

UNC Teaching and Learning with Technology Collaborative

Mission Review

Terms and Definitions:

Teaching and Learning with Technology (TLT) here refers to teaching methods and learning environments that incorporate computer-based technologies. The focus of TLT is increasingly on the online environment, but the term embraces the use of other technologies that maybe combined with the Internet or otherwise used in more traditional classroom environments, such as networked computing systems, visualization and modeling systems, specialized hardware/software, etc.

e-Learning here refers to Internet-based programs that are developed and managed to be independent of the location of the learner. e-learning programs are not exclusively a subset of distance education programs or of campus programs but rather embrace all Internet-based programs. This distinction is important. Strategic planning, development and support must take account of the commonalities among e-learning content and program development and delivery in order to avoid duplication of effort and potential conflict among competing technologies and services.

The UNC Teaching and Learning with Technology (TLT) Collaborative is a consortial organization, created by the President of the University of North Carolina, that provides vision and shared resources in support of TLT programs and initiatives throughout the 16 campuses of The University of North Carolina. The vision for the TLT Collaborative is to: “unite the collective interests and goals of the sixteen campuses of The University of North Carolina to serve as a catalyst for, and nurture excellence in, the productive application of technology for teaching and learning.” The mission identifies six major goals of the UNC TLT Collaborative, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Facilitate TLT communications and decision processes for UNC administrators, faculty, and professional staff.
2. Provide a common resource of research and best practices associated with TLT.
3. Support campus efforts to provide professional development in TLT for faculty, administrators, and professional staff.
4. Facilitate efforts between campuses to seek and develop commonalities in support of TLT-related resource procurement and related decision processes.
5. Explore funding strategies and mechanisms to support both Collaborative and campus TLT efforts.
6. Work with the campuses and UNC Office of the President in an advisory role to identify, review, resolve, or define policy and procedure issues associated with TLT.

The TLT Collaborative Board consists of voting representatives of the sixteen campuses, as well as non-voting members of important TLT constituents. The Board is closely involved in Collaborative operations and project priorities, and serves in an advisory capacity to the Vice President of Information Resources, who has final approval over budget, and is the direct report of the Executive Director.

Introduction

During its first 12 months of operation, the UNC Teaching and Learning with Technology Collaborative has been successful in building community around TLT services and initiatives, and has supported a number of important ventures that include:

- Design and development of a UNC-wide portal to share knowledge, expertise, and best practices that supports the work of UNC teaching and learning centers, faculty, and instructional technology staff.
- An annual UNC-wide conference (now in its second year) designed to build community and achieve targeted objectives among key TLT communities throughout UNC (Teaching and Learning Center directors, TLT professionals, faculty, library professionals, and decision-makers from academic programs, continuing education, and IT.
- Campus grants in the areas of assistive technology, wireless/handheld computing, visualization and modeling, online course development, and authoring engines.
- UNC-wide licenses for TLT Roundtable and Flashlight services.
- A state Aid grants to foster knowledge-sharing and cooperative research into online learning environments.
- Workshops and symposia associated with TLT, including a UNC-wide Flashlight workshop, a TLT symposium.
- Coordination of UNC engagement with the national MERLOT initiative.
- Close consultation with, and engagement in, TLT-related issues and initiatives that derive from the UNC Office of the President.

It is noteworthy that during these first 12 months operations, there have been a number of concurrent developments across UNC that are very relevant to the Collaborative mission:

- A new Senior Vice President and staff in the Division of Academic Affairs
- All UNC campuses now have Teaching and Learning Centers
- A UNC Association of Teaching and Learning Center Directors has been created.
- The UNC Alliance for Shared Services is operating and has potential to expand its goals from collaborative efforts in administrative computing to support for strategic e-learning management systems and services.
- Emerging initiatives in e-learning will build on the Distance Learning component of the UNC IT strategy to develop support services associated with online learning programs.

With these developments in mind the UNC TLT Board has taken steps to review the mission and priorities of the Collaborative. The Board has concluded that the TLT mission remains well-defined, with a primary focus on community-building and collaboration in the effective use of technology for teaching and learning. At the same time, the key components of the Collaborative mission need to be carefully aligned with these emerging new initiatives and partners to ensure an effective overall service structure for UNC. The following report clarifies the TLT Collaborative mission in the context of overall UNC teaching and learning services and of UNC e-learning initiatives.

TLT Collaborative and UNC Teaching and Learning Services

The TLT Collaborative's mission is very focused on the integration of technology into the academic mission of the University in a broad range of contexts that include: identifying best practices with regard to learning assessment and learning effectiveness; design and development of online learning environments; support and training of faculty and instructional technology professionals; community tools for UNC teaching and learning centers and directors; research into emerging technologies for teaching and learning; evaluation of learner help desk services.

