The Integration of Technology into Instruction at UBC: An

Analysis of UBC's Strategic Planning Process

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Introduction

The University of British Columbia (UBC) was established in Vancouver, British Columbia in 1908 as a research university. In 2005, a second campus was added in Kelowna, BC. In total, there are about 43,500 undergraduate students and 10,450 graduate students (University of British Columbia, n.d.a).

The President heads the university, working with seven Vice Presidents, and the Deputy Vice Chancellor of the Okanagan Campus. Like other universities in British Columbia, UBC has a bi-cameral system of governance, with the Senate responsible for all academic governance, and the Board of Governors responsible for financial governance. The Vancouver Senate has 90 members, elected from faculty, students, and residents of British Columbia along with some ex-officio administrative staff (Eaton, 2013). Deans of each faculty report to the Provost and Vice President Academic (Provost). There are a total of 3,694 faculty members and 9,727 staff members at UBC (University of British Columbia, n.d.b).

In 1997, several units at UBC were responsible for the integration of technology into teaching and learning: The Centre for Educational Technology (CET); the Centre for Faculty Development and Instructional Services (FDIS); Computing and Communications; and Distance Education and Technology (DET) (Haughey, 2007). At present, the Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology (CTLT), through its two directors, reports to the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs. Including the two Directors, it currently has 69 full-time and part-time staff.

In the Year 2000, UBC's new ten-year strategic plan (TREK 2000) was presented by President Martha Piper, identifying the integration of information technology into instruction as a priority. This paper will summarizes, analyze, and discuss the sequence of events and

decisions regarding technology that came about as a result of the vision.

Summary of Events

Motivation for Change

TREK 2000 acknowledged the uncertain role of universities, and the need to remain relevant in the new knowledge-based economy. Goals and strategies were mapped out with the purpose of providing students with an education that prepared them for the future. Key emphasis was placed on increasing funding, faculty and staff renewal, and the development of alternative learning and research methods. TREK 2000 became the guiding framework, catalyst, and motivation for many changes over the next decade at UBC.

Integrating technology into all areas of instruction was considered a crucial focus. The TREK update (University of British Columbia, 2001) reported progress associated with technology, however these changes were largely focused on IT infrastructure, with the exception of continuing education courses, which were being offered almost entirely online.

The Process of Change

In a memo to the Deans, Heads, and Directors (McBride, 2003), Provost Barry McBride reiterated the TREK 2000 goal of technology integration. He acknowledged advances being made in infrastructure and online course offerings, but recognized that an increased focus on technology for teaching and learning was imperative. Consequently, he appointed a small team chaired by Neil Guppy, Associate Vice President, Academic Programs to conduct discussion and inquiry into technology for teaching and learning. The Academic Committee for the Creative Use of Learning Technologies (ACCULT) was mandated to develop a consultative plan for the use of learning technologies that was consistent with the overall academic plan, cost effective, would lead to an enhancement of student learning, and aid the work of faculty and staff.

On November 15, 2000 ACCULT submitted their plan to the Senate (Albon et. al., 2000). This paper outlined the importance of developing technology, an action plan, and a discussion of possible pitfalls. ACCULT members sought confirmation and clarification from the Senate regarding their current focus, and stated their intention to bring the final recommendations back to the Senate in the spring of 2001 (Vancouver Senate Secretariat, 2000). Senate members affirmed ACCULT's focus and also expressed concerns about funding, infrastructure, perception of traditional versus creative teaching, and called for further study, consultation and a risk analysis. Provost McBride ended the discussion with a warning to the Senate that although the development and use of technology was an uncertain prospect, neglecting to make an investment would ultimately create more risk for UBC.

ACCULT's final report (Albon et.al, 2002) was written in January 2002 and accepted by the senate. They recommended a decentralized, distributed system of implementation with a focus on faculty innovation supported by a central system of experts providing guidance for the growth of technology for learning. Distance education would continue to be kept central. However funding changes were recommended, including provision for the hiring of a director to lead the coordination of learning technology. Faculty leadership was emphasized but it was also recognized that not all faculty would participate, resulting in uneven growth throughout the university. A university-wide Technology Action Plan committee was suggested with the formal recognition for the current Faculty Alliance for Technology in Education (FATE) team already in place.

