

ComETS Responds to the Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Report

Executive Summary

Prepared by the
Community of Educational Technology Support
(ComETS) Planning Committee
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PREFACE

ComETS (Community of Educational Technology Support) is a UW-Madison grass-roots organization with 160 members representing learning technology support staff from departments, college support units, the libraries, and DoIT. Its mission is to encourage networking and collaboration to better share resources and expertise. ComETS work takes place via collaboration with other groups on campus including the Teaching Academy, the Office of the Provost's Teaching and Learning Council, and the annual Teaching and Learning Symposium. In response to the February 22, 2006 TEL Report, we offer actions in which ComETS member can participate. We also offer several observations based on our knowledge of campus and faculty support.

A. Members of ComETS can take the following action steps:

1. Provide information to the TEL Taskforce to strengthen action plans as they relate to creation and support of distance courses *and* courses that mix online with classroom (hybrid) instruction.
2. Directly engage faculty participation in technology-enhanced learning at department, college, discipline, and central levels by providing consulting services around technology integration, support for research applications adapted for the classroom, and support for instructors pursuing education grant funding to implement new technologies.
3. Collaborate with the TEL taskforce to strengthen the TEL hub by tapping our member network in order to promote TEL resources and generate a more complete picture of learning technology support personnel and resources, and create and maintain an up-to-date list of technology resources for the Teaching & Learning Excellence web site. This work helps clarify learning technology support pathways for faculty and strengthens collaboration between all learning technology support staff.
4. Collaborate with faculty to provide instructional access to and adaptation of specialized software used professionally or in research. This work highlights the specific tools and applications students will need to use in their disciplines.
5. Develop mechanisms for sharing software needed for TEL course development and delivery while reducing costs. Explore collaborations within and between colleges and departments and look for shared software licensing solutions. Identify mechanisms for providing software licenses for students requiring remote access (i.e., virtual infolab).
6. Identify methods to scaffold technology support as faculty needs grow and require funding to support TEL.
7. Contribute to decisions regarding which services for TEL should be centrally funded and available to all and which services fall outside of core learning technology services.

B. General observations related to providing technology support to faculty

1. Often, faculty develop their interest and skills with technology gradually. As technology use increases, support services and programs become more attractive.¹
2. Members of ComETS pay close attention to the ways in which faculty request technology support and how faculty learn new tools and strategies. Faculty need access to support that is “just in time”, often one-on-one, includes online help, and incorporates help with instructional design.
3. In formulating TEL plans, it bears attention that many faculty have developed distance and hybrid course with little or no support. Mechanisms to recognize and provide these faculty with additional support should be considered, as well as their potential to mentor other instructors.
4. In formulating TEL plans, the role of departmental support needs to be explicitly included, along with college and central support. Depending on expertise and time, departmental staff can be instrumental in the support of learning technology, or work as part of the team with other course developers.
5. Frequently, collaboration across departmental and college boundaries makes the most sense to faculty and is encouraged in research, e.g., cluster hires. These collaborations often present challenges to faculty because of the reticence of units to support people from outside a department or college. While understandable at one level, this situation often leaves faculty without a place to turn for support.
6. There are key differences between funding and resources for technology support for distance courses in comparison with existing support for use of technology for hybrid courses. The model for producing distance courses calls for funding to support the various aspects of course production. A collaborative model for supporting hybrid courses is a network or star model that leverages current funding. Learning technology support is drawn from multiple roles across campus.
7. In response to Action Plan 6, Distance Learning Wisconsin <http://distancelearning.wisconsin.edu/> is a comprehensive list of courses and degree / certificate programs offered via distance learning from the University of Wisconsin Institutions. Distance Learning Wisconsin can serve as a model portal of courses offered online.

¹ Programs address mentoring and support and include Teaching Academy, CIRTL, CCLE, teaching grants, Summer Institute, Engage, and charge-back services supporting learning technology.