

ABSTRACT

SUPPORTING ONLINE LEARNERS: A STATEWIDE APPROACH TO QUALITY ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

The rapid growth of web-based distance learning in Connecticut and nationwide has created the next challenge for higher education—online academic support services. The Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC) FIPSE project will take the best practices that have been developed to deliver academic support services to online students within a single institution and use an innovative model developed by the CTDLC to facilitate a comprehensive collaborative solution among multiple institutions. In this case, we have 12 two and four, public and private participating institutions. The project focuses on three areas of need as identified by student surveys and focus group research conducted by the CTDLC: 1) design and implement an electronic portfolio framework across institutions which can be used for advising, outcomes assessment, and creating tools for job placement such as expanded resumes; 2) ensure that all students are able to succeed in online and technologically enhanced courses by designing a technology literacy assessment which can evolve as technology changes and by providing appropriate training where necessary; 3) lastly, create a campaign to disseminate information about this comprehensive, cost effective model for providing services to online students to other statewide consortia and virtual universities. This dissemination effort will also include information about our innovative, collaborative online tutoring project which is part of this suite of comprehensive academic support services.

This project is innovative on two fronts: creating academic services for online students is an important area of new development for higher education, and developing administrative and technical solutions statewide should produce the synergies, cost savings, and efficiencies that are characteristic of FIPSE sponsored innovations.

SUPPORTING ONLINE LEARNERS: A STATEWIDE APPROACH TO QUALITY ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

Introduction

The rapid growth of web-based distance learning in Connecticut and nationwide has created the next challenge for higher education—online academic support services. In the process of working to solve the institutional, administrative, faculty and student needs of distance education, the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC) has begun addressing the academic support services problem for online learners, and we seek FIPSE support to create a collaborative, cost effective, and highly replicable model.

This three-year FIPSE project will develop a comprehensive solution to providing academic support services for online students among multiple institutions. We will take the best single institution practices¹ and employ the innovative model we created for our multi-institution online tutoring program. *Supporting Online Learners: A Statewide Approach to Quality Academic Support Services* will facilitate a collaborative solution among twelve four and two-year, public and private participating institutions.

The project focuses on three academic support service needs as identified by student surveys and focus groups: 1) design and implement an electronic portfolio framework across institutions which can be used for advising, outcomes assessment, and creating tools for job placement such as expanded resumes; 2) ensure that all students are able to succeed in online and technologically enhanced courses by designing a technology literacy assessment which can evolve as technology changes and by identifying appropriate training where necessary; 3) create a campaign to disseminate information about this comprehensive and economical academic services model to other state-wide consortia and virtual universities. This model also includes the expansion of information about our pilot online tutoring project to include all interested member institutions and most core subjects.

¹ Putting Principles into Practice: Promoting Effective Support Services for Students in Distance Education Programs. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. 1998 FIPSE Grant

Students are approaching learning in new ways. Increasing numbers enroll in higher education online courses hoping that their credits will earn them a certificate, then possibly a two year degree and eventually a BA. Each semester over 10% of our online students overall and 30% of students taking online courses at a Connecticut community college, are taking online courses at institutions where they are not matriculated.² These students tell us they are not receiving appropriate academic support services.³ They have also expressed a need for training in new technology to keep up with the ongoing demands of learning from a distance. While distance education offers increased access to higher education, developing collaborative academic support services will support that access and increase retention and program completion.

A state-funded agency, the CTDLC has grown to include all but one of the accredited higher education institutions in Connecticut and has built collaboration and dissemination mechanisms that will ensure this project's success during and beyond the FIPSE grant period. The CTDLC supports member institutions who collectively offer 23 full online programs and over 360 courses a semester. Increasingly students are identifying these courses through an aggregated web site (www.ctdlc.org) which markets members' online offerings. We support students crossing institutional boundaries through a variety of initiatives including: participation in the Department of Education Financial Aid Demonstration Project; funding of course and program development with intent to support degrees which cross institutional lines; and the provision of centralized services to members including multiple delivery platforms, faculty development, a seven-day help desk, online registration and payment systems, and student assessment. With the support of the Davis Education Foundation, we have begun to create a collaborative online tutoring center where tutors provided by any of eleven different public and private, two- and four-year institutions are available to their online students seven days per week. More importantly, that grant has allowed us to begin to conceptualize a model for designing, piloting, refining, expanding, and integrating collaborative academic support services into the fabrics of the participating institutions. This

² Data from CTDLC Online Student Evaluation Surveys, Spring 2001 and Fall 2001.

