TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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Introduction

In defining the nature of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Trinidad and Tobago reference is made to the four modes of trade in services as defined by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). In large part, ODL in Trinidad and Tobago has been in the form of Mode 1: Cross-border supply of educational services. Of late there has been a growth in Mode 3: Commercial Presence - Service delivered within the territory of the member, through the commercial presence of the supplier and often in a twinning/partnership relationship (e.g. School of Business and Computer Science partnering with Herriot Watt University to offer the flexibility of distance learning with a series of on-campus intensive seminars).

If we investigate the indigenous development of ODL it can be said that based on Sam Adkins' Market Analysis of the 2002-2010 US E-Learning Industry, Trinidad and Tobago may be pegged at the Value Creation Phase of eLearning or Phase 1. This is at a point in time when the US is moving from the 3rd Generation eLearning Era into Universal Access.

To speed up the country's level of ODL development, The Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Development has focused on two key strategic initiatives:

- The creation of a National Research and Education Network (NREN) to connect to the global pool of knowledge and learning and collaborating institutions.
- A National Knowledge Network called LEARN.TT which intends to use a multimedia, multichannel approach that infuses technology into learning to create an expanded outreach to the wider citizenry via the Internet, television, mobile and face-to-face channels.

Status of Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Development ODL Initiatives

Trinidad and Tobago Research and Education Network (TTRENT)
TTRENT is a closed user network developed to serve the education and research community in Trinidad and Tobago. TTRENT was launched in 2012 and currently connects the four major tertiary level institutions (UWI, UTT, COSTAATT & USC) and MTEST to a network operating centre at Nelson Exchange, Port-of-Spain. TTRENT is connected to the regional research and education network C@ribNET, which provided connectivity to global RENs such as Internet2 (US), CANARIE (Canada), RedCLARA (Latin America) and Geant (Europe).

Although TTRENT is still in the early stage of development, there is already a wish list for applications and services from the R&E community including: Commodity Internet access; hosting of Learning Management Systems; full featured e-Learning platform; tools and portals for collaboration in course and programme development; multiparty video conferencing; hosting of digital library resources; brokerage for software licenses; catalogue systems and document delivery; collaborative tools e.g. Wikis.

LEARN.TT – National Knowledge Network
LEARN.TT has begun the development of a web platform which will provide users with access to educational videos on demand, initially on mathematics and science topics from local and international sources. To support the web platform, the Ministry and the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), the project's implementer, have negotiated agreements with key international Massive Open Online Courseware (MOOC) providers such as Coursera and also Khan Academy, a non-profit educational website to feature their resources via the LEARN.TT web platform. Additionally, a local Technical Vocational and Education and Training (TVET) provider is expected to offer its course in video production on this platform. LEARN.TT has in addition acquired an instance of the CANVAS Learning Management System, which will be available for the development and hosting of online course. LEARN.TT will be formally launched on April 2nd 2014.

Top 5 Priorities

A concern for Trinidad and Tobago has been that developments in ODL have not been planned or aligned to national priorities or labour market needs. As such, programme relevance has become an issue especially weighed against the outflow of funds to foreign providers. The challenge going forward will be to ensure that distance programmes are relevant to the needs of the country; are of a high quality; provide graduates with the skills to effectively function in the workplace; and can articulate with national qualification systems. Top 5 priorities for the 2014-2016:

1. Incorporation of TTRENT as a non-profit organization and the expansion of the e-infrastructure to include the school network of the Ministry of Education; libraries and hospitals and other key stakeholders.
2. The expansion of the LEARN.TT initiative. Further development of content for the Content Management System; production capacity for local learning content, a mobile platform and the establishment of learning hubs.
3. Rapid capacity building for expertise in instructional design; designing for online learning and teaching online.
4. The restructuring of the Open School initiative in Trinidad and Tobago.
5. The adoption of a National Qualifications Framework covering Technical Vocational Education and Training and Tertiary Education and the adoption of the VUSSC Qualifications Framework.

What can COL do to support national ODL Agenda of Trinidad and Tobago

Using the top 5 priorities for ODL as a guide, COL can assist the national agenda as follows:

1. TTRENT has approached CANARIE, Canada's Research and Education Network, in the past to act as a mentor for the development of the local network, through sharing of best practices, expertise, training, institutional visits and collaborative ventures. CANARIE has not responded to our requests in a substantial fashion. It would be appreciated if COL can act as a "go between" to facilitate a relationship between TTRENT and CANARIE.

2. COL can facilitate a LEARN.TT and Mindset, South Africa collaborative initiative to build an appropriate business case for public education broadcasting in Trinidad and Tobago. The key elements of the collaboration include Mindset:

   - Conducting a Stakeholder Engagement session in Trinidad and Tobago for a needs analysis to support the building of the LEARN.TT Business Case.
   - Leading Technical Strengthening sessions with LEARN.TT resource personnel and stakeholders to define the elements of educational content production (including content documentation/meta-data procedures and curriculum mapping to video programming).
   - Guiding the development of an implementation plan for the digital production and delivery of local content.
   - Co-directing a "Kick-Start" project for local programming.

3. COL has already begun collaboration with MTEST to offer an online course, Developing & Teaching Online Courses. The first cohort begins in April 2014. It is hoped that this course will have a regular schedule of offering so that more persons can participate. It will be further appreciated if more courses such as this one are offered to enhance the professional development of ODL practitioners.

4. The MOE wishes to re-engage with COL to re-engineer the Open School Initiative in T&T.

5. The MOE wishes to undertake the adaptation of the subject resources produced by COMOSA for our students' use.

6. The MOE requests the training of facilitators in the areas of on-line mode of instruction and the development of Open Educational Resources (OER). The development of these resources (OER) will not only be utilized in the Open Schooling venture but the digital content can be placed on students' and teachers' laptops.

7. The MOE is interested in COL's on-line resources for a Diploma in Education and Master in Educational Leadership resources which can be modified and used by all teacher preparation institutions, thereby increasing the number of places in the programmes offered at this time and improving the quality of our educators.

8. The MOE's priority to increase the skill set of our school population may be addressed through courses such as "Small Engine User Maintenance", "Working with Concrete" and /or "Working with Timber". These can be offered after the re- establishment of the NOSTT.

9. MTEST in collaboration with the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago would like to work with the VUSSC initiative of COL to adopt the TQF in its national qualifications system.

10. Revitalization of the L3F in Trinidad & Tobago in agriculture and fisheries, especially in light of the AgriNeTT project at UWI. The primary focus of AgriNeTT is to build Information and Communications Technology (ICT) applications around Agriculture data. The approach that is being used is to capitalize on the growing global phenomenon of Open Data and Open Access and build an Agriculture Open Data Repository. This repository will house different data sets from institutions and associations, including farm level production data, commodity prices and volumes, farm land spatial data, soils, weather and pest and diseases tracking data. A prime objective in building this platform is to create a central repository for agriculture data in which the data sets can be visualized in different ways and where local developers can build applications that are useful to the national community.

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