Appendix C An example of Assignment 2a - an Institutional Review

Institutional review
College of Education
University of Canterbury

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Source: http://www.education.canterbury.ac.nz

Introduction

› The Christchurch College of Education was founded in 1877 and in 2007 became a part of the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. It covers a wide range of pre-service teacher education (early childhood, primary, secondary) as well as professional development and support services for teachers.

› Being a member of a group who will design an online course for pre-service secondary teachers, I investigated the UC College of Education regarding Information and Communication Technologies, in order to use the data I gathered to inform the development of my online course.

› For this review I used the resources that the College of Education offers on the web (College of Education/Learn/UCTL/ICTS web sites) and I interviewed staff from the part of administration/management, academic staff, ICTS (Information and Communication Technology Support) members and students.

› Specifically, two staff members were interviewed from the part of administration, six academic staff members, two from the part of ICTS and sixteen students.

› The questions used for the interviews were based on the assignment guidelines that were given to us from our lecturer. Part of them was also based on the pre-questionnaire that Elbaum, McIntyre and Smith (2002) suggest for technical requirements and administrative support, as well as Ko and Rossen's (2001) guidelines for institutional resource exploration.

interviews
web
literature
questionnaires

Resources used for the institutional review

Main
The situation at my institution

› The review on the situation at UC College of Education has two parts: the first part refers to the available resources and on the second part the perspectives of staff are examined. The third hyperlink leads to some reflections on the implications that might occur during the two weeks when I and my team will teach the online course we are preparing. Finally, there is a hyperlink for references used for this review. Click on each button and follow the hyperlinks to navigate.

PART A: Resources

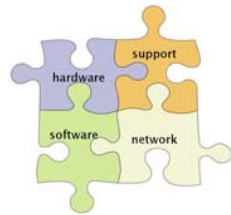PART B: Staff

Possible implications

References

Resources

Elements consisting resources

What is in place	
Support to educators/students	
Resource level	

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Resources
What is in place

- At the UC College of Education there are computers for every staff member available at their office. Students are also offered computers; at Otakaro building two rooms with 21 Pcs, one room with 21 Macs and two rooms with 21 dual boot Macs and PCs are in place. There is a research room at the Education Library building with 16 PCs. Also, a computer workroom at the Kokutu building with 44 Macs is available to students. In total, there are 123 computers available to students.

- The Operating System in use is Windows XP for the most of PCs and MacOS for Macs.

- The network that the College of Education provides full high speed coverage relied on Ethernet, under the standard of Category 5 UTP, meeting the demands for high bandwidth. On some areas of the campus here is wireless broadband network available.

- At the institution's teaching rooms there are video-projectors and computers for the educators to use during their lectures.

- ICTS (Information and Communication Technology Services) give academic staff the option to hire equipment to support audio conferencing. Additionally, the UC provides video conferencing facilities where point to point or multi point connections can take place.

- Each staff member and students have their University email address and access to the internet from any of the College's computers. They can also access the University's network remotely, using their own username and password.

Video conference room
Source: http://www.icts.canterbury.ac.nz

- Among the College's resources there is UC Live which is a set of online services based on Microsoft's live@EDU tachnology, providing students access to their email accounts and file storage of 25GB. UC Live service also includes access to announcements from the University, Outlook Calendar with information about lecture timetables, exams, social events and much more. Moreover, help services are provided, as well as important links for students.

- At the UC College of Education, distance learning is already in place. In fact, this institution is in a leading position regarding online teaching an learning. Distant courses begun to be offered approximately 8 years ago through StudentNet. One other LMS used at the College of Education was Blackboard.

- The LMS that the College uses from 2009 is Learn by Moodle. Most of the College's Courses are supported by Learn and others are fully taught by distance. The transition from Blackboard to Moodle was a decision of a committee consisted from staff members among the colleges of UC.

Learn's home page
Source: http://www.learn.canterbury.ac.nz

- Learn is an open resource used by the whole UC to support online learning. It provides the academic staff with many tools to support their face to face teachings, as well as set up for fully online courses. Such tools include uploading files, adding audio and video, wikis, databases, glossaries, online discussion forums, calendar, online assignment submission and Gradebook.

Resources
Support

- The Learn site has a lot of helpful resources for the educators and students as well, such as quickstart quides and helpbooks giving information about the use of Learn site, how to navigate, how to share files, how to use the forums and much more. Lecturers can even have access to some sample courses and get a better idea on what they can do for their own course.