³ Burton, L., Goldsmith, D. (2002) *Students' experiences in online courses: An online focus group evaluation for fall 2001*. Report for the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium.

collaborative approach to online learning across institutional types provides the foundation for future improvements. Over four years of collaborative experience, along with our involvement with national distance education associations such as WICHE, WCET, MERLOT, EDUCAUSE and the newly established American Council of Virtual Education⁴, has positioned CTDLC to have its finger on the pulse of national and local issues in distance education.

The Problem:

Over the past four years the number of courses offered online in CT grew from two a semester (Spring 1998) to over 350 (Spring 2002) and the number of students taking online courses continues to increase each semester to over 5600 this spring. Initially, institutions focused on the academic issues-- pedagogy, instructional design, course management systems etc.--involved in offering online courses and programs. In the beginning most students taking online courses were enrolled at an institution and were using online courses to accelerate their progress or to take advantage of the convenience. Generally, students took some of their classes online and some at the institution. Their need for academic support services was met by the existing onsite services. While large numbers of students continue to mix and match face-to-face with online courses, the growth of programs which students can take totally online and the increasing number of students who never set foot on the campus where they are enrolled have highlighted the need to provide quality academic support services online. Complicating the delivery of such services, the CTDLC has facilitated the development of collaborative degree programs (e.g. six of the CT Community Colleges offer a joint degree in General Studies), and of systems that allow students to take courses at multiple institutions that count toward their degree. Additionally, students who don't understand the policies of colleges and universities are picking and choosing online courses from a multitude of institutions without knowing if they fit into a degree program. However, developing and maintaining a robust set of online academic support services can be expensive and requires staffing during hours that often don't fit into the normal staffing patterns of most institutions. For all of these

⁴ The Lexington Group of Virtual University directors incorporated as the American Council of Virtual Education.

reasons, the CTDLC is committed to working with institutions to create collaborative solutions to academic support services that are both cost effective and that serve the many students who cross institutional boundaries to complete their degree requirements.

The Model:

The model for this project is based on the work we have done over the past year in answering the need for tutoring services for online students. With partial funding from the Davis Education Foundation, the CTDLC has worked with four two-year public institutions, two four-year private institutions, and the Connecticut State University System office to create a collaborative online tutoring center. Creating this model was challenging, requiring that institutions think outside their institutional borders to share resources and create a plan which puts students first. The center uses a commercial platform supplied by Smarthinking, but the tutors are hired and supervised by each of the institutions involved. Each semester, the institutions decide on the subjects to offer tutoring and how many hours collectively should be offered. This model was chosen so that the tutoring centers at each institution will recognize this project as an extension of what they do, rather than as competition or “outsourcing.” The model is cost effective because each institution only has to supply a limited number of tutors in order for their students to have access to tutoring seven days a week during times when our research shows that online students do most of their work.⁵

