

The 2006 TLT Conference brought together over five hundred participants under the bright green roof of the Raleigh Hilton for three jam-packed days of workshops, presentations, and, of course, socializing. From faculty to administrators to librarians to staff, those attending shared a common interest in improving higher education through the thoughtful application of educational technology. It is hard to believe that a conference of such variety and magnitude began as simply an idea, voiced in what seemed like an ordinary committee meeting; one that has grown through the leadership of the members of the TLTC and through the collaboration of seventeen different UNC campuses. Vision, leadership, and collaboration are, indeed, the three defining themes of the conference, its history, and the role of UNC TLTC in making it possible.

THE TLTC

Historically, the ivory tower (a common metaphor for academic life) was a lonely place and one that by definition was separated from the rest of the world by the very intensity by which those within it pursued their illusive goals of truth and knowledge. The tower metaphor is apt, too, because a tower was by definition a military defense, designed to ward off potential attackers and to safeguard its inhabitants from the outside world. It would take vision to overcome this defense territoriality that is deeply engrained in the traditions of the academic world. It would require collective effort to move beyond the boundaries to which we are accustomed and comfortable. For faculty, that boundary tends to be the classroom; for staff and administrators, the University campus. The separate towers that dotted the North Carolina landscape seemed, literally and figuratively, a long way apart. But might there be a way to turn towers into pillars?

To turn them into pillars required a kind of vision for the foundation that the pillars would support. Through various legislative acts the seventeen member schools of the UNC system were brought under one umbrella and one governing body, the UNC Board of Governors, in 1971. Since that time, there have been initiatives to bring the activities of the member institutions into closer collaboration with each other and to take advantage of opportunities to achieve economies of scale and scope. It is an on-

going process, one that moves forward with slow, but, inexorable energy.

One such initiative was suggested by the Campus Teaching and Learning with Technology task force in 1998. Their recommendations included a provision that called for the creation of "a TLT Collaborative organization (with all campuses welcome to join) to facilitate development, exchange and storage of system-wide TLT knowledge." The North Carolina legislature funded the project the following year, and the TLTC (Teaching and Learning with Technology Collaborative) was born, officially becoming a program under the UNC General Administration in 2000. The purpose of the TLTC was to serve as leaders in bringing together educational technology initiatives across the campuses, to serve, in other words, as leaders in bringing the independent and disparate pillars together under one roof.

Since 2000, the UNC TLTC has led efforts to promote common causes, such as adoption of best practice technological tools, partnerships with external bodies, and training and development for members. The latter has been especially enhanced by the creation of the Teaching with Technology portal, designed to be the hub for information about technology in higher education. The TLTC staff, though, was small, and in order for their efforts to be successful they needed a means to link their efforts to a wider collaborative net of practitioners. As their slogan states, the goal is to 'do more together'. Shouting from the top of the tallest tower (Boone, NC), they asked interested parties to come together, share information, and to create a solid base of support for the new edifice under construction. The TLT conference was born.

THE CONFERENCE

The first conference, attended by 85 participants, was sponsored by member institution Appalachian State. The participants were largely IT or development specialists and one of their primary tasks was to define the role that they, and others, might play in the vision outlined by the TLTC. From that beginning, the conference has considerably expanded to include faculty, library faculty, other staff, administrators, vendors, and even interested 'civilians.' By 2002, the UNC Faculty Assembly became an official co-sponsor and the TLTC recruited more and more faculty to help with the planning and execution of the conference.

Every summer, the TLTC begins by deciding on a timely theme and then by reviewing comments and suggestions made by the previous years attendees. The planning team consists of interested faculty and staff from each of the member institutions and representatives of the TLT collaborative and the UNC Faculty Senate. Each year, the committee reviews evaluations of the previous year's conference and makes changes. It is an implicit assumption of the planning team that each successive conference should include a new innovation on conference management, organization, and/or content; preferably by using new technologies. In 2004, conference organizers proposed a new session type, the demonstration session, designed to provide a relatively short hands-on experience with technology in the classroom. In 2005, selected sessions were included in blogs or podcasts. In 2006, the committee added the concept of a Collaborative Café, which allowed potential participants to find birds of a feather and to propose collaborative sessions for the conference and, of course, the publication of conference proceedings.

