ETEC 520
Planning and Managing Technologies in Higher Education

Option 1

Assignment 3: Analysis and Comparison of Approaches to eLearning at Bellevue College and the University of Greenwich

Submitted by: R. S. Rusyniak

Word Count: 2556

This paper provides analysis of eLearning approaches by two post-secondary institutions – Bellevue College (BC) in the United States and the University of Greenwich (UG) in the United Kingdom – based on their published eLearning strategies.

I've chosen to compare these two institutions because they're similar in size – over 30000 enrolled students per year (James, 2016; University of Greenwich, 2017) – with significant part time student populations – 44.4% at Bellevue College (James, 2016) and 28% at Greenwich (HESA, 2017), which may be especially relevant in cases of distance education. Both also offer a wide variety of programs in areas such as Arts, Business, and Science, including some professional Health Science programmes and the associated Continuing Professional Education courses.

There are also some potentially relevant differences between these institutions. The University of Greenwich is well established – over 100 years old – and is located in London, where it is one of many potential options for incoming students. Bellevue College services a relatively large area of Washington State which has few other post-secondary institutions. It started out as a community college about 50 years ago, and has only recently been granted the right to offer four-year bachelor's degrees (Wikipedia, 2017).   As a result, these institutions may differ in the rationale behind their eLearning strategies.

University of Greenwich

University of Greenwich's strategy defines eLearning very broadly by invoking the "e-learning fan" described be Scribbens and Powell (cited in: UG, 2006a). The document goes on to highlight a preference for "blended learning" as a priority and doesn't seem to mention distance education. A Teaching and Learning Strategy from the same time period also seems to simply point to eLearning as a way to "enhance" learning (UG, 2006b), while

a more recent UG Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (2012) simply refers to promoting "flexible learning".

The stated rationale for investing in eLearning seems to be that it will enhance learning, support a diverse group of learners and allow UG to achieve and maintain a competitive advantage over other institutions when attracting new students. If one considers this in the context of an institution located in a fairly saturated market, this last component would seem the most critical for the University of Greenwich.

Overall, I feel like the university has produced a detailed and strong eLearning strategy.

Organizational Structure

- The eLearning strategy is spearheaded by a working group that is part of UG's Learning and Quality Committee, which seems to be a university-level committee. The strategy appears to be well integrated into University Strategic Plan and the IT Strategy. This deep integration into the University's core strategic plan and the fact that eLearning was not simply shuffled off as an IT department responsibility, seems to indicate that UG is making eLearning a core part of their business.

- The organizational change taking place as a result of this strategy is likely to most closely follow the Fordist Model described by De Freitas and Oliver (cited by Bullen, 2015) – there is a clear commitment on the part of the working group to monitor progress and actively manage the endeavour. There is also a little bit of Community of Practice Model in there as well. The eLearning strategy makes it very clear, right from the beginning, that 'one size does not fit all' and that flexibility is critical to a successful implementation of eLearning. It thus 'paints the big picture', sets some standards and some of the larger goals, but acknowledges that

the various schools/departments will need to develop their own materials in ways that are most appropriate for them.

Support

Funding

- Initial funding for the project seems to have been a grant from the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund in the UK, but the university is looking for ways to make funding 'sustainable'. No further details seem to be given in any of the documents I've come across, however one of the stated objectives is ensuring that each school will have a "clearly articulated and <u>resourced</u>" eLearning strategy. Thus, sustainability is definitely a concern for the working group.

Faculty Support

- The eLearning strategy is very clear on the need for faculty/staff support. It envisions training sessions in addition to the provision of a 'Good Practice website and forum' for faculty, as well as the development of more generalized teaching resources which can be reused in multiple contexts, and also act as models for good eLearning design.

- There also appears to be a commitment to include the teaching of eLearning principles in the school's post-graduate teaching programmes and CPD courses.

