing Services, demystifies a new technological tool.

Photo by Paul Carson



Nancy Kaplan, chair of the Department of Radio/Television/Film, enjoys a lesson in podcasting at last year’s Catalyst Boot Camp.

Photo by Joe Zonta

room. Nancy Kaplan, from the Radio/Television/Film Department, was one of the first faculty members we supported in academic uses of podcasting. Joan Bloomgarden, a professor of counseling, research, special education and rehabilitation, said: “I have an ongoing consciousness of exploring possibilities since that boot camp.”

The camp itself is intensive. Participants spend five hours a day trying everything from wikis to audio recording to Second Life. Faculty members who took part in two different boot camps each called the experience “mind blowing.” “I love you!” exclaimed education professor Monica Byrne-Jimenez to her iPod when she first learned how to use it to record voice notes. The boot camp gives faculty what they really need to make substantive changes in their teaching: a grounding in the options and an understanding of how those options might help them achieve their goals.

Provost Herman Berliner has asked that the January ’08 Catalyst Boot Camp be reserved for department chairs. The May ’08 Catalyst Boot Camp is still open. If you are interested, please contact me in Faculty Computing Services at (516) 463-6316 or judith.tabron@hofstra.edu.

Judith Tabron, who leads the Catalyst Book Camp, has 10 years’ experience in teaching and 20 years’ experience in academic computing support. She is director of Faculty Computing Services.