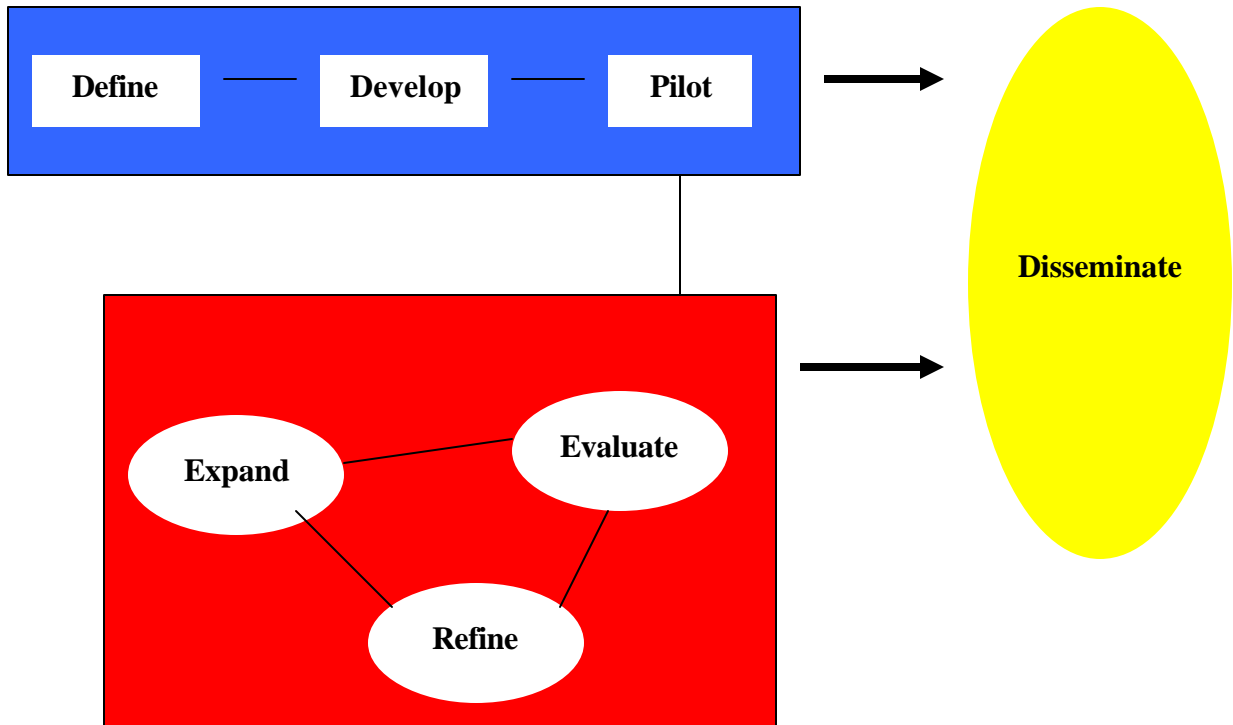
We began the pilot slowly with the participating institutions involved in all aspects of the project design. Many of the best ideas for the project came out of this collective work. We carefully evaluated what we were doing, made changes in the design, and added new tutoring subjects and new tutors. We learned many lessons about how to do this type of collaborative work better and how to move the ownership of the project into the fabric of the institutions. For example, we learned that it was essential to build in ownership not just by the distance learning coordinators, but by the tutoring center directors and staff. For this reason, we will require institutions to commit staff time from the units most involved

⁵ Data from CTDLC’s 2001-2002 focus group research.

in this FIPSE project. We also learned the importance of putting resources into marketing new services. Students, faculty, and staff need to be made aware of the new services and to see them as important to their work and learning. We will be piloting a range of marketing strategies as part of the tutoring project that we will then be able to use as we implement the technology assessment tool and the electronic portfolio.

CTDLC's Executive and Membership Committees were kept informed of the Davis project progress with oral and written reports at the bimonthly meetings. Therefore, all of the institutions in Connecticut knew about the project and many were clamoring to participate. As a result, in year two we have expanded the project to include five more institutions. These institutions do not have grant funding, so they are paying for the tutors and paying a partially subsidized amount for the platform and for the staff person who coordinates the project for CTDLC. In year three we expect to continue to expand the project to include more institutions even as the subsidy decreases and the costs for the institutions increase. By year four, when there is no longer any grant funding, all institutions participating in the project will be sharing the cost of the platform and the staffing, so that the project will be fully integrated across institutions. In general, this is the model we are intending to follow in this project. One difference is that we will not be able to buy a commercial product for either the technology assessment or the electronic portfolio so the development project includes the creation of these programs.

The Model:



In the following sections we discuss each component of the work separately, beginning with a more detailed description of the tutoring project already under way, to make sure that the links between this effort and the proposed work are clear.

Tutoring

We seek funds from this FIPSE project to begin the process of national dissemination of the online tutoring project begun with Davis Foundation support. As the tutoring project is slightly ahead of the projects we will be initiating under the FIPSE grant, we can begin to disseminate both the exciting results of the tutoring project, the model that we have created with it, and our plans for continuing to use the model to build comprehensive academic support services through the FIPSE grant. Dissemination

plans are discussed in depth in the section on dissemination (p. 17). The following description of the project outlines our goals.

