

Assignment 2:

E-Learning Readiness Audit - Overview

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Tool Description

The e-learning readiness audit tool is primarily an adaptation of content from Cecilia A. Mercado's article *Readiness assessment tool for an e-learning environment implementation* (Mercado, 2008) as well as relevant Bates and Sangrà material that discusses key readiness factors and organizational structure (2011, pp. 71–75; 111–119). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey that could only be administered from within the institution. Rather, it is designed mainly to give a reasonably accurate preliminary forecast of what a more exhaustive survey might reveal. The tool can be applied to any publicly accessible information and should provide a realistic estimate of any institution's level of e-learning readiness.

Decision Making Process

Our decision making process began with consideration of the Student and Instructor surveys; however, it soon became apparent to us that most of their survey items were inappropriate for the kind of assessment tool needed for this assignment. They were specific survey questions that would be asked in an internal staff and student survey--and they did not realistically relate to the kind of information that would normally be publicly available. Furthermore, they seemed more focused on technology than on pedagogy, which is not the approach that we wanted to take. As our moderator, Dr. Adnan Qayyum from Penn State University, pointed out in last week's discussion forum, many institutions often put too much emphasis on technology training and not enough on pedagogy ("Thread: Centralized versus Decentralized DE – 2015S1-2-....," n.d.). This is also a concern expressed by Bates and Sangrà (2011).

We edited the Mercado tool based on Unit 2 from ETEC 520 and Bates and Sangrà content. Some items were added, others deleted based on redundancy, others were modified.

For example, we added item #4, “There is commitment on the part of "champions" with power and influence (Bates & Sangrà, 2011, pp. 71–72) to use technology to achieve strategic academic goals and that such commitment extends beyond just using technology.”, as we felt that a “champion” with power and influence was not only vital to institutional readiness, but distinguishable from simply an institutional leader who is committed to using technology. A modification includes distinguishing the language between items #24 and 25, in reference to technological infrastructure where one item is “adequate to sustain” and the other is “well-developed to support growth”.

We then proceeded to apply the audit tool to The University of Ottawa, in order to begin analysis using the Report of the E-Learning Working Group, and *Destination 2020*, The University of Ottawa's strategic plan. While analyzing, we concurrently applied a “backward design” to the audit tool, adding items highlighted by The University of Ottawa, that we felt were important in assessing an institution. Audit item #18, "The institution participates in a broader consortium in order to share resources, expertise and costs in improving technology-enabled learning" is such an example, as is audit item #13, “The institution is willing to make provisions for collaborative learning and social constructivist pedagogy by integrating Web 2.0 technologies wherever possible.” Both of these items demonstrate examples that lead to our conclusion that the University of Ottawa is shows progressiveness beyond readiness by displaying consideration of items beyond a standard audit tool. We will discuss this further in our analysis.

Preliminary Assessment of The University of Ottawa

Administrative Support

While analyzing the executive summary of the University's 82 page document (*Report of the E-Learning Working Group*, n.d.) and applying the backward design process, it became immediately apparent that e-learning initiatives are key aspects of The University of Ottawa's

mission. The E-Learning Working Group was established in late 2012 and the fact that such a working group even exists is consistent with the recommendations of Bates and Sangrà (2011, pp. 111–119). Another positive indicator is the membership of the working group. The Chair is Christian Detellier, Vice-President Academic and Provost of the University, and there are a number of other high ranking institutional leaders in the group. They, along with report co-author Richard Pinet, who is the Director of the Centre for e-Learning, Teaching and Learning Support Service at the University are all potential "champions" with power and influence (2011, pp. 71–72) to use technology for achieving *strategic academic goals* that extend far beyond *just using technology*. In fact, there are several statements throughout the report itself that stress the need for "a championing program" (pp. 6, 43, 44, and 47) that encourages teaching innovation and disseminates good practice information to other instructors. These administrative commitments are all key readiness factors that clearly provide ample evidence for audit tool items 1 to 4.

So far as other administrative support is concerned (such as policies and instruction), the report provides plenty of additional evidence of institutional readiness. For example, one of the report's key recommendations is a large scale shift to blended learning (BL) because research findings indicated that BL would support the University's key objectives in e-learning. However, the report is also careful to point out the likelihood that a BL initiative will inevitably result in some problems that will necessitate "inter-departmental and inter-functional area cooperation" and pedagogical innovation for large-scale course redesign. It predicts some specific challenges that involve shifting some classroom activities to online interactivities, retraining professors in key aspects of both technology and pedagogy, plus decentralizing some decision making and increasing interdepartmental collaboration (*Report of the E-Learning Working Group*, n.d., p. 17).

Another key piece of evidence that provides some of the most vital positive support

for the University's overall readiness is the report's acknowledgment that today's students undergo a significant amount of informal learning via Web 2.0 and other technologies, thus creating another key advantage of e-learning: the increase in collaboration between students and the community that is afforded by emerging technological tools and social media. This fully supports audit item #13, which is one particular aspect of e-learning readiness that has some major long-term implications--an area that we will explore in depth for Assignment 3.

