Summary Report, 2004-05: Executive Summary

This document provides details about three principle goals of the SCHEV Learning Technology Advisory Committee (LTAC). Achieving these goals will support the Virginia Learning Infrastructure Initiative (VLII) with the purpose of expanding access to high quality online learning experiences for citizens of the Commonwealth. The first goal addresses issues of academic quality, learning outcomes, access and resources. The second goal highlights the critical role of faculties at Virginia higher education institutions in transforming learning environments and the need for faculty professional development. The third goal considers the administrative processes, technical underpinning and support services associated with sustainable learning environments.

Goals and Recommendations

Goal 1: Transform learning environments to improve academic quality and associated learning outcomes, student access, and the appropriate use of scarce resources.

To assure high quality educational experiences, Virginia should:

- Craft a working understanding of "academic quality."
- Make quality learning environments--physical and virtual--available to every Virginia citizen.
- Create varied and customizable learning environments and experiences.
- Develop innovative, individualized courses of study that may draw on multiple education providers.
- Use both formative and summative assessments to inform and differentiate instruction between learners and to continuously improve instruction.

Definitions of, and expectations regarding, learning outcomes should include students' use of learning technologies, not simply their mastery of instructional content.

- Quality learning environments and experiences will increase completion rates for all programs of study, both degree and non-degree.
- Active, high quality learning environments will encourage the citizens of Virginia to undertake learning activities at many stages in their lives, as their professional and personal learning needs change.
- Online learning environments will help students increase their fluency in all aspects of information technologies, while enriching their knowledge of content areas.
- Compelling technology-enriched first-year academic experiences will prepare beginning students for excellence and sustained engagement with a program of study. Capstone courses that engage technologies appropriately with advanced

work in specific content areas will help students to achieve a rich synthesis of their accomplishments during that program of study.
- Robust social networking tools will create strong online communities and foster commitments to excellence and completion in programs of study.
- Institutions should be encouraged to offer varied courses and learning modules online at all levels, from general education, to senior seminars in the major, to masters- and doctoral-level learning activities.

"Students" should be defined in the broadest possible terms. Extending access to such a broadly defined population presents unique challenges.

- SCHEV should advocate ubiquitous access to computers and high-speed Internet connectivity in every Virginia community.
- Further, SCHEV should facilitate a statewide collaborative development of student support services.
- Students will also need access to a statewide network of testing and test-proctoring facilities shared across multiple institutions.

Collaboration is essential to success

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- With SCHEV's leadership, educational institutions should jointly develop and share learning resources and learning objects, targeted to high-priority learning needs.
- Consortia of institutions should be formed for strategic program development and support.
- SCHEV should also facilitate consortial licensing arrangements with Course Management Systems and proprietary database vendors, while simultaneously administering seed funding for collaborative discovery of new technology-enriched approaches to teaching and learning, including open source projects such as Sakai.
- Constant innovation in emerging technologies should be encouraged, as information technology development is being led more by consumer electronics and telecommunications innovations than by educational IT providers. In particular, observing how students already use IT in their daily lives and bringing those uses into the educational realm should both realize savings and provide a tighter integration between academic instruction and the business of living.

Goal Two: Promote professional development for faculty and staff in the effective use of technology to improve teaching and learning

No institution can afford to provide ideal support and development programs for every member of the faculty and staff. Higher education as a system in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and each college and university within it, needs to establish a balanced mixture

of broad goals for professional development as well as underlying conditions and competencies. Therefore, Virginia should:

- Support an annual program to update conditions, competencies, and performance measures (including the uses of "adaptive technologies" for making all aspects of education more accessible to those with disabilities). Involve faculty members, technology professionals, librarians, instructional designers, etc. in this collaborative updating process.
- Support programs that favor the collaborative work of diverse teams including faculty members, technology professionals, librarians, et al.
- Support programs that include a requirement that participants develop and use forms of assessment designed to collect data that will enable further improvements and that encourage faculty members to share assessment results with colleagues that can help others replicate successes and avoid failures.
- To ensure that technology is used appropriately as a support system in the design of effective learning experiences for students, technology competencies are recommended for faculty. Those competencies should include the ability to:
- Plan and design effective learning environments and experiences supported by the technology.
- Implement curriculum plans that include methods and strategies for applying technology to maximize student learning.
- Apply technology to facilitate a variety of effective assessment and evaluation strategies.
- Use technology to enhance productivity and professional practice.
- Demonstrate a sound understanding of technology applications.

Goal 3: Collaboratively identify and adopt complementary methods and processes needed to create and sustain transformed learning environments.

Learning environments that cross institutional boundaries must adhere to standards. Therefore, via SCHEV or some other mechanism, Virginia should:

- Identify the most critical areas where learning technology standards are being developed.
- Compile background information on the most important standards.
- Join or subscribe to standard-setting and learning technology organizations as appropriate.
- Develop an alert service for informing members about developments related to interoperability standards.
- Track progress of specific high profile projects such as Sakai.
- Make recommendations on which national and international standards to adopt in Virginia.

Support services needed for successful Virginia Learning Infrastructure Initiative projects and programs should build upon administrative structures that are currently in place. Therefore, SCHEV should:

- Identify VLII support service needs that complement support services on individual campuses.
- Emphasize support services that work across campus boundaries.
- Take advantage of existing cooperative ventures (e.g. articulation agreements, VIVA).

Assuring quality will require consistency of support. The VLII governance model should provide a mechanism for addressing needs in the following areas.

- student support for use of learning technologies
- cost accounting for VLII initiatives
- access to library and information resources
- academic administration (e.g. registration) and financial administration (e.g. financial aid)
- outcomes and assessment related to VLII projects and programs
- communication, dissemination and reporting

Use of evidence-based research methods and metrics for evaluating outcomes of Virginia Learning Infrastructure Initiative projects is important. Administrative support for collecting, disseminating and evaluating research findings and data related to VLII-funded programs and projects will be necessary. Therefore, the establishment of a central database and clearinghouse, accessible to all member institutions via the web, is recommended. This database should then be used for outreach and dissemination of information about processes, standards, best practices, and projects.