University Task Force on LMS and Academic Technology
Working Group on Academic Technology

Thursday, December 3, 2020
9:00 – 10:00 AM

Members: **Solman Ahmed**, **Maureen Byrne**, *Omar Dib*, **Allison Edgley**, *Cailin O'Connor Fitzpatrick*, **Jennifer Gentile**, **Rose Gonnella**, **Marshall Hayes**, **Stephen Kubow (co-chair)**, **Eric Landaverde** (Student Representative), **Sara Maass**, **Qian (Joyce) Mao**, **Joe Marinello**, **Joy Moskovitz (co-chair)**, **Christopher Rustick**, **Greg Shepherd**, **Corey Vigdor**, **Jane Webber, Maureen Byrne**

In attendance (**bolded** above)
Absent (*italicized* above)

Agenda

New Business

Welcome new student member, Computer Science major and Kean sophomore (Eric Landaverde). Brief introductions of all members and summary of Task Force mission.

I. Review and approval of minutes from 10/29/2020.

Motion (Jane Webber) and second (Corey Vidgor) to approve minutes. Minutes approved unanimously.

II. Update from LMS Working Group.

Steve: D2L BrightSpace, Canvas, K16 Solutions, Blackboard Ultra have been evaluated as LMS options. Each of the systems has its own strengths and weaknesses. We are currently inviting Canvas back in the upcoming week for a follow-up for further information beyond bells-and-whistles features, for example how to use it to teach a course. The goal by the end of term or between now and next term is to have "sandboxes" available for Task Force members to experience and play test the various systems.

Joy: All demos have been recorded (~1 h each) and will be available in the future for review.

Steve: These are all substantially advanced platforms, cloud-based, that will take us beyond where we are now with Blackboard Classic.

III. Discussion/Feedback on Recommended Technology Requirements for students and faculty by program/college and next steps.

Steve: Thanks to everyone for submitting recommendations regarding students and faculty computing needs. We will defer to Joe (Marinello) for recommended next steps.

Joe: We will take the specs and do some costing around them to align price points and consider various financial models to bring to fruition.

Steve: Given COVID and the emphasis on virtual learning, the goal is to have one or two base configurations as options for students depending on a student's intended major, perhaps one standard Mac configuration and one standard PC configuration. These options could be built into tuition or covered with another approach.

Greg: In surveying my college, there is a clear split in preference PC (60%) vs. Mac (40%), but no way to reflect that in the spreadsheet. (Rose concurs).

Steve: Perhaps the appropriate response is "No preference", and then we work toward providing one configuration of each.

Joe: Yes, that sounds reasonable at this stage, to consider a number of configurations, which obviously impacts price points. But we can consider different choices, and allowing students, faculty and staff to go either way.

Rose: Several Design faculty are reluctant to use one (Macs) or the other (PCs). I want to be sure we address cross-platform issues, exchanging or sharing or using files across different platforms.

Steve: Yes, this is true especially for specialized courses. For Gen Ed courses it may be less of a problem given the terminal/Windows emulators that are out there.

Joe: Yes, we have windows emulator options available through the university. Again, we're working through the different financial models, and we have the option to use cloud-based alternatives, virtual desktop technologies that can be run from any platform that are platform-agnostic. However, we should keep in mind that hourly rates get very expensive when we're considering licenses to access cloud-based services (Azure, AWS).

Marshall: In the STEM program there is a strong aversion to anything that is ChromeOS.

Joe: Yes, this seems to be coming from K-12, where students are first exposed to Chromebooks but might have access to limited software. We're aware of incompatibilities, and we may be able to address these with certain cloud-based implementation. We need to keep in mind shifting costs (hardware vs. cloud support).

Steve: So, perhaps we should focus on PC rather than Chromebook.

Jennifer: I've had similar experiences re: K-12 at home with children using ChromeBooks and had things not running. Perhaps the conversation needs to focus on needs vs. wants. What our students need rather than what is on their wish list.

Eric: From a student perspective, most faculty use Windows-based environments. There are. additional issues with group work among students when you have a lone student with another platform.