While we will not be seeking any funds from FIPSE to support the growth of the tutoring project, we understand that this project is a necessary part of this effort to create and implement a set of comprehensive services for online students. As noted above, the tutoring project also provides a model to follow in the implementation of this project. For this reason we are requiring the institutions who are participating in this FIPSE initiative to also continue or add involvement in the tutoring project.

With the tutoring initiative not even one year old, we have begun to work on meeting our goals for the second year. These include expanding the number of institutions involved, doubling the number of subjects in which tutoring is offered, almost doubling the number of tutoring hours available to students, and expanding our outreach efforts to students, faculty, and staff. We have also found that it is impossible to limit online academic support services only to online students. Students taking courses on site also want the convenience of getting tutoring help from their desks at home on Saturday afternoon or Tuesday night. Therefore, we have expanded the tutoring opportunity to include all students enrolled at the participating institutions. New Participating institutions are not being supported by grant money. To join the project, they are paying a fee at a slightly subsidized rate for use of the platform and for the staffing necessary at the CTDLC. They must also cover the cost of paying for tutors. This expansion effort will continue in the third year, with the subsidies for all participants continuing to decrease until the fourth year when there is no longer any grant or subsidy support. Specifics of these efforts in the next three years are outlined below, even though no FIPSE funding is sought to help us meet these objectives.

TUTORING	
September 2002- August 2003	
Goal 1: To increase the number of non-grant supported institutions in the project.	
Goal 2: To increase the number of subjects and hours of tutoring.	
Goal 3: To increase the number of participants.	
Objectives	Evaluation
Growth beyond the pilot organizations.	How many new institutions participate and pay subsidized costs?
Growth in the number of subjects and tutoring hours.	How many hours of tutoring and how many subjects are offered?
Growth in student use of tutoring.	Usage reports.
Provide quality tutoring.	Monitoring by tutoring coordinators and the CTDLC academic support services coordinator. Surveys of students, tutors, faculty.
September 2003- August 2004	
The same goals are supported through this year.	
Goal 1: To increase the numbers of non-grant supported institutions in the project.	
Goal 2: To increase the numbers of subjects and hours of tutoring.	
Goal 3: To increase the numbers of participants .	
Growth beyond the pilot organizations.	How many new institutions participate and pay subsidized costs?
Growth in the numbers of subjects and tutoring hours.	How many hours of tutoring and how many subjects are offered?
Growth in student use of tutoring.	Usage reports.
Provide quality tutoring.	Monitoring by tutoring coordinators and the CTDLC academic support services coordinator. Surveys of students, tutors, faculty.
September 2004- August 2005	
Goal 4: Successful integration of the collaborative tutoring center into the fabric of the participating institutions.	
Model successfully integrated into the institutions and CTDLC.	How many institutions continue to participate with no grant funding?

Electronic Portfolios:

Portfolios have been developed and used within single institutions generally for assessment purposes (both capstone and developmental portfolio projects). Essentially portfolios allow users to collect and select their work over time to show development, provide a thick description of their work, and demonstrate their ability to reflect upon what they've done, created, or learned. However, portfolios can be large, cumbersome objects which take up storage room and aren't readily transportable.

Electronic Portfolios can be designed to allow for students and others to add information easily in a

variety of forms and provide a variety of types of access to others. This means electronic portfolios can be used for a variety of other purposes including advising and career placement since students can maintain them for use as expanded virtual resumes.⁶

Advising is of particular importance in the situation where students cross institutional boundaries and thus cross student information systems⁷. Because they are not on campus, online students have limited access to academic advisors and those advisors do not have access to the student's records if that student is not matriculated at the advisor's institution. In addition, many students don't understand the language and standards of higher education. Words like "matriculate" and "residency requirements" are not salient to many online learners who, without access to advising, choose courses of interest assuming this will move them toward a degree. Monies from FIPSE will be used to ensure that the electronic portfolio can be used by online students to provide advisors, faculty, and staff access to their work, grades, and program planning as necessary. In such a portfolio, students could build a private, unofficial transcript, complete with courses, relevant projects, and educational goals that they can share with advisors from multiple institutions.

Institutions will also use electronic portfolios for course, programmatic, and/or general education assessment purposes. Here again, where students may be using online courses or a hybrid of online and face-to-face courses offered by multiple institutions to complete a program, the electronic portfolio framework provides an excellent method for selecting and reflecting on work from multiple institutions to demonstrate growth or mastery. The web-based framework can also provide for linking to work placed on other web sites and to work which is in non-written formats. Institutions will also be able to adapt the electronic portfolio for other purposes. For example, career counselors can work with students to create virtual resumes.

