

# The NYU ITS Academic Discovery Project

## Exploring Faculty & Student Technology Needs

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ITS strives to give the University's academic community the technology services that can best support its diverse research and instructional goals, and to anticipate its future needs as well as the opportunities new technologies might provide. The multi-departmental NYU Academic Discovery Project arose in the spring 2008 semester as part of the ongoing effort to obtain information that can inform and guide ITS' strategic initiatives. The results are helping to provide a clearer picture of the role that technology services play — and can play — in teaching, research and learning at NYU.

### Interviews, Focus Groups, Surveys

ITS invited colleagues from the NYU Libraries, the Office of Faculty Resources, and NYU Press to sit on the project's advisory board. They would work in collaboration with ITS Academic Technology Services staff, as well as organizational assessment and development consultants from MOR Associates, Inc., with the purpose of gathering insights from faculty and students on the use of technology in teaching and learning at NYU.

The first part of the process involved a series of interviews and focus group meetings. Faculty members from different departments at the Washington Square campus were invited to meet in one-on-one sessions with expert interviewers from MOR Associates. In addition to these faculty interviews, there were student focus groups in which MOR Associates staff members talked with both undergraduate- and graduate-level students about their technology needs and expectations. The data collected from these faculty interviews and student focus groups provided the foundation for the

project's next and larger phase: the surveys.

Two surveys were created — one for faculty and another for students. Working with MOR consultants over the course of the summer, the project's advisory group vetted the subject areas and questions for the surveys, and in fall 2008, the surveys were administered. Eight hundred randomly selected faculty from all NYU schools and departments were invited by email to participate. Similarly, 800 students were invited to participate, with student invitations being divided equally between graduate and undergraduate students. The emailed invitations contained links to the web-delivered surveys, which included a variety of item types — Likert (rating) scales, multiple choice, and fill-ins, as well as free-form comment boxes.

### How Technology Is Used & Viewed

There was a tremendous response from both faculty and students. More than half of the faculty and students invited to participate in the surveys did, which was an excellent response rate, increasing the reliability of statistical analyses performed on the collected data. The final report reviewed the frequency with which NYU faculty and students use existing technology services, their preferred or accustomed methods for learning about technology services, and how they perceive the levels of service and technology that ITS provides to the community.

Frequency of use information is helpful for resource planning because it highlights the technologies and services deserving the greatest amount of attention, as well as areas where resources ought to be focused. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that the most frequently

used services are NYU Blackboard, email, and Lyris Lists. Faculty reported using these services for both instruction and research, with the majority using them either daily or weekly.

When computer labs were used for part of classroom and instructional sessions, they were used almost 80 percent of the time for individual assignments and instructors' presentations, with almost equal time given to both activities. Heavy usage of computer labs was also reported for student presentations and collaborative group work, which garnered 62 percent and 48 percent of the time, respectively.

With respect to new or expanded technology services that respondents would like to see, the areas of greatest interest included wireless access, assistance with creating and maintaining websites, support for collaborative learning tools, and support for collaborative research tools.

### Learning About Technology

In particular, faculty members were asked about how they learned of new resources (both NYU-provided and not), their adoption of new technologies, and their methods for learning about available support systems. The three most common means by which faculty "learn something useful on technology" are via the NYU Libraries' website, word-of-mouth, and ITS email communications. More than 75 percent of the respondents reported these methods as their most common sources of such information.

More than one third of faculty reported learning useful information about academic technology from the NYU Libraries' website on a frequent basis. The NYU Libraries

and ITS work closely on a number of projects designed to provide faculty with electronic resources and tools that aid both instruction and research. The majority of tutorials and how-to's, as well as Help Desk information, are found on the Ask ITS website at *AskITS.nyu.edu* (see sidebar for more).

Training sessions — classes, workshops, and clinics — are available through both ITS and the NYU Libraries. These resources are being expanded continually, and even more so in response to the Academic Discovery survey results, in which NYU faculty and students expressed a need for increased familiarity with, and understanding of, the instructional and research technologies available to them.

### Moving Forward

With a clearer understanding of the perspectives and interests of faculty, researchers, and students, ITS and its NYU collaborators in this project can continue to plan, develop and coordinate the technology services that can best support them. As ITS and the Libraries work to sustain current IT services and build/roll-out new ones, their decision about such things can be informed by the survey results.

Many of our survey respondents expressed interest in participating in future focus groups on a variety of topics. If you are a faculty member or student who would like to participate in future focus groups, please send an email to *fts.focusgroups@nyu.edu*. \$

## For Technology Help & Training

Online tutorials and support can be found on the ITS website at *www.nyu.edu/its/faq* and in the Ask ITS knowledgebase at *AskITS.nyu.edu*.

For information on classes offered by ITS (some in collaboration with the NYU Libraries), visit *www.nyu.edu/its/classes*.

For information on classes offered by the NYU Libraries (some in collaboration with ITS), visit *library.nyu.edu/classes*.

See p. 5 for information on the NYU Data Service Studio, and p. 49 for details on the Digital Studio and ITS Client Services.

For additional information and assistance, contact ITS Client Services at *AskITS@nyu.edu* or 1-212-998-3333.