

Initial Comparator Research – University of Tennessee

(LMS = Blackboard *and* Blackboard Collaborate, with a greater emphasis than usual on synchronous online instruction, <http://bblearn.utk.edu/>. UT’s Blackboard license is purchased through the student technology fee, and managed by the Office of Information Technology. UT’s office of Conferences and Non-Credit Programs partners with two different third-party vendors to provide online courses; those vendors supply the virtual environment.)

General impression: UT is striking the right balance between centralized and decentralized services. Online education is clearly a centralized priority and idea, with support from the Provost on up to the state legislature and the Governor of Tennessee. Logistical support has been somewhat centralized, with collaboration between units employed when necessary. There is a lot of internal grant funding for instructional technology innovation, leading to an expansive, “can-do” mindset in both the teaching and learning center and the instructional technology support division. While fully online degrees remain limited in number, there is more happening with hybrid or tech-enhanced undergraduate courses here than at some of our other comparators.

1) What services does this institution’s Extension unit provide to campus partners?

None. UT’s office of Conferences and Non-Credit Programs (<http://noncredit.utk.edu/>) generally offers face-to-face courses for personal and professional development—including a number of professional certificate programs in the health sciences, business skills, photography, culinary arts, and an unexploded ordnance training program—and summer programs for students in grades 3-12. Its online offerings are coordinated through Ed2Go (<http://www.ed2go.com/utk>) and UGotClass (<http://yougotclass.org/catalog.cfm/Utk>), and cover topics ranging from project management to parenting and eldercare. While some of the topics covered in both their online and offline offerings might be of interest to UT students (such as their online GMAT and GRE preparation courses, offered via Ed2Go), there is nothing to indicate that their programs are being marketed to the in-residence student population.

2) Where is digital education housed? Are there separate units for online learning and blended or hybrid courses? Are technology and pedagogy combined or separate? How much of this effort is centralized?

Digital education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (<http://volsonline.utk.edu>) is given centralized guidance from the Office of the Provost, with course development and implementation left to individual academic departments. (Technological and pedagogical support is provided on an as-needed basis via centralized service units.) The Director of Online Programs—who oversees, coordinates, and sets standards for online education—is one of three direct reports to the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs (the other two being service learning and summer school; see <http://cdn-provost.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2015/01/ProvostOrgChart1.151.pdf>). The Provost Office’s web site contextualizes their online programming as one part of the institution’s effort to become one of the top 25 American research universities (as measured by *U.S. News and World Report*; <http://top25.utk.edu>). This “Top 25” or “Vol Vision” effort began in AY

2010-11, and was organized by the Chancellor of the University in response to a direct “challenge” from the Governor of Tennessee. While online education at UT may pre-date this initiative, it is now one tool through which the University’s strategic plan is being accomplished, particularly with regards to graduate education.

New online programs and courses are subject to the same approval processes as offline courses, at both the departmental and institutional levels. Online degree programs are limited in number, and are classified as distance education; their courses are not open to on-campus students (<http://volsonline.utk.edu/online-programs/>). The sole undergraduate offering is an RN to BSN degree program that admits students already holding an Associate’s degree or Diploma in Nursing. 19 graduate degree programs and 6 graduate certificates are also offered, with the following academic units participating:

- College of Communication and Information Sciences
- College of Engineering
- College of Education, Health, and Human Services
- College of Nursing
- College of Social Work
- Institute of Agriculture

In addition to online degree programs, individual online or hybrid courses are offered each term to meet the needs of the on-campus student population (<http://volsonline.utk.edu/online-courses/>). The exact number of online courses offered each term is not publicly available.

While online learning has become a centralized *idea* at UT, the logistics remain decentralized. Technological and pedagogical support are offered through several separate service units across the Knoxville campus. The Office of Information Technology (OIT; <http://oit.utk.edu>) and the Tennessee Teaching and Learning Center (TennTLC; <http://tenntlc.utk.edu>) are the primary support providers for technology and pedagogy respectively, with additional support for digitization (Digital Media Services, a division of OIT) and video conferencing or streaming (Engineering Services; <http://web.utk.edu/~ites/index.html>) provided by other units.

The University of Tennessee System (of which the Knoxville campus is the flagship) recently received additional state funding for MOOC development, resulting in \$2 million total investment over two years (<http://tntoday.utk.edu/2014/05/22/ut-pilot-program-success-mooc-technology-leads-continued-state-investment/>). Their two-year MOOC pilot program began in AY 2013-14 in partnership with the Tennessee Board of Regents. Four courses have been offered via Coursera, and several more via edX. The content includes general education courses and AP exam preparation. In addition to offering these MOOCs to the general public, several have been used as the content for flipped courses offered for credit at UT.

3) What structures, formal or informal, are in place to encourage pedagogical innovation on campus? Is there any effort to centralize such activity?

Pedagogical support at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville is generally the provenance of the Tennessee Teaching and Learning Center (<http://tenntlc.utk.edu>). This unit is relatively centralized and well-funded, with a full events calendar. TennTLC provides specialized workshops for new faculty, individual consultations, and creative teaching grants, as well as ongoing training on critical thinking, experiential learning, service learning, flipped classrooms, and other topics. Support is also made available for graduate student teachers.

In addition to the pedagogical support provided at TennTLC, the Office of Information Technology provides not only instructional design support and one-on-one training (see more below), but a robust suite of innovation opportunities

(<https://oit.utk.edu/instructional/development/Pages/default.aspx>), including:

- A well-established community of practice that brings faculty together to discuss topics related to teaching with technology
- An annual faculty fellowship that grants course release time to support faculty interested in instructional technology initiatives
- A faculty grant program that supports the development of technology-enhanced courses
- A grant program for GTFs who want to redesign a face-to-face course for digital delivery
- A mobile learning initiative
- Grants for faculty interested in conducting research on instructional technology
- A summer teaching institute

Both TennTLC and OIT are members of the UT Learning Consortium, a collaborative group of campus service units that sets online course standards and promotes best practices in digital pedagogy.

4) Where are instructional design and instructional technology housed? What pathways exist to guide faculty to instructional technology services? Is access to instructional technology support uniform across different faculty groups at the institution?

Comprehensive, centralized support is offered through the Office of Information Technology's Instructional Support division. Advertising itself as "the link between teaching and technology," the division offers individual course and web site development, a wide variety of teaching tools (tablets, clickers, etc), and customized training, among other Services. (<https://oit.utk.edu/instructional/Documents/onesheet.pdf>) Access to support is uniform. There is also a very nice Online Instructor Toolkit (<https://oit.utk.edu/instructional/strategies/toolkit/Pages/default.aspx>).

This is a solid model of how centralized ed tech support could become part of IS, as well as of "thinking beyond the LMS." While the LMS remains a central vehicle, they regularly support faculty who are thinking more broadly about instructional technology.

5) At what administrative level are digital education initiatives, endorsed, supported, or made a fundraising priority? For example, does the institution count, encourage, or otherwise track student enrollment or participation in digitally-inflected (hybrid, blended, tech-enhanced F2F) courses? What institutional investments have been made in hybrid and/or blended learning?

Top-down model with external investment or influence from the Governor of Tennessee and the state legislature has pushed innovation at UT. Internally, the Provost's explicit endorsement of online education and the development of standardized procedures has helped make this more of an institutional priority. The Tennessee state legislature is clearly willing to provide funding when a case can be made for change or growth.

There is a great deal of grant money living in the Instructional Support division of the Office of Information Technology, origin unclear, but it appears to be relatively stable.