THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

Meeting of the UWIDEC Academic Programme Committee
to be held on Friday, May 5, 2006
at the St Augustine Hill Campus

Building a system for implementing blended learning in the UWI's distance education programme

Drawing on the experience of the pilot project, the project team has developed the procedures described below as a means of building a more formal and sustainable system to support the implementation of blended learning in UWIDEC.

A. Observations made about the pilot

(1) Information about the shift to blended learning was adequately disseminated and generally well received by the UWIDEC community. Over the period of the pilot, meetings of various categories of staff were always well attended and very interactive. In this regard, special mention must be made of the site staff – the level of interest in these meetings was always very high.

(2) Tutor performance was variable, in particular in the first Semester. In Semester 2, clearer guidelines and tasks were prepared to govern performance; there was a definite improvement in the level of tutor activity.

(3) The majority of the student body has taken at least the initial step to make the shift to blended learning and in particular to the online component of the new delivery mode. Log on data extracted from the learning management system shows that a significant proportion of those enrolled in the various courses actually logged on and that the overall number of hits received on the respective course sites was relatively high. (*see Attachment A*).

(4) While there was a fair amount of accessing of information provided on the course site, overall active participation was low for most courses in Semester 1 (Intro to Sociology was the noted exception). However, in Semester 2, with a more focused attempt to articulate learning activities in several of the courses and to allocate grades for student performance in these activities, active participation increased significantly. There is, nonetheless, still a fair amount of anxiety and uncertainty among students.

B. Goals of the proposed system

(5) The new system has been designed to:
- Provide a well-defined visual structure to support student and tutor behaviour in the online learning environment.
- Bring greater clarity to the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders in course delivery.

- Ensure that students acquire all necessary skills to function efficiently as online learners.
- Standardize the selection, appointment and remuneration of online tutors across the UWIDEC network
- Ensure that tutors are adequately trained
- Establish a monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with procedures set.
- Maintain an efficient helpdesk system.

C.   Structure of the virtual environment

(6)   The implementation of the blended learning delivery mode centers on the use of the asynchronous tools of the online learning management system. More specifically, these tools serve to define the different types of tasks that students and tutors will perform. Thus it is the LMS that defines the manner in which students, tutors and course coordinators will engage with one another in the teaching and learning of a course.

(7)   At the beginning of Semester 2, the course main page was re-designed and established as the standard for all courses. This main page sets up the teaching-learning space as comprising three broad areas, namely *Course Information, Course Resources* and *Learning Forums.* It is envisaged that this clearly articulated structure would facilitate greater ease in navigation and by extension, enhance students' capability to manage the learning process.

D.   Responsibilities and duties of course coordinators and tutors

(8)   Attachments B and C list the responsibilities and duties of course coordinators and tutors respectively. Special attention is drawn to the categorization of courses and the teaching-learning tasks associated with each category. It is to be noted that both lists are to be appended to the respective instruments used to retain the services of each type of staff – the contract for the course coordinator, and the letter of appointment for the tutor.

(9)   **Recommendation: *The APC is being asked to ensure that arrangements for issuing and honouring contracts and letters of appointments are in place on all three campuses.***

E.   Preparing students for online learning

(10) Steps have been taken to revise and upgrade the course, *Improving Your Study Skills,* which will continue to be used for training students. The original has now been divided into 2 parts – *Orientation to Online Learning* will provide training in using the online tools. *Improving Your Study Skills* focuses on understanding learning styles and the development of efficient reading skills for the tertiary level. Both courses are specifically targeting incoming students this year.

(11) *Improving Your Study Skills* is a 6-week online course, which requires tutorial support. The core materials must also be provided in print form. We estimate that there will be about 1000 new students, necessitating 30-35 tutors.

