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Final Report of the AFIT Quality Initiative Internal Discovery Committee

Air Force Institute of Technology

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FINAL REPORT OF THE AFIT QUALITY INITIATIVE INTERNAL DISCOVERY COMMITTEE

TECHNICAL REPORT

AFIT/EN/TR-17-01

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
AIR UNIVERSITY

AIR FORCE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio

AFIT Internal Discovery Study on Key Elements of Effective Teaching and Learning

Executive Summary

This document contains results of a study effort designed to document the key elements for student success at AFIT in our continuing education and graduate programs and discover to what degree they exist at AFIT. Five areas of study (thrust areas) were initially identified through the QIP (Quality Initiative Project) proposal and are listed below:

1) Classroom and teaching laboratory design, functionality and utilization
2) E-learning technologies for resident and distance delivery
3) Faculty and Staff development programs and support infrastructure
4) Infrastructure to support advanced instructional technology capabilities
5) Organizational structures, policies, processes, procedures, and strategic vision to support effective teaching

The internal discovery plan involved a two-pronged approach that sought to understand:

1) The key attributes of each thrust area, and the current state of these attributes.
2) The degree to which each of the thrust areas contribute to student success (relative contribution).

Inputs were solicited from the AFIT community to determine what the key elements are as part of the effort. A series of electronic surveys and focus group meetings were conducted in order to collect data related to each of the thrust areas. The goal of the first part of the two-pronged approach is to make certain the right attributes of our inventory are measured to help further the success of our students and our programs. The second part of the data gathering effort sought to determine whether these attributes exist at AFIT or not. Nearly 400 AFIT personnel across all schools and directorates within AFIT were involved in the study and this committee is greatly indebted to these individuals who volunteered their time to the project.

Findings were selected based on perceived deficiencies in each thrust area and were reached by analyzing the frequency to which comments pointed to problems. The identified problems were then checked to make certain they were correlated to a factor that was identified as contributing to success in school. The committee was tasked to identify 5 attributes for each thrust area. A list of these attributes is given below for each thrust area:

1) Classroom and teaching laboratory design, functionality and utilization

    - Displays with wireless screen sharing
    - Need for an experimental classroom
    - Classrooms with anonymous voting/student feedback
    - Moveable/Collaborative furniture
    - Computer laboratory utilization

2) E-learning technologies for resident and distance delivery

- Video lectures
- Video conferencing limitations
- Lack of student management system combined with a student learning system
- Lack of a readily available/reliable file sharing system
- Lack of training opportunities

3) Faculty and Staff development programs and support infrastructure

- Lack of formation mentoring (conversational) communities
- Direct, recurring engagement of university leadership with faculty
- Majoring of faculty not accountable for faculty development
- Time and resources for faculty development are not available
- Lack of available time/money/resources for sabbaticals

4) Infrastructure to support advanced instructional technology capabilities

- Network reliability and speed
- Lack of an enterprise solution for teleconferencing capability
- EN Extension Services needs expansion
- Lack of power and connectivity in some classrooms for student computers
- Lack of clear and centralized scheduling functions and resource management for classrooms

5) Organizational structures, policies, processes, procedures, and strategic vision to support effective teaching

- Too many restrictive IT policies
- Need for peer to peer teaching evaluations
- (EN) Basic instructor course should be longer and include more topics
- Lack of structured support for master's thesis and other research projects
- Multiple chance of command (within EN)

The following report documents in more detail the methods and some example data sets used to produce these findings.

Introduction

The study effort represents an attempt to guide improvement of our graduate and continuing education programs through experience available from our faculty, staff and students. The process outlined below was designed to achieve success by allowing the participants to define what it means to succeed and then self-assess the presence of these factors at AFIT. It's therefore a true internal discovery process since its output reflects the state of our internal understanding of teaching and learning excellence. This inclusive approach, which garnered participation from 400 people across AFIT's schools, will hopefully cause the AFIT community to buy into the process and become excited about it since they own it and

are full participants. By allowing the AFIT community to define the study items and objectives in this way, we believe that the results will be more widely accepted and implemented. Figure 1 shows the flow of activity and points where output was generated by the internal discovery subcommittee.

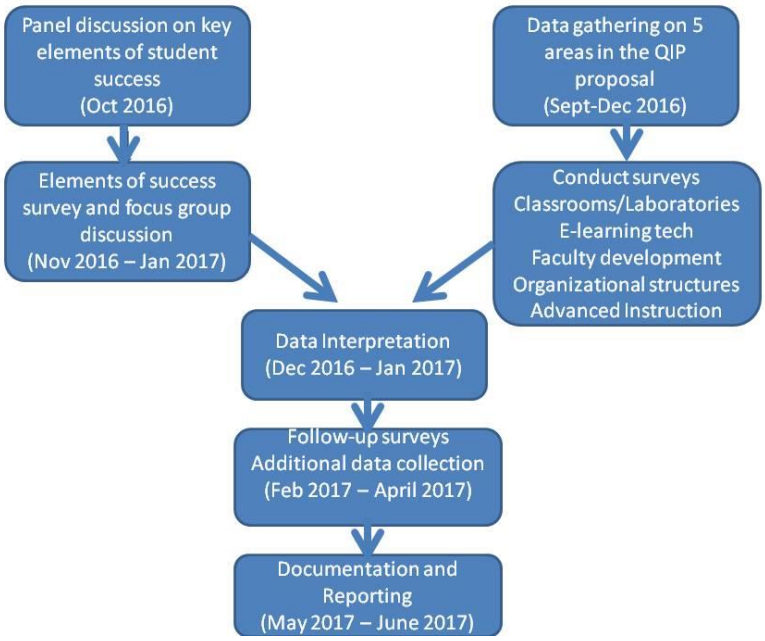

Figure 1: Flow chart showing the progression of internal discovery and associated activities

Five thrust areas were identified as a starting point from the QIP proposal and are listed below:

1) Classroom and teaching laboratory design, functionality and utilization
2) E-learning technologies for resident and distance delivery
3) Faculty and Staff development programs and support infrastructure
4) Infrastructure to support advanced instructional technology capabilities
5) Organizational structures, policies, processes, procedures, and strategic vision to support effective teaching

We found no additional thrust areas are needed in order to address the key elements for success in school.

Participation

The internal discovery subcommittee organized and participated in a series of electronic surveys and discussion groups. Those activities and their participation are outlined below:

19 Oct Survey Classroom Utilization and E-Learning: 76 participants

27 Oct Panel Discussion on Key Elements of Success in Grad School: 40 participants

17 Nov AU/A6 Focus Group on Distance Learning: 10 participants

2 Dec Survey on Faculty Development: 34 participants

8 Dec Survey on Key Elements of Success in Graduate School: 109 participants

8 Dec Focus Group on Classroom Utilization and E-Learning: 9 participants

27 Jan Focus Group on Success in Grad School 9 participants

15 Mar 2nd Faculty Development Survey 41 participants

24 Mar Staff Development Survey 36 participants

3 Apr Survey on Key Elements of Success in Continuing Education 37 participants

Figure 2 shows a breakdown of participation demographics across AFIT.

