Common Collaboration and Learning Environment
ITPB Review: November 29, 2005

FCET Vision:

"The time has passed when the use of technology in instruction was found only in small pockets of innovation. Educational technology now plays a critical role in learning and teaching in many disciplines at UCLA. The FCET believes that our students now require a consistent, powerful, and transparent application of our educational technology applications across disciplines and across the campus.

Select a single application to support collaboration and teaching tools for instructional, research and administrative groups. " *FCET, Spring 2005 recommendation to ITPB*

A New Landscape

The FCET based this recommendation for a single application on a set of principles and goals, some of which are included in this summary. They call for a commitment to providing an integrated environment as an institution-wide service that supports local customization and end-user service. The FCET core assumption is that such a service would be made available to any individual or unit that chose to use it.

Key goals and principles include:

1. User experience:

   a) Is common, independent of organizational boundaries
   b) Is based on a common tool set for teaching and research
   c) Allows for self management of collaborative and course sites
   d) Integrates service with relevant UCLA systems and data
   e) Includes support through a virtual 24/7 help desk for common services
   f) Depends on local support for peak time, discipline, and unit-specific tools and services

2. Local IT service:

   a) Focuses on peak time, discipline, and unit specific service features and provision
   b) Extends UCLA look and feel to incorporate local identity
   c) Contributes to implementation of common services and sharable tools
   d) Participates in the governance of the campus-wide service
   e) Participates in service management and provision at the campus level
   f) Implements discipline-specific requirements as needed

3. Institution-wide service:

    a) Provides service to any UCLA individual or unit
    b) Ensures quality and level of service as defined by service governance
    c) Fosters coordinated autonomy by working with local IT support staff to share expertise in areas such as end user support, tools development, and local requirements
    d) Provides a consistent framework and single point of integration for campus services, against which tools can be developed
    e) Works with other UCLA system and service providers to ensure integration
    f) Creates opportunities for focusing UC-wide projects and expertise.

In addition, the FCET based its recommendation on the assumption that a system could be found that would enable UCLA not only to achieve these goals but also to:

1. Focus more of UCLA IT expertise on accelerated innovation in the use and development of discipline-specific tools and technologies
2. Take back control of a critical component of the technology infrastructure by selecting an open source solution that could be customized and continually improved to meet UCLA general and unit-specific requirements
3. Enable UCLA to work with a national community to influence overall technology direction and speed up UCLA access to innovative tools and technologies
4. Use IT resources more effectively by sharing commodity services and expertise
5. Provide for a single point of system integration with critical UCLA systems such as the Library, Registrar, Directory, Student and Staff Portal(s), and Email system.

Sakai Pilot

When the Sakai Project was announced in late fall of 2003, the FCET recognized that the goals of the project were aligned with their own vision for a common application to support teaching and research. The FCET obtained funding for UCLA to join the Sakai Educational Partners Program in the spring of 2004 and issued a "Call for Participation" to the campus in order to launch a UCLA pilot of Sakai.

A joint proposal from the Anderson School, the Center for Digital Humanities and Academic Technology Services was selected. The Library, the Office of Information Technology, the Office of Instructional Development and the Psychology Department all joined as pilot sponsors, contributing resources, advice and guidance to the pilot. A status report on the Sakai pilot is attached.

In the past 15 months, the Sakai pilot has provided the following learning experiences:

1. The Sakai tools provide added value to the learning experience of students working in project teams
2. The campus can successfully work together to develop and deliver a shared service to support teaching and research

3. UCLA and local customization of the look and feel is possible
4. The technology architecture (a common framework + tools) enables UCLA units to work collaboratively with other institutions and with each other, while responding to discipline and unit needs
5. UCLA has a sufficient and growing amount of Java expertise to implement Sakai
6. UCLA has an increasing knowledge of the relevant national standards
7. Sakai can be integrated with key campus data systems (registrar, directory)
8. Sakai still appears to be the strongest candidate for meeting the FCET"'s general requirements

Core work, however, remains to be accomplished with Sakai over the next 6 months. For example:

1. Integration of existing and new tools written in languages such as PHP and PERL
2. Import/export of digital content between Sakai and the Digital Library
3. Submission of final grades to the registrar
4. Validate that all required functionality as specified by the pilot units is available in Sakai
5. Further development of training materials for faculty and students to maximize the value of the range of Sakai tools available

Sakai is a process and a community as well as a product; the vision is cutting edge, the work is difficult, the system is complex, and the work depends on community members (some paid, some volunteer) both at UCLA and nationally. The speed of development and deployment is thus a combination of the progress of the national project and of UCLA's contributions to that effort.

Emerging Concerns

The Sakai pilot has also enabled us to learn about the larger issues that flow from the FCET-proposed model and set of assumptions.

1. Can UCLA develop a model for delivering an institution-wide service?

2. What is the correct balance between institutional standardization and regional/local customization as it applies to policy, operational and usability decisions?

3. What governance processes will be needed to ensure institutional and local goals are understood and met?

4. What are good models for offering a service to the campus that any person or unit may select to use?

5. What are the support and service models that will continue to provide direct end-user, discipline-specific support with a common system?

6. What are the funding models that will support institutional services, regional

and local services?

7. What support will UCLA IT staff need to transition to a single application and layered service model?

8. How can a new service be phased in to ensure a smooth transition for faculty and students?

Work Plan

The Executive Sponsors (Jim Davis, Larry Loeher, Pat O'Brien, Judith Smith and Gary Strong) have endorsed the FCET recommendation for UCLA to select a single application to support teaching and research. If this recommendation is endorsed by the ITPB, the full review process will proceed with the following work plan:

- Form Functional and Technology Sponsor Groups
- Establish functional and technology criteria
- Evaluate possible solutions against the criteria
- Recommend an application for UCLA
- Recommend approaches for implementing a shared service model that combines institutional, regional and local responsibilities