(12) **Recommendation: *The APC is being asked to identify funds to meet the expenses associated with the mounting of this course, in particular those associated with the hiring of tutors.***

F.   Selection, appointment and remuneration of tutors

(13)   A new system for retaining the services of tutors has been worked out. In this regard, APC is being asked to note the following:
- All e-tutor positions are to be advertised. All current tutors who wish to be considered must apply (*see Attachment D for advertisement*)
- The advertisement is to be handled centrally, at the Director's office and specifically through the office of the Assistant Registrar. The advertisement is to be issued regionally.
- All selection is to be done within UWIDEC by a specially selected team and using criteria to be worked out. Faculties will be asked to provide criteria for assessing the academic qualifications of the applicants. In selecting applicants efforts will be made to ensure that, as far as possible, there is a cadre of online tutors at each site.
- Once the selection process is completed, the names of those selected will be forwarded to the relevant Campus Registry for the preparation and issuing of letters of appointment.
- In terms of remuneration, there will be a fixed fee for tutoring a course based on tasks set out. The course categories described earlier will also impact the fee structure (*see Attachment E for description of the payment scheme*).

(14)   **Recommendation: *The APC is being asked to review and provide feedback on the payment scheme.***

G.   Tutor training

(15)   From the upcoming academic year onwards, all new e-tutors will be required to go through the UWIDEC training programme, which will be a revised version of the one used for the initial training that formed part of the pilot project.

H.   Monitoring mechanism

(16)   To ensure compliance with procedures, a formalized monitoring function has been established, with the course team on each of the 3 campuses having the responsibility for checking the level of tutor activity in particular. The relevant course team will also be responsible for taking steps to remedy the situation.

I.   Helpdesk

(17)   Following on initiatives already taken in Semester 2 of the pilot project period, a helpdesk system will be formalized and will serve as a one-stop point for receiving all problems. Where necessary, the staff appointed to manage the helpdesk will channel the query to the relevant source for resolution. The Helpdesk will also verify that all problems received are attended to.

(18)   The Oregon State University (OSU) Helpdesk, which is an open source software solution, has been identified for use in UWIDEC, to facilitate the efficient running of our system. (http://osuosl.org/projects/helpdesk/)

(19)   As an accompaniment to the Help Desk, a set of Frequently-Asked-Questions has also been developed, based on the experience of the pilot year.

Attachment A

Login and hits received on course sites (up to April 26, 2006)

COURSES	NO. OF STUDENTS	NO. OF STUDENTS THAT LOGGED ON	TOTAL HITS
(SOCI1002) Introduction to Sociology	465	440	132,724
(EDRS1402) School and Classroom Research	20	9	584
(EDFA1401) Schooling, Personal and Social Development	20	7	387
(EDEA1410) School and Classroom Management	34	20	680
(EDEA1101) Introduction to School Administration and Supervision	21	7	356
(FOUN1210) Science, Medicine and Technology in Society	272	252	21,855
(MGMT2011) Caribbean Business Environment	259	219	24,785
(EDEA3314) Guidance and Counselling in Education	86	85	28,933
(MGMT3017) Human Resource Management	133	111	18,132
(ACCT1002) Introduction to Financial Accounting	436	380	74,710
(MGMT3011) Management Information Systems II	136	128	61,925
(ECON1003) Mathematics for Social Sciences	490	395	57,916
(FOUN1101) Caribbean Civilization	302	204	16,279
(EGOV1001) Local E-Governance in the Caribbean	23	21	20,102
(ACCT1003) Introduction to Cost and Management Accounting	200	120	2,449
(EDEA3301) Management Information Systems in Educational Administration	43	31	1,358

SEMESTER I

Login and hits received on course sites (up to April 26, 2006)