Drawing on ACCULT recommendations DET published its own strategic paper (Distance Education & Technology, 2002). The plan envisaged a gradual move to a collaborative teaching and learning support network that would include all departments currently focused on

technology at the university. DET offered vision and leadership in the area of technology,
moving them from a primary focus on distance education to the expanded, university-wide
support of eLearning in all its forms.

As part of a routine review process, UBC commissioned an external review of DET in
January 2003 (Anderson, Stanton, Hartman, & Pratt, 2003). The review team reported that the
current organizational structure could not and did not support the vision of TREK 2000 and the
2002 ACCULT report. In their opinion, DET was operating as a 'big distance' operation within a
culture of 'little distance.' Their findings called for a cohesive approach to learning technology,
requiring a consolidation of all current technology-focused departments, with the drive for
innovation originating from the faculties. They proposed doing away with the distinction of
distance and on-campus courses, and relieving DET of their direct responsibility for distance
education. Finally, they recommended hiring a new 'high profile' director/research chair
connected to a faculty to oversee DET, or an integrated network (Anderson et al., 2003).

Although DET found many of the review recommendations consistent with their own
plan, they also recognized contradictions (Distance Education & Technology, 2003). The report
lacked concrete strategies and was unclear whether the approach was decentralized with central
support, or completely decentralized to the faculty. Until such time as faculties could provide
strong learning technology units, DET recommended continuing in its current role while
expanding its responsibilities. Funding changes were recommended along with a call to the
university to provide a strong mandate and focus on lifelong learners and their needs, providing
DET the authority to proceed with a balanced, collaborative, centralized approach.

In the Fall of 2003, Provost McBride constituted a committee chaired by Neil Guppy to
follow-up on the evolution of DET. In June 2004, the committee recommended a decentralized

model with central support, reflecting the original plan (Guppy, Bullen, Gallini, Isaacson, & Lamberson, 2004). Changes however, would include DET staff being transferred to faculties, and the merging of DET and OLT. Additionally, DET would now report to the Vice President Academic instead of Continuing Education. Changes were to be implemented by a small DET transition team with a completion target of April 1, 2005.

In the Fall of 2004, Dr. Anna Kindler was appointed Associate Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. On March 13, 2005, one month before the recommended completion date, the DET transition team received a memo from Dr. Kindler informing them that the plan to proceed with the decentralization was now cancelled (Kindler, 2005a). The letter referred to 'complications' about the original assumptions on which the decision to decentralize DET had been based. Subsequently, it was announced (Kindler, 2005b) that DET would now come under OLT, and that the position of the Director of DET had been eliminated since it would no longer require independent oversight.