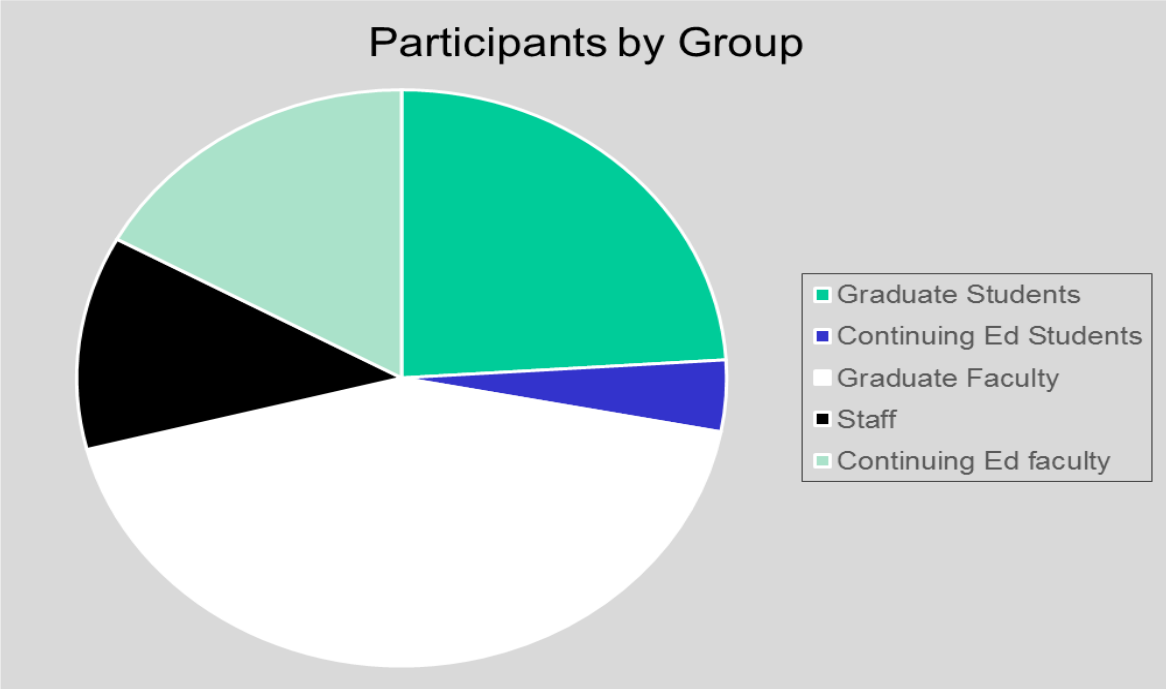

Figure 2: Demographic breakdown of participation in the internal discovery process

Internal Discovery Plan

An important part of the internal discovery effort was designed to determine how the success of our graduate and continuing education programs is measured and to identify what are the primary elements that must be present to achieve success in these programs.

Faculty and Student Survey on Key Elements for Success in School (November – December 2016)

The purpose of this survey is to ask some open-ended questions about the following:

i. What do you believe are the keys (key elements) to success in graduate school?

ii. What do you believe are the key elements for success in continuing education?

iii. What personal experience can you offer that substantiates your positon

iv. Of the elements you identified, please indicate for each one where you think most of the control of them lies (Society, SECDEF, Air Staff, AETC, AU, AFIT, and Your School, Your department or yourself)

v. What roll do you believe technology plays in your identified elements?

vi. What roll does classroom design play?

This survey was conducted electronically and distributed to faculty and staff across all schools as well as staff at AFIT's main campus. In order to improve the participation in the survey, gift cards were offered as an incentive to participate.

Responses to the survey were analyzed in terms of their application to graduate school and continuing education success. With a total of 186 participants and each one contributing as many as three factors that contribute to success in school, the data set obtained was rich and informative. Comments were organized by categories and graphed to show what factors contribute the most to success in school. The results of this survey were used later to help prioritize the committee's key findings, thus making the results of the study pertinent to success in school. Figure 3 shows the frequency of comments for each factor contributing to success in graduate school. Figure 4 shows the frequency of comments for factors contributing to success in continuing education programs.

What emerged from this part of the study (as shown in Figures 3 and 4), is that skilled faculty in the classroom was the number one key to success in school. This supports the notion that what happens in the classroom is paramount and attributes that support improved classroom teaching and effectiveness will improve student success in school (focus area 1). The importance of accessible online and interactive content (E-learning) was listed as the third and fifth highest ranking contributor for success in

school in continuing education, which supports the need to investigate focus area 2. The quality of faculty and their ability to advise and teach was listed as the number one contributor to success in school and supports the need to investigate focus area 3 (Faculty and Staff development programs and support infrastructure). Focus areas 4 and 5 are needed to encompass many of the smaller areas that are identified as important to success in school such as the laboratory equipment and the library.

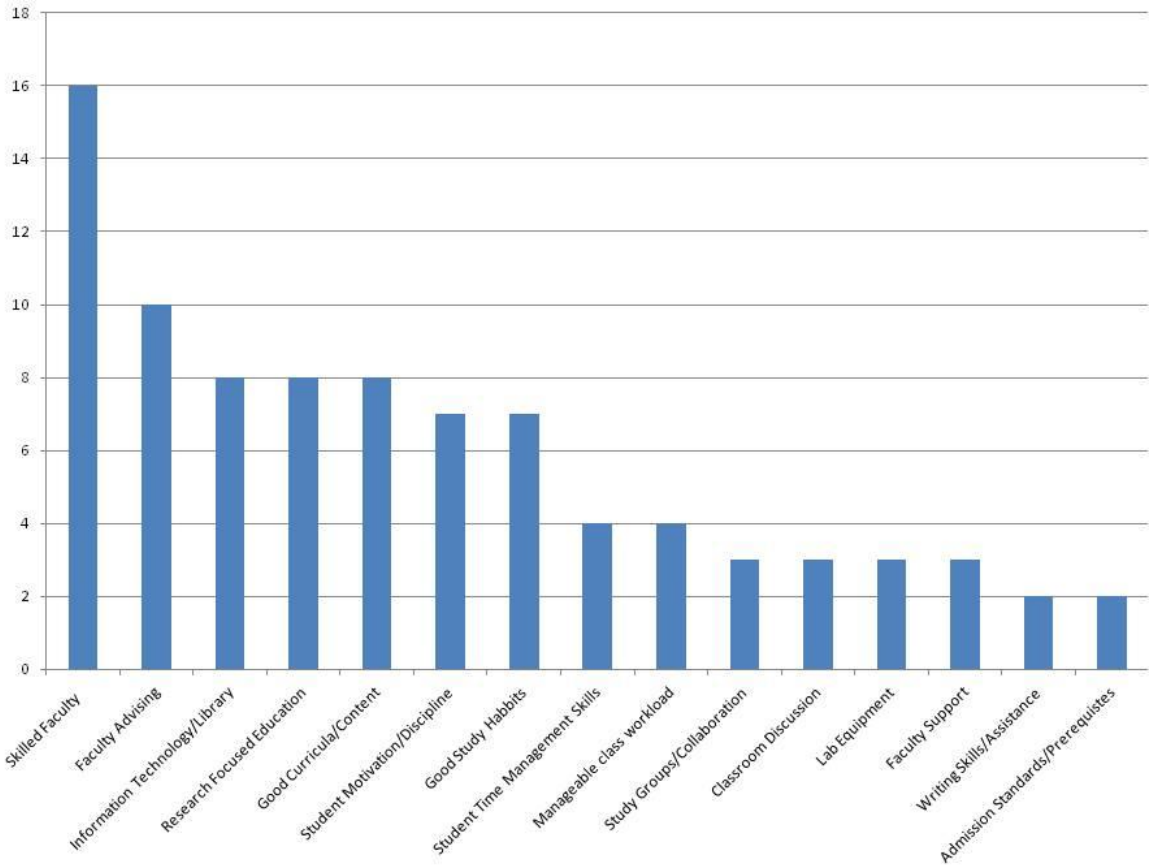

Figure 3: Success in Graduate Education Comment Frequency (Y-axis shows the frequency of comments)

