

TABLET PROJECT IN AN ARTS COLLEGE

Tom Walters recently accepted a new position at his college as the Director of Information Technology. Tom had been a respected faculty member at the college for the past 15 years. The college—a small, private institution in the Southwest—offers a variety of programs in the liberal arts and professional areas. Enrollment includes 1,500 full-time traditional students and about 1,000 working adults attending evening programs. Many instructors supplement their courses with information on the Internet and course Web sites, but they do not offer distance-learning programs. The college's niche is serving students in the region who like the setting of a small liberal arts college.

Like other institutions of higher learning, the use of IT at the college has grown tremendously in the past 10 years. Wireless access is available everywhere on campus. Only a few classrooms on campus have computers for the instructors and students, and most other classrooms have only instructor stations and projection systems. Tom knew that several colleges throughout the country require that all students lease laptops or tablets, and that these colleges incorporate technology components into most courses. This idea fascinated him. He and two other members of the IT department visited a local college that had required all students to lease laptops for the past three years, and they were very impressed with what they saw and heard. Because tablets were becoming more popular, they thought it would make more sense to require tablets instead of laptops. Tom had heard how easy it was for faculty members to create interactive course materials that would run on tablets; these materials also could help reduce the cost of textbooks, a concern expressed by many of his students. Tom and his staff developed plans to start requiring students either to lease or purchase tablets at their college the next year.

Tom sent an e-mail to all faculty and staff in September, and briefly described his plans. He did not get much response, however, until the February faculty meeting. As he described some of the details of his plan, the chairs of the History, English, Philosophy, and Economics departments all voiced their opposition to the idea. They eloquently stated that the college was not a technical training school, and that they did not have time to write their own course materials to run on tablets. They liked the books they used, and students could already buy books in an electronic format, but most preferred the print versions. Members of the Computer Science department voiced their concern that almost all of their students already had state-of-the-art laptops and would not want to pay a mandatory fee to lease less-powerful tablets. The director of the adult education program expressed her concern that many adult-education students would balk at an increase in fees or required technology. Tom was in shock to hear his colleagues' responses, especially after he and his staff had spent a lot of time planning how to implement tablets at their campus. **Now what should he do? What have been missed by Tom?**