COURSES	NO. OF STUDENTS	NO. OF STUDENTS THAT LOGGED ON	TOTAL HITS
(FOUN1101) Caribbean Civilization	360	288	46,578
(FOUN1210) Science, Medicine and Technology in Society	475	399	69,286
(AGBU3003) Introduction to Ecotourism	14	13	3,112
(AGBU3012) Agricultural Project Course	9	8	324
(MGMT3037) International Business Management	120	101	9,113
(MGMT3031) Business Strategy and Policy	230	219	38,853
(ACCT1003) Introduction to Cost and Management Accounting	810	653	86,802
(EDEA3301) Management Information Systems in Educational Administration	172	167	85,415
(EDMA1721) Mathematics Appreciation	29	20	352
(EDEA1410) School and Classroom Management	30	20	523
(EDTL1720) Instructional Design I	29	20	696
(EDEA1102) Introduction to Organizational Development of Schools	32	18	494
(EGOV1001) Local E-Governance in the Caribbean	31	28	5,179

SEMESTER II

Attachment B

Responsibilities and duties of the course coordinator – to be appended to contract

Responsibilities:

The course coordinator provides overall academic and pedagogic supervision for the delivery of the course. He/she is required to monitor the teaching/learning process and ensure that students are given appropriate guidelines and support to assist them in their study of the course. He/she must lead a team of tutors and provide them with the relevant information to assist them in carrying out their role as learning facilitators in a blended learning delivery environment.

Duties:

He/she
1. Prepares and/or identifies additional materials to supplement the pre-packaged materials. These may include web-based materials, multi-media presentations developed or sourced by the course coordinator, and/or print-based materials.
2. Prepares and/or updates guidelines and instructions for tutors, thus providing them with a framework for carrying out their own tutoring tasks.
3. Holds a teleconference briefing session with tutors at the beginning of the semester to ensure clarity in their understanding of their role in the delivery of the course.
4. Prepares a study schedule for the course.
5. Based on the category within which the course falls (see below), prepares the required number of online learning activities. These may take the form of quizzes, short-answer questions, problem sets, short essays, mini-research exercises. Based also on the category of the course, identifies the activity (ies) that tutors would be required to grade and for which they would provide individual feedback.
6. Maintains ongoing communication with and supervision of tutors through the course coordinator-tutor forum in the online learning management system; accesses that forum at least once per week and shows evidence of active participation.
7. Posts a message in the course coordinator news forum at least once every two weeks to motivate students, to draw attention to specific aspects of the delivery of the course and/or to highlight broader areas of interest that impact on the study of the course. The first of these messages will be a self-profile.
8. Conducts at least two (2) teleconference sessions with students.
9. Prepares in-course assignments/examinations with accompanying guidelines and instructions to students.
10. Provides tutors with a marking scheme for grading in-course assignments/examinations.
11. Prepares the final examination paper and corresponding marking scheme in accordance with the procedures established by the Faculty.
12. Submits the final examination paper to the Campus Registry on or before the deadline date set.
13. Undertakes and/or coordinates the marking of all final examination scripts.
14. Delivers in accordance with the relevant deadlines, marked scripts and mark sheets, duly signed to the Registry.
15. Accepts end-of-semester reports from tutors

16. Drawing on the tutor reports received and based on his/her own evaluation of the delivery of the course, prepares a report for submission to the Dean of the Faculty or his/her representative as well as to the Director/Campus Coordinator, UWIDEC.
17. Provides input for the update of the course.
18. Performs any other duties that are consistent with those described above.

Course categories with related learning activity requirements

Course Category	Description	Learning activity requirements
1	Reading courses at Levels 2 and 3; and courses at any level with moderate skills development component	4 learning activities, 1 to be tutor-marked with individual feedback by tutor; 3 to be computer-marked, or delayed provision of correct answers, with group feedback by tutor.
2	Reading courses at Level 1 (Mgmt. Studies) & Level 2 (B.Ed, Agribusiness)	6 learning activities, 2 to be tutor-marked with individual feedback by tutor; 4 to be computer-marked, or delayed provision of correct answers, with group feedback by tutor.
3	Quantitative courses & courses with strong skills development component	8 learning activities, 3 to be tutor-marked with individual feedback by tutor; 5 to b4 computer-marked, or delayed provision of correct answers, with group feedback by tutor.