Finally, in May 2010, after a failed attempt to find a Director for the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) Provost David Farrar announced that the CLT and OLT would be merged into one entity called the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT) with co-leadership until a suitable Director could be found (Farrar, 2010). Figure 1 summarizes the sequence of events described above.
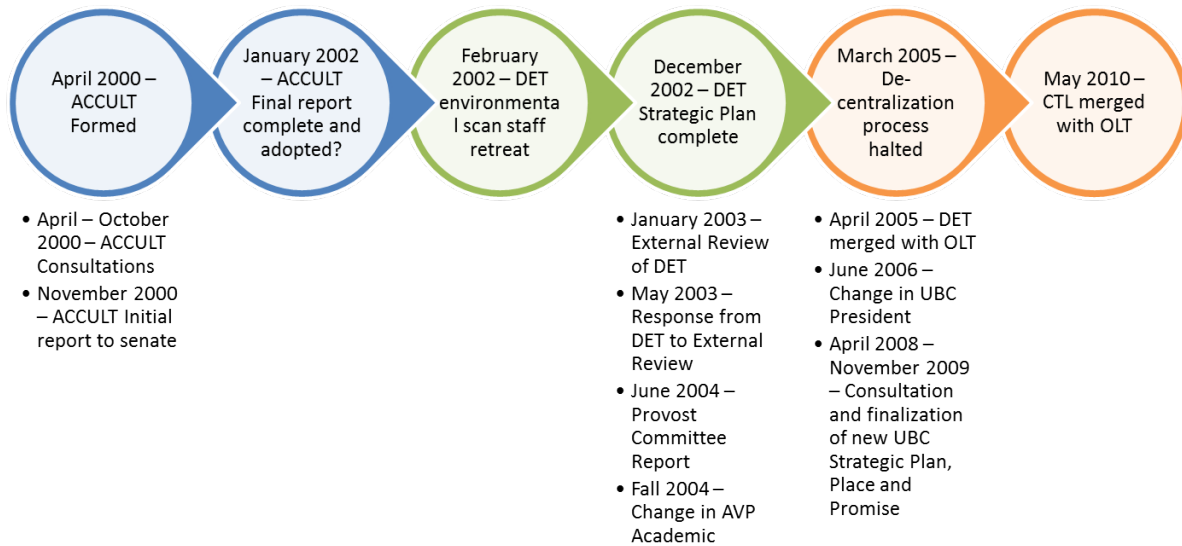
April 2000 – ACCULT Formed
- April – October 2000 – ACCULT Consultations
- November 2000 – ACCULT Initial report to senate

January 2002 – ACCULT Final report complete and adopted?

February 2002 – DET environmental scan staff retreat

December 2002 – DET Strategic Plan complete
- January 2003 – External Review of DET
- May 2003 – Response from DET to External Review
- June 2004 – Provost Committee Report
- Fall 2004 – Change in AVP Academic

March 2005 – De-centralization process halted
- April 2005 – DET merged with OLT
- June 2006 – Change in UBC President
- April 2008 – November 2009 – Consultation and finalization of new UBC Strategic Plan, Place and Promise

May 2010 – CTL merged with OLT

Figure 1: Sequence of Events following TREK 2000

Analysis

Leadership and Consultation

A strategic thinking process, one in which 'faculty and staff are drawn into the visioning and strategic thinking' (Bates & Sangra, 2011) for learning technology is vital. This effort needs to have the explicit support of the executive, and should involve faculty members in order for it to be seen as an academic effort, rather than an administrative one.

Committee Membership of ACCULT

Simon Albon	Pharmaceutical Sciences
Tony Bates	Director, Distance Education and Technology
Ted Dodds	AVP IT Services
Neil Guppy	AVP Academic Programs (Chair)
Evan Horrie	AMS
Dayna Lee-Baggley	Graduate Student Society
Kathy Pichora-Fuller	Audiology & Speech Sciences; IHEAR; Faculty Association
Gary Poole	Director, TAG; Faculty of Medicine
Janet Teasdale	Director of Student Development
Martha Whitehead	Head Information Services Division, Library

Figure 2: Composition of ACCULT Final Report Committee

As Figure 2 demonstrates, the consultation process used to derive the recommendations for the ACCULT paper involved many university faculty members and some members of the executive team. However, the committee driving the process did not include the most senior members of the UBC Executive Team, nor did it include representatives from the larger faculties. For example, while the committee includes a faculty member from Pharmaceutical Sciences, a representative from the Faculty Association, and a representative from the Faculty of Medicine, absent are any high-level representatives from the Faculty of Arts, or the Faculty of Science. Notably absent as well are members of the executive team, considered crucial for 'driving a strategic plan' (Bates & Sangra, 2011, p. 89) and exerting a strong influence in the allocation of funds and resources. While the AVP Academic Programs and AVP IT Services are arguably senior members of the management team at UBC, they would still exert their influence through the Provost and VP Academic.

This arrangement can be contrasted to the current efforts at BCIT (See Figure 3) to create an e-Learning Strategy. In the E-learning Strategy Working Group, half of the schools at BCIT are represented (BCIT n.d.). Furthermore, the Steering Committee includes two senior executive

members that report directly to the President of the University (BCIT, n.d.) as well as the Dean

of one of the major schools at BCIT (BCIT, 2011).