Academic conferences are a practice nearly as old as the University system itself and their purpose have always been to promote scholarly discussion and innovation across campuses. In the Middle Ages, scholars were believed to be entrusted with a holy quest for truth and knowledge; a quest that separated them from the mere mortals with whom they might deign to share this wisdom. The TLT conference serves the opposite function, in a sense, as the point is to spread knowledge and information as widely as possible without privileging academic knowledge over experience. Perhaps one of the most momentous changes to higher education in the twentieth century is the shift to a learner-centered paradigm and the 2006 conference theme recognizes that this shift requires vision, leadership, and collaboration. The common goal of TLT conference participants is to improve learning, as is evinced by the titles of the papers and workshops presented. Sessions focused on improving learning at the systemic level, such as Cyprien Lomas' plenary speech entitled "Planning for Change: Fitting Emerging Practices and New Technologies into Existing Institutional Strategies"; at the campus level such as Scott Rice's formal paper, entitled "Making the Library Work: Bookmarklets to Library Resources" and at the level of the individual classroom, such as Jason Romney's demonstration session, "Podcasting: Turning your Classroom into an Internet Radio Station."

THE CONTRIBUTIONS

The papers contained in this volume are not a complete record of those presented at the conference, but they are representative of its diversity, its depth, and its themes. Vision manifests itself most clearly at the classroom level, where instructors must take traditional courses and transform them through technological tools. In this volume, Sue Spalding, for example, discusses how she used MyLab products to improve student learning in large lecture courses at UNC-Charlotte. Similarly, Betty Black and Harold Heatwole at NC State share how they were able to apply Quicktime to make their distance education courses more interactive and, ultimately, more effective. At times, vision needs to be prompted. In a workshop session, Christopher Field from UNC-Wilmington explains RSS feeds and solicits instructors to find potential classroom uses for this emerging technology. Michael Rappa (NC State) performs a similar function for podcasting. Moving beyond the single classroom, Edward Gehringer and others at NC State demonstrate the power of Espertiza not only to generate peer-reviewed learning objects but also to transform the learning paradigm across disciplines. For those seeking new ways to bring technology to bear on higher education, these papers provide inspiration.

The second conference theme, leadership, is reflected in projects that serve as models for others to follow. That leadership can take the form of finding technological solutions to persistent learning problems. For example, a group at UNC Chapel Hill concerned with the challenges posed by professional demands in public health developed a method of generating authentic on-line interactivity using Macromedia Breeze. To combat high levels of disinterest and frustration among minority students, a group of professors at North Carolina A&T developed self-paced learning modules which build the confidence levels of introductory Biology students. Finally, a group at Eastern Carolina University has looked into how Tablet PC's can improve the quality, quantity, and speed of instructor feedback in many different types of classroom settings.

Leadership can take the form of implementing new policies for others to implement. Administrators and staff at Appalachian State, for example, provide recommendations for identifying and selecting teachers for on-line courses. Other contributions suggest new directions for research. The authors of "The Future has Sent you a

Message," for example, compare the use of Chat and Instant Messenger software in library applications and speculate on how interactive library websites might function in the near future. A group at Fayetteville State has been exploring how AuthorPoint software can be modified to create an improved system of instructor evaluation; one that combines ease of scheduling with the retention of information on instructor performance that is often lost in classroom observations. These initiatives, and others not presented in this volume, are leading the UNC system into the future.

Last but certainly not least, the contributions to this volume collectively suggest the power of collaboration to shape how teaching and learning take place. This is especially evident in the large number of articles that are co-authored by groups of instructors, staff, and administrators. Two faculty members at Fayetteville State, for example, surveyed the use of technology in K-12 teaching and concluded that teachers do not use available technology for instructional delivery as much as they use it for other reasons. Among other suggestion, the authors recommend collaborative projects that incorporate technology, an example of which is Western Carolina University's program to have students build virtual exhibits; a joint project sponsored by the history department, IT services, and the Mountain Heritage Museum. The final contribution is the minutes of a meeting of one of the TLT interest groups, another feature of the conference, and shows how participants from all over the system can come together on a single subject.

It took vision to overcome the institutional and historical forces that work against academic cooperation; leadership to see how these would be replaced; and collaboration to make it all sustainable. The TLT works not simply to improve teaching with technology, but to change the culture around which teaching and technology take place and the TLT conference is the crucible for making that change happen. We no longer live in an age where academic life takes place in an ivory tower and it will take great vision indeed to see where these new collaborative models will take us in the future.

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