A Plan for Adapting to the New Digital Education Ecosystem

The days of the traditional course management system, managed and maintained by the campus on campus hardware, existing as its own silo of content and user interaction information are over. During that earlier era, did campuses take advantage of the valuable user analytics data available to them within those silos? No. Was the content and data about how our students, teaching assistants and faculty interacted with that content and each other safe? Yes. What does the evolving change in the educational technology ecosystem mean for those students, teaching assistants and faculty members, and for the institutions within which they are community members?

Course management systems are increasingly hosted in the cloud by service providers, and not the host campus. Simultaneously those course management systems are becoming more porous, allowing faculty members to easily import or embed learning objects and activities from other, external, cloud based services and providers. Increasingly the institution's primary contribution to the suite of content and services is primarily access to their faculty and the rosters of students authorized to access course content. In the previous era we as institutions did a very poor job of mining the wealth of interaction data to develop useful diagnostic tools for faculty, advisors and students to aid in making our students more likely to succeed in their studies. The publishers, developers, and service operators that are increasingly playing the key role in providing the educational infrastructure for face to face, blended and online courses offered through our universities, on the other hand, are continually looking for new ways to tap into that data to their own benefit, and ultimately to monetize it. They do this with impunity, shielding their access to the data from the members of our community behind impenetrable click-through agreements and/or licensing agreements. Now, if a campus wants to access that interaction data to develop useful diagnostic tools to aid in students' success, it frequently cannot, or may not get the data from the multitude of vendors holding the data. Furthermore, students are for the most part completely unaware who controls the data about them, and to what uses it may be put. In general they assume, incorrectly, that their institution holds and protects that information. Educating faculty members about the differences between good players and bad players in this field is important and helpful, but clearly not enough. Vendors have had the opportunity to develop their systems, use the data, and develop additional strategies around monetization precisely because universities as a whole have either not paid attention or not had a collective voice of dissent regarding these practices. This must change.

The ETLG, under the auspices of the ITLC, have made clear the dimensions of the problem, and have proposed what was initially posed as a three-way choice of plans of action, one of which being staying with the status quo. On further reflection, we believe that maintaining the status quo, or essentially doing nothing, is untenable and not in the best interests of our students, faculty or institutions. We further believe that the most appropriate response is a systemwide effort to address the challenges described with a two-fold strategy. The first element of this strategy is to organize as a system to address software and service licensing to obtain both more favorable and consistent financial terms, and more importantly to negotiate terms that ensure that we can obtain easy access to all of our user's analytics data and to ensure that student's data rights are respected. In addition to this effort, we propose the formation of a systemwide learning analytics workgroup tasked with establishing institutional data repositories for learning analytics data; development of useful diagnostic reports on student learning activity to be made easily available to faculty and advisors to aid them in facilitating student success. These repositories and diagnostic tools should be developed and made available on all campuses. No campus should be left out of access to these potentially beneficial tools. Third, a second systemwide task group should be formed to develop systemwide content repositories to facilitate faculty sharing and reuse of valuable teaching content and interactive learning activities regardless of individual campus learning management system. The efforts of both workgroups should be managed and coordinated at the systemwide level through the ETLG under the guidance of the ITLC with appropriate collaboration with the Academic Senate, Libraries, University Counsel, and business operations arms of the university. This effort should be established as a three year project with specific deliverables and a development timeline. A primary goal of this effort should be to ensure a high degree of coordination and timely information sharing within the workgroups and ETLG, as well as wide dissemination of results to our campus teaching and learning communities. To that end we recommend that funds be made available for a full-time coordinator for the overall project to facilitate communication and information sharing, to aid with scheduling and monitoring progress, and to manage storage, organization and dissemination of internal documents and the production of external documents. The full-time coordinator should work for the ETLG, but be housed at UCOP perhaps in the office of the Systemwide CIO. In addition, funds should be made available for two half-time coordinators to aid the two

workgroups. Those coordinators could be housed at any of the campuses most actively involved in each of the two workgroups. [Add additional costing information from existing document in Google]. By self organizing in this way we can bring to bear the considerable talent and resources of the entire UC system to meet the challenge. We also believe that rather than simply being one of two options, as previously discussed, this is an essential project which should be supported.

The second element of the two-pronged strategy would be to fully engage with Unizin as a Founding Member with a seat on the Board. In this way we could further leverage the investment and organization realized by pursuing the self organization described above. In addition we believe that we would be much better partners to the other Unizin members if we are already fully engaged on these issues as a system, rather than a few individual campuses. Simply in terms of leverage for license negotiations, as a system we represent about 180,000 students. While significant, if we were to then join forces with Unizin, based on current Unizin member enrollments, the whole would be representing more than 800,000 students nationwide. Thus, the move to join Unizin represents an optional enhancement to our own efforts, rather than a completely independent option as previously envisioned. [Add in cost estimates for that from existing Google docs].

As the level of discussion on this topic has evolved over the past year, it has become clear that the time to act and address these challenges is now. It is also clear that we will derive the greatest benefit by acting as a system through coordinated effort and investment. We must be able to both access and protect our student's learning analytics data. We must be advocates for students rights over their data. Finally we must work toward being able to effectively develop useful learning diagnostic tools for faculty and advisors to better serve our students and help ensure their success as UC students.