- The ICT service desk is offering to the staff members and students help with any technical problem and they are willing to visit staffs' offices if necessary. Many students and staff members are calling or visiting the ICT help desk every day and among the most common issues they have is limited access to UC Live or technical issues about logging in to Learn. Most times these problems occur because of faulty attempts to log in, but sometimes it is because of the system's malfunctions. The fact is that most of the appearing problems, are solved in a short period of time.

- Among the assessment tools that Learn provides is Turnitin. Turnitin is a software used from course lecturers to detect plagiarism in students' assignments. It gives the opportunity to check the originality of a document. In order to use Turnitin appropriately, academic staff is given support from UCTL (University Centre of Teaching and Learning) staff.

- QuestionMark is a browser used for online quizzes and offers a supervised testing environment. The results from these quizzes can connect directly to the Gradebook. Students get feedback from the quizzes which can include activities such as multiple choice, matching, calculated, short answer, true/false or numerical questions. Lecturers design these quizzes setting up their properties, such as the grade, the number of attempts, the reviewing options and the feedback received by the students.

- In some courses MyPortfolio is used within teacher education programmes, which is an open source electronic portfolio that includes collaboration and communication tools. Its use is not that widespread among courses in the College of Education, it is mentioned as a resource, as it is used in the course I and my team will further develop.

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- ICTS webpage has many useful resources for students and staff, giving information about its services, such as PC or Mac hiring, frequently asked questions, common issues, workshop and training requests.

- ICTS and UCTL (University Centre of Teaching and Learning) organize workshops for teachers and students as well. Such workshops offer a wide range of guidance, from basic computer skills to more complex skills using enhanced tools. Moreover, there are workshops that provide training on using the Learn site as well as some more specific tools that it incorporates. During the transition from Blackboard to Learn a lot of workshops took place, helping the lecturers get used to the new LMS.

- Apart from the workshops, whenever a staff member or student needs special training services, there is an individual training request form which can be submitted to ICTS and get an immediate feedback.

> Additionally, educators have access through Learn to Susan Tull's online course called "Educational design classroom" where they can learn how to build an online classroom and get assistance to develop their own materials. It was the College's initiative to hire a course designer to lead this course and its contribution to the regular transition from Blackboard to Learn has been well recognized among staff members.

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Resources
Level of resourcing

> The UC College of Education has advanced infrastructure consisting of high technological resources available. It has developed online teaching and learning in a very large scale, compared to the other Colleges of the UC. It has many courses offered online, while the majority of the courses taught at this institution are web supported. It could be said that it is in a leading position compared to other institutions in New Zealand, even in the rest of the world.

> Its level of resources is high and this gives online or blended course designers the advantage of having a ready-to-use Learning Management System (Ko & Rossen, 2001). Moreover, the College has already developed an enhanced support system to help academic staff and students keep up with the new teaching and learning tools available to them.

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Staff

Elements consisting staff

- Administrative/Management position
- Academic staff attitudes
- Student attitudes
- The driving force
- Threats to the vision of online teaching and learning

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Staff
Administrative/Management position

> At the UC College of Education there is a mixture of the ways decisions are made regarding delivering online courses. Decisions can be made from the part of the Administration by the Associate Deans, especially for whole programmes that will be taught by distance, such as the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning (Early childhood/ Primary) which is offered through the Flexible Learning Option (FLO). On the other hand, many courses are taught online after student demand who whish to learn by distance. Finally, for the postgraduate courses it is the lecturers who decide whether their content will be delivered online or face to face.

> The College of Education visions, by the end of 2010 to have all its courses supported by Learn, as there are only few who do not have a Learn site yet. They find that there's been a variety in the development of online learning, as there are some courses that have used creatively most of the available tools, while others are still utilizing the basics.

- Moodle is considered to be more functional than Blackboard, as it is an open source and has made it easier to share resources and participate in online discussions. Compared to StudentNet which needed financial support to work at new developments, Moodle has given the opportunity to overpass such obstacles, being an open source.

- Comparing face to face and online teaching and learning, it is a common attitude that both methods have advantages and disadvantages, but using both can help us get the best out of each. Blended courses offer a combination of both methods' positive outcomes, but it depends on the type of the course which one option will be more effective. For example, theoretical courses can be easily delivered online, while there are some limitations for courses that need more practical work from students. However, the administration acknowledges the options that technology has to offer, such as video recording or synchronous tools and seems to be optimistic in the opportunities lecturers are given to develop online courses.