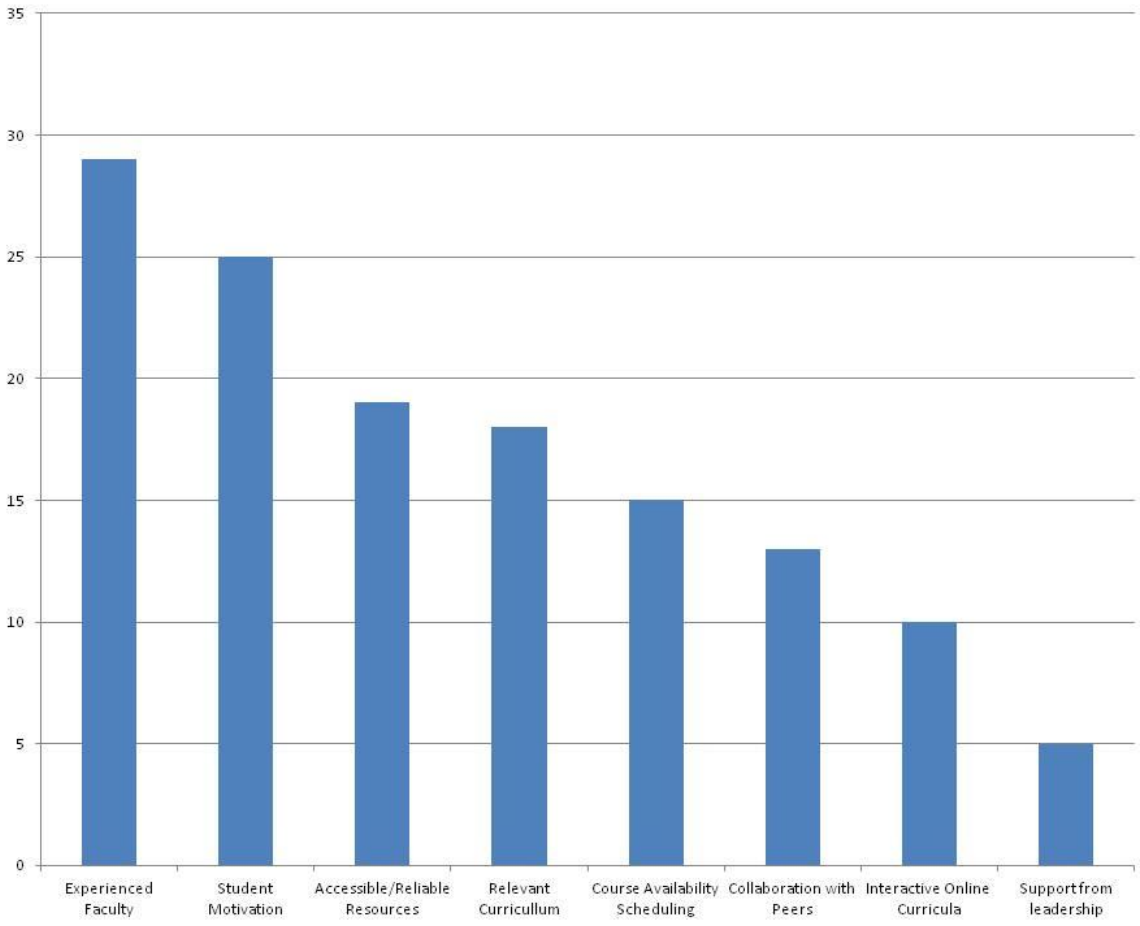

Figure 4: Success in Continuing Education Comment Frequency (Y-axis shows the comment frequency)

Assessing the presence and availability of the key elements for success within the 5 thrust areas

This part of the project was designed to identify the presence, quantity and accessibility of the key elements of success as defined in this study. An electronic survey was conducted as well as follow up group discussions in order to answer the questions that emerged in this second part of our study. The desire for more resources and changes in our policies, procedures and organizational structures was identified and outlined as part of the report. The study effort explored areas outlined in the QIP proposal.

Thrust Area 1: Classrooms/ Labs Design, Functionality, Utilization

This educational factor dealing with classroom and laboratory design involves discovering what classroom and laboratory resources we have and how they are being utilized. A survey was administered electronically in the November time frame with some data gathering accomplished via a discussion group. Sample survey and interview questions for individuals and focus groups.

a. How important to you is it that classrooms have moveable furniture
b. If moveable furniture is an important classroom feature, explain how you would use moveable furniture to enhance the classroom experience for your students. (if not indicate N/A)
c. Currently all class rooms have some computing equipment present in the room. In your experience is it adequate or not? If not what are your needs for classroom computing equipment?
d. All classrooms have projectors, are they adequate for your instructional needs? If not explain what capability you would like them to have.
e. Are interactive classrooms with anonymous student voting, text questioning capabilities desirable? (1-10 scale, 10 being most desirable)
f. Would your courses benefit from interactive classrooms with screens showing the class outputs from student computers. (scale of 1-10, 10 meaning it would be a great benefit)
g. Are you currently utilizing smartboards in your classroom or teaching laboratory? If so, how do you feel they are enhancing your teaching capabilities?
h. Are you currently using tablets in your classroom or teaching laboratory? If so, how are they being utilized to improve the delivery of your course?
i. Have you had classroom maintenance issues in the past year? If so, please explain what they were.
j. What resource(s) would make your job of educating in-res students more effective?
k. If an experimental classroom were available with new instructional aides and equipment, would you be interested in utilizing it for improving your course (1-10, 10 being very interested)

The survey results are reported here first noting the demographics of the respondents. In this case the majority of respondents were members of EN as shown in Figure 5:

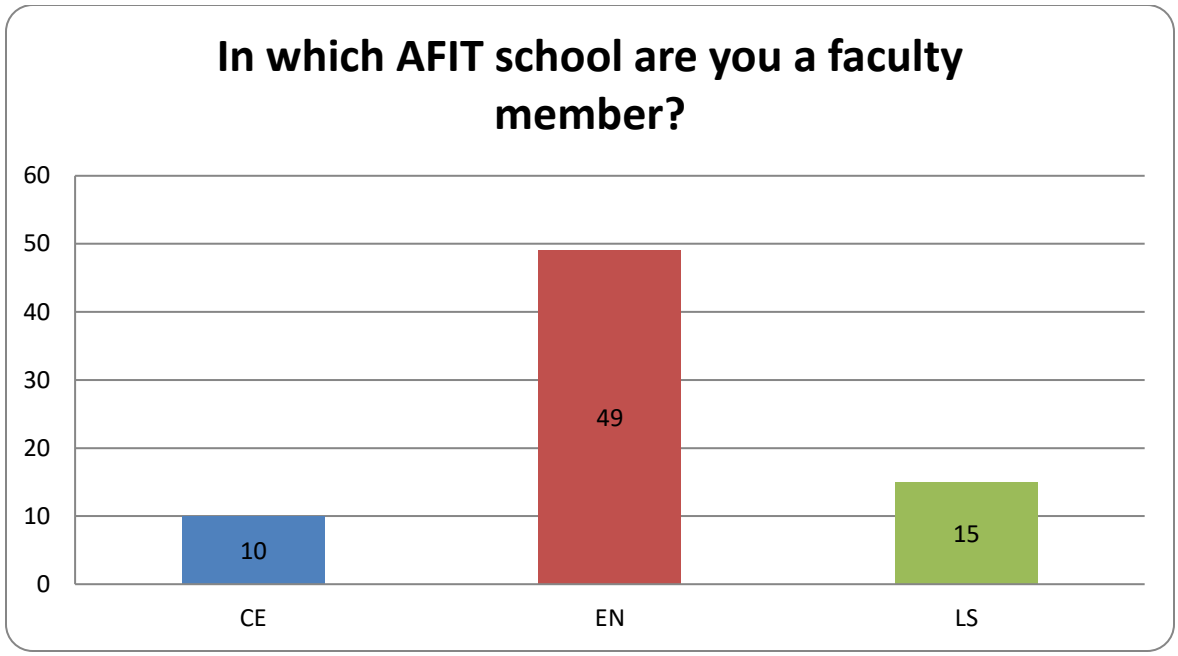

Figure 5: Classroom survey respondent affiliation

Answering a question about moveable furniture in the classroom, survey participants indicated their preferences as shown in Figure 6.