- Additionally, UG plans to support development of eLearning projects by facilitating the exchange of eLearning modules as well as providing supervision/quality control of such projects by a specialized eLearning Management Group.

- Lastly, there is a provision in the plan to motivate and support staff in developing eLearning materials by freeing up their time for such activities.

Student Support

- While a majority of the eLearning Strategy focuses on providing faculty with the

tools they need to enhance their teaching in order to appeal to a wider variety of student learning preferences, there is also a provision for the training of new students to ensure they are able to access and use the tools being developed for them at UG.

Delivery

- According to the eLearning Strategy from 2006, the focus would be on blended learning. This would involve the production of a wide variety of resources to cover all the different programs. A more recent presentation by the Head of the Educational Development Unit at UG, seems to indicate that UG staff and faculty have been quite busy during the time period covered by the document released in 2006. According to that presentation, it seems that UG is, or will soon be, able to provide eLearning content in 100% of their programs (Walker, 2013).

Strengths

- One of the things I appreciated about this eLearning Strategy document, was the level of planning that seemed to go into it. It seemed to be fairly well thought out and was quite specific about the responsibilities of the various committees and groups in delivering on specific targets. The plan seemed to be broken down into realistic actions and even included deadlines.

Weaknesses

- Sources of funding (aside for the TQEF grant) are not defined. Supporting eLearning can be quite expensive, in fact the UG IT department alone estimates their annual costs at £2 - 2.5 million (UG, 2013). This does not include the cost of instructors, or educational developers/designers, or staff who provide training and support to faculty and students.
- There seems to be no mention of distance education in this document. This feels

like an oversight, Since UG is so focused on being competitive and increasing its enrolment, offering fully-online courses could be one way of attracting more adult and international students.

- There should be more of an effort to promote their eLearning tools on their website. Currently, searching the UG website for "elearning" or "e-learning" tends to mostly result in links to staff/faculty profiles from the "Computing and Information Systems" department due to their publications and attendance of relevant conferences.

Recommendations

- Securing stable funding is critical for the long-term survival of this endeavour. While the IT department likely has a relatively stable budget, it may make sense to look into using Activity-Based Accounting as suggested by Bates & Sangr (2011), especially for any Continuing Professional Development programs to help offset costs of extra faculty and support staff. A recent Prezi dealing with what appears to be an updated eLearning strategy mentions "seed fund" (Walker, 2013), which may indicate some sort of an attempt at generating a sustainable funding source – unfortunately, I was unable to find the updated strategy.

- Considering UG's efforts to attract more international students, the availability of distance education options could make UG more attractive to some – especially considering recent economic uncertainty in parts of the world (Tijani, 2016; Minnich, 2016), which have been the source of a majority of UG's international students (UG, 2016). The UG internationalization strategy only makes one vague reference to virtual student exchanges and MOOCs in the context of discussing international student and staff exchanges and mobility (UG, 2016). More emphasis should be placed on this.

Bellevue College

I was able to find two versions of Bellevue College's eLearning strategy – one from 2009 and one from 2015. Overall, the more recent document is much more compact (fewer guiding principles, fewer strategies, fewer goals, shorter definitions, etc) and polished, but I will focus my analysis on the earlier document as it seems to document the college leadership's initial thoughts and reflections on the need for eLearning at their institution.

Bellevue's initial Strategy defines eLearning by listing examples of the uses of technology in teaching and learning, as well as examples of teaching technologies. The wide variety of items on the lists show that eLearning has a very broad meaning at Bellevue, but unlike University of Greenwich, distance learning seems to be the main focus – it's listed as the first guiding principle.   The idea of enhancing face-to-face learning doesn't come up until the third guiding principle.

Also, it should be noted that this document was produced at a time when the college was transitioning to becoming a bachelor's degree-granting institution, so it would likely have been much more willing to experiment and make changes to curricula, etc.