- The support offered to academic staff to get used to Learn is considered to be efficient, since lecturers have previously used StudentNet and Blackboard which have many similarities to the new LMS. However, more support is needed, as the College recruits new staff members who might not have previous experience in using Learning Management Systems.

- Administration acknowledges that one of the most efficient initiatives of the College for support was Susan Tull's "Educational design classroom" which is an online course where teachers have access to learn how to built their own courses.

- Some of the benefits from the part of the administration that online learning offer to students is flexible learning. Students can learn at their own pace and the institution expands its educational act outside the borders of New Zealand.

Source: http://rutraining.wordpress.com

- For the teachers, administration finds that online learning helps them deliver flexibly and creatively. Their preparation time changes and they are given the opportunity to be more flexible on the time they will spend on their course. Furthermore, because of the variety of tools they are offered, teachers can choose those that best suit the needs of their students and try out some new methods that they could not use in a face to face classroom.

- From the administration/management staff's perspectives there are some issues that need to be considered, such as the fact that sometimes lecturers and students are expected to have a certain amount of experience regarding online teaching and learning, when most times this is not the case. Support must be offered in such a way that it is not assumed people are already familiar with technology and online education.

- On the other hand, people get often overwhelmed by the new tools that they have available and as a result they get carried away. Administration staff underlined the importance of being creative and realistic at the same time. Teachers need to find a balance between creativity and reality and manage their time better, as they have other obligations too.

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Staff
Academic Staff attitudes

- Among the interviewed academic staff members, all of them seem to find UC College of Education in a leading position, compared to the rest of Colleges in the University of Canterbury.

- It is a common view that online learning offers students flexibility to learn anywhere, anytime. Learners interact more with each other, since in an online environment there is less "noise" than in class. Students are also more encouraged to ask questions and participate in conversations, as they have more time to think and organize their thoughts. Moreover, educators find important the fact that in blended courses learners can revisit some ideas that were discussed in the classroom without being obliged to do so. Thus, they choose if and how much time they will spend studying. However, some teachers underlined the fact that students are different and the benefits one might have from learning online depend on his/her needs.

- From the part of the academic staff, it is also believed that online course delivery has advantages for them too. They can have an ongoing access to their courses and thus are able to interact with their students anytime from anywhere.

- Comparing online course delivery to traditional face to face classrooms, was not easy for academic staff members to decide which one is better. It is a common view though that both have different strengths and it depends on the teacher's and students' needs, as well as the course's aims whether online or face to face is more effective. Some of the staff members feel more comfortable in a face to face classroom, as they are not used yet to online interactions, while others enjoy teaching online and have found ways to manage effective discussions from distance.

- Most of the interviewed academic staff members believe that the transition to Learn was necessary, since it was difficult to understand how Blackboard works and the majority of them were using just the basics in their courses.

- They agree that they were given much support for the transition from Blackboard to Learn, and continue to be supported, although the help they are given is more than teachers can use, since they do not have much time during the day, as there are other obligations for them as well, being academic staff members.

- Another problem they find relates to the accessibility of the online content, since there are many distant students from regions with poor internet access. Furthermore, there is a common view that students are not given as much training as the educators and this makes them feel frustrated, at least at the beginning of the courses.

- Finally, an issue that educators think that rises, is that they are expected to know more than what they actually know. Teaching online presents many challenges to them, as teachers are expected to think about a lot of issues when they teach online. Considering the limited time that they can actually offer to workshops and training, it is very difficult to confront all these challenges.

Source: http://geekyteacher.wordpress.com

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Staff
Student attitudes

- Students who participate in the course that I and my team will design, have already enrolled in courses with online component and have been offered some training from their other course's teachers on how to use the Learn site, but the majority of them think that they were not given much support. Some lecturers show to students how to navigate through Learn, but others expect the students to do it by themselves. A big amount of these students believe that they should be given more instructions from their teachers in all courses, although they appreciate the help given to them by the lecturer of this course.

- Among students, it is a common practice to ask one of their classmates if they have any problems using the Learn site. They also think that the most suitable person to ask about a problem is their course's lecturer. Finally, they will seek for help at the ICT service helpdesk when they face technical problems and neither their peers or the lecturer can help them.