Jane: I agree with Jennifer. In conversations with faculty, the question was more of what certain faculty wanted or preferred versus what a student needed, and some faculty insist that they need both. This has generated a great deal of discussion and that's good.

Steve: Glad to hear that, Jane, and this is one reason why we broke things down to a faculty versus student wish list.

Joe: Now that we have recommendations, we can take a closer look at specific student configurations, and then consider whether what we are looking at is more of a need or a want.

Rose: We should build in flexibility. For those students who have the means, they should be able to go through financial aid or with their own funds to have a more powerful system.

Steve: We could go back to have the recommendation or proposal of a base-dollar amount, and then possibly suggest additional builds that might come at an extra cost.

Joe: This is going to be tough, because of how to best structure the program and implement it right. We want what's in the best interest of the students, and once they have something that's suitable, what do we do when they start to run into problems. So we treat it as a hardship case, or provide short-term loans? These things sound like simple issues but they are difficult to manage. So the concern is about implementation.

Rose: Then we consider that some of it (purchasing ability) is going to go through Financial Aid, through something like a technology fee, but that will be difficult to equalize.

Joe: If we make it an allowable expense against financial aid, then are students required to go through the university? Thinking beyond that, we should consider these other issues. Some of which are easier said than done.

Steve/Rose/Joe: Consider tuition and fees (books and supplies) as well as cost-of-attendance to develop strategies for allowing students to purchase machines. Do we consider credits to a student account or allow something like a layaway system? Depending on eligibility?

Steve: As an example, at my alma mater, there was a university-run computer store with base systems, and the store was staffed by student workers. Effectively this cut out the "middleman" to a certain extent.

Joe: As far as that goes, it's whether we actually sell the machines or not. I love the idea from a technical and operation perspective, having a student tech unit that does nothing but service machines and provide tech support. This will require a lot of resources. But we can start with our standard configurations and consider a modular approach, like the hard drives. If we're diagnosing the problem from a standard configuration, then we just swap out the drive into the exact same type of machine and then reissue it back to the student without being inconvenienced. The same thing could work for faculty.

Steve: We won't solve all of these issues today but this has been a good starting point.

Joe: Yes, working from the spreadsheet we can start to look into potential solutions in terms of the financial models and the hardware specs. We should keep in mind that the hardware specs are going to change every couple of months.

Steve: These are good discussions and they're long overdue. Now we should move on to address our various subgroups and prioritization. The goals might be to go back and talk to

colleagues and students and come up with ideas that represent strengths and weaknesses in these different areas. (Floor opened for discussion).

IV. Updated assignment of members to topics based on Qualtrics results:
a. Classroom Technology: Gregory Shepherd, Sara Maass-Meyer
b. Student Use Technology: Marshal Hayes, Jane Weber, Eric Landaverde
c. Faculty Use Technology: Qian Mao, Cailin O'Connor
d. University Wide Technology: Allison Edgley, Jennifer Gentile
e. Additional Locations and Technology: Maureen Byrne, Christopher Rustick
f. University Software/Systems: Corey Vigdor, Joe Marinello

Greg: Looks like we will need university-wide surveys for most of these working groups. We should try to centralize the process to avoid sending out seven different surveys across the entire campus.

Steve/Jane/Jennifer: This sounds like a good idea. Perhaps start small, speaking to our own students and then gathering information to see where there are areas of overlap.

Steve: We can share a survey that would be a good starting point, and avoid a large survey with a hundred questions that no one would complete. Perhaps if we had 4-5 questions each. I like the idea of going back to your students and colleagues and getting feedback, and then prioritizing issues into survey questions.

Jane: I support that idea, since our students may have different needs and may express different thigs. Initial questions from conversations or focused groups would be most helpful.

Steve: We'll go ahead and put a link to a survey resource on a shared Google Drive, so that people can look at it and suggest other questions. I do like the idea of having some focus groups or ways to narrow down the survey, into sections that are appropriate to as students, staff or faculty. We can plan to discuss this a bit more on our next meeting and set a timeline, just in the interest of time.

