

## READY for Some Decision-Making Help?

Higher education institutions today face an increasingly large number of decisions concerning the adoption of information technology. How a college or university positions itself regarding this adoption can have a significant and lasting impact on the viability of the institution, yet the possibilities and challenges accompanying these choices are not always obvious. Luckily, campus leaders are not alone in making these decisions. Many administrators have already started down various decision paths and have much to teach other institutions about the implications of their decisions. What is currently lacking is an accessible way to extract that information.

The EDUCAUSE National Learning Infrastructure Initiative (NLII) is addressing this problem. The NLII's Institutional Readiness Project (the READY Project) provides a way to organize and communicate information about the incorporation of technology into higher education. Using a Web-based decision framework, the READY tool will enable higher education leaders to filter through large amounts of information and select that which is pertinent to their current or projected situation.

In some decision areas, of course, there are many more questions than answers. But that does not mean that asking the questions is not a useful exercise. In many ways, these less-developed areas are the most important to address. Even when no one yet has the answers, the READY tool will help frame the issue by guiding users through the right questions, setting a conceptual framework. Some other

areas are relatively well established, with a strong grounding in empirical data, even benchmarks. For those areas, the tool will give more concrete suggestions based on individual responses. In all cases, the tool engages decision-makers in active learning about the concepts as it walks them through the issue. At the same time, the tool allows institutional leaders to hold constructive dialogues with members of their campus community. Engaging in these dialogues can be even more helpful than learning about solutions in place at other institutions. By allowing multiple users at each institution to share and compare their responses about an issue, the READY tool will help develop a common vocabulary.

Finally, after asking questions and conducting dialogues, institutional leaders must decide where information technology resources will make the greatest impact. An unwise investment of resources (one in which the initiative is doomed to failure from the start or in which more important needs remain unmet) may not only waste the resources but also engender distrust, contaminating the next implementation. For example, encouraging faculty to adopt technology in their teaching before the support infrastructure is in place is probably unwise. The Web-based READY tool will support an institutional planning process for applying scarce resources strategically—addressing weaknesses, taking advantage of strengths, responding to the environ-

ment, and moving the institution toward transformation.

The beta version of the READY tool can be found at <<http://www.educause.edu/ready>>. The completed version of the tool will be released at EDUCAUSE 2001 in Indianapolis (October 28–31, 2001). The content branches that are currently under construction are distance learning, delivery of student services, engagement of second-wave faculty, and partnering in the learning marketplace. These areas were chosen in part to ensure that the design of the tool would be flexible enough to incorporate material from different sources (a

white paper, a presentation, a series of surveys, and a book). The content is not appropriate at this point for real-world decision-making. The database that drives the tool is nearing completion. After the pilot phase this summer, the tool will continue to be modified to reflect the ongoing development of the con-

tent areas and the addition of new content areas. In addition, the resources supporting each content area—case studies, definitions, references, and examples—will be regularly updated. There will be many ways for users to contribute to this tool. After all, it is those on the front lines, those making these decisions, who can offer the best advice.



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