

**ETEC 520**  
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## **Introduction**

This paper analyses the planning processes at University of British Columbia (UBC) between 2000 and 2005, and related decisions of 2010, that occurred in response to UBC's mission for the 21st century and its *Trek 2000* strategy of 1998.

The processes aimed to follow through the university's big-picture vision to fully integrate learning technologies into teaching and learning. A summary of key events follows to provide a context for this paper's analysis of the planning processes.

## **Trek 2000**

*Trek 2000* was UBC's mission and a framework of action for five to ten years. It responded to UBC's need to educate people for a knowledge based society. Among the broad strategies of *Trek 2000* were themes of people, learning, research, community and internationalization.

The 'learning' strategy of *Trek 2000* included goals to 'integrate information technology with the learning environment' and 'create new learning opportunities and methods of learning delivery' (UBC President's Office, 2001). It led to UBC's VP Academic establishing a taskforce to explore 'learning technology futures' (ACCULT, 2000, p. 3) and working with a Committee of Deans to develop an Academic Plan.

## **Integration of Learning Technologies into Curriculum**

In November 2000, the Academic Committee for the Creative Use of Learning Technologies (ACCULT) published a paper to "stimulate discussion and debate"

about the direction and implications of learning technology integration (ACCULT, 2000, p. 3). The goal of *Trek 2000* for learning technology integration would first need to be addressed by discussion of opportunities, pitfalls and organizational changes involved. Findings from workshops with faculty, staff and students informed the paper that was presented to the UBC Senate. ACCULT also presented a video, *UBC 2005: Learning with Technology*, as a visualisation of future learning. In response, the Senate felt that ACCULT was heading in the right direction, but requested further information (Vancouver Senate, 2000).

In 2002, ACCULT produced its second report, *Advancing the Creative Use of Learning Technology*, which presented recommendations that were “more concrete”. These included a move towards decentralization of learning technology combined with a central unit overseeing the creative use of learning technology.

## **Reorganization of the Distance Education and Technology Unit**

In December 2002, a *Strategic Plan for Distance Education 2008* was prepared by the Distance Education and Technology Unit (DET) . The Plan was based on consultation with staff and external experts, as well as *Trek 2000* goals, ACCULT reports and the *Academic Plan 2000*. The Plan proposed a new structure of support for faculties, one where DET linked with other central units in a service collaborative called the Teaching and Learning Support Network (TLSN). Faculties would retain their own learning technology initiatives but have the advice of the experts in the centralised network. The Plan also proposed more flexible learning delivery to address a changing student demographic. Further, it proposed actions to balance DET's budget.

In January 2003, a Visiting Team was commissioned by UBC's senior administration to review DET and its Strategic Plan. The Team acknowledged the expertise and research focus of DET. In addition, the Team stated that UBC did not appear to have a well thought out policy for learning technology and that there were overlapping functions in central administration units. The Team stated that current organizational structures and funding mechanisms at UBC impeded realization of *Trek 2000*'s goal for learning technology integration. It proposed a "migration" to a "coherent" structure for learning technology support (Visiting Team Report, 2003), however this did not mean endorsement for the TLSN.

In May 2003, DET submitted a formal response to the Visiting Team report, proposing a client service model with both centralized and decentralized services. A funding model linked to this service model was also suggested (UBC DET, 2003).

The UBC Provost established a committee, which in June 2004, reported organizational change consistent with that presented by the Visiting Team [Committee to Consider the Evolution of the Distance Education and Technology Unit at UBC (CCED), 2004]. A transition team was then put in place to manage the change.

In March 2005, a memorandum was issued by the AVP Academic Programs to the transition team that stated that dissolution of DET was cancelled (Kindler, 2005a). In April 2005, UBC awarded the stewardship of DET to the Office of Learning Technology (Kindler, 2005b).

In 2010, UBC implemented a further restructure of learning technology and distance education by merging central units into a new Centre for Teaching and Learning Technology (CTLT).

The remainder of this document critically examines the planning processes for integration of learning technology and for reorganization of DET. There are eight levels of analysis.

## **Analysis 1 - Motivations behind the two planning processes**

There are at least four motivators for the planning processes occurring for learning technology integration. One was a changing student demographic; students who juggled work and studies that wanted more flexible modes of study. The second was a pressure on universities to deliver better access to students without compromising quality or increasing costs (Bates & Sangra, 2011). The third was the funding initiative of the Government of British Columbia for innovation in higher education teaching (Bates & Sangra, 2011). The fourth was UBC's investment in technology; the university was already investing significantly in technology for research and administration, so learning technology should be included in the innovation wave (ACCULT, 2000).

