Instructional Continuity

This site builds on last year's "tips for instructional continuity," which still apply. But with these easy steps, faculty can achieve even more flexibility:

Invest in a cheap USB headset with microphone

If you can stick a USB MP3 player into the side of your computer or laptop, using a USB headset and mic will give you so many more "show AND tell" options with Blackboard, Wimba and simple, free "screen casting" tools that we've promoted effectively through the hybrid learning initiative. Why? An MP3 player ONLY lets you record audio on that device. A USB headset and using Wimba lets you do that AND show images, presentations or demos--all with synchronized audio. You can even hold the equivalent of a conference call using Wimba's VoIP (Voice over IP) protocol. DoIT will continue to make MP3 players available (we distributed 140 last year and have 60 left). But with a little more time to prepare this year, and better remote support options through our 24/7 service, faculty should find these easier to do and provides more flexibility than MP3 recorders alone.

We have developed short, online video demos showing how to use the USB headsets with Wimba:

- Buying a USB headset at the UMBC Bookstore
- How to plug in a USB headset into a computer
- How to run the Wimba wizard
- How to create a Wimba classroom
- How to upload content (PowerPoint presentation)
- How to record and archive presentation
- How to enter an archived Wimba classroom

Take a two-week, online course in "how to teach an online course"

Since most faculty teach the way they were taught (and most weren't taught with technology), the best way to start is to first learn online, when someone else is driving the experience. As members of the Sloan Consortium, UMBC faculty have access to Sloan-C's "College Pass" program, which allows you to register for online courses such as the two-week "Getting Started" course that will be offered August 25, October 13 and November 3. This may not be for everyone, but we have the Sloan-C membership which has other workshops, all of which is on a first-come, first-served basis for our available "seats."

Practice Instructional Continuity with a Virtual "Snow Day"

The impact of February's "snow week" is still fresh on everyone's mind, so we're going to propose a virtual snow day once a month in the fall. We encourage faculty to designate these as non face-to-face (f2f) instructional days, but not holidays in terms of student participation. As with all of our support, we'll have short, online video demos of tools and ideas faculty might consider, drawn largely from our hybrid "effective practices" site at www.umbc.edu/oit/hybrid/practice. We'll also schedule some "online/hybrid drop in sessions" a week or so before the "snow day." Tentative virtual "snow days" will be as follows:

- Friday, September 24
- Friday, October 29
- Friday, November 19 (BEFORE Thanksgiving break)
- Friday, December, 10 (Last Friday of Fall 2010 semester)

Take Advantage of 24/7 Bb Support

In November, we'll have been using the 24/7 Bb support resource for a year. Typically, the service is used more by students than faculty, but this is a good place to start for basic, "getting started" kind of help using Blackboard. If people have questions about advanced topics, including UMBC-specific issues dealing with course creation or enrollment, then the 24/7 support service will do a "warm transfer" to our DoIT Help Desk during regular office hours, or escalate via an RT ticket after hours. The 24/7 Bb support can be reached via the Blackboard Help tab inside Blackboard or directly at http://bbsupport.umbc.edu.