



Year One: Learning From Experience

A. **Project Title:** Your kingdom for a few words?

The University of Toledo Business Management Technology FastTrack Learning Community

B. **Overview:** Tell the world what you're doing. 75 Words or less!

The FastTrack Learning Community addresses the common priority among its partners for quality, easily accessed higher education courses that will allow students to complete a degree program in an accelerated length of time. The FastTrack path to an Associate degree in Business Management Technology at The University of Toledo (UT) allows qualified candidates the opportunity to complete their degree through enrollment in concentrated, fast paced courses thereby reaching graduation in as few as 13 months.

C. **Community Curator(s):** Who is involved in preparing and writing the case study on behalf of your LC?

Project Directors, Karen Rhoda and Mary Humphreys, and the project evaluator, Gale Mentzer.

D. **Learning Community Members, units, roles:** List your community members, their units or disciplines, and roles in the LC. Who are core members and associates (key people involved in the community project other than core members) of your LC? What experiences do each bring to the community and project?

Core members	Unit/Discipline	Contributions
Sheila Doles	Student—Business Technology Management	Provided student perspective on accelerated courses.
Paula Gleckler	Industrial representative	Provided industrial perspective on course content.

Chris M	Student—Business Technology Management	Provided student perspective on accelerated courses.
Doug Greiner	Faculty—Business Technology Management	Developed accelerated courses.
Selina Griswold	Faculty—Business Technology Management	Developed accelerated courses.
Gale Mentzer	Program Evaluation & Measurement Consultant	Project evaluation and student assessment consulting
Janet Green	Division of Distance & E-Learning	Provided marketing and community outreach for new accelerated program.
Mary Humphrys	Chair, Business Technology Management	Provided project leadership and technical content
Karen Rhoda	Director, Division of Distance & E-Learning	Provided project leadership and distance learning expertise and technical support.

Associate Members	Unit/Disciplined	Contributions
Barbara Schneider	Department of English	Provided online required English courses.
Carl Nelson-Burns	Department of English	Provided online required English courses.

E. Background & Context: Briefly describe your Learning Community Project and the context within which you undertake it. What do you hope to achieve? What desired ending(s) would you like for the story of your LC and its project? What types of institutional support do you have or would like?

The purpose of this LC project is to develop an online associate degree in Business Technology Management that can be completed in as little as 13 months. It is specifically designed to assist those students coming directly from high school or unemployed adults who need to retrain and/or retool quickly in order to obtain gainful employment. In addition to developing and offering the online degree, this LC hopes to create a partnership that will extend beyond the duration of this project so that interaction between essential components of technical education and the professional community may continue on a regular basis thereby improving the quality of the coursework and ensuring that what is learned in the classroom is indeed what will be expected on the job.

Institutional support came specifically from the University's Office of Research who provided assistance in grant proposal preparation and fiscal management of funding. The Office of the Provost also provided support for this project by encouraging the marketing of the accelerated degree to prospective students. Finally, and most importantly, the Division of Distance and E-Learning provided marketing support, and technical support in the area of course adaptation and delivery.

F. Description of your early work, planning and preparations. Describe the preliminary work of the learning community as you prepare for your community project and for attending a Learning Institute. What were the key components in your planning and preparation for your LC (Roles? Methods? Timelines? Coordinating schedules?)? What were key issues and concerns, and, how did you sort them out? What were the key successes and what impact have they had? Are there any vignettes that illustrate these?

Project planning followed roughly the original timeline outlined in the proposal. All members were contacted July 2004 and a kick-off retreat was held on September 17, 2004. The proposal clearly delineated the roles of each LC member making the early stages of the project straightforward.

G. Community building and project development. Describe early phases of building your community and developing the project. What key challenges, problems, solutions, struggles, and failures do you have and how do you handle them? What did they – or will they - lead to? What successes have you enjoyed to date? Are there any vignettes of potential consequence or impacts that you can share?

Early phases of building the community focused upon recruiting students to enroll in the FastTrack program. Getting the word out was not as easy as expected as the local high schools, for example, did not want their students enrolling in a DL course as a post-secondary option because that affected their state funding. The LC met with the TechPrep representative to discuss other recruiting strategies that might be pursued such as targeting graduating seniors.

Another difficulty the LC faced concerned the course evaluation phase. Faculty members outside the LC were not willing to allow students to complete course evaluations. The LC decided to modify the original plan and ask the faculty themselves to provide information as to how the OLN Principles of Good Practice have been incorporated into their courses.

H. Description and reflections on implementation. Describe how your project work has evolved, including how what you do impacts member learning. Use critical incidents and vignettes to illustrate the action of your community's project. What are key challenges, problems, solutions, struggles, and failures, and how do you handle them? What have been your key successes? How have you leveraged these to your advantage?

The project began with the marketing strategy. Early meetings focused upon identifying avenues for making the program known not only locally but nationally through the UT Distance Learning website as well as through links from other, related websites. Ads were placed in newspapers and magazines.

Once the marketing strategy was in place, course development became a priority. Faculty

involved in this phase reported progress to the LC. LC members provided faculty with suggestions as to content and timing. Student LC members were particularly helpful in this area.

To date, course redevelopment is in progress. Student LC members will pilot the courses and provide feedback before they are offered to the public.

I. **Key Resources:** Who and what are the beneficial people, organizations, materials, websites, and other resources you have utilized? What types of support did you receive from your departments, colleges, administration? Of all resources, which were essential and why were they essential?

University departments participating in this project by providing online courses in general education have been particularly supportive in reserving seats in sections so that FastTrack participants are assured enrollment. The Division of Distance and E-Learning has provided technical and design assistance to faculty redeveloping courses as well as extensive student support services. In both cases, support provided was essential to providing a quality program that provides a practical education within the timeframe promised.

J. **Discussion.** As you reflect back on the preliminary stages of your community and its focus and how it has evolved and developed over time, what are critical incidents, key questions and junctures that made a difference in how your community has evolved? What worked and why do you think it worked? What didn't work and why do you think it didn't work? What are the next steps in the cycle of reflective practice? The next steps may not be predicted and take you in another fruitful direction.

Maintaining regular meetings was imperative to the viability of the LC. Coordinating schedules sometimes became so difficult that it was tempting to skip meetings. However, the LC decided to postpone rather than skip and the result was positive.

Some members of the original LC evolved from core members to associate members. These were members who were not directly related to the project but rather provided support necessary yet their attendance at meetings was not vital to project progress (Arts & Sciences faculty).

K. **What visible bridgework (structural elements, findings, lessons, ideas, beauties, legacies, processes, relationships, etc.) is your learning community leaving, that inspires others to *build their own bridges as they walk on them*?**

This LC has brought together the full cycle of the educational process—the learner, the educator, and the implementer (industry). As such, we have created the groundwork for other programs within the University to develop similar partnerships. By linking all stakeholders, communication is clearer, outcomes and goals are better articulated, and

attainment of these goals is more likely. The FastTrack LC will provide a concrete example of the results that are possible.

You have completed Case Study: 1st Year

Please send to Andrea Wood awood@oln.org

By JUNE 1, 2005

THANK YOU!