TECHNOLOGY IS EMPOWERING

After 42 years, and having taught over 10,000 students, I am retiring from Boston College this June. Rita Owens, Executive Director of Academic Technology, asked me if I would write an editorial about my experiences with technology at BC.

What unbelievable transformations have taken place. In my first year, all teaching/research related computing was done using punched cards (which you prepared yourself). You would submit a deck of these cards that would contain the instructions for the task that you wanted to accomplish (perhaps a statistical analysis or solving a mathematical problem). Then you would return to the computer center the next day to retrieve your results. If you had mistyped an instruction, you started the whole process over again.

In those early days, I was often asked to teach faculty about computing. One such mini course took place in January between semesters. Over 300 faculty sat in on a 3 day course that I gave on word processing – using something called MASS-11. While the software was extremely tedious to use, the number of faculty who attended spoke volumes about the commitment faculty had to learning about technology.

That dedication and commitment has only escalated over the years, and because of the vision and leadership of Fr. Monan (President) and Frank Campanella (Executive Vice President), and now Fr. Leahy and Dr. Garza - financial, technical and emotional support for faculty use of technology was, and is, a given.

Nobody, in the 1970's would have foreseen a day when every faculty member had a personal computer in his or her office, or that students would routinely bring something called a laptop to the classroom.

I truly witnessed a revolution that transformed how students (and all of us) learned and how teachers taught. Now we have social networks, collaborative learning with technology, instant access to information, digital libraries, digital museums, video chats, instantly available research tools, students building technology companies, faculty lectures streamed on the internet, tweets, blogs, and much, much more.

Students and faculty can learn when they want, how they want, and where they want. They are free to access untold riches of data, collaborate with their peers and teachers, and create new and exciting learning opportunities. Wow!
Technology is indeed empowering. It certainly empowered my teaching career.

While I don’t feel it is my place to give advice, I will share my thoughts on what I felt was important with respect to integrating technology into my activities.

Technology helped me connect with students. Because I was using many of the same technologies as they were, many students felt a kind of bond with me as their teacher and we often learned from one another.

I LOVED helping faculty learn about technology. It didn’t matter whether this was part of my role in the Multimedia Lab or just a response to a phone call. It always gave me great pleasure to help colleagues.

Technology helped me improve my teaching and research. By using technology, I was often able to work faster and in a more organized way. This left me more time to stop and look at my teaching and look at how to improve what I did in the classroom. It also allowed me to make many advances in my research on EagleEyes and to develop custom applications for handicapped students in the Campus School.

Technology brought me closer to many of my faculty colleagues. I encourage you to seek out colleagues in other disciplines, colleagues who have received university technology grants, and colleagues who may be using tools that you have only read about. You will be amazed at how helpful your faculty colleagues can graciously be.

It’s not all about fancy podiums, laptops in the classroom, and high definition projectors. It’s about using technology to connect to students, to share work with peers, and to advance the mission of the academy.

BC has so very many opportunities to get more involved with technology. E-Teaching Day is a wonderful celebration of the faculty use of technology, Faculty Technology Consultants are an exceptional source of information and help, TC’s are great at technology support, the Instructional Design & eTeaching group are fabulous people, IT’S is focusing on listening to and helping all users, and the Academic Technology Advisory Board is constantly looking at new ways to support faculty and to empower them.

BC’s future is quite bright indeed – and technology will be a very big part of that future. Jump in. Never stop learning. Have fun – and connect with your students and peers. You will never regret it.

Digital Course Options. On March 16, 2011, Instructional Design and eTeaching Services (IDeS) held a luncheon focused on new options for incorporating digital materials into courses. The luncheon featured presentations from the BC Libraries, the BC Bookstore and IDeS. Topics included eBooks, eTextbooks, online course reserves and digital coursepacks. For more information on and resources from the day, please go to:

http://idesweb.bc.edu/ides/website/events/programs/eteachingluncheons/2011

Lecture Capture
Lecture capture is a technology that allows faculty members to record classroom-based activities in a digital format for distribution and consumption online. For more information, click here.