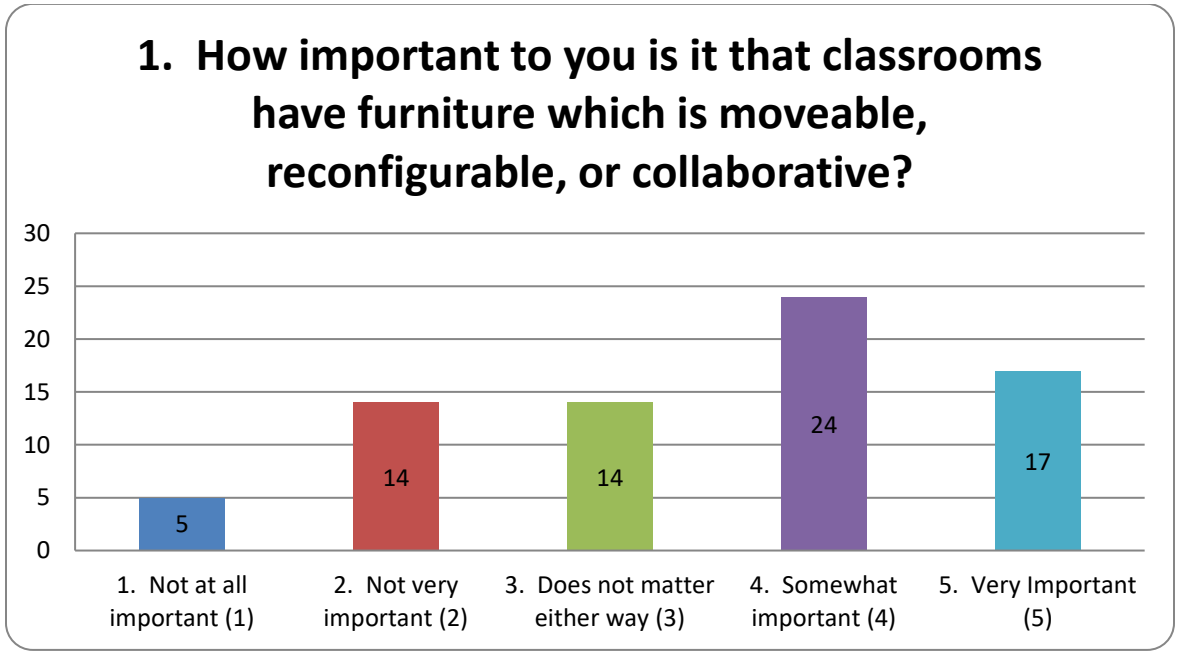

Figure 6: Response to question about moveable furniture

This data supports the notion that having furniture that is moveable is desired by the AFIT faculty for creating a collaborative classroom environment. Follow up questions with a focus group of 8 individuals from the EN, CE and LS schools showed a similar response, but when asked if moveable furniture is still

preferred if it means that students do not have access to electrical power for portable computers, the responses indicate that access to power is more important than having moveable furniture. A survey of classroom facilities at AFIT show that some classrooms have furniture that is moveable to some degree (simple lightweight desks), but no classrooms have furniture that is considered to be moveable and still yields adequate access to power receptacles. These results support the finding that:

Finding: **A majority of faculty would favor having moveable and collaborative furniture in the classroom as long as it does not curtail access to power receptacles. Such facilities are nearly non-existent on the AFIT campus.**

A question was asked in the survey about the adequacy of computing equipment in the classrooms. A follow-up discussion on the topic was also pursued via a focus group meeting. The electronic survey results produced the following data as shown in Figure 7.

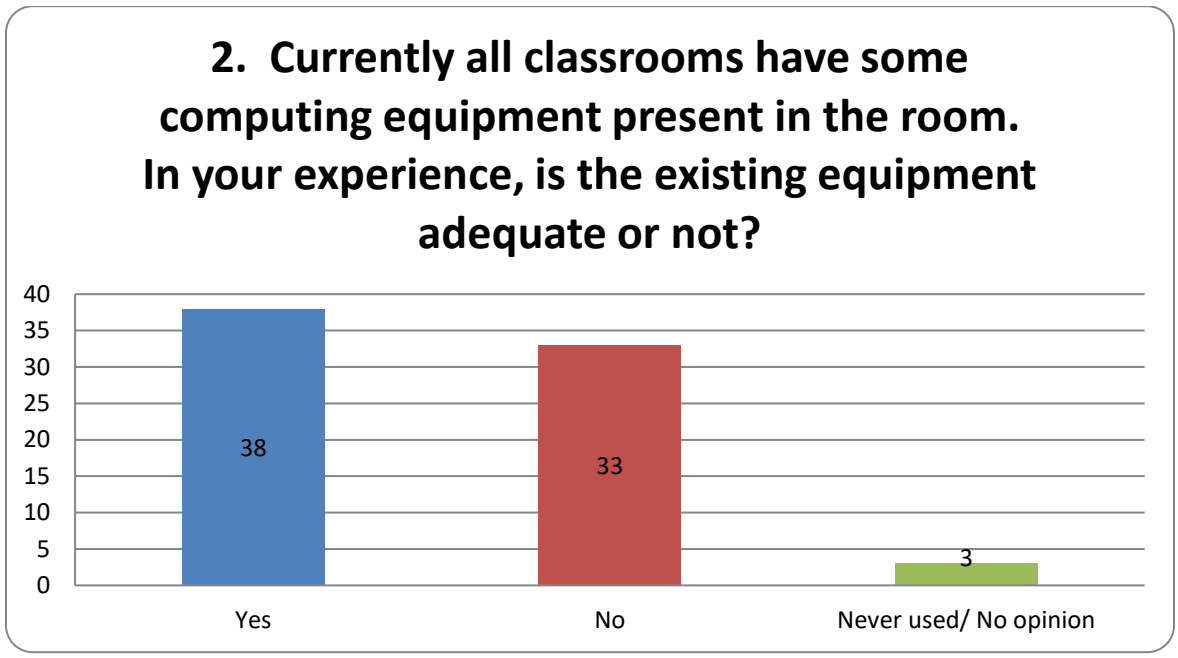

Figure 7: Response to question about classroom computing equipment

Nearly half of the respondents either thought the equipment was lacking or do not even utilize it. In discussions held during our focus group meeting on the topic, the consensus was that computing equipment in classrooms and teaching laboratories was of low quality and not well maintained. The faculty indicated that for students who are in residence, it would be better if they brought their own computing equipment to class. Faculty could also bring laptops to present material that are owned by AFIT, but individual to each faculty member. For students visiting AFIT for short periods it is still desirable to provide computing equipment in the classroom.

Finding: **A majority of faculty would favor removing computing equipment from classrooms and teaching laboratories in favor of having students bring equipment to the classroom for in residence**

education. For continuing education courses, it is preferable for computing equipment to be provided by the school since their attendance at AFIT is for short periods of time.

The next question deals with the desire for anonymous student voting capabilities in the classroom. These capabilities do exist at AFIT in small quantities, but are not widely available in most classrooms. This technology makes it possible for students to indicate anonymously whether they are keeping up with the class so that instructors know when to pause for further explanation. When asked if these capabilities would be desired, a majority of respondents indicated that they would be as shown in Figure 8.