Organizational Structure
• The eLearning strategy was probably developed by the college's Distance Learning Committee. The more recent version seems to be the work of the eLearning Council, which appears to be supported by the Office of Instruction. Thus eLearning seems to be positioned near the core of an educational institution's mission, and is apparently directly linked to its institutional goals (this is mentioned briefly in the conclusion). Clearer evidence of this can be seen in the more recent eLearning Strategy document, which aligns each of its goals to very specific parts

of the College's Strategic Plan and Academic Master Plan (BC, 2015a).

- If we are to describe the institutional changes that would have been happening as a result of the adoption of eLearning and the other changes at BC at that time. We would probably see a combination of things. I can see constant references to continuous improvement (the Fordist Model), but the strategy also makes it quite clear that faculty would be incentivized to experiment with ideas to see what works (Evolutionary Model) and the numerous references to sharing best practices brings to mind the Community of Practice Model (Bullen, 2015).

- The freedom to experiment is somewhat reminiscent of the "Chaos" stage of eLearning integration, whereas the focus on "college-wide, consistent guidelines for designing and building eLearning courses seen in the more recent document sounds much more like the 'Planning' stage. (Bates, 2007 as reproduced in Bullen, 2015)

Support

Funding

- The sources of funding are unclear from either version of the eLearning Strategy, but it seems that the College is making an effort to set funds aside for things like "faculty development of new online courses and curriculum", faculty incentives to "support continued expansion of online and hybrid programs", and "mini-grants to experiment with new technologies".

Faculty Support

- Faculty support through funding, professional development opportunities, sharing best practices, faculty orientation, and development of a "Teaching and Learning Center" shows up in nearly all of the 8 strategies presented in the original document.

- It seems that much of the support would actually take place using some of the

eLearning tools themselves.

Student Support

- Compared to the UG Strategy, students and their needs are mentioned more frequently in the BC documents. The eLearning Strategy at BC seems to be very aware of remote students and their needs, and there is much effort put forth to "reduce student commute trips to campus". This includes development of assistance/support tools that would be easily accessible online, eTutoring programs, availability of electronic documents and books, as well as a laptop check-out program.

- In addition, there is some emphasis placed on tracking student progress and collecting success data for analysis and program improvement. In fact, the BC website features an analytics tool (along with an online tutorial on its use) which allows users to dig into some of that data on their own.

Delivery

- According to the eLearning Strategy from 2006, a lot of focus was on accessibility of educational content, along with support and administrative services online to allow students to access all of it remotely from their homes. Thus supporting distance learning.

- The more recent eLearning Strategy, still has that aspect, but more emphasis seems to be placed on development of high quality educational tools.

Strengths

- Looking at the strategy for BC, I was impressed by the amount of focus on allowing and even encouraging educators to experiment with technology to find something that works in their class. That level of freedom is likely to have lead to some really creative uses of technology and interesting discoveries that would not have been

tried otherwise.

Weaknesses

- Bellevue's rationale for initiating an eLearning Strategy does not seem compelling. It seems to be simply an attempt to keep up with the times: "As a leader in higher education in Washington State, Bellevue College is committed to the effective implementation of digital tools and systems to meet today's and tomorrow's educational needs." (2009, p3) Their updated Strategy improves upon this by discussing the need for innovative delivery and supporting student success (2015).

- Many of the goals tend to be repeated under different strategies. This makes the document longer than necessary and at times confusing. The inclusion of 8 separate strategies, each with 3-8 individual goals and up to 10 target activities, makes it seem like the committee was taking on a little too much all at once. The changes made in the 2015 update have improved the strategy by not trying to do too much and by making it easier to read through.

Recommendations

- The eLearning strategy from 2009 does not discuss organizational structure at the College and only once mentions the Distance Learning Committee, leaving the reader to make assumptions about the College organization.

- I would have liked to see more information about the source and stability of the funding for this project. A lack of funding can quickly kill a project as complex as this.

