

Initial Comparator Research – University of Connecticut (UConn)
(LMS = Blackboard, called HuskyCT)

General impression: UConn, despite its sprawling character as a multi-campus public land-grant university, has a centralized approach to digital education that is more pedagogical in character than one might expect. Pedagogy and technology are clearly interrelated—faculty engage with different divisions of a single unit when considering these topics. While Extension serves a different purpose here, and Continuing Studies has been dissolved (their services absorbed into other units), the result has been the growth of a more robust teaching & learning center, and online offerings that focus on quality more than quantity.

UConn eCampus is a small unit, but is heavily invested in providing online graduate degrees and certificates.

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

In essence, none. Given UConn's land-grant mission, their Extension unit (<http://www.extension.uconn.edu/>) is external-facing, focused on science in the public interest, and housed in the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources.

The College of Continuing Studies was previously its own distinct unit, with responsibility for summer session, professional studies, non-degree programs, winter intersession, and the Bachelor of General Studies program. Continuing Studies has been dissolved and absorbed into other University units, however; its web site (<http://continuingstudies.uconn.edu/>) is no longer functional. Some of the services offered by Continuing Studies have become the property of the Office of Summer and Winter Programs, non-degree services are now offered by the Registrar (<http://nondegree.uconn.edu/>), and the general studies degree for returning students has become the provenance of several of UConn's regional campuses (Waterbury, Stamford, Hartford, and Torrington), as well as of the Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning (CETL) at Storrs (<http://cetl.uconn.edu/>).

Other services that were provided by Continuing Studies appear to have become a component of the Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning.

More information on the reorganization was provided by the Provost's office in 2012: <http://provost.uconn.edu/2012/04/25/new-center-for-excellence-in-teaching-and-learning/>

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 UConn is delivered through two centralized models that end up living "near" one another, if not exactly in the same office. The HuskyCT learning management system (a Blackboard Learn installation) is managed by the Applications and Technology Solutions division (<http://ats.uconn.edu/>) of University Information

Technology Services (<http://uits.uconn.edu/>), but technical support for instructors is provided within Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning, via the Instructional Resource Center (<http://irc.uconn.edu/>). The IRC is a division of the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL), which is an arm of CETL. While the IRC largely focuses on training from a tool-oriented perspective (“here’s how to use the LMS, clickers, etc”) they clearly do so as part of a larger pedagogically-oriented unit.

Another division of CETL is UCONN’s eCampus (<http://ecampus.uconn.edu/>), which is the home of online education at the University. eCampus offers undergraduate and graduate courses for credit that follow the university’s academic calendar; they are delivered via HuskyCT. There is a significant emphasis on quality—faculty are all drawn from UCONN, UCONN is a QM school, accreditations and standards very prominent in their description. Faculty are provided with a timeline to follow if they wish to build an online course, must take 2-week course in how to teach online, have support staff on hand to help, all courses subject to QM review prior to delivery, must get administrative okay on new online courses.

Most of the courses offered are at the masters level. In addition to a variety of undergraduate courses being offered in an online format, there are full online graduate degree programs in five subjects, online graduate certificates in eleven subjects (with a twelfth soon to be available), a post-baccalaureate certificate in occupational safety, and a hybrid graduate certificate in holistic nursing.

Overall, while eCampus (formalized online learning) is a distinct unit, its position within CETL suggests that technology and learning are connected, efforts are centralized, and pedagogical training is valued.

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

CETL seems to be a central effort—it is led by an Assistant Vice Provost, so it functions as a central, academic (or academically-oriented) unit. Within CETL, ITL (the Institute for Teaching and Learning) functions as the engine for pedagogical development, and offers both awards for faculty innovation (including one specifically for adjuncts!) and a small grants program to provide funding for pedagogical experimentation and growth.

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?

The Instructional Resource Center houses some of the instructional design staff, as does eCampus. All faculty technology services are housed in the same complex (<http://maps.uconn.edu/m/info/ROWE>), faculty have a single destination when seeking support. This suggests that access to instructional technology support is relatively uniform.

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?

The growth of digital education at UCONN has been spurred by the creation of CETL, the establishment of new degrees in digital media, and multiple hires with a digital humanities or digital education focus. While their eCampus is a relatively new effort, there is explicit endorsement from campus leadership. UCONN is also currently expanding the ranks of tenure-track faculty; these efforts are linked.