⁶ Yancey, K.B. (2001). *Digitized Student Portfolios*. In B.L. Cambridge, S. Kahn, D.P.Tompkins, and K.B. Yancey, K.B (Eds.), *Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices in Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning* (pp.15-30). Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.

⁷ Even Connecticut's public Community College and State University Systems either don't share a student information system or have built firewalls which prevent institutions from easily sharing data.

The three-year plan for this collaborative electronic portfolio project is outlined below. While we have outlined the plan for each part of the project separately, it is essential to note that they are interrelated. For example, the electronic portfolio will require specific technical skills in order for students to successfully add material, create links, and provide access to others. These skills need to be determined by the group designing the portfolios and then communicated to the technology assessment project so that they can be assessed and training can be provided. Dissemination will be done as a whole since we understand the electronic portfolio, technology assessment, and the online tutoring center to be part of a comprehensive set of necessary academic support services and we understand the model by which we are approaching the development of these services to be the same.

ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIO	
September 2002- August 2003	
GOAL 1: To develop an Electronic Portfolio Framework which can serve as an advising and assessment tool for the participating institutions .	
Objectives	Evaluation
Develop a list of agreed upon attributes of the electronic portfolio so it meets advising, outcomes, and resume needs.	Survey of advisors, faculty and/or department chairs involved in assessment, career counselors.
Build software to meet these needs.	Users will test the software throughout its development.
Develop a protocol for using the portfolio for advising across institutional boundaries for online students.	Survey of advisors.
Have one program (or general education) in each participating institution, which is offered at least partially online, design an outcomes assessment method using the electronic portfolio.	Interviews with faculty and/or department chairs on how well the electronic format meets their needs.
Develop an online training program for students on how to use the portfolios.	Observational study of a pilot group of students taking the training in a lab situation and then using the portfolios.
Develop online and onsite training programs for faculty and staff on how to use the electronic portfolios.	Survey of pilot group of faculty and staff taking the training and then using the portfolios.
Pilot the portfolios with a small group of users in multiple institutions. Evaluate them for problems and make any necessary revisions.	Surveys of those users.

September 2003- August 2004	
GOAL 2: Complete a pilot involving all participating institutions including implementing the training programs for faculty, staff, students.	
Objectives	Evaluation
Begin training of faculty, students, and staff.	Survey of trained users after using the portfolio for feedback on the usefulness and design of the training.
Perform pilot involving all participating institutions using both the assessment and advising pieces of the portfolio.	Surveys of students, staff, faculty who are using the portfolios for any reason.
Continue revisions of the platform where necessary.	Feedback from users.
Market to students, faculty, and staff.	Document usage.
September 2004- August 2005	
Goal 3: Complete a final large scale pilot involving all institutions and multiple uses.	
Goal 4: Increase participation to those who aren't receiving FIPSE funding.	
Revise the platform.	Feedback from users.
Revise the training.	Feedback from users.
Continued implementation of training and marketing.	Monitor usage.
Perform large scale pilot involving all institutions and multiple uses.	Survey of all users.
Increased participation.	How many new institutions participate and pay higher but still subsidized costs?
YEAR FOUR: NO GRANT FUNDING	
Goal 6: Model successfully integrated into the participating institutions and into the CTDLC.	
Goal 7: Increased participation by those not in the original FIPSE project.	
Integrate model successfully into the institutions and CTDLC.	How many institutions continue to participate with no grant funding.
Increased participation.	How many new institutions participate with no subsidy.

Technological Literacy:

To respond to a national challenge to improve technological literacy and ensure that inadequate technology skills do not interfere with successful degree completion, we will pilot a state-wide Basic Technological Literacy program. This program will identify desired technology literacy levels, assess incoming students, and assist institutions in meeting identified student needs. With an increasing use of course management systems (e.g. WebCT and Blackboard), student information systems (e.g. SCT Banner and PeopleSoft), and now online tutoring and electronic portfolios, all students at our institutions

will need to use technology during their college career, and online students encounter this in their first course.

