███████████ : Candidate Statement

Friday, February 24, 2017

The description of my position as digital curriculum coordinator came out of a white paper that the CNS Dean's Office had me develop in the spring of 2014 to generate the strategy for developing a Center for Technology and Teaching. After looking at similar centers on campus, national trends and interviewing faculty and departmental chairs, I concluded that creating a Center would not be the the most effective approach. Faculty time constraints, low usage of centers, a diffusion of inexpensive desktop applications and high prices of updating and maintaining technology all pointed to a more decentralized and embedded approach. My recommendation was for fixed- term positions to be located within departments that would be responsible for digital curriculum development, as well as to be able to share more of the teaching burden.

With this context I took the job of digital curriculum coordinator to meet three objectives within the college: 1) Improve the quantity and quality of digital instruction, 2) create community among the faculty creating and delivering digital content, and 3) connect CNS to other College and University resources concerned with digital instruction.

To address objective 1, my challenge was first how to define and promote "quality digital instruction" that would be recognized by faculty. Nationally there is a trend for faculty to not appreciate online instruction even though research has shown equivalency to face-to-face instruction. To increase the number of online/hybrid course offerings, it would be necessary for faculty to see it as having value. This was a cultural challenge. My strategy has been to get the University to adopt Quality Matters - a nationally recognized, research-based, rubric for evaluating online courses. This rubric serves as a benchmark for talking about course quality as well as provides training to faculty about evidence-based practices for effective digital course design. The University did adopt Quality Matters and adoption of this system was in collaboration with the College of Arts and Letters (CAL) and MSU IT Services. My work to create systems that promote quality online instruction can also be seen in the development of MSU's Digital Learning Strategy. I worked with MSU's CIO, Associate Provost, and Directors of the Innovation Hub to draft heuristics that will guide best practice in digital instruction across the University.

Most of the projects that I took on over the last two years invariably met multiple objectives of my position's description. For instance, to build community with the digital practitioners of CNS, I co-facilitate two monthly Faculty Learning Communities (FLC). One of these FLCs focuses on accessibility. We were approached by Academic Human Resources, Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives, and the Faculty and Organizational Development Office to develop a D2L self-enrolled course on Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning. The FLC spent the year creating this resource and it is now used as a resource by the university. This project

improved the quality of instruction, increased community among digital practitioners, and connected CNS to more resources throughout the University.

The challenge of accessibility exploded across campus soon after I accepted the role of Digital Curriculum Coordinator. Litigation throughout the U.S. had increased concerns and many universities were struggling with how to implement initiatives that were often interpreted by faculty as unfunded mandates that impeded their academic freedom. This challenge shaped a large portion of my projects and scholarship over the last two years and included giving many workshops to course instructors, producing tutorials, creating accessible templates, writing a grant to CNS' OCC Office, presenting posters and delivering talks at conferences, sitting on panels, piloting programs, drafting reports and talking about accessibility issues with faculty, department chairs, and instructional technologists. These products can be seen in Form C, but distillation of this work comes down to the point that by increasing accessibility we increase the quality of our instruction; for example, through conversations we have about accessibility we increase community and connection to resources. At first I was concerned that accessibility would be a distraction to my mission as Digital Curriculum Coordinator, but it has instead served to improve the synthesis of my objectives. The main challenge I face related to accessibility is how to build a culture that values educational equity regardless of capabilities.

I have spent the majority of my time over the last two years building connections to University resources and faculty within numerous units, which has helped me understand (but not necessarily influence) many of the systems we have in place at the University. My goal over the next few years will be to meet more often with unit chairs to create incentives and structures that will help to build communities and connected resources. For instance, I generated and distributed to unit chairs a list of digital production facilities across the College and University, most of which are free, but what would make this more effective is to have reciprocity agreements that would allow smaller departments the use of facilities without paying prohibitive fees. I would like to build more of these opportunities and remove barriers to digital production.

I view my role in the first two years in the Digital Curriculum Coordinator position as a generalist. I have worked on a variety of projects that have given me a broad understanding of the needs and resources throughout the college and university. A downside of this approach is that I do not have much opportunity for scholarship or identity development around a specific knowledge/skillset. For my next three years, I would like to focus on a few larger projects to ensure their success and visibility. By providing some clearly robust examples of innovative effective digital curriculum or new online programs, departments and faculty would see the benefits of investing the resources and could use these examples as templates for their own initiatives. The hope is that focusing on a few projects will allow me also to build skills/knowledge that will translate into increased regional and national presence. Already so far, my work has led to consultations with MSU's College of Veterinary Medicine, College of Human Medicine, as well as textbook companies like Cengage and Pearson, and I believe there is even further capacity for me to achieve broader scholarship and visibility.

Related to teaching, the last two years involved me developing and iterating my approach to teaching preservice teachers science practices (ISE 420) as outlined by the Next Generation Science Standards (standards that serve as K-12 science teachers framework) and aligning course objectives and activities to improve students understanding and experiences of science. I continue to use my courses as my pedagogical laboratory, testing new technologies and approaches with the goals of improving learning gains, reducing student costs, and increasing student motivation. My main goal for my teaching practice over the new few years will be to develop a competency-based approach to the science practices. This would involve a remapping of course objectives and aligning them to course materials and assessments. The benefits of this approach would be to increase the transparency of course activities and assessments to specific science practices: students will know where they are on their progression from novice to expert on skills such as: 1) asking questions, 2) using models, and 3) communicating scientific information. I believe this approach will promote student understanding of course goals, creation of personalized paths for learning, and recognition of deficiency and mastery of skills.

Coordinator of Digital Curriculum Development, College of Natural Science
(Continuing System Curriculum Development Academic Specialist; AN, 100% time)

College of Natural Science Responsibilities: 51%

- Provide leadership to enhance the number and quality of online/hybrid courses in CNS.
- Bring together faculty groups to enhance online/hybrid instruction.
- Advise dean's office and departments concerning opportunities and best practices for online/hybrid instruction.
- Lead the evaluation of CNS online/hybrid course offerings and develop and implement benchmarks for their effectiveness.
- Coordinate with MSU offices and resources concerning online/hybrid instructions.
- Participate in appropriate college and university service activities.

Center for Integrative Studies in General Science Responsibilities: 49%

- Teach 2 sections of ISE during the academic year and 1 section of ISB online in summer.
- CICGS Online Coordinator
- Associate Director (principally summer signatory responsibility)