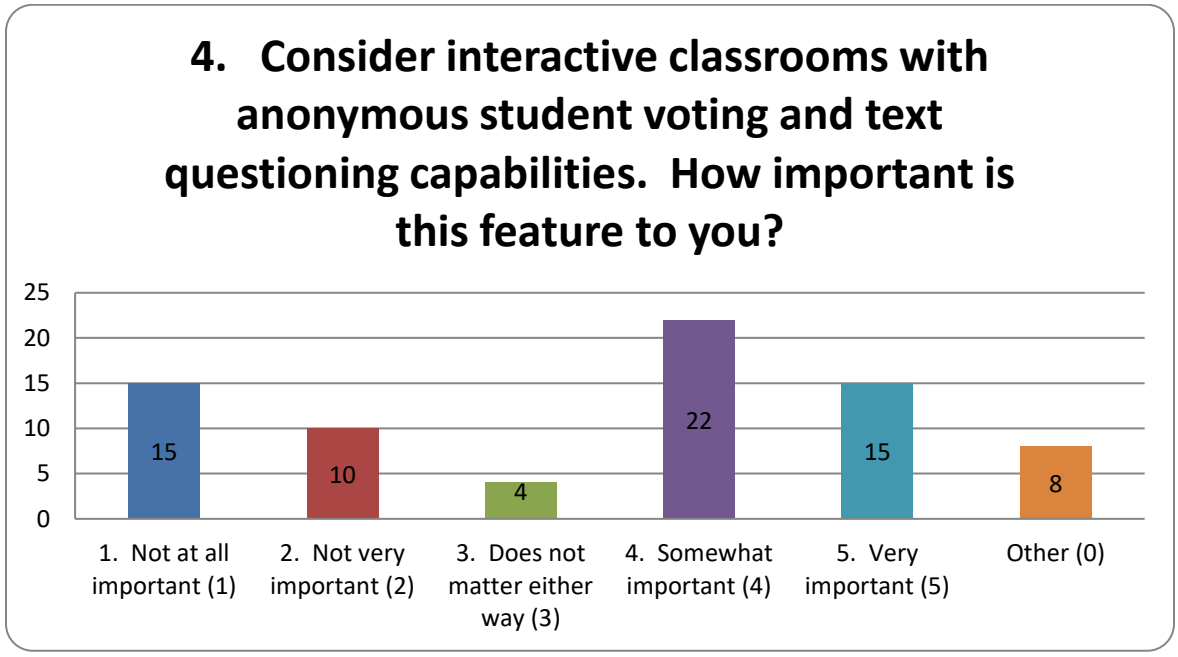

Figure 8: Response to question about anonymous student voting capabilities in the classroom

This data set supports the following finding:

Finding: A majority of faculty would favor having anonymous student feedback capability available in classrooms. This capability is not widely available in most AFIT classrooms.

Another question on the survey investigates the possibility of utilizing presentation technology with screen sharing capability. This allows faculty and students to cast information from their devices on the common large screen, making for a more interactive experience. This would also facilitate connection to the screen for faculty who bring their individual laptops to class. Figure 9 shows the responses to the question.

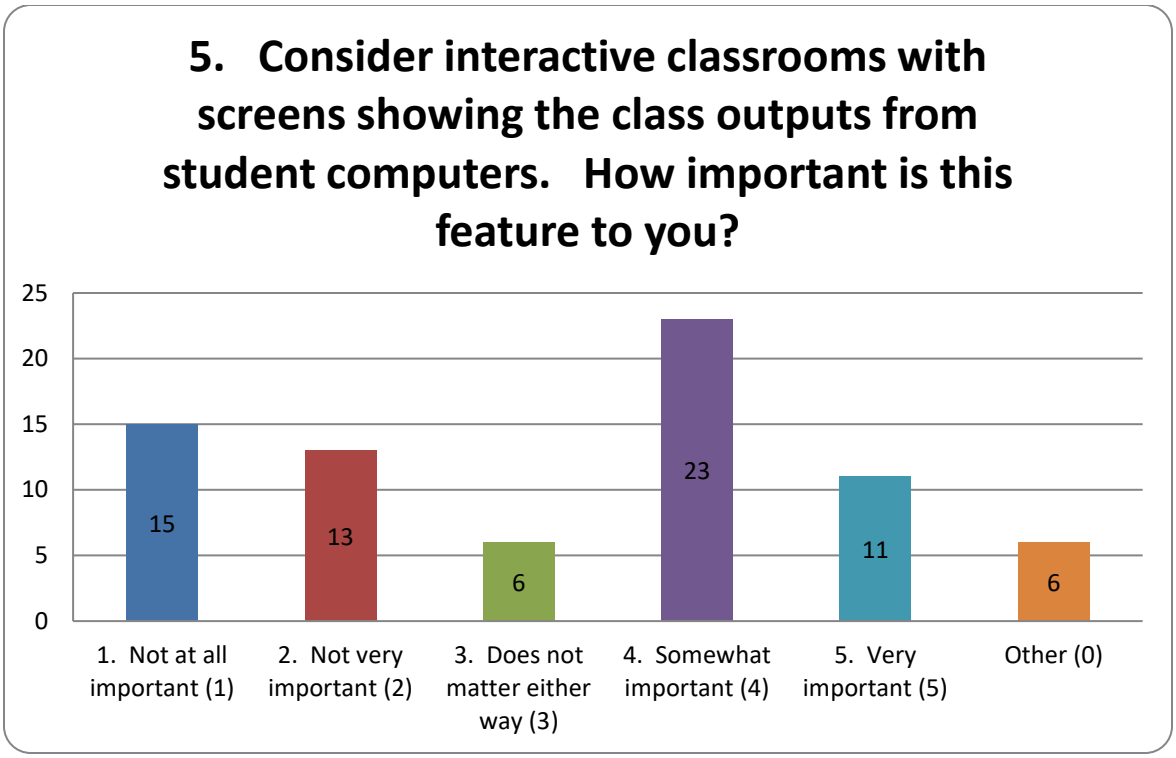

Figure 9: Response to question about displays with screen sharing capabilities

This data set supports the following finding:

Finding: **A majority of faculty would favor having screen sharing capability available in classrooms. This capability is not widely available in most AFIT classrooms.**

The next question deals with the idea of an experimental classroom. This would allow faculty and students to utilized new instructional capabilities without large investments. Promising technologies could be tested and then implemented on a larger scale when they are deemed mature enough for large scale implementation. Figure 10 shows the response to a question about the need for such a facility at AFIT.

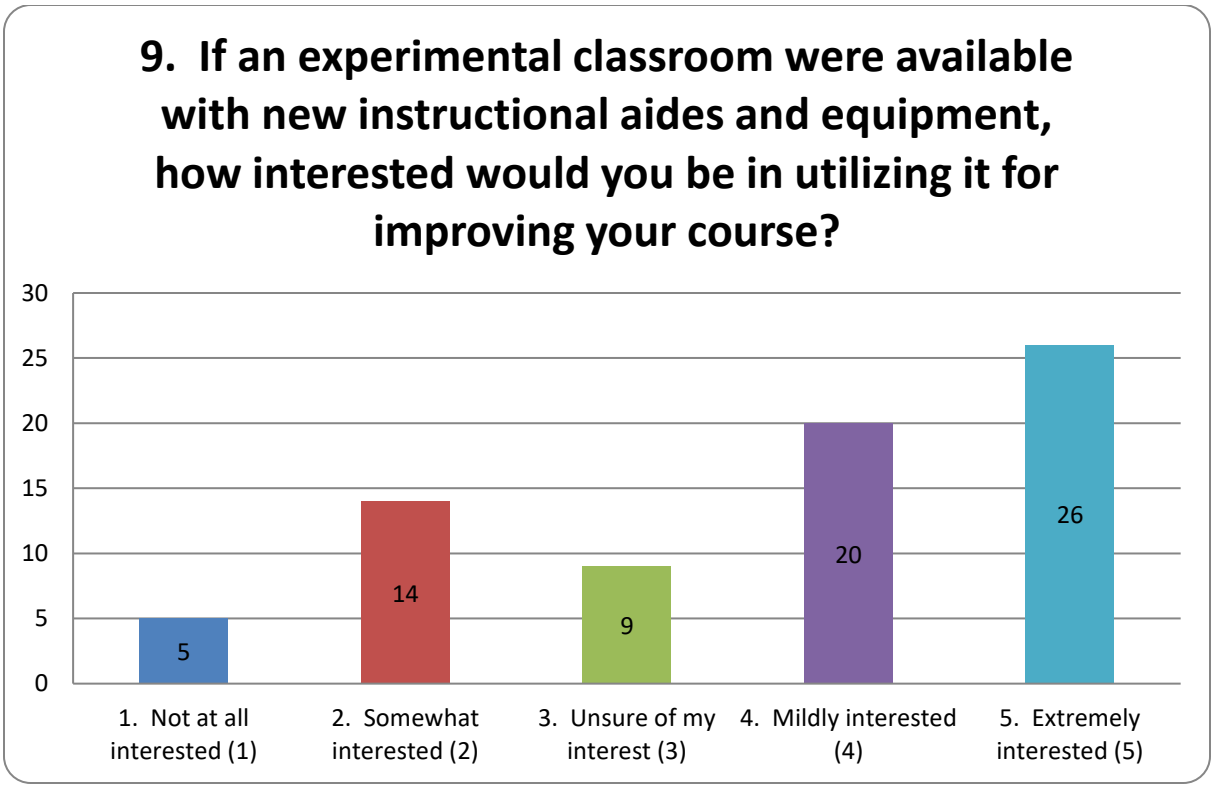

Figure 10: Response on question about need for an experimental classroom

This data set supports the following finding:

Finding: **A majority of faculty would favor having access to an experimental classroom. This capability is not available at AFIT.**

Thrust Area 2: E-Learning technologies (Resident/Distant Learning)

This part of the study involved a categorization effort utilizing a survey of instructors who are already immersed in DL courses and e-learning efforts. The survey was designed to find out answers by asking the following open-ended questions:

1. Do you have adequate technology to use e-learning tools the way you want?
2. Did you get the training and assistance you needed when you got started? If not, how can AFIT improve this?
3. How has the use of e-learning tools improved your ability to provide quality instruction?
4. Are your peers hindered from using e-learning technologies by any obstacles that could be removed or reduced? How so?

Hundreds of text responses were analyzed from this data set and combined with responses from the survey on organizational structures and success in school, which also contained comments pertinent to the subject of E-Learning. The following findings were surmised from these inputs:

Finding: Students would like to have access to video recordings of lectures

- Not to replace existing lectures, but to augment and provide reference and review
- Classroom interaction and collaboration still valued
- Already available from limited numbers of courses at AFIT

Finding: There exist severe limitations on video conferencing capabilities at AFIT

- AU solution (Adobe Connect) relies completely on audio systems available on AFIT computers which are poor to non-existent
- Lack of administrator privileges on computers means installing simple devices like microphones and web cameras is impossible

Finding: There exists a lack of a student management system combined with a student learning system within some schools

- Courses offered in some DL courses feel disconnected from student registration systems
- Produces some dissatisfaction with some (not all) online programs

Finding: There is a lack of a readily available/reliable file sharing system

- Share drives are used for file sharing, but not readily accessible from home
- Problems accessing VPN/VDI make the use of intranet share drives problematic

Finding: There is a lack of training opportunities for E-learning and distance delivery resources

- Many comments indicated their DL and E-learning training was mostly on the job
- Of those who received training 37% indicate that they would like to have more training

Thrust Area 3: Faculty Development

The internal discovery effort was designed to determine what faculty development activities are ongoing at AFIT is accomplished via two surveys. Sample survey questions from the first survey are shown below.

a. What kinds of faculty development are being pursued within your department/school?

b. Is there a requirement for faculty to articulate a development plan during the annual review cycle?
c. How many days a year do you spend on faculty development?
d. How do you think faculty development activities within your department can be improved?
e. What activities do faculty pursue to improve their teaching?
f. What activities do faculty pursue to improve their research?
g. What activities do faculty pursue to improve through service?
h. What are your long-term goals for your career?
i. What faculty development activities do you pursue to achieve those goals?
j. What kind of activities do you pursue to help you become a better teacher?
k. What connection do you believe exists between teaching and research?
l. How do you pursue life-long learning?
m. What roll do you see research activities playing in your faculty development?
n. What kind of service activities do you pursue and do they aid in your development as a faculty member?

The first survey had 37 participants and helped our team to determine what people think faculty development is and how they are currently pursuing it. Key findings obtained from the first survey are based on the responses to the following questions:

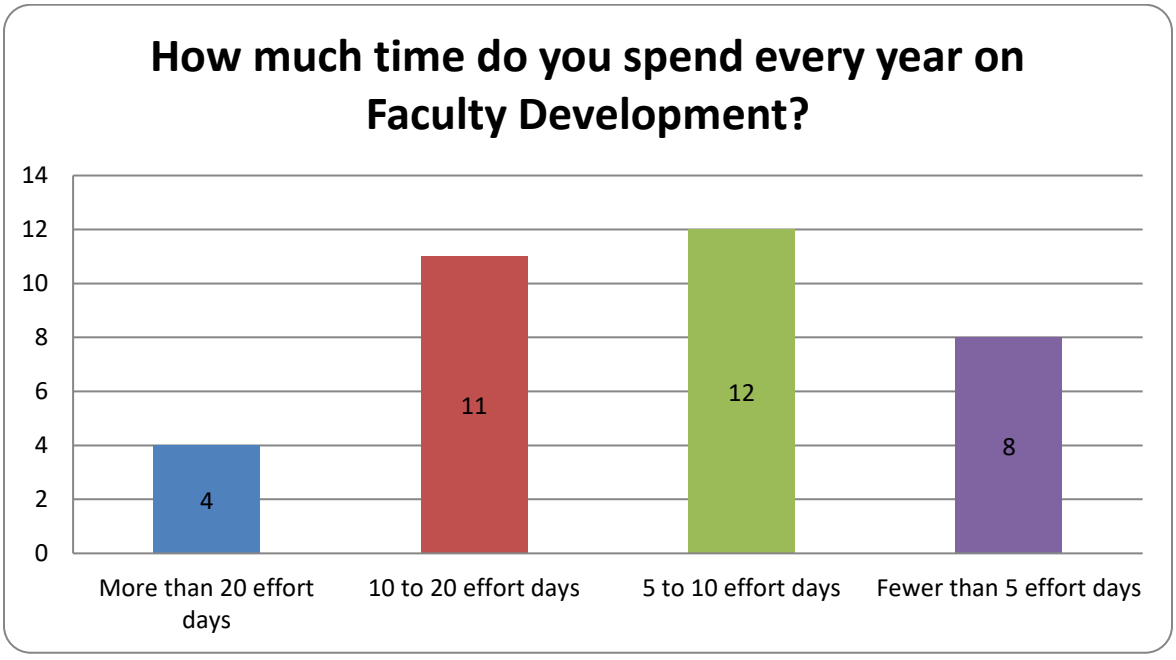

Figure 11: Number of days spent accomplishing faculty development per year

Finding: The majority of faculty spend less than 1 day a month accomplishing faculty development

Another question was asked about requirements for articulating a faculty development plan during the appraisal cycle. When asked if faculty must articulate a development plan during each appraisal cycle, only 27% of respondents indicated that they did as shown in Figure 12.