Students working online should be free to focus on scholarly substance without technological literacy impediments. Although many incoming students possess a basic technological understanding, some students indicate that they need assistance when facing the technological challenges of working online. Faculty members confirm that not all incoming students possess the technological competencies that online or technologically enriched courses require. Some of our institutions already offer general advice regarding the level of technological ability necessary to succeed in an online course, but the range in technology competencies of incoming students suggests that an individualized approach to assessment and placement assistance is necessary to ensure student success.

Our Basic Technological Literacy program will include developing an evolving statement of desired technological literacy, building an adaptable online assessment instrument that will help students identify areas of weakness, and suggest a corresponding training program to address those identified needs. Participating institutions will select representative faculty and academic support services professionals who will form a think tank to identify areas of greatest common need, create and implement an assessment framework, and develop and implement an adaptable training program to address the identified needs, taking advantage of existing training opportunities wherever possible. The think tank will be coordinated by Catherine Manly, who, under special arrangement with one of the participating institutions, will serve as a consultant to the CTDLC to lead this part of the project.

The think tank will develop a statement of the desired technological literacy level of incoming college students that will allow for evolution of technology across time and that will be applicable across institutional types. The development of the statement will be guided by the work of organizations that have already developed technological literacy standards for high school graduates⁸, and will include the input of faculty at the pilot institutions who teach online or technologically enhanced courses, and their

⁸ Standards for Technological Literacy: Content for the Study of Technology. International Technology Education Association. (2000). <http://www.iteawww.org/TAA/PDF/xstnd.pdf> ISBN 1-887101-02-0

students. This statement will provide the basis for developing the online assessment of technological literacy, and will also be useful as a standard that other institutions and consortia around the country may either wish to adopt or use to develop their own standards.

The assessment will be based on an adaptable framework usable by multiple institutions. Since technologies evolve over time, it will allow for future technologies to be included as part of an ongoing review process during and after the grant. It will be administered online and will allow institutions to choose whether they wish to use the entire assessment or just pieces. It will also allow for institutions to give an overall score or give separate scores for different technology areas, allowing for a flexibility of assistance in response to the results.

The think tank will also identify several possible means of addressing the technology needs identified by the assessment from which institutions might choose. These could range from credit courses to a self-paced model, allowing institutions to approach this as it suits their needs. Efforts will be made to incorporate existing support structures whenever possible so that the resulting assistance for students will be ongoing once the grant support ends. The guidelines that are developed will also be useful to other institutions and consortia addressing this issue.

The three-year plan for this Basic Technological Literacy project follows. It is important to note that this technology literacy program will assist students in using the online tutoring service and the electronic portfolio being developed in other parts of this grant, in addition to assisting them in using course management and student information systems more effectively. This program will benefit from the ongoing dissemination efforts of other parts of the grant, which will facilitate early information sharing about the project.

TECHNOLOGY LITERACY	
September 2002- August 2003	
GOAL 1: Develop a Minimum Technology Literacy Statement desired for incoming students.	
GOAL 2: Develop a Technology Literacy Assessment based on the statement.	
GOAL 3: Begin a pilot of the assessment.	
Objectives	Evaluation
Develop a statement of minimum desired technological literacy for incoming students.	Survey of faculty and/or department chairs and testing staff.
Develop an assessment that gauges whether students meet the standards in the statement.	Survey of faculty and/or department chairs and testing staff.
Build software to perform the assessment.	Users will test the software throughout its development.
Develop online and onsite training programs for placement testing staff on how to give the assessment.	Survey of pilot group of staff taking the training and then using the assessment.
Pilot the assessment with a small group of users in multiple institutions. Evaluate the results for problems and make any necessary revisions.	Surveys of those users.
Begin statewide dissemination.	Whether other institutions ask for information.
September 2003- August 2004	
GOAL 4: Perform a pilot of the assessment involving all participating institutions.	
GOAL 5: Develop guidelines for addressing needs identified by the assessment.	
Continue revisions to the statement of basic technological literacy.	Feedback from users.
Complete training of staff giving the pilot assessment.	Surveys of testing staff.
Pilot the assessment involving all participating institutions.	Surveys of those users.
Continue revisions of the assessment where necessary.	Feedback from users.
Modify assessment software as necessary.	Users will test the software throughout its development.
Develop guidelines with paths institutions can have students follow to address identified needs.	Survey of faculty and/or department chairs, testing staff.
Market to institutions.	Document usage.
September 2004- August 2005	
Goal 6: Complete a pilot involving all participating institutions.	
Goal 7: Increase participation to those who aren't receiving FIPSE funding.	
Revise the statement.	Feedback from users.
Revise the assessment.	Feedback from users.
Revise the assessment training.	Feedback from users.
Continue implementation of training and marketing.	Monitor usage.
Large scale pilot involving all institutions, including evaluation of effectiveness of testing and 'placement' on performance and retention of students from years 1 and 2.	Survey of all users.
Increase participation.	How many new institutions participate and pay higher but still subsidized costs?