Attachment C

Responsibilities, reporting relationships and duties of the tutor – to be referenced in the letter of appointment

Responsibilities

The tutor is expected to assist the learners to build knowledge and acquire competencies related to the course for which he/she was appointed as a tutor. He/she is also expected to assist the learners to develop the learning skills that would allow them to manage their own learning. The tutor must facilitate the building of an online environment that would allow learners to see themselves as a part of a learning community.

Reporting relationships

The tutor will report both to the site coordinator and to the course coordinator. From the site coordinator or his/her representative, the tutor will receive,
- The letter of appointment
- The document entitled 'Responsibilities, reporting relationships and duties of the tutor'. This document is referenced in the letter of appointment and is applicable for each letter of appointment that the tutor receives, unless stated otherwise.
- The package of course materials
- Information for accessing the online management information system and learning management system.
- Any other materials necessary for the delivery of the course that cannot be made available online.

At the end of the semester, the tutor will submit to the site coordinator
- The mark sheet (until this is no longer necessary)
- The claim for remuneration

From the course coordinator, the tutor will receive, through the web-based learning management system,
- The main assignment (s) (if applicable)
- Marking scheme for the assignment
- Information regarding the conduct of mid-semester examinations (if applicable) and final examinations
- Ongoing guidelines and instructions relative to the tutoring role

At the end of the semester, the tutor will submit to the course coordinator and site coordinator, a report evaluating the delivery of the course, using the form provided.

Attachment C cont'd...

Duties

The tutor,
1. Attends the teleconference briefing session that the course coordinator conducts for tutors at the beginning of the semester.
2. Studies the course materials and all supplementary materials thoroughly prior to the beginning of the semester.
3. Identifies the areas of the course content that are likely to be difficult for the students and devises strategies for dealing with these in the online tutoring environment.
4. Posts an introductory greeting in the *Getting-to-know-one-another* forum and at least two responses to students' postings over a 2-week period.
5. In the introductory greeting, informs students of what they can expect of the tutor and lets them know what he/she expects of them. This will also include time and frequency of log on.
6. Where appropriate, makes available additional materials to enhance the learning experience of the students.
7. Responds to all student queries in the *Student queries and concerns* forum. Where necessary, accesses information from the appropriate source in order to address the matter raised.
8. Makes at least two separate postings in the *Unit discussion forum* for the specified period. One will invite students to post their own remarks or ask questions about the content in that Unit. The other will be a discussion topic to facilitate the exchange of ideas and views among all group members.
9. Posts at least 3 responses in the different areas of the particular *Unit discussion forum* ensuring that all issues raised by students are addressed.
10. Makes at least one posting in the *e-tutors Presentation Area*, which will present information, explain or discuss selected aspect(s) of the course content for that Unit.
11. Where there is a learning activity attached to the Unit, post an introductory message to guide, encourage students or to highlight special points that they should pay attention to. Grades and provides individual feedback for the selected activities, as instructed by the course coordinator. In cases where individual feedback is not required, post one follow-up comment for the whole group.
12. As necessary, communicates with individual students via e-mail to counsel, advise and motivate them.
13. Accesses the *course coordinator-tutor forum (teachers' forum)* at least once weekly and shows evidence of interaction with the other tutors and the course coordinator.
14. Grades and provides individual feedback for in-course assignment/examination, based on the marking scheme provided by the course coordinator (**to be remunerated separately).**
15. Prepares and submits the marksheet
16. Submits a report based on his/her evaluation of course delivery to the course coordinator.
17. Performs any other duties that are consistent with those described above.

Attachment D

Advertisement for tutors of blended learning courses

Background

Over the past year, UWIDEC began the transformation of its courses to a blended learning/asynchronous delivery mode. As a result, tutoring for these courses will now be conducted online, using a web-based learning management system. UWIDEC is therefore inviting applications for online tutors for the courses listed below for both semesters of the academic year 2006-2007.

Responsibilities

Working under the guidance of the course coordinator, tutors are expected to assist the learners in building knowledge and acquiring competencies related to the course for which they are appointed as tutors. They are also expected to assist the learners in developing the learning skills that would allow them to manage their own learning. Tutors must also facilitate the building of an online environment that would allow learners to see themselves as a part of a learning community.