- Most of the students have their own computer, but not all have internet access at home. Some of the students who have remote access are sometimes facing poor internet connection problems. They can all use the College's facilities to have access to a computer and to be online.

- It is interesting to point out the elements that students find useful and assist their learning process. Most of students believe that in order to learn, their online course needs to include learning outcomes, instructions on the activities that they need to do, explanations on teaching strategies, revision quizzes and links to discussions used in class. Only one student finds the use of forums helpful for his learning.

- Finally, The majority of students acknowledge the importance of having many resources available through the Learn site. Some of them are concerned though on how their progress will be accessed.

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Staff
The driving force

- It seems that there is a mixture of driving forces for online teaching and learning, coming from the Administration, the students and the lecturers.

- The Associate Deans are responsible to decide on which programmes will be offered by distance as a whole through the Flexible Learning Option and the lecturers are the receivers of these decisions.

- Students' demands are also pushing the College of Education to deliver more courses online, as there are many people for which studying at a distance is the only option.

- Finally, for postgraduate programmes it is the teachers who decide how their courses will be delivered .

- As a conclusion, I could say that the driving force is coming from all directions, although it is believed that the whole online teaching and learning initiative resulted from the strong demand from the part of the students who wanted to be flexible and have access to knowledge from any part of the world.

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Staff
Threats to the vision of online teaching and learning

- In order to deliver online courses effectively, an institution has to provide high quality materials so that "course instructors include the widest feasible range of media and activities to appeal to different styles of learning" (p.11) (Elbaum, McIntyre, Smith, 2002).

- The institution must also ensure that all students and academic staff members have computer and internet access.

- Furthermore, ongoing support must be in place, so that students and teachers get the training they need. Some support might need to be provided individually.

- For teachers, extra training must be in place, as they need to "create effective online courses with many specific elements that contribute to sound pedagogy for inquiry learning" (p.11)(Elbaum, McIntyre, Smith, 2002).

The UC College of Education has in place many resources to ensure that online teaching and learning is a positive experience for teachers and students. Among the resources are the following:

- Ongoing workshops for both students and teachers with orientation activities, as well as specific Learn features.

- Individual training options after request.

- ICT service desk assistance for most of IT needs with a phone call or email.

- Support from the "Educational design classroom" where all academic staff members have access and can learn the techniques of designing effectively for distant course delivery.

- Many helpful resources on the Learn site, such as quick start guides and tutorials.

- Computer equipment and internet access for all academic staff members.

- Computer workrooms for students (123 in total) with high speed internet connection.

- Computer hiring services.

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Possible implications

Considering the findings of the institutional review for the College of Education, there are some implications that might occur during the two weeks of teaching the online course designed by my team.

- There are some students who do not have access to a computer. These students use the computer rooms that the College of Education provides. However, sometimes the demand is higher than the offer and students can not use the computers any time or day of the week, as they are all occupied. Perhaps, computer hiring services will be useful for them.

- Furthermore, high speed internet access is required and some of this course's students have either none or poor internet access. Using the computer rooms provided by the College of Education might be a solution, but still, these students have to check on what time of the day there is not that much "traffic" in the rooms, so that they can use the computers.

- One more possible implication might occur by the fact that students for this course are more comfortable using MyPortfolio rather than Learn, as they will continue to have access there after the course finishes. MyPortfolio is an open source as well where students can create online communities and share resources and ideas. It seems that they prefer using an environment where they can have ongoing access for more then one semester. This is one disadvantage of Learn, because it could be an ongoing source of learning helping not only pre-service teachers, but also teachers during their professional career.

  Perhaps students must be given instructions on using both Learn and MyPortfolio to upload files, but also facilitate online discussions on the Learn site, by setting up discussion forums with specific topics.

- Finally, students seem that they do not acknowledge the strengths of online discussions and their contribution in learning. Not participating in online discussions might be an implication. Through exposure and effective interactions, students can expand their knowledge and think more critically.

  Discussions, if designed appropriately, "keep students on-task, promote full participation and encourage peer collaboration" (p.81) (Elbaum, McIntyre, Smith, 2002). Some factors that might influence the participation of students in discussions might be the roles that can be assigned to them, the instructional tasks and the load of the information (Vonderwell, Zachariah, 2005). So, as a moderator of online discussions, I need to help students acknowledge the contribution of effective dialogue in learning and support reflective discussions in the group.

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References

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