

Keynote address
ICT in T&L for the College of Sciences and Technology

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The background to the current ICT situation on campus at the University of Sydney is that a flexible online learning project was put together in 2000 to focus on building a stable platform and support network, in an educationally sound manner, for online learning. The decision was taken to buy WebCT.

In year 1 there were 100 users, *WebCT* sites, a help desk and training in place.
At end of 3 years there were 600 users and up to 1500 units of study with *WebCT* sites.

In 2003 the Academic Board reviewed the use of ICT in T&L – this took about 6 months as there were several consultative rounds. A proposal was then developed to move the online learning project into University core business. In the proposal it was acknowledged that it would be best to work at the College level. The FOLP (Flexible Online Learning Project) became the FOLT (Flexible Online Learning Team), becoming part of a broader activity referred to as the “ICT in Teaching and Learning initiative” located in the Office of the PVC (Teaching and Learning). In addition to continuing individual support for staff, through the helpdesk, there has been an increase in staffing to work at the College level. This has provided a core strategic network of people.

The expanded team works together as one team in peak periods when the units of study are being QA’ed for uploading. In non-peak periods (4000 hours per year), the team is divided in clusters and is College based. Since mid 2004 the organisational and administrative structures associated with the ongoing work of the FOLT have been developed, although it is true to say that many of these are still in an evolutionary phase.

From each College there is an academic director of ICT (Mary Peat for CST) and faculty representatives (Lee Britton (Rural management), Paul Sheehy (Veterinary Sciences), Stephen Cattle (Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources), Kirsty Beilharz (Architecture), Rafael Calvo (Engineering), Jonathan Gray (Science), Tom Hubble (Science)). These meet both within the College as a group and within the University with the two other College groups in an ICT in T&L Working Party of the ITL. The University central resource consists of a team of educational and instructional designers and project managers, with one project manager associated with each College. Karen Scott is the project manager for CST. She is responsible for liaising between the College group and the central team.

Currently each College is looking to identify strategic projects for using the 4000 hours of time available for the College from the central team. Information about expressions of interest (EOI) has been sent out to faculty representatives and it is their job to discuss possible projects, to help project proposers to write the initial EOI request form and to liaise between the project manager and the project proposer from the very outset of the process.

Strategic projects must meet a set of criteria which include: sustainability (will it be used after its first iteration; how are the maintenance requirements being fulfilled); evolving synergies (can the project usefully join up with other projects); filling significant gaps (is this really a noticeable gap that must be filled; what would happen if we left the gap); and working across boundaries (across faculty developments; across college developments).

The current projects which are in place for the period October 2004 – end of January 2005 are:

- Using Still Images in eLearning (joint project CHS and CST)

This joint CHS/CST Project aims to develop, and test user-friendly protocols and templates for seamless use of still images stored both locally and centrally within learning management systems (e.g. *WebCT* and/or multimedia¹) environment (and by extension other systems compliant with appropriate standards). Then to deliver staff development (both in-person sessions and printed/online guidance) on the use of still images in effective teaching and learning.

- *WebCT* sites for 2nd year Psychology

This project aims to provide a *WebCT* environment for large cohorts of students in second year Psychology. The strategic arguments for this development are: that half the students are enrolled in Arts and half in Science; there are large classes in second and third year (third year sites will ultimately be developed); and the current first year students have been using *WebCT* and reporting on its usefulness in supporting their learning.

- Audit of online teaching and learning in the College(CST)

The aim is to develop a benchmark of the status of e-learning within each unit of study within the College. This project will collect information about every unit of study on the faculty books. Information will identify what types of online resources are being used; how they are being delivered (*WebCT*, local servers/web sites etc); what teaching staff would like to do in the future; whether they provide formative assessment; etc. etc. The online audit form was originally developed by the group in CHS in consultation with CST and FOLT staff.

- Lifelongearning logo and link to WebCT sites

The aim is to ensure that the logo is seen by every student.

This project involves all unit of study codes in the Faculty of Science. The Faculty has recently finished a project to provide a web site for students to use to ascertain their own development of generic attributes prior to graduating. The web site <http://www.lifelongearning.science.usyd.edu.au> was launched in semester 2 2004, and as part of the dissemination process to students, the Faculty requires the logo and link to be put into each WebCT site.

- Identifying strategic projects for CST for 2005

The aim is to ensure that the strategic hours available to CST for 2005 are used in a responsible and effective manner.

This project involves all faculties within the College. The faculty ICT reps (seven of them) will be required to work with those interested in their faculty to develop ideas for projects for 2005. The Project Manager has provided a list of projects that are being done currently or have been done to give the reps an idea of what can fall in to the e-learning envelope. This is seen to be important the first time round.

Ideas for future projects – currently the following projects are being supported elsewhere in the university:

CHS

- Using still images in e-learning (with CST)
- Showcase of College e-learning resources
- Audit of ICT resources

¹ Multimedia is included in this project description to acknowledge that an appropriate decision will sometimes be to store images and/or an interactive browser interface on a CD to be provided to students. Such a T&L resource is likely to be designed for seamless interaction with an online environment.

CHASS

- Academic writing skills website (non-WebCT; to be embedded into online units)
- A project to identify projects
- Audit of ICT resources
- Development of an image database (2005)

Other ideas:

- Projects which work in conjunction with other University or outside-funded projects, eg TIF, SORRT
- CD-ROMs

After the presentation a number of questions were asked:

1. What initiatives are in place or will be in place to support postgraduate research students who are off campus?

WebCT can be used effectively to support external postgraduate research students. Other software is currently being investigated to serve as an additional or alternative form of support.

2. The demand for strategic projects is an unknown, and presumable will start off small but will increase and could be overwhelming in the future. How will the College/University cope with this?

Projects will be prioritised and will have to fit the criteria set by the College. Those projects with additional support from other sources (eg College/Faculty/Department/ TIF/ other) will help set the priorities. The scoping phase of the project will also help identify that it will be doable within the projected timeframe.

3. How will we be able to find the time/money to prepare online materials if it takes 16-25 hours to prepare one hour of online material?

There are sustainable ways to do this, eg use of WebCT because it helps streamline activities; look at the blended learning strategies and use the easy ones first; make more use of other services eg the Library online service for readings.

The quoted number of hours may be required if the course content needed to be developed from scratch, and if the online material were not developed through a learning management system such as WebCT, which facilitates uploading of content. *Whilst the time to develop a WebCT site is quite considerable the first time round, subsequent uses do not generally require very much time.*

4. Students report a range in quality of web sites. Should we have college rules? Default standards? Should we move away from WebCT and use other systems?

Faculty of Science tried to implement a default standard way back in the early 90s but this was not acceptable at the time. The University is looking at integrating WebCT with Interwoven (the Uni management system) so that materials can be uploaded.

5. What are the pedagogical criteria for developing e-learning support? Are we evaluating what we put up?

All work with the Central team is based on good learning outcomes of students; all projects have an evaluation phase built in to them.

6. One issue is sustainability. How do we address this?

Using templates is very helpful. This is the experience of some users within the College. One of the thrusts should be development of user-friendly templates.