E-Learning Strategy Working Group

- Mark Bullen
  Dean, Learning & Teaching Centre and Chair
- Sanja Boskovic
  Faculty member, School of Energy
- Shaun Culham
  Faculty member, School of Computing & Academic Studies
- Rosario Passos
  Instructional Development Consultant, Learning & Teaching Centre
- Ron Stewart
  Faculty member, School of Construction & the Environment

E-Learning Strategy Steering Committee

- Mark Bullen
  Dean, Learning & Teaching Centre
- Paul Dangerfield
  Vice-President, Education, Research & Interational
- Chris Golding
  Vice-President, Learning & Technology Services
- Robin Hemmingsen
  Dean, School of Business
- Stephen Lamb
  Chief Information Officer

Figure 3: BCIT eLearning Strategy Committee

Furthermore, the ACCULT consultative process did not result in clear direction from

executive leadership regarding change implementation. Three years after the final ACCULT

report was completed, Martha Piper, leader of UBC and champion of the TREK 2000 vision,

announced her decision to step down (Vancouver Senate Secretariat, 2005). At the same

meeting, a review of the Senate's functionality revealed concerns regarding overlapping

executive responsibilities, insufficient coordination and communication, and a lack of follow-up

(p. 166). This lack of clarity, follow-up, and leadership from UBC's executive offices, affected

the ability of technological leaders within the university to effectively develop technology for

teaching and learning.

The transition in 2004 of a key figure, AVP Academic, and chair of the ACCULT

committee is a further demonstration of the leadership void. The events that followed suggest

that at the highest level (Provost and VP Academic) there was no buy-in to the recommendations

of ACCULT or the subsequent planning processes that followed. For example, a year after being

appointed, the new AVP Academic, Dr. Kindler, halted the transition of DET to the faculties and

subsequently merged OLT and DET. With no documentation for reasoning, and limited

consultation, several years of consultations and recommendations from ACCULT, the faculties, DET, external reviewers, and various other committees were abandoned. Had there been a strong buy-in from the executive team throughout the ACCULT process, one would have expected to see evidence of a more robust staff engagement.

Vision

Bates & Sangra (2011) highlight the importance of a powerful, 'compelling vision' (p. 99) to help focus stakeholders when implementing the integration of technology for teaching and learning in higher education. In fact, the absence of such a vision can be detrimental. There are two examples demonstrating UBC's lack of a 'compelling vision' during this process. The first emanates from the TREK 2000 plan, the second from the DET external review. While Trek 2000 does suggest that the university should aim for 'the incorporation of information technology into all areas of instruction'(University of British Columbia, 2009), the strategies and advances in the Trek 2000/2001 report make it clear that information technology is largely focused on administrative purposes. Developments include: (a) increasing internet availability on campus; (b) tying the learning management system (WebCT) to administrative systems (the Student Information System); (c) launching a digital document system aimed at course-pack creation (University of British Columbia, 2001). These initiatives will clearly improve the chances of the uptake of learning technologies, and are in alignment with the goals stated, however, they do not give any clear direction as to how faculty and staff members are to pursue the use of learning technologies in the classroom.

In the DET External Review Report, the reviewers state that UBC 'does not appear to have a well thought out policy about what it wants to do regarding learning technology' (Anderson et al., 2003). This conclusion was drawn after consultation and interviews with 'more

than 55 people' from both DET staff, and faculties utilizing the technology support units. This

would suggest that regardless of whether these stakeholders were using, deploying, or supporting

learning technology, neither staff nor faculty understood or comprehended a university-wide

vision.

Looking back to the timeline of events, it is clear that decisions made by the UBC

Executive also supports the idea that there was no compelling vision for learning technology.

While the recommendations of the External Review are to de-centralize, in their response

document DET recommends that a strong central unit would be more beneficial. The latter

happened to be where the university ended with the merger of DET and OLT, and later of CTL

and OLT. However, inconsistency is evident as the university first supported de-centralization

and then reverted back to a centralized support. Decisions made at each of these junctures

seemed to be more opportunistic than based on a sound strategy being pursued by the Executive,

suggesting a lack of a strategic vision for the organization.