ACCULT wanted to position UBC as a leading innovator in the use of technology for teaching and learning. It aimed to garner interest in the creative use of information technology. It sought input from stakeholders on what a future learning environment might look like and it identified that UBC students expected quality, state-of-the-art education using learning technology.

By contrast, the processes of reorganization of DET were motivated by the need to correct misconceptions at UBC about its function and expertise as separate from on-campus teaching, its value in helping UBC meet goals for flexible learning delivery, and issues with its budget. DET had gained international recognition as a research centre for e-learning, administered the WebCT course management system (with

clients in 57 countries), and had the instructional design expertise to support mixed-mode and fully online learning delivery. Therefore, DET wanted to promote its rightful place in the UBC organizational structure.

## **Analysis 2 - Identification of problems in current processes and organizational structure**

ACCULT's focus was on developing innovative ways of delivering credit and non-credit programs in accordance with *Trek 2000* goals (Bates & Sangra, 2011). However, it failed to identify any overlap of central administrative units towards this agenda, because it hadn't progressed its strategic planning in sufficient detail to be able to identify this problem, and because UBC was yet to establish a central support unit for mixed-mode learning delivery, called the Office of Learning Technology (Visiting Team, 2003, p. 5) which was in addition to central services of TAG, DET, IT Services, and others.

The process undertaken by DET was more thorough. It identified problems. Firstly, British Columbia fell short of the Canadian average for post-secondary enrolments and UBC's current organizational structure would not meet the growing demands for access, flexibility and diversity. DET deemed that a new organizational structure and a new mandate for DET were necessary.

DET would bring its expertise “from the margins” and operate centrally in the organizational structure towards UBC’s goals of access, flexibility and diversity (UBC DET, 2002, p. 6).

Secondly, DET identified that learning technologies were still relatively new at UBC at the time, and that ACCULT had recommended a target of 2,000 FTE mixed-mode classes by 2005 (UBC DET 2002, p. 7). DET felt that technical and pedagogical support for faculty was imperative. Faculties would have their own learning technology units, but centralised expertise of a higher level would be required. DET proposed the LTSN and for the Unit’s mandate to expand to include services for mixed-mode teaching (UBC DET, 2002).

What DET failed to disclose in its proposal, and which was later pointed out by the Visiting Team, was that overwork and burnout of DET staff was a present reality. DET had problems meeting its existing responsibilities and volume of activity.

The Visiting Team also questioned DET’s role to support courses for lifelong learners, as the Team found that the majority of students taking DE courses were on-campus students, not lifelong learners (Visiting Team, 2003, p. 4). Also that a number of DE courses were delivered by faculties, not by DET. CEDD reported in 2004 that DET was “not engaged in development and delivery of non-credit courses in any significant way” (CEDD Report, 2004, p. 4).

There was an unaddressed issue of both DET and the Visiting Team as to where centralized support for distributed learning *should lie* given that OLT was currently providing faculties with this support.

According to DET's proposal, its budget deficit would be balanced by 2004/05 and reach surplus by 2005/06. Faculties would receive the benefits of the surplus. The Visiting Team identified confusion among stakeholders about the funding base for DET, causing a number of faculties to believe that DET was taking funding away from them. Also, according to Mark Bullen, many faculties had a misguided view that they would gain financially through any decentralization of DET's budget (personal communication). DET sought to solve funding concerns by proposing a new funding model where DET would be treated as a credit operation and funded out of UBC's general purpose operating fund (UBC DET, 2003).

**Analyses 3 and 4 - Relationship, connection and coordination between the planning processes, and degree of logical and coherent planning overall.**

The level of relationship, connection and coordination between the two planning processes is best explored in the context of the overarching institutional planning at UBC because coherent, coordinated strategy, plans and funding allocations for technology stem from institutional plans.

“Too often technology for teaching is seen as a desirable nice-to-have rather than a core activity that needs to be funded adequately ... This was particularly true of those institutions that did not have a strategic plan, or did not integrate the planning of e-learning within the overall institutional plan” (Bates & Sangra, 2011 p. 93).

ACCULT was an 'ad hoc' committee, which was not formed as part of institutional processes. UBC's *Trek 2000: Report for 2000-2001* made no mention of the

Committee being formed or its work, despite ACCULT having presented to the Senate.

