

Digital Media Center Plan

(Institutional Self-study, Criterion Five, p. 95)

Introduction

Since it's beginning the Digital Media Center—working in conjunction with the Community Development office—has reached out from the IIT campus to the community that surrounds it, successfully lifting some of the barriers that have existed between IIT and its neighbors for many years.

Through our Digital Media Center Community Outreach Program we've not only begun to change the community's perception of IIT, but IIT's perception of who we want to be in the community. We've gone from thinking of the Digital Media Center and IIT as "location" or "destination" —a place where we expected, in the future, that the community would come for learning—to thinking of ourselves as part of the "glue" which binds the community together; and together with IIT, as a fellow community member. Using our unique resources—smart people, institutional influence and technological expertise—we've found a much needed community role to fill: facilitator. And in this role we're not only showing community schools and organizations that we can help, but that they can also help each other and work together toward shared goals.

The Community Challenges, Needs and IIT's Response

We started our outreach program efforts with the idea of using our resources—as a premier technology institution—to bring the community to a more equal footing in terms of technology capability and math and science education. Our outreach objectives were two-fold:

1. To organize Illinois Institute of Technology's internal resources and those of neighboring organizations to help bridge the Digital Divide in Bronzeville.
2. To partner with Bronzeville schools and community groups to improve academic achievement and performance, particularly in science, math, engineering and technology.

And these are our objectives still. But when we got out into the community we realized that there was a lot of work to do in building the relationships and basic infrastructure required as a foundation to accomplish these objectives.

Bringing better reading, math and science curriculum to the schools, for example, required first developing strong relationships with classroom teachers and school principals. And bridging the digital divide in Bronzeville meant first tackling the unpleasant reality of old, broken machines, very basic infrastructure needs and school/community support staff that had only basic technology knowledge and no formal training.

To date, we have collaborated with more than 45 schools and community-based organizations to understand the community's needs and create outreach activities that address their current reality. Through these collaborations, our understanding of what is needed to achieve our original objectives has changed significantly. Our successes stem from our willingness to step back from our original vision and provide support that meets Bronzeville schools and organizations where they are now.

Population Served and the Anticipated Impact

There are two target populations that are served and impacted by the Digital Media Center Community Outreach Program. The first population is school age children in grades K-12 from the Bronzeville area. These minority children will have the opportunity to experience technology and will be encouraged to incorporate it into their lives. Students will be directly impacted by programming efforts that involve the K-12 students and indirectly impacted by programming efforts that focus on the training and development of K-12 teachers. The second population is IIT students. Their involvement with the Digital Media Center Community Outreach Program and the new school of education will offer an opportunity to participate in community service and to serve as mentors to the next generation of students.

Ultimately, the Digital Media Center is designed to be a shared-use facility for IIT students and K-12 school children, parents and teachers from IIT's surrounding communities, with a focus on historic Bronzeville. The computer lab will be housed on IIT's main campus. The lab will be fully equipped with a variety of state-of-the-art digital equipment designed for interactive learning—Internet hookups, advanced PCs, projection and editing devices.

The DMC Community Outreach Program

Vision

The IIT Digital Media Center Community Outreach Program will empower the Bronzeville and surrounding communities to embrace the power of technology / digital inclusion to impact social change.

Goal

To bridge the digital divide (promote digital inclusion) in Bronzeville and Chicago, and to improve reading, math, science and technology education in the Bronzeville and other neighborhood communities.

Mission

Our mission of “Technical Excellence” and our TechE Outreach Program direct our integrated approach towards “digital inclusion.” By employing IIT students and by partnering with the community, the DMC provides:

1. Technical support and services to schools and agencies
2. Curriculum and content development or “wetware” to support community technology centers
3. STEM Institute for youth

Technical Support Initiative (TSI)

The goal of the TSI is to create a highly skilled technical task force that respond to community technical issues. TSI is fully staffed by IIT students. In order for Community Technology Centers (CTC) and their computer labs to be fully effective in their digital divide issue, the equipment needs to be up and running. TSI staff members are just a phone call away in order to answer this demonstrated need. TSI staff can repair and refurbish machines, install and maintain networks, or consult on the additions of new equipment to the labs. All organizations, CTCs, local businesses, and schools can benefit from the work of the TSI. All work is performed either at or below cost depending on previously established agreements with the DMC.

Curriculum and Content Development

The goal of the curriculum and content development is to assist CTCs with quality content to deliver to their constituency. With an emphasis on reading, math and science, the Digital Media Center is poised to develop very effective and highly innovative materials for delivery within the centers. The content will be developed in discreet modules and CTCs can pick and choose which modules are used in their labs. These modules can be used in conjunction with current facilitators or as stand-alone learning initiatives within the CTC.

Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) Institute

The goal of the STEM Institute is to target the improvement of math, science and technology skills for middle and high school students and to encourage students to pursue careers in the math, science and technological fields. The STEM Institute will provide a central organizing office that will manage the existing pre-college programming efforts targeting students and teachers. The current programs at IIT include student enrichment programs, collaborations with the Bronzeville Neighborhood Learning Network (a community web center located on IIT’s main campus), IIT’s new Math and Science secondary education program and Neighborhood Technology Partnerships. In addition to building on the existing math, science and technology outreach programs, the objectives of the STEM Institute include responding to the needs and requests of local schools and community agencies to expand and enhance their math, science and technology education programs and developing and implementing specific outreach and enrichment programs.

Conclusion

The Digital Media Center Community Outreach Program is an integral part of our comprehensive strategy to improve math and science education in the Chicago Public Schools, particularly in the Bronzeville area. We seek your support to enable IIT's Digital Media Center Community Outreach Program to continue to address the infrastructure and technology access issues in the Bronzeville area schools and community centers and support and to improve math, science and technology education in the Bronzeville and other neighborhood communities.

By focusing on decreasing the "digital divide" and improving reading, math, science and technology education in the Bronzeville community, we are making an investment in education and economic development that will pay dividends well into the future. We are building strong and lasting relationships with the Bronzeville community and we are ensuring that members of the community are prepared for the technological advancements of the next millennium. We believe that the community outreach program will serve as a national model for universities in addressing the educational needs of underserved urban communities throughout the country.