V. Discussion and updates from prioritizations based on Qualtrics results.
a. 100% reliable WiFi - 24/7. Average Rank 2.8
b. Enhanced student access to technology through loan programs, tying technology to financial aid, working with B&N to give students new access to both hardware and software. Average Rank 3.2
c. Proactive software licensing to support specific college-based applications. Average Rank 3.6
d. Timely and effective support response to technology problems. Average Rank 3.6
e. College-based technology support. Average Rank 4.7
f. Proactive faculty and staff support so that basic administrative functions operate continually. Average Rank 5.1
g. Implement a 5 year (maximum) replacement cycle for all computers, both individual and in labs. Average Rank 5.1

Steve: In the interest of time, let's address these other issues. Any additional updates on technology on campus? We also talked briefly about immersive technology classrooms and things like that.

Joe: I can touch on Wi-Fi quickly. The vast majority of upgrades have been completed on campus. This has been the benefit of the pandemic, since our crews have been able to go through all of our facilities. We still have some of the residence halsl to go, but we are expecting to complete that between Christmas and New Year's and into January. Then we'll have all the facilities on campus on the most current Wi-Fi 6 standard. What we hear back from people on campus is pretty good. They are happy. The places that we have upgraded have been working fine, and we do have spotty issues elsewhere and we expect to take care of those. The other issues with RF technology is that once we get people back in the buildings, we'll see how that's impacted but we are cautiously optimistic now. We have also outfitted a number of classrooms with highly interactive high-end AV systems by Cisco Systems, and we are going to be looking for faculty members to teach from those rooms once we return to campus, with classroom support from us. These are still a work in progress, but we'd like faculty to get trained on these systems so that we can get feedback or make tweaks and adjustments. Chris Rustic will head up this effort, and we'll be looking to identify the faculty in the second and third weeks of January potentially.

Steve: One of the things that Joy and I have been taking about at the Council of Deans is to target programs that can serve all three locations (Union, Skylands and Ocean). We're looking to be able to accomplish much more that a collaborative Zoom. We want the cameras moving around, the ability to see the class, and the students, and the white board. These are things that are difficult to accomplish through Blackboard Collaborate or Zoom. We might focus on common programs (environmental biology, criminal justice, general business, psychology) those things common to many locations. Perhaps even focus on a graduate program such as Counseling Education. This is just to mention it in case there are faculty that are interested in volunteering to teach these courses face-to-face or hybrid so that they are able to utilize the fullest extent of the technology.

Jane: A quick question – just to point out the differences in resources (video recording, etc.) between Kean Ocean and Kean Union. This may end up being an accreditation issue.

Steve: Yes, we are thinking about that, regardless of where students are, we'll be able to link them to the classroom experience as if they are sitting in a classroom in Union. This may not be just classrooms, but also other meetings and conferences. We want to start small and get a group of faculty that show how easy it is to use, and then in an ideal world, encourage everyone to use it.

Joe: Just to emphasize that the technology can be used in any number of teaching scenarios. We want to think about the number of possibilities, including faculty-to-student in the classroom, and faculty-to-student remote, and then student-to-student remotes. We should be able to facilitate any number of these combinations. And getting faculty to use it and give us feedback will be the first step in the process.

Steve: So, please start thinking about sharing these opportunities with your colleagues, particularly in terms of connecting to remote locations in Ocean and Skylands. It would expand options for those students without encumbering them with additional travel.

VI. Next steps and next meeting date.

Steve: Lastly, we're running close on time so we should talk about the next meeting date. Would we want to try to shoot for next week to discuss further more plans for coming up with focus group/survey questions. Does that work for everyone?

Joy: Hold our usual time on the calendars, and we'll send an invite out to you.

Steve: Thanks very much to everyone for the great discussions. We aren't going to settle everything today, but hopefully we can start advancing toward solutions. We appreciate the time and effort that you are putting into this committee. It will probably have a very long-term impact.

VII. Discussion and questions.

No further questions and discussion