

August 19, 2014

In 27 years at ACU, I worked on dozens of projects in roles in the Adams Center, Web Integration and Programming, Information Technology and Educational Technology. In my initial years, I also served as a faculty member. This document is in support of Kyle Dickson's application for promotion to full professor.

The ideal educational technology creation cycle should begin with a clear problem to solve, articulation to technologists of the potential solution, creation of a prototype and gathering of feedback from early-adopter faculty, development of a core solution with ongoing feedback and refinements, and promotion and support to the faculty at large. If successful locally, reporting to colleagues in larger venues brings additional refinements and gauges applicability beyond the local setting.

This ideal cycle requires significant cooperation between technologists and faculty. For many years, Kyle Dickson has played the role of tireless advocate and spokesman for faculty as well as a partner to technologists, in effect interpreting the needs of one group in the language of the other. He has played this role in numerous projects. The following are representative but not exhaustive. I will give more detail on the first in order to illustrate the breadth of the typical project.

Mobile Learning Team

Both Kyle and I served on the mobile learning team during critical years of its development. There were countless discussions of technical and financial issues, but just as often of impact on teaching and learning. Questions of priority, process and pedagogy were more balanced because Kyle and other faculty were so integral to the team. While to the outsider it may have seemed like a technology or even public relations initiative, it was academic at its core. Kyle and others in the Adams Center led the initiative and faculty participation and buy in was tremendous.

Wordpress Blogging System

Kyle approached my group in IT several years ago to request a local installation of a blogging system. We had a course management system in place at the time, Blackboard, but there was a need for a lighter-weight, more agile system for fostering easy posting of course content and comments by students and faculty. The solution needed to be flexible enough to use from both a computer and mobile device but easy enough to learn that it could be used by a majority of faculty. I need to note that we had access to a blogging system through our portal software, and on a strictly technical basis we would have likely chosen it. Kyle's leadership in gathering requirements and feedback from faculty through a pilot project that included a half-dozen faculty from as many disciplines and departments led to the selection of Wordpress, a much more usable and familiar choice for faculty and students.

Once selected, Kyle served as faculty voice for the many priority decisions and tradeoffs that are part of any project. Representing teaching and learning needs while acknowledging technical requirements is a hard balancing act but one that he performed very well.

While the software system was being installed and configured, Kyle also created training and support materials, organized and conducted faculty interest meetings, and eventually served as the primary support person for Wordpress.

One of the markers of success of this project was the broad adoption by faculty. Not only that, it became a second web publishing and content management system for the campus at large and is used in such diverse areas as ACU Today, the Library and faculty Tenure and Promotion portfolios. Kyle's ongoing attention to selecting plugins and templates to support need as they arise have made Wordpress one of the most successful technology implementations ACU had over my years there.

HeadsUp

HeadsUp is a mobile web app created at ACU to enhance classroom discussions. We worked with faculty to capture best practices in group discussions as well as to discover limitations of ad hoc group selection, manual preparation and distribution of materials, and informal feedback mechanisms. Kyle was a partner at all phases over several years. He helped us gather faculty input, organized interest and feedback sessions, personally tested the software on an ongoing basis, and initiated several efforts to expand the reach of HeadsUp outside ACU.

Maker Lab

After I moved from IT to educational technology in the Adams Center, John Weaver asked his leadership group to explore the creation of a Maker Lab. Kyle took the clear leadership role in researching existing labs and related areas, contacting national leaders in the maker movement, and envisioning and creating the film, "We Are Makers." Once the film was created, he initiated sessions with various faculty groups to determine potential impact of the maker movement on various disciplines as well as how it might impact pedagogy across the disciplines. Kyle led the creation of the Maker Lab blog, gave extensive input on the design of the space based on his experience designing the Learning Studio, and contributed in countless ways to the startup of the lab.

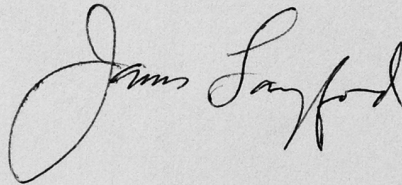
Other Projects

I have mentioned representative large projects, but there are many other projects that allowed me to see Kyle's contribution to how technology can impact teaching and learning and faculty growth. I had the privilege of participating in a session on digital storytelling and later helped facilitate a workshop. Another time I was able to join the photography workshop in Gruene. Educational technology assisted Kyle in the technical implementation of the One Button Studio.

In these and in many, many others, I experienced first hand the importance of having not just a faculty advocate for IT projects but a real conversation partner invested in finding the appropriate junction of technology and teaching and learning.

ACU has many innovative faculty willing to experiment with new technology and it was a pleasure to work in such an environment for so many years. However, there will always be a divide between those whose primary concern is technology and those whose task is educating students. I believe that the role of bridging that divide is an absolutely essential one if we are to apply digital innovations in a thoughtful, responsible manner. Whether I was asking Kyle for his help in a project, or more often, responding to projects he initiated and led, I found him to be the ideal faculty partner and a valued colleague. Both the technology side and faculty and students are richer because of his impact.

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James Langford". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name and email address.