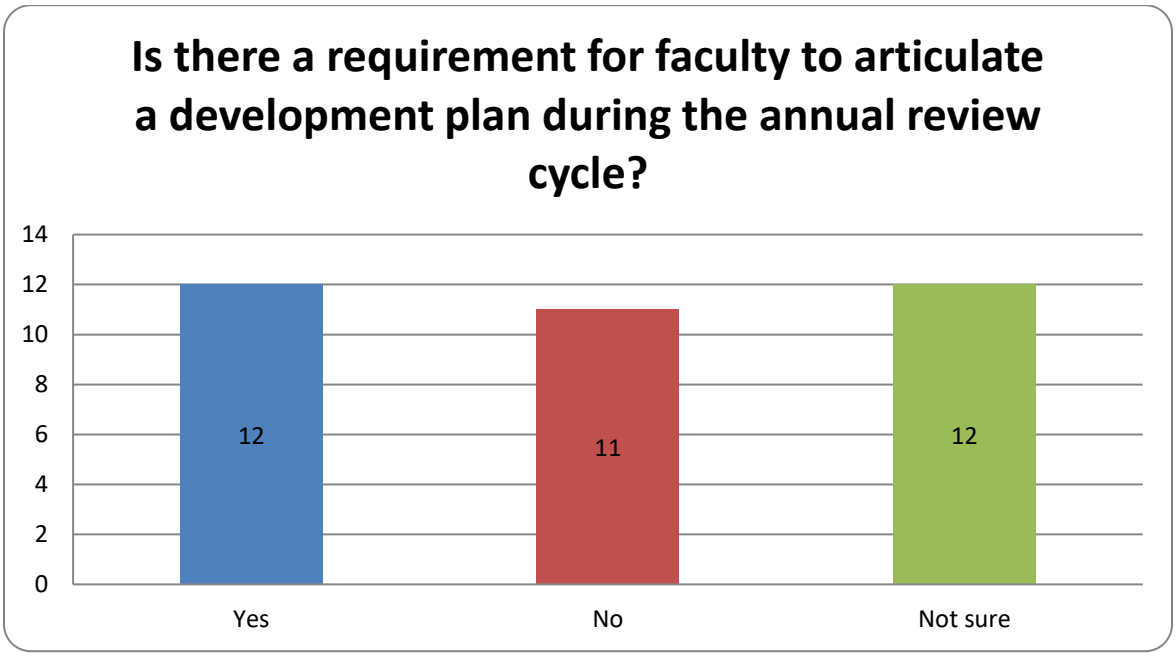

Figure 12: Number of faculty required to articulate a development plan during their yearly appraisal

Finding: The majority of faculty do not articulate a development plan as part of their yearly appraisal.

Finally, when asked an open ended question about plans for sabbaticals, most faculty indicated that there was neither time nor money to accomplish them. This leads to the following finding:

Finding: There is a lack of available time/money/resources for sabbaticals

The output of that survey helped to shape the second survey aimed at measuring interest in faculty develop activities that are not being widely practiced at AFIT. A question asked in the second survey dealt with formation mentoring communities. These groups consist of faculty or staff who share common problems, giving them a venue to discuss solutions and find support. Figure 13 shows the results of the survey.

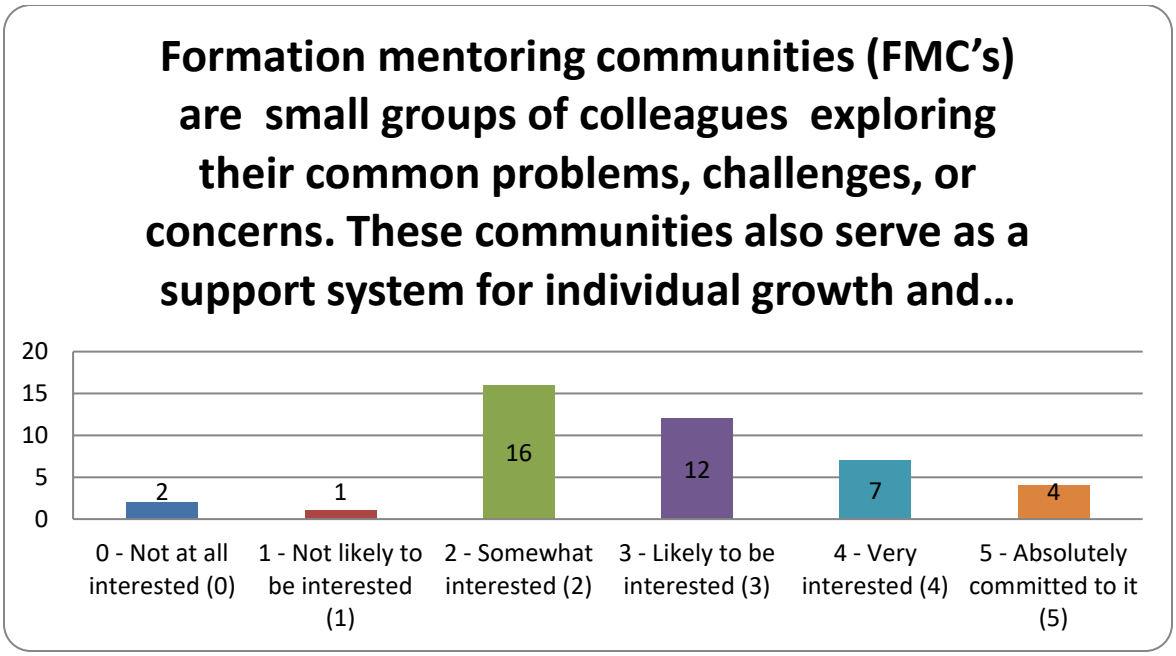

Figure 13: Faculty interest in formation mentoring communities

Finding: Faculty wish to participate in formation mentoring communities, which do not currently exist at AFIT

Another question asked on the second survey dealt with availability of senior leadership within each school for interacting with faculty. For example, a dean might have a lunchtime gathering with faculty in his school in order to accomplishing mentoring and get more connected with their personnel. Figure 14 shows the survey response from this question:

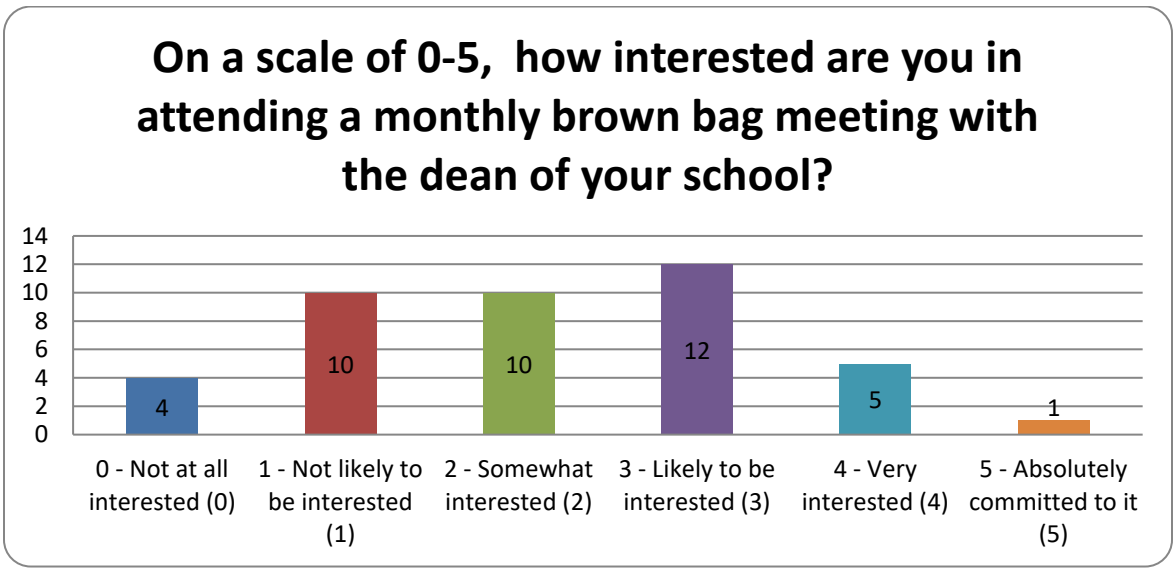

Figure 14: Faculty response to question involving brown bag lunches with the dean of their school.

Finding: Faculty would like to participate in activities that involve chances to interact with senior leadership.