It therefore critical to ensure effective, ongoing communications between the TLT Collaborative and key stakeholders in these areas: the UNC Division of Academic Affairs; campus Teaching and Learning Centers; UNC Association of Teaching and Learning Center Directors; UNC TLT centers and directors; University Libraries Advisory Committee; the UNC Faculty Assembly, UNC TV. All of these communities are represented on the TLT Collaborative Board, with the exception of UNC TV. The following steps are recommended to further strengthen these relationships:

- The TLT Executive Director should establish a close working relationship and regular meetings with the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, and participate in workgroups and committees as appropriate.
- The TLT Executive Director should establish a close working relationship with the Chair of the UNC Association of Teaching and Learning Center Directors. The TLT Collaborative staff should establish close working relationships with the Association, and facilitate cooperative projects that bring together professionals across UNC to leverage resources and provide valuable professional development opportunities.
- The TLT Executive Director should establish a close working relationship with the Chair of ULAC, Director of UNC TV, and Chair of the Faculty Assembly, and be available to meet with these organizations at least once annually for reports and discussion.
- The Collaborative Technology Coordinator will continue to expand the development and management of the TLT Portal to provide a resource-sharing and community- building service in support of UNC Teaching and Learning Centers, professional training and development services, project reporting and online workplaces, etc. Collaborative staff will coordinate efforts to populate the portal with TLT content and support efforts to add content that extends beyond TLT. As resources permit, the Collaborative will extend these services to provide additional application development in support of teaching and learning operations and services.
- The Collaborative Project Manager will continue to sponsor and host an annual TLT Conference that brings together all UNC professional communities with an interest in TLT in order to share knowledge and explore emerging issues and develop synergy and project priorities.
- The Collaborative Program Coordinator will coordinate and facilitate cooperation among UNC teaching and learning centers and TLT services with regard to common training, workshops and support materials for faculty and students in the effective use of TLT.

- The Collaborative Program Coordinator will participate in activities associated with the assessment and evaluation of technology-mediated learning, and new models for teaching and learning.
- The Collaborative Project Manager will participate in fund-raising efforts to support TLT service development throughout UNC, and seek to support research into the effective use of emerging technologies such as wireless and handheld devices.
- The Collaborative Program Coordinator will participate in efforts to develop common standards and policies associated with TLT, for example in the areas of assistive technologies.
- The Collaborative Technology Coordinator will explore ways to showcase TLT activities on each campus via the portal, presentations and reports.

UNC TLT Collaborative and UNC E-Learning

UNC e-learning initiatives will clearly build on both existing and new service components. Within the Division of Information Resources it is anticipated that e-learning will require support from the UNC TLT Collaborative, UNC Alliance for Shared Services, and UNC Distance Learning. The precise breakdown of these service components is pending a readiness assessment to be undertaken during the spring of 2001. With that in mind the following speculates on the potential role of the UNC TLT Collaborative within these emerging e-learning service structures.

The Information Resources Division, with participation from the UNC TLT Collaborative and the UNC Shared Services Alliance, will coordinate efforts to select and procure course management systems and related applications in support of campus e-learning. This ensures that selection of these services will be integral with, and not separate from, selection of strategic administrative systems and related services such as common directory and authentication systems. The TLT Collaborative will assist the Alliance by participating in evaluation and selection of e-learning application with regard to learning effectiveness and functional richness of these applications.

The Distance Learning component of the UNC IT strategy is not fully defined but we speculate that this will potentially provide operational support for e-learning where campuses seek common service solutions. This support may include but not be limited to:

- Hosting of e-learning management systems and related applications;
- Delivery of technical support services in support of campus e-learning;
- Support services for the design and development of online learning materials;
- e-learning help desk

The UNC TLT Collaborative's role in support of e-learning should focus on the following:

- Cooperation with campus teaching and learning centers and campus TLT services to coordinate training and professional development services associated with-learning.
- Development of sound assessment and evaluation processes to measure learning effectiveness in the e-learning environment.
- Publication of support resources for e-learning, and showcasing of best practices via the TLT portal, TLT conference, and other events and publication tools.
- The TLT Executive will attend Alliance Board meetings and maintain close communications with the Executive Director of the Alliance.
- TLT Collaborative staff will participate in e-Learning meetings and workgroups.
- The TLT Collaborative can potentially coordinate a learner service component to an e-Learning help desk.

Conclusion

The UNC TLT Collaborative mission remains very well defined to serve emerging TLT and e-learning initiatives. It is important that the mission remains focused on effective use of technology and on the community-building and collaborative efforts that have been a hallmark of success to date, and it also critical that the organization is effectively aligned with the Divisions of Academic Affairs and Information Resources, and with campus Teaching and Learning centers and other key service players in the TLT and e-learning environments. The best way to achieve this alignment is by a detailed clarification of the Collaborative mission in terms of services provided to UNC teaching and learning centers and services, and to UNC e-learning initiatives.

References are all available via the UNC TLT Portal at <http://www.unctl.org>

UNC TLT Collaborative Governance document
UNC TLT Conference 2000 and 2001
UNC TLT Portal and Resource Lookups
UNC TLT Collaborative Projects
UNC TLT Collaborative Board Meetings and Reports