*Trek 2000: Report for 2000-2001* published various IT implementations against the goal to 'integrate information technology with the learning environment'. Access, delivery and marketing outcomes of continuing education were reported against the goal to 'create new learning opportunities and methods of delivery'. A statement was made that "almost all new Continuing Education courses are delivered via the Internet" (UBC President's Office, 2001, p 4). However, there was no mention of ACCULT. Without due mention of its existence and purpose in such a public report, the Committee had no 'public face' and no way of promoting its recommendation of more flexible learning delivery across the institution. DET (whose Director was on the ACCULT team) also had no 'public face' and remained a talent hidden under the brand of continuing studies.

Hence, ACCULT worked from the ground up with faculty members and consulted extensively on the potential for 'creative' applications of technology to teaching and learning. It did not get access to faculties by other means (existing committees) and it did not get the steerage of the VP Academic to produce "a detailed strategic plan with specific strategies, targets and timelines" (Bates & Sangra, 2011 p. 88) which would have gained more traction.

It was when DET's debt situation became an issue, and a formal review of the unit was ordered that a different approach to planning occurred. The Director of DET needed to influence senior administration of the expertise of his team and its value to

flexible learning delivery, and so he produced a strategy for institution-wide learning technology integration with 'compelling vision and goals' (Bates & Sangra, 2011 p. 99).

It is not known if the consultation or research undertaken for the *ACCULT Final Report* and the *DET Strategic Plan 2008* published in 2002 overlapped in method or content (e.g. did the data from one report inform the other?). There is a link of Dr. Bates as a member of ACCULT and also Director of DET, so the possibility exists..

The recommendations of ACCULT were taken more seriously by the Visiting Team and by CCED in 2004. UBC's funding would have been a driver for these reports and would have influenced decisions made about where to locate staff and what resources would be required for e-learning development, delivery and support.

A more logical approach for UBC that could have led to more coherency of strategy and planning would have been for the VP Academic to approach the *Trek 2000* learning technology integration goal by forming a working party of all Deans, Heads of the centralized support units for academic support, together with the ICT and other relevant units. The collaboration of members of such a committee might have led to "better understanding of the sometimes complex and technical issues to all those likely to be involved" (Bates & Sangra, 2011 p. 113) and a more prompt development of a strategy for e-learning, together with governance of new learning technology addressed within a "coherent, overall structure" (Bates & Sangra, 2011 p. 126).

## **Analysis 5 - Consultation**

ACCULT formed from a top-down process where the learning strategy of *Trek 2000* was delegated to the VP Academic Affairs and Provost, who then delegated planning of learning technology integration to the AVP Academic Affairs, who then established the ACCULT committee (Bates & Sangra, 2011).

ACCULT conducted workshops with faculty, staff and students from all twelve faculties before producing a discussion paper. The Committee's presentation to Senate sought feedback about whether ACCULT had correctly captured Senate's sense of the direction of technology in learning and steps towards their vision (ACCULT, 2000). ACCULT processes became a blend of top-down and bottom-up, with stakeholders being consulted at various stages.

The DET Strategic Plan was more of a bottom-up response to a departmental review. It was informed by *Trek 2000*, the *UBC Academic Plan 2000* and ACCULT reports. DET benefitted from the insights of previous consultations when conducting its own environmental scan and discussions. The TLSN proposed by DET had the goal of sharing resources and expertise, providing flexibility, improving teaching, and sharing costs. It was consistent with UBC's organizational culture that favoured faculty-based initiatives over top-down management (UBC DET, 2002).

Subsequently, the processes for reorganization of DET appeared to shift to a top-down mandate. The decision by the Provost to decentralize DET seems motivated by Visiting Team recommendations and the desire to divide the DET budget between the faculties. There does not appear to have been regard to the caution of

one of the CCED committee members (M. Bullen, personal communication) nor the recommendations in the DET response paper to the External Review.

Certainly, the cancellation of the dissolution of DET and subsequent repositioning under the umbrella of OLT were both top-down decisions whose underlying reasons were never disclosed.

### **Analysis 6 - Practicality of recommendations in ACCULT, Visiting Team and CCED reports**

While the reports vary in many ways, all three sets of recommendations support a faculty- based learning technology model with continued centralized support.

The ACCULT Final Report lays out in broad brush strokes a plan for decentralization of learning technology where faculties decide on spending priorities. The report refers to enhancing support within faculties, creating a central facilitation hub for learning technologies, and consideration of the organizational alignment of central units.

The Visiting Team report suggests a repositioning of the DET unit under the VP Academic, a name change for the Unit, and a change in the role of DET from a full-service unit to one emphasizing professional development, research, standards setting and capacity building.

