

Vice-Chancellor's Learning and Teaching grants 2010

Learning Communities/Communities of Practice in emerging technologies

The following background information is intended to assist staff in thinking about initiating or joining a Learning community.

What are **Learning Communities/ Communities of Practice**?

For the purposes of this project, a **Learning Community** is described as a “cross-disciplinary academic and support staff group of six to fifteen members (eight to twelve members is recommended size) who engage in an active, collaborative, yearlong program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning with technologies and with frequent seminars and activities that provide learning, development, the scholarship of teaching, and community building”¹

The **goals** of this UTS Vice-Chancellor's funded initiative are to:

- Become a learning organization by building university-wide communities of practice in teaching and learning with technology;
- Encourage a culture of innovation in teaching and learning;
- Increase financial support for teaching and learning developments;
- Increase recognition and reward of excellent teaching;
- Encourage cross-faculty collaboration.

Learning community eligibility

Learning communities should have a strong focus on collaborative learning and exploration by their members, with further engagement of the wider UTS community. Communities may engage in exploratory activities designed to test the potential of technological innovations for learning. By contrast, the small grants scheme is intended to fund specific projects that aim to directly improve student learning, engagement or the student experience.

Examples of potential Learning Communities include but are not limited to the following:

- Using Web 2 technologies for learning
- Exploring opportunities for service learning and community engagement using new technologies

Activities of Learning Communities

Each Learning Community will receive up to \$10K to expend on activities which might include:

- exploratory projects
- research assistance
- seminars

- attendance at, or holding of conferences

Examples of ways in which funds might be expended include:

Example 1: Each member of the Learning Community receives \$1,000 for professional expenses such as marking assistance, any teaching and learning activity related to the project, travel to a conference in the area of the Learning Community's project.

Example 2: Each member of the Learning Community receives \$100 to spend on relevant books or other reading materials plus up to say, \$500 as a mini-grant to the support particular project within the goals of the Community. Student members might receive a thank you in the form of books, vouchers to use at the Co-op and so on.

Example 3: The Learning Community expends all funds on development of a particular resource (eg website, widget, iPhone app) to be trialled and used in teaching and learning by members of the community from different disciplines.

Application requirements and process

An application of no more than 3 pages should include:

- learning community goals and objectives;
- an outline of proposed activities and/or project ideas, including the ways in which members of the learning community will collaborate and ways in which activities of the community will be made available to the UTS community. Communities that received funding for 2009 must describe how these activities will substantially extend what has been achieved so far;
- a plan for expenditure of up to \$10K. All budgets must be expended by end 2010. Any resourcing that is required beyond the budget (eg server space, technical support) must be identified and its availability confirmed prior to submitting the application

If the community received funding for 2009, and is seeking ongoing funding, the applicants must provide an interim summary (up to 2 pages) outlining the activities and achievements of the community to date.

Each application should include at least five academic and/or support staff participants, from at least two different disciplinary/institutional areas. Groups might also include students. One of the applicants must nominate as leader/ facilitator. The application cover sheet should include the following details for each participant:

- name, contact details, position
- subject/ course/service initiative they may select for exploring the new technology
- experience or expertise they bring to the project
- approval of Dean/ Director to participate

Applications should be submitted by email and signed hard copy to the office of Shirley Alexander, DVC and Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Equity) by Thursday December 10, 2009. Email Anna.Neo@uts.edu.au

Criteria for selection

- Extent to which the learning community is engaged in exploring cutting edge innovation in learning and teaching, with the potential of informing learning and teaching practice in more than one discipline/area of UTS
- Potential for the community to engage its members in learning and cross-Faculty collaboration
- Relevance of the proposed activities to community building and dissemination of ideas
- Quality of the proposal, including coherence between the proposed goals, activities and budget plan

Reporting requirements

Each Learning Community will be required to have a web presence – this may be a UTSOnline site or a website which makes the activities of the group visible to UTS staff. At least some of the seminars/activities of the group should be open to the wider UTS community. In addition, a final report outlining activities and outcomes of each Learning Community is required by February 2011. This should also include a full financial acquittal.

ⁱ Modified from Cox, M. (2004). An Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities: Utilizing FLCs to Solve Problems and Seize Opportunities. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, Number 97, Jossey-Bass. Note addition of 'technology' in definition and replacement of the words 'faculty' and 'staff' with 'academic' and 'support' to reflect differences between American and Australian language usage.