Objectives	Evaluation
Publish and distribute the statement of minimum technological competencies and the institutional guidelines for meeting identified needs where they will reach a national audience.	Whether other entities use or adopt these standards.
YEAR FOUR: NO GRANT FUNDING	
Goal 8: Integrated model successfully into the participating institutions and into the CTDLC.	
Goal 9: Increased participation by those not in the original FIPSE project.	
Integrate model successfully into the institutions and CTDLC.	How many institutions continue to participate with no grant funding?
Increased participation.	How many new institutions participate with no subsidy?

Dissemination Campaign:

The nature of this project requires two different concepts of dissemination: 1) internal—to our institutional members within Connecticut in order to increase participation in the project and 2) external—to approximately 50 statewide consortia and virtual universities whom we hope will adopt the model and some or all of the products to use in their consortia. This internal dissemination continues throughout the project and is part of the model that will be disseminated nationally.

Internal Dissemination: The goal of the internal dissemination for the first year of the project is to make all the members of the CTDLC aware of the goals of the grant and provide ongoing information about the progress of the project in order to build interest and excitement among those who are not participating in this grant funded project. Built into the structure of the CTDLC are a number of avenues for this type of dissemination. The Executive Committee, composed of representatives from the University of Connecticut, the Connecticut State University System, the Community College System, and the Independent Colleges meets bimonthly and receives reports about all ongoing projects of the CTDLC. The Membership Committee with representatives from all the members of the CTDLC also meets bimonthly receives reports about ongoing projects. For both committees, we send out minutes, so that those who miss meetings are kept current with activities. We are in the process of making improvements and changes to the CTDLC web site so that we will be able to include ongoing information about this

project. We are also creating an electronic newsletter which will be sent to all faculty, staff, and administrators who are involved with the CTDLC at any level.

During the second year, the goal of internal dissemination is to provide substantive information about the project and preliminary evaluative data to all of our members statewide with the goal of bringing members who aren't grant funded into the project for year three. All of the activities described for year one will continue for year two. In addition we will add a track at our annual CTDLC distance learning conference for academic support services personnel and those involved in outcomes assessment. We will also make presentations to the existing statewide organizations of academic support services personnel such as testing coordinators, registrars, and advisors. We have found that it is easy to get on the agendas of such organizations when one or more of their members are part of the project we want to discuss.

These same efforts will continue during year three with the goal of attracting more members to the project and ensuring that those who began the project with grant-funding have integrated the project into their work and will sustain the project at the end of the granting period. In addition to the strategies described above we will sponsor a statewide conference focused solely on academic support services and outcomes assessment.

External dissemination: External dissemination will be targeted specifically at those 50 or so statewide consortia and virtual universities who can use the model and products we are creating through this grant project. We have an established presence through membership, conference presentations, and leadership positions with a variety of national distance education associations such as WICHE, MERLOT, EDUCAUSE, the American Council of Virtual Universities, and the Department of Education Financial Aid Demonstration Project⁹. Through these organization's newsletters, web sites, and meetings we will, during all three years, provide information about this project. During the second and third years of the grant we will target two national conferences sponsored by these associations for presentations on

⁹ The CTDLC is a participating member of all of these organizations. Ed Klonoski, Executive Director of CTDLC, is a board member of the American Council of Virtual Universities.

this project. During the third year we will also publish a report on the project with emphasis on its outcomes specifically written for the leaders of statewide consortia and virtual universities. In conjunction with this report we will create a web-based community conversation where we can continue to discuss the issues raised in the report, respond to questions, and provide technical assistance. We will continue to support this web site for at least a year after the grant funding has ended.