The CCED report supports tasking faculties with ensuring the teaching of online and paper-based studies is integrated with other teaching models, including classroom based. It addresses the dissolution of DET, with staff resources transferring to faculties or a merged OLT/DET unit.

Of the three reports, the CCED report presents the most practical case for ensuring the transition to decentralized learning technology with specialized central support. There is considerable detail contained in the recommendations, assigning timelines and persons responsible for effecting change.

All three sets of recommendations are consistent with Trek 2000 goals.

The implementation of any of the three sets of recommendations would likely improve practice and service to learners. Enhanced learning technology support can help provide optimal learning experiences for on- and off-campus learners in support of *Trek 2000* and ACCULT visions, via increased student access and increased use of mixed-mode studies.

### **Analysis 7 - Assessment of the cancellation of decentralization**

It is not uncommon for universities to have three versions of a strategic plan: a published, publicly available version that tends to avoid provocative issues; a more detailed version with relatively sensitive information, made available to staff on a need to know basis; and an even more sensitive and confidential

plan that “might never be committed to paper, but that resides in the heads of the senior university administration”. (Bates & Sangra, 2011 p. 86).

The cancellation of the decentralization plan and decision to have the OLT take over DET was likely the latter type, evidenced by the fact that Mark Bullen, Acting Director of DET at the time, was never made aware of the reasons for the cancellation. |

The Visiting Team cited concerns over the retirement of Dr. Bates because much of the research emphasis in DET was a result of his interest and expertise. His retirement would necessitate the reappraisal of the MAPLE unit. One has to question how much of a role the loss of such a key player in learning technology played in Kindler’s decisions in 2005. As Bates and Sangra (2011) claim, “there are dangers in charismatic leadership. When the leader leaves the institution, the vision and drive toward tech integration leaves the institution too” (p. 84).

The Visiting Team report mentioned funding issues surrounding DET, with some faculties concerned about the processes for funding and perceiving that “DET was taking tuition away from faculties in a climate where all parties have limited resources” (Visiting Team, 2003, p. 6). Faculties were also misguided in believing that decentralization would mean that they would inherit the DET budget. It may be surmised that when the Deans finally realized that they would in actuality inherit liabilities, rather than assets, from dissolution of DET that they put pressure on Kindler to cancel the decentralization plan (M. Bullen, personal communication).

As previously stated, OLT, TAG and DET were separate, central administrative units with overlapping functions. The Visiting Team did not see the TLSN model

proposed by DET as addressing “fundamental structural, process, and funding discontinuities” (Visiting Team, 2003, p. 4). The External Review report stated that there was no united development plan or common goals tied to *Trek 2000* and that a review was necessary. While this review did not happen, it would appear that the decision to put DET under the umbrella of OLT may have brought the central units closer to aligning with the vision of *Trek 2000* and ACCULT reports.

### **Analysis 8 - 2010 Developments**

Three key developments occurred in May 2010: the merger of Office of Learning Technology (OLT) with Teaching and Academic Growth (TAG), the merger of OLT with Telestudios, and the merger of existing entities into the Centre for Teaching and Learning Technology (CTLT). These developments reflect the final organizational structure for fully integrating learning technology into teaching activities at UBC. These developments followed the recommendations of the Visiting Team to address overlapping functions of the three central administrative units.

With services centralized in one unit under the governance of the Provost and VP Academic, planning and management of teaching and learning technology would be better coordinated, facilitate efficient resource utilization, and better integrate with the university’s overall mission, goals and institutional processes.

In addition, UBC's capacity to offer flexible, high quality, lifelong learning to a diverse audience would improve by having services for learning technology, pedagogy, research and professional development coordinated in one central unit.

After a somewhat tumultuous process the institutional strategy and structure for technology integration appears to have reached an equilibrium point where it will continue along in an operational mode. As such, the focus can now shift towards greater innovation to fully exploit the benefits of technology in teaching and learning. This push towards scholarly innovation in teaching and learning to produce transformative education is apparent in both the vision and mission statement of the CTLT (CTLT website).

## **Conclusion**

The planning processes for the integration of learning technology at UBC highlight the need for a balance between vision and strategic thinking. Both vision and strategic thinking are essential to create an environment that supports the innovative use of learning technology. Bullen (2013) points out that simply adding e-learning is less effective than fully integrating e-learning into core operations, overall strategic plans and e-learning strategic plans. The processes analyzed in this paper demonstrate there is truth in Bullen's statement; once e-learning activities are brought closer to the university's core, included in overall strategic planning and linked to the budgetary model, the integration of learning technology moves forward.

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