Resource Support

Finances are a central consideration of resource support, and in some senses are key to the operation of all other factors. The documents showed evidence that The University of Ottawa is a mature well-established university that is showing considerable forethought in proceeding with e-learning initiatives. The report shows strong consideration for many financial aspects, including awareness of the importance of budgeting for infrastructure, multimedia tools, and support (e.g. staffing in human resources), cost-recovery, cost-effective solutions (e.g. the use or transformation of existing spaces versus the creation new ones), as well as the awareness and consideration of obscure costs that may be considerable in affecting budgets (e.g. copyright licensing, broadcast quality production of video, legal costs). Revenue-generation is also an aim in an effort to going beyond a break-even or revenue neutral position for distance learning.

Provincial consortiums or partnerships vary in development maturity and effectiveness, but are an opportunity for institutions to share resources and costs. The university already participates in the Centre for Mediated Teaching and Learning, a service of 14 sites of videoconferencing in Ontario and Quebec, and has also committed to participating in Ontario Universities Online (OUO), a consortium to support technology-enabled learning in universities. The Ontario Online Institute, slated to launch in 2015 will offer another opportunity for the University of Ottawa ("Ontario to launch \$42-million central hub for

online postsecondary classes,” n.d.).

Human resources have been carefully considered, both in terms of budget and allocation, including faculty and technical support staff (supporting both faculty and students) for e-learning. Infrastructure and hardware considerations have been evaluated by the university and the document shows ample evidence of recommendations to address future needs.

Summary & Conclusion

The University of Ottawa through the E-learning Working Group has shown considerable forethought in its readiness for e-learning. They show ample evidence in most aspects of readiness as an institution. The report prepared by the group shows a sober assessment of both the strengths and challenges of the university, as well as well-considered recommendations for continuing and building e-learning at the university. They show evidence of being well-rounded in their resources and readiness for e-learning.

Institutional Assessment

The following items deal with administrative support in terms of commitment, policies, and instruction (Mercado, 2008, pp. 18.8–18.9).		No Evidence	Some Evidence	Ample Evidence
1	An e-learning initiative is an important aspect of the institution’s mission			X
2	The institution recognizes that large-scale course redesign for the e-learning initiative involves a strong collaboration among the teachers, IT personnel, and administrators in the planning as well as the implementation.			X
3	There is commitment on the part of institutional leaders to use technology to achieve strategic academic goals.			X
4	There is commitment on the part of "champions" with power and influence (Bates & Sangrà, 2011, pp. 71–72) to use technology to achieve strategic academic goals and that such commitment extends beyond just using technology.			X
5	The institution is willing to employ or to assign an academically capable			X

	and/ or experienced faculty to oversee the implementation of the e-learning environment.			
6	The institution supports and provides training for employees who seek out non-traditional development programs or experiences.			X
7	The institution is committed to implementing e-learning as a mode for teaching and learning.			X
8	The institution has a committee or is willing to put up a committee that will work directly with the development of online courses and programs.			X
9	The institution ensures / or is willing to put in place provisions that would ensure adequate and timely support to the teacher and students when technical issues arise			X
10	The institution provides or is willing to provide teachers with professional development opportunities to assist them in improving their online teaching.			X
11	The institution support teachers to have access to a network of other online practitioners to discuss pedagogical and curricular issues.		X	
12	The institution is willing to ensure that a professional support system is in place to ensure teacher success in delivering the online course.			X
13	The institution is willing to make provisions for collaborative learning and social constructivist pedagogy by integrating Web 2.0 technologies wherever possible.			
14	The institution is committed to learner-centered instruction			X
15	Computing is firmly integrated into the institution's culture.			X
The following items deal with resource support, including financial, human, and technical resources (2008, pp. 18.8–18.9).				
16	The institution is financially ready to venture into e-learning		X	
17	The institution is willing to create a budget for implementing e-learning.			X
18	The institution participates in a broader consortium in order to share resources, expertise and costs in improving technology-enabled learning.		X	
19	The institution has experienced human resources, or a department that organizes trainings related to online learning.			X
20	The institution have adequate human resources to support an e-learning initiative.			X
21	Adequate and timely support is available to the <i>teacher</i> when technical issues arise.			X

22	Adequate and timely support is available to the <i>students</i> when technical issues arise.			X
23	The institution has a courseware delivery system (LMS) through which courses and programs are delivered.			X
24	The current technological infrastructure is adequate to sustain an online learning environment.			X
25	The current technological infrastructure is well-developed to support growth of the online learning environment.		X	
27	The online platform provides appropriate tools for communication and collaboration.			X
28	The institution is willing to provide students and faculty access to appropriate hardware and software needed in the e-learning implementation.			X
29	The institution ensures that instructional resources and equipment are readily available, accessible and reliable.			X
30	The institution has extensive bandwidth capability			X
31	Connection speeds are sufficient for communication and accessing all course materials.			X

References

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