- I would also like to see some discussion of the state of the available infrastructure. Bellevue College seems to be aiming for a rapid expansion, thus it's IT resources might become a limiting factor. An indication that this is something that has been

considered in the plan would improve it.

With part-timers making up significant percentages of their student populations, both these institutions are likely to be focusing on eLearning in order to appeal to that part of their student body, but they're likely doing it for different reasons. With a central location in the UK among many other similar institutions, the University of Greenwich may have been trying to differentiate itself from their competition through offering eLearning. Bellevue College, on the other hand, appears to be one of very few local options for students in a large area of Washingon state, its focus is thus likely on providing numerous options in order to appeal to as many remote students as possible.

References

Bates, A.W. & Sangr , A. (2011). Managing Technology in Higher Education: Strategies for Transforming Teaching & Learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Chapter 7.

Bellevue College, (2009). eLearning Strategic Plan 2009-2014. https://www.dropbox.com/sh/90x6ohdj1y94pe9/AAASEDLG0MzNO3MYRJnCLZzka/Bellevue%20College%20E-Learning%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf?dl=0

Bellevue College, Office of Distance Education and eLearning (2015a). 5-Year eLearning Plan 2015-2020. http://s.bellevuecollege.edu/com/sites/8/2015/07/5-Year-eLearning-Plan-2015-2020.pdf

Bellevue College, Reinventing Governance Task Force. (2015b). Reinventing Governance at Bellevue College. http://s.bellevuecollege.edu/com/sites/8/2015/08/A-Report-to-the-President-from-the-Reinventing-Governance-Task-Force-April-7-2015.pdf

Bullen, M. (2015). Revisiting the Need for Strategic Planning for eLearning in Higher Education. In M. Ally & B.Khan (eds.). The International Handbook of E-Learning, Volume 1, 139-152.London: Routledge

Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA] (2017). 2015/16 Students by HE provider. https://www.hesa.ac.uk/files/student_1516_table_1.xlsx

James, P. (2016). Bellevue College at a Glance — 2015-16 Fact Sheet. Bellevue College. http://s.bellevuecollege.edu/wp/sites/114/2014/05/2015-16CollegeAtAGlanceWorking2.pdf

Minnich, J. (2016). Opinion: China's economic problems will come to a head in 2017. MarketWatch. http://www.marketwatch.com/story/chinas-economic-problems-will-come-to-a-head-in-2017-2016-11-23

Tijani, M. (2016). It's official – Nigeria in worst economic recession in 29 years. The Cable. https://www.thecable.ng/breaking-its-official-nigeria-in-worst-economic-recession-in-29-years

University of Greenwich, e-Learning Working Group (2006a). eLearning Strategy. http://www2.gre.ac.uk/__data/assets/word_doc/0008/36593/2006_elearning_strategy.doc

University of Greenwich, Academic Council (2006b). Learning and Teaching Strategy for 2006-11. http://www.gre.ac.uk/__data/assets/word_doc/.../Item_4_L_and_T_Strategy_2006-11.doc

University of Greenich, Academic Council (2012). Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy 2012-2017. http://www.gre.ac.uk/current-students/regs/?a=791017

University of Greenwich (2013). University of Greenwich Information and Technology Strategy 2013-2017. http://www.gre.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/907553/IT-Strategy-Final.pdf

University of Greenwich, Global Greenwich Committee (2016). Global Greenwich. http://www2.gre.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/1033238/Global-Greenwich-Strategy-April-2016.pdf

University of Greenwich (2017). University of Greenwich: Home Page. http://www2.gre.ac.uk/

Walker, S. (2013). Greenwich Connect: a strategy for learning innovation at the University of Greenwich. e-Learning Team Away Day presentation. https://prezi.com/3y9i5n3ohi6w/greenwich-connect-a-strategy-for-learning-innovation-at-the-university-of-greenwich-e-learning-team-away-day-presentation/

Wikipedia (2017). Bellevue College. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bellevue_College