

ITLS Interim Department Head Looks to the Future | CEHS

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Dr. Andrew Walker took over as the Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences interim department head in July, when Dr. Mimi Recker stepped down to go on sabbatical.

"There are some big shoes for me to fill," Walker said. He steps into a department that the Educational Media and Technology Yearbook recently described as possibly "the top program in the world for research productivity."

Walker's bachelor's degree was in English at Washington State University but he is a self-professed and largely self-taught geek who enjoys programming as much as he likes to engage in academic writing and working on grants. Today his research delves into topics like technology teacher professional development, problem-based learning and meta-analysis and he has recently started to explore educational data mining.

One of his favorite projects is an NSF-funded grant examining how computer-based systems can assist students doing complex problem solving, like troubleshooting a desktop computer. The meta-analysis is attempting to look at how different kinds of assistance are associated with the range of student learning outcomes.

In addition to welcoming a new department head, ITLS is enjoying the success of its students. "I've never had a student struggle to find a job in our field," Walker said. "With professional success often coming before the completion of their program, our students are highly

sought after. When they choose to do internships, they are paid experiences that often lead directly to job offers."

Graduates of the program wind up going in many different directions. Many already work in industry and choose to continue their careers there. Some are teachers in school and college settings, some work either directly for the government or for subcontractors.

It's a challenging field in large part because things change so frequently. The department strives to keep abreast of the latest technology and practices. "There's always an evolution in what you want to get out to your students," Walker said. "A big part of that evolution is taking a step back and having students take a leadership role in their studies—so that when pedagogical or technical innovation comes, they will already be thinking of themselves as lifelong learners."

As an interim department head, Walker is not looking to make big changes, but he also doesn't want to lose a year to a transition period. "We've received some national recognition for the hard work of our faculty and students. Now is a great time to market those efforts."

There are collaboration opportunities with other departments in the Emma Eccles Jones College of education and at USU. "Most of these conversations have already started and they can take years. As long as our faculty and students are on board I'm all about moving forward," he said.

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