

MIT Department Helps Faculty Connect Innovation and Technology

Study.com: I think that the Office of Education and Innovation Technology is one of the coolest college offices that I have ever heard of or seen in my life. Could you tell me a little bit about it and what you do?

Brandon Muramatsu: A few years ago at MIT we took a look at how we had organized academic computing and administrative computing; in most universities these are



the two organizations that handle the technology infrastructure on campus. At the time, the decision was made to reorganize pieces of academic computing. Stuff like the learning management system went to central IT, and other parts to the library. Our group, the Office of Educational Innovation and Technology was created to bridge between faculty innovation and the service organizations. We do the fun stuff from working with faculty, looking at scaling up innovation, and experimenting with things. We're part of the Dean for Undergraduate Education's office, and so our mission is to work with MIT faculty to do teaching and learning innovations for MIT students.

I do a number of things with OEIT, ranging from working with individual faculty members to looking at strategic initiatives for the university to how we might move forward with some of the teaching and learning innovations that we see in the world at large. So it's both the local focus with individual faculty and students, as well as an Institute-wide focus. I'm also fortunate to be able to continue to participate in the open education community and the broader technology and learning community outside of MIT.

Study.com: Can you tell our readers a little bit about some of the very cool things that OEIT does and helps with?

BM: We have a couple big project areas. One group is called STAR; it takes research software, software that faculty and graduate students are using to perform research, and looks at how it might be used in undergraduate classes. More generally they look at the educational problems faculty want to address or they have in their teaching that technology might be able to help address. And so what we've done is we've taken this research software, we've rebuilt pieces of it and we've also put in interfaces that are much more approachable, with a few minutes of introduction for undergrads, versus say months of learning if you're a graduate student trying to understand all the nuances of the software. Our students can get started very quickly doing some really cool learning activities.

Then the other group is the one that I work in, it's called Content and Curriculum. As the name says, we have a number of projects looking at how content is related to MIT's curriculum, and how it's related to pedagogy.

One of the projects that we launched about a year and a half ago is something we're calling Project Greenfield. I know about the notion of greenfield from manufacturing, it's an industrial age term where factories and production used to be in towns and cities (brownfields), and if you wanted to try doing something new, you would go out into a green field and start over. And so we sort of took that name and started to think about - and we've actually been thinking about this for years - how MIT has this great resource, OpenCourseWare, but that we thought it could be much more. We wanted to try this little tweak to OCW or this other little experiment. Instead of experimenting on OCW live, we came to the realization that wait, we could just try doing all of these ourselves under the same license that everybody else can. What we've done is we've made a copy and are starting to experiment with it.

Study.com: OEIT is awesome, especially for MIT students, but what opportunities do other students who don't attend MIT have? Can they use OEIT's resources? Is there anything they can take advantage of, other than obviously OpenCourseWare?

BM: So OpenCourseWare exists. The thread of openness pervades much of what we do at OEIT. And even though we're doing things in some cases very specifically for MIT students, much of what we do is openly available on the Web. The STAR tools are all on the Web; you can download them, you can use them, there are exercises that you can use as part of them. All of the things that we're doing to play around with OpenCourseWare are also on the Web. The other software tools we're developing is often open source, so individual tools and things you can use.

I think it'll be interesting as we continue to move forward whether there's additional opportunities for the world at large to really start to use this same set of tools that we're providing for MIT students.

MIT led the open education revolution and won the [2011 People's Choice Award for Best Open Education Resource \(Non-Video\)](#). Now it's leading a new phase with the recently announced MITx, an online learning initiative that will allow students to take rigorous MIT-style courses and receive certificates for demonstrating their mastery of material.