Funding

According to Bates & Sangra (2011), universities have two strategies: one publically

communicated, and a private internal one driving the executive team. Evidence for this exists at

UBC in the funding structure assigned to DET. In response to the external review, DET

identified their three main sources of funding as coming from tuition revenues, allocations for

internal course development and support, and revenues from public, cost-recovery distance
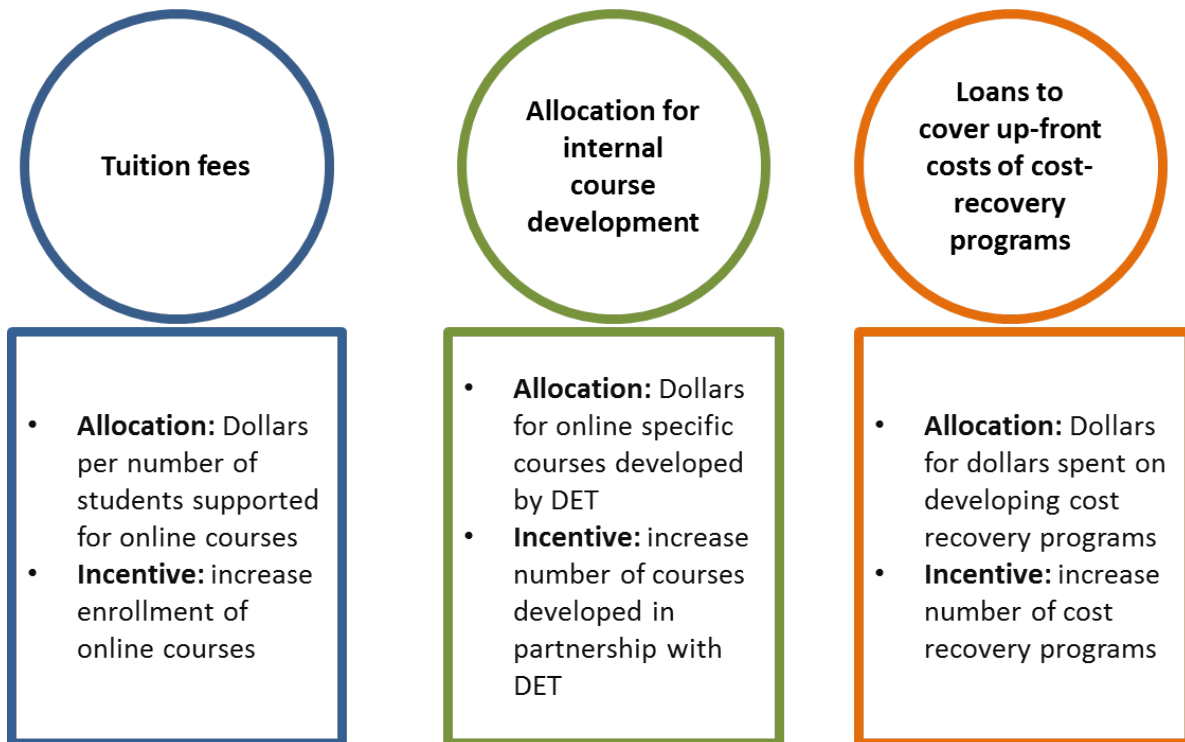
education courses (See Figure 4).

