EDC Grant Midterm Report

Title: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Collaborative

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Overview of the project

The project entails setting up a website that will be a portal into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Visitors will be able to access a variety of levels of engagement into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, including reviewing current projects, searching for collaborators in their area of interest and disseminating their research results. Our portal will allow visitors to search the database for potential collaborators, access ideas and projects that are currently underway or planned, and link to summaries of completed SoTL projects. The possibility of cross-institutional research will be enhanced with the use of this electronic tool. Our goal is to create a vital connection between academic institutions that will introduce, encourage and nurture the development of SoTL projects.

Progress toward the stated goals at the midterm point

We contracted Northstudio (http://www.northstudio.com/), a Victoria, British Columbia based Web design company, to do the development. As described below, we developed hypothetical use case scenarios to consider what visitors would be looking and how navigation could be most intuitive and user-friendly. Over half of the functionality is in place. We need to complete the functionality development, enter sample data, test all of the navigation and invite selected visitors to add content and test the navigation before we make it available to SoTL researchers.

SoTL Collaborative Website Design Framework: Phase 1 Design Process

In the conceptual phase of thinking about design, the project team for the SoTL Collaborative developed a series of use case scenarios to facilitate decisions around technologies to support the needs of potential users. These took the form of simple descriptions of the actions we envisioned for future SoTL researchers. Throughout this process we also began to imagine and develop roles, such as visitor, member, administrator, project leader, etc. Here is a use case scenario example:

Title of case: Testing out an idea
User: Member
Description: Member 1 has an idea for a research project. She is curious to know what research has been done that is related to her idea. She is also wondering what others will think of her idea. She goes to the SoTL Collaborative to search for research projects on keywords related to her idea. After browsing the search results she decides to initiate a project. She prepares a summary. At this point she has conducted some research and has some references to share that support her research idea. Member 1 waits to receive notification in her email inbox that someone has liked or responded to her post.

From these descriptions we were able to identify several desirable features. For example, in the above case needs emerge for robust search as well as customizable email notification. This case also raised discussions about visitor access to the website, and at what point account creation is necessary.

Northstudio (http://www.northstudio.com/), a Victoria, British Columbia based Web design company was contracted for development. Based on the early discussion anchored on use case scenarios, several options for platforms to support the project were reviewed. Open Atrium (http://openatrium.com/), project management software built in Drupal, stood out as a promising platform. It had several advantages:

1. Free and open source;
2. Customizable;
3. Features and metaphor support team approaches to workflow;
4. Possibility for integration with the Learn Together Collaboratory, an existing website to support professional learning.

In the initial design we created a model as a way to map sequence and actions with Open Atrium tools. The following diagram and description became our basis for development.

SEARCH
- For ideas, topics proposed, research working groups, publications, people
- For help

Momentum: Get inspired to post ideas, get feedback, create a project group.

CONNECT
- Post and obtain feedback on ideas for a research project
- Build a network of potential collaborators
- Submit a call for collaboration
- Request workbench group space

Momentum: Launch research project, or find existing research project to follow or join.

COLLABORATE
- Form research working groups
- Set goals and milestones
- Co-author documents
- Post research reports in progress
- Complete research projects

Momentum: Work together to complete research and write report.

PUBLISH
- Completed reports
- Disseminate results

Momentum: Make your group's research report(s) available for others for feedback and advancement.

The core tools in Open Atrium can be mapped onto the workflow required for our Search-Connect-Collaborate-Publish model. However, the project management language used in the software is not necessarily intuitive. This required customization work to

rename labels for tools. For example, an obvious change for phase 1 development included "research tasks" instead of "case tracker".

Website Hosting and Stewardship

The website is currently hosted within the Learn Together Collaboratory (http://ltc.bccampus.ca/), a website supported by BCcampus. The SoTL Collaborative is not currently integrated with the Learn Together Collaboratory in any way. There may be some advantages to integrating accounts and profiles so that users can seamlessly take advantage of all services related to research and professional learning. However, at this stage of development the SoTL Collaborative can easily become a separate website and hosted elsewhere. BCcampus has covered hosting and support costs during the development phase.

The SoTL Collaborate website will require ongoing community and technology stewardship
- Monitor Case Tracker for Research Working Group requests
- Curate Group content based on progress: 1. Active Research Working Group, 2. Completed, 3. Inactive/Archived
- Ensure consistent Group names for all SoTL core groups, Research Groups
- Monitor Publications Group
- Manage accounts (e.g. duplicates, incomplete information)
- Monitor keywords, maintain taxonomy
- Respond to help requests
- Identify further needs for development

Barriers and challenges and plans for solutions

The cost of website development exceeded our original estimates. As a result, our entire grant allocation of $2200 was expended on website development. The HST on the payment was contributed by BCCampus. With the project design and preliminary testing well underway, we are confident we will be able to complete the project if we receive one more year of funding from EDC. We now have a more realistic estimate of website design costs. We have eliminated all other costs from the budget so the entire allocation is planned for website design. The investigators will use funding from their home institutions to attend conferences where presentations on the project will be made.

Dissemination

We presented the website framework and our goals as both a poster and roundtable at the 2011 STLHE conference in Saskatoon. Our poster won third prize in the poster contest. We received valuable feedback from conference participants that will assist us in making revisions and additions to the site. One suggestion we received was to add content on how to design and conduct SoTL studies. As part of phase II, we will determine the feasibility of adding this content and do so if possible.

We will submit a proposal to present a session at the Centennial Symposium on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at Mount Royal University in November 2011.

Project leaders will use available listserves to advertise the new website when it is live. We will present at EDC/STLHE and local conferences to encourage use of the portal. Our presentations will take a poster-style format where participants can access the website in a hands-on atmosphere. We will investigate advertising in appropriate journals and request to be added to campus websites through existing SoTL pages they currently have or with their faculty development centres.