Qualifications

Applicants must have at least a Bachelor's degree in an appropriate discipline and at least a B grade in the course (s) for which he/she is applying. A Master's degree will be an asset. Applicants must also show evidence of teaching/training experience at the tertiary educational level, in the public sector or in industry. Persons who also have formal qualifications in this area of practice will enjoy a distinct advantage.

Additional requirements

Applicants must have reliable access to a computer with Internet connectivity. They must also have good written communication skills for interacting in the online environment. Given the nature of teaching and learning online, applicants must be team players as well as team builders. They must also be sensitive to the special circumstances of students studying at a distance away from the teaching institution. Applicants will be required to participate in an e-tutoring training programme conducted by UWIDEC.

Applications may be completed online at …………………….. Alternatively the forms may be downloaded at ………………. Completed hard copy application forms should be addressed to:
The Assistant Registrar
UWIDEC, Cave Hill

They may be delivered to any UWIDEC local site or campus office. Deadline for the receipt of applications at any of these locations is ………….

Attachment D cont'd...

Blended learning courses (2006-2007).

Current courses:
    i.   Science, Medicine and Technology in Society
    ii.   Caribbean Civilisation
    iii.   Introduction to Ecotourism
    iv.   Agricultural Project Course
    v.   International Business Management
    vi.   Business Strategy and Policy
    vii.   Introduction to Cost & Management Accounting
    viii.   Management Information Systems in Educational Administration
    ix.   Introduction to Sociology
    x.   Mathematics for Social Sciences 1
    xi.   Caribbean Business Environment
    xii.   Guidance & Counselling in Education
    xiii.   Human Resource Management
    xiv.   Introduction to Financial Accounting
    xv.   Management Information Systems II

New courses:

    i.   English for Academic Purposes,
    ii.   Survey Design and Analysis,
    iii.   Topics in Economic Development,
    iv.   Compensation Management,
    v.   Introduction to Financial Accounting
    vi.   Introduction to Quantitative Methods
    vii.   Principles of Marketing

Attachment D

Suggested payment scheme for eTutors*

Online elements/activities	Category 1 etutor	Category 2 etutor	Category 3 etutor
Familiarization with the online course environment	Yes	Yes	Yes
Discussion postings • Student queries and concerns • Getting to know you • Unit forum • E-tutors presentation	(Minimum no, of responses/postings) • 1 per week • 1 per week • 1 topic set per week and 1 response to students per week • 1 per week	(Minimum no, of responses/postings) • 2-4 per week • 2-4 per week • 2-4 per week	(Minimum no, of responses/postings) • 5 or more per week • 5 or more per week • 5 or more per week
E-mail &/or chat	(Minimum no, of messages) 3-6 per week	(Minimum no, of messages) 3-6 per week	(Minimum no, of messages) 3-6 per week
Learning Activities • Feedback on each quiz or • Feedback on each assignment or worksheet (quantitative)	1-2 quizzes per course 1-2 assignments of 100-250 words 1-2 worksheets per course	3-6 quizzes per course 3 assignments of 100-250 words or 1-2 assignments of 500 words 3-6 worksheets per course	7 or more quizzes 4 or more assignments (short answer or 100-250 word) Or 1-2 500 word assignments 7 or more worksheets per course
Sample Payment Scheme (per group, per course) Based on 1/8 of a pay rate of TT$8,000 per month i.e. an average of TT$1,000 per month			
6-8 week course (e.g. Improving Your Study Skills)	US$242 or TT$1,500	US$290 or TT$1,800	US$355 or TT$2,200
Semester course	US$484 or TT$3,000	US$581 or TT$3,600	US$645 or TT$4,000

***Based on 1/8 pay of an Assistant Lecturer calculated at the highest existing pay rate across the three campuses to be increased in Categories 2 and 3 by 20%.**