Tuition fees

- **Allocation:** Dollars per number of students supported for online courses
- **Incentive:** increase enrollment of online courses

Allocation for internal course development

- **Allocation:** Dollars for online specific courses developed by DET
- **Incentive:** increase number of courses developed in partnership with DET

Loans to cover up-front costs of cost-recovery programs

- **Allocation:** Dollars for dollars spent on developing cost recovery programs
- **Incentive:** increase number of cost recovery programs

Figure 4: DET Funding Model

While the UBC Executive publicly supported the incorporation of information technologies in learning and teaching (TREK 2000), the financial structure of DET would suggest that this was not the main focus that the university had in mind for them. Different incentives created by the funding structure of DET, reveal that their attention and internal resources were being pulled in different directions. Of note are the variable structures of each of the revenue streams. It is unlikely that DET would have been pursuing initiatives that did not directly support their revenue streams. For example, while the external review suggests giving the faculties more responsibility, this would not be in line with DET's revenue incentives. If faculties began developing their own courses without DET support, DET would then lose this allocation thus reducing their funding. While there are many reasons why DET pushed for strong central support, such as the sharing of recognized technological expertise for creating online courses, the financial incentive would seem to be one of the most compelling.

Ultimately the sudden disbanding of the DET restructuring plan in 2005 seems to be a financial one. Distance courses had the ability to bring in revenues to concerns of over-enrollment (Vancouver Senate Secretariat, 2005). By placing the onus on faculties, many who were not ready or capable of consistently providing online courses, it was likely that revenues would have dropped rather than increased. By keeping DET focused on distance education, the university had a guaranteed income source to make up for funding shortages.

Technology Governance

Another area of significance is technology governance, whereby all relevant stakeholders are included in the governance of technology (Bates & Sangra, 2011). The process for technology at UBC seems at best disjointed. While the ACCULT group was tasked with creating a compelling vision, it was not clear which body was behind the vision. The process would seem to fall naturally under the Provost and VP Academic portfolio where other pieces of the puzzle resided (such as the OLT). However, it is not clear that they were mandated to drive the execution of the vision, and as discussed earlier, it is not clear that this leadership had 'bought in' and was invested in doing so. The effects of this lack of coherence between organizational structure and the goals being pursued by UBC is evidenced through the part that DET played in this drama. While DET demonstrated a desire to be a key figure in implementing the vision set out by ACCULT, and while this initiative would naturally fall under the Provost and VP Academic portfolio, DET was not part of this portfolio. In fact, DET came under the Executive Director of Continuing Studies and resided outside the academic purview. We can posit that this structure led to a lack of access to both resources and people who were in charge of driving the decision-making around information technology in learning and teaching at UBC. Ultimately this created a barrier between the goals set out by DET, and its ability to complete them.

Discussion

The recommendations of the ACCULT Final Report, DET External Review Report and the DET Provost's Committee Report are consistent in that all envision a distributed learning technology model, led by the faculties, and supported by related central units such as IT Services, the Library system, and Distance Education. While all three, in accordance with TREK 2000, recognize the need for sound pedagogical teaching and learning practices driving instruction, this is not what happened.

In our view it is significant that there was a lack of executive leadership throughout the planning process. The leaders driving ACCULT were not part of the university's executive team. Only two of the ten were responsible for learning and teaching at any faculty, with none representing the largest faculties. Furthermore, none had any budget responsibilities.

We recognize that a strong, central unit facilitating learning technology was likely the best path for UBC to take at a time of great uncertainty when the only consensus seemed to be that doing nothing would be the worst course of action (McBride, 2003). The process began with open, inclusive reports, generally with a consistent call of action. Nevertheless, the plan was reversed by the Vice Provost for Academic, probably for sound reasons but without any information provided to the people affected. We hypothisize that this lack of information and consultation negatively impacted staff morale, especially since the culture at UBC favors strong decentralized units (as noted by several of the reports cited above). Communicating the rationale for the discontinuation of the decentralization process could have lessened the negative impact of the abrupt decision.

A well-developed, formal plan and continuation of key leadership would also have helped UBC take TREK vision forward. An evaluation process for student learning, which was

a focus area of TREK 2000, could have helped UBC determine the impact of the technology

integration therefore guiding future steps. Attaching a financial plan to the TREK vision for

technology would also have enabled UBC to take the vision forward faster. As UBC continues

the process of technology integration, elements that it might consider developing are: a strong

vision and leadership for technology, driven by teaching and learning outcomes; a sound and

transparent plan developed through consultation; a financial plan; and an evaluation plan for

teaching and learning outcomes.

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