Thrust Area 4: Infrastructure to support advanced instructional capabilities

No survey or focus group meeting was designed to collect data in this area. As a consequence of asking open-ended questions in the success in school survey as well as the organizational structures area, hundreds of text comments were collected and analyzed. The following findings were arrived at from this set of text comments:

Finding: Network Reliability and Speed is a consistent problem

- 50% of comments about computer networks indicate problems with reliability and speed
- Reliable and fast networks cited as key ingredient for success in all educational areas

Finding: Need for an enterprise solution for teleconferencing capability

- Viable video teleconferencing capability is not widely available at AFIT
- Would allow for expansion of non DL program into the DL domain
- Facilitates research collaboration and classroom interaction with subject matter experts

Finding: EN Extension services need expansion

- Should not just support distance learning
- Provides support for course design and E-Learning technologies into the classroom
- Organization received 100% Positive Feedback among those surveyed

Finding: There is a lack of power and connectivity in some classrooms for student computers

- Many AFIT classrooms do not provide power to student desk space.
- AFIT WiFi is weak in spots making connectivity unreliable
- VDI has limited desktop resources so students cannot always access common drives

Finding: There is a lack of clear and centralized scheduling functions and resource management for classrooms

- Each two-letter maintains a unique, disparate system to reserve their set of rooms

Thrust Area 5: Organizational Structures supporting effective teaching

The purpose of this effort was to identify organizational structures throughout AFIT that support teaching and learning. In order to accomplish this we conducted an electronic survey with the following open-ended questions:

1. Beyond the classroom environment, what AFIT organizational structures are you aware of that support teaching and learning?
2. Which of these organizational structures do you find to be a benefit to your teaching/learning experience at AFIT?
3. Which of these organizational structures do you find to be a challenge to your teaching/learning experience at AFIT?
4. Are there any organizational structures that you would like to see implemented at AFIT to facilitate effective teaching and learning?

Text responses were analyzed and grouped based on their correlation to organizational structures at AFIT. Figure 15 shows the breakdown of comments received and divides them into negative and positive comments.

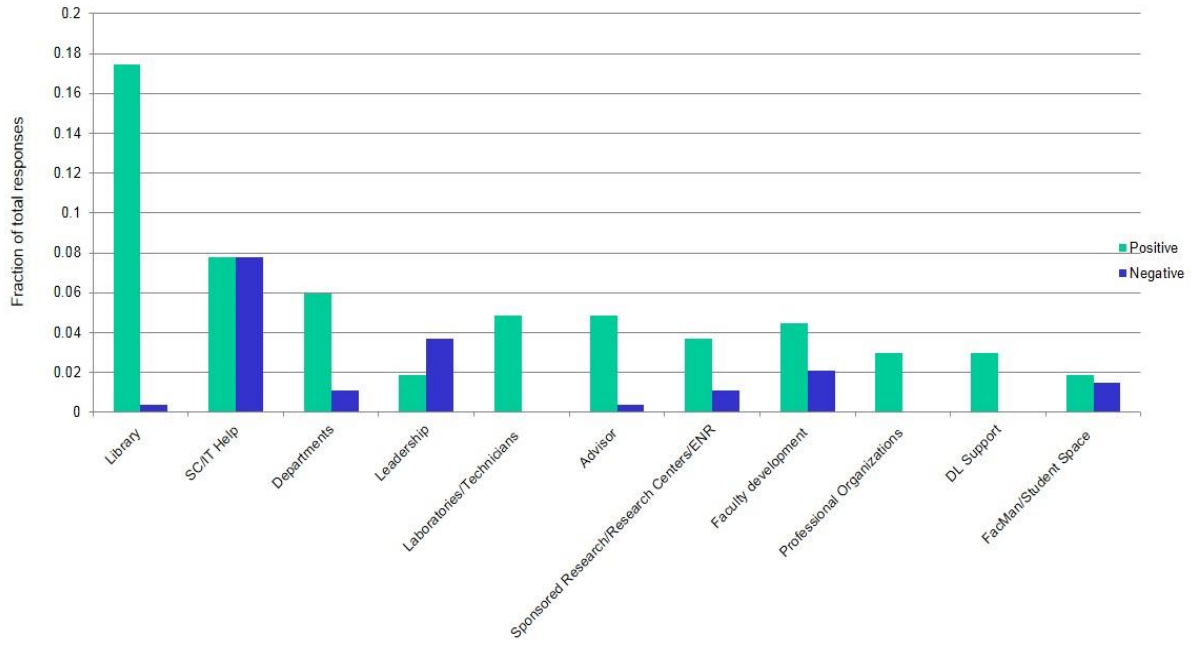

Figure 15: Fraction of total comments on existing organizational structures at AFIT

Comments garnered from this survey that occurred with high frequency served to provide key findings related to organizational structures at AFIT.

Summary of Findings:

1. **Too many restrictive IT policies** (SC/IT Help Category)

    - Nearly 10% of all negative comments on AFIT organizational structures focused on this
    - IT policies inhibit efficient exchange of information
    - File sharing is cumbersome and not conducive for classroom interaction
    - Software restrictions make offering new tools cumbersome
    - Lack of administrative controls by local users makes even small problems large
        - Professors at AF Academy have admin privileges

2. **Lack of Peer to Peer Teaching Evaluations** (Academic Departments Category)

    - Not practiced by all departments within all schools
    - Ties into mentoring in faculty development
    - Many comments called out the need for this to improve teaching and augment our promotion and tenure process

3. **(EN) Basic Instructor Course Should be Longer and Include More Topics** (Faculty Development Category)
    - 50% of comments indicated need for improvement
    - Ideas to include how to better integrate research and teaching
    - Classroom design and management topics are other areas that could use expansion

4. **Multiple Chains of Leadership Within the Graduate School Need to Be Removed** (Leadership Category)
    - Nearly 10% of all negative comments on AFIT organizational structures focused on this
    - Interaction with multiple chains is confusing
    - Spending time figuring out who to ask for what
    - Having extra meetings to connect with multiple leadership chains
    - Training requirements come from different directions resulting in non-compliance

5. **AFIT Campus Needs a Student Writing Center** (New Organizational Structures)
    - Writing center needed to improve the quality of thesis and research projects
    - Finding information relevant to thesis work is important for success

- Library listed as most helpful organizational structure: 98% Positive

Resources

The following is a list of resources and their associated dollar value that were utilized to carry out the project.

Committee Manpower (8x 0.1FTE/year)*14 months*$200K = $187K

Supplies and Incentives = $750

Survey Classroom Utilization and E-Learning: (76x 1 FTE/hour)*0.5 hours*$96 = $3,648

Panel Discussion on Key Elements of Success in Grad School: (40x 1 FTE/hour)*1 hours*$96 = $3,840

Focus Group on Distance Learning: (10x 1 FTE/hour)*2 hours*$96 = $1,920

Surveys on Faculty Development: (75x 1 FTE/hour)*0.5 hours*$96 = $3,600

Survey on Key Elements of Success in Graduate School: (109x 1 FTE/hour)*0.5 hours*$96 = $5,232

Focus Group on Classroom Utilization and E-Learning: (9x 1 FTE/hour)*1 hours*$96 = *864

Focus Group on Success in Grad School (8x 1 FTE/hour)*1 hours*$96 = $768

Survey for Continuing Education Students(37x 1 FTE/hour)*0.5 hours*$96 = $1,776

Survey for Staff(36x 1 FTE/hour)*0.5 hours*$96 = $1,728

Total: $211,126

Conclusions

The internal discovery study effort endeavored to engage the AFIT community and discover how success in graduate and continuing education is achieved. This project was unprecedented and has the potential to reshape our programs through the cross-fertilization that is bound to occur when we discover the potential diversity of activities going on at AFIT that are related to our core business. The study was kicked off with a discussion that will challenge us to define what we think stimulates learning and contributes to student success at AFIT. To this end, different delivery mechanisms were implemented and tested including online surveys, focus groups as well as net meetings. With 400 participants across the AFIT schools, not a single organization or labor group was left out of this study. The hope is that the data archive and methodology created from this experience will set an example for future improvement efforts.

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14. ABSTRACT

This document contains results of a study designed to document the key elements for student success at AFIT in our continuing education and graduate programs and discover to what degree they exist at AFIT. The effort represents an attempt to guide improvement of our graduate and continuing education programs through experience available from our faculty, staff and students. The process outlined herein was designed to achieve success by allowing the participants to define what it means to succeed and then self-assess the presence of these factors at AFIT. It's therefore a true internal discovery process since its output reflects the state of our internal understanding of teaching and learning excellence. This inclusive approach, which garnered participation from 400 people across AFIT's schools, will be used in conjunction with the external committee's recommendations to determine a course of action to invest into AFIT's instructional capabilities.

15. SUBJECT TERMS

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