DISSEMINATION	
Objectives	Plan
September 2002- August 2003	
Disseminate tutoring project statewide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports to executive and membership meetings. • Add information to CTDLIC web site. • Highlight in new CTDLIC electronic newsletter. • Travel to non-participating institutions
Begin national dissemination of the tutoring project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written updates to the national virtual university organizations. • Presentation at one national conference or meeting.
September 2003- August 2004	
Dissemination entire project statewide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports to executive and membership meetings. • Add information to CTDLIC web site. • Highlight in new CTDLIC electronic newsletter. • Add academic support services track to statewide conference.
Begin national dissemination of the entire project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports in national newsletters. • Present at two national conferences or meetings.
September 2004- August 2005	
Objectives	Plan
Continue statewide dissemination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports to executive and membership meetings. • Add information to CTDLIC web site. • Highlight in new CTDLIC electronic newsletter. • Continue academic support services track in statewide conference.
Disseminate entire project nationally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports in national newsletters. • Present at two national conferences or meetings. • Published report directed specifically at the leaders of virtual universities and collaboratives. • Creation of a web based community conversation on the model. • Publish and distribute nationally the statement of minimum technological competencies and the institutional guidelines for meeting identified needs.
YEAR FOUR: NO GRANT FUNDING	
Continue national dissemination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the community conversation. • Provide technical assistance on the model when requested.

Institutional Capacity and Commitment to the Project

The Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium is applying for a FIPSE grant to fund a project which is completely integral to the work of the CTDLC. Even without the grant funding, we would continue to build on our success with the collaborative tutoring project to create a set of comprehensive services for online students. We see this as essential to the success of online courses and programs. The grant, however, would provide the resources that will enable us to accomplish our goals quickly and in a more comprehensive manner. It will also ensure the involvement of greater numbers of institutions in the project at the development and pilot stages. This early involvement is key to creating service tools which meet the needs of the range of institutions who will use them and to their early integration into the fabric of the participating institutions.

As is evident in the description of the key project personnel, the CTDLC has committed staff with the skills, knowledge and experience to accomplish the goals of the project. The project will be directed by the person who has led the collaborative tutoring project. The technical assessment project will be directed by a key institutional participant in the Davis collaboration on a consultant basis to the CTDLC. The CTDLC technical people involved in creating the electronic portfolio and the assessment tool have many years programming experience and certification in Cold Fusion. And the CTDLC Executive Director's connections to national distance education organizations will be utilized in the national dissemination of the project.¹⁰

Twelve institutions also feel strongly enough about this project to commit a considerable amount of staff time and expertise to the project. The following institutions have agreed to appoint a project director from their institution and to commit staff and faculty from their advising, assessment, technology, testing, tutoring, and institutional research departments to these projects (see Appendix):

Capitol Community College – President Ira Rubenfeld

¹⁰Crawford, A. (2002, May). Shining in the Distance. *University Business*, 37-41.

Central Connecticut State University – President Richard Judd

Charter Oak State College – President Merle Harris

Manchester Community College – President Jonathan M. Daube

Naugatuck Community College – President Richard J. Sanders

Northwestern Connecticut Community College – President Eileen Baccus

Quinnipiac University – President John L. Lahey

Sacred Heart University – President Anthony Cernera

Teikyo Post University – President John Jay DeTemple

Three Rivers Community College – President Grace S. Jones

Tunxis Community College – President Kathryn Addy

The standard commitment letter which spells out the requirements for the institutions’ participation in the grant is attached, along with letters from key players at some of the participating institution which affirm the importance of the project to them.

Evaluation:

Evaluation is an essential component of this project. The evaluation plan involves both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and includes both formative and summative evaluations. Along with monitoring usage, we will work with an experienced external evaluator, Dr. Jennifer Brown (her biography is included in “key project people”), to design a series of surveys and interviews of the key stakeholders and users (as outlined specifically in the tables above). These evaluation processes are designed to guide us in our development and refinement of each of the services and platforms over the three years of the project in order to assess their quality and usefulness to students, to the providers of the service, and to those who would have knowledge of the effects of the service such as faculty. This formative evaluation will continually allow us to monitor and improve the services throughout the project. Toward the end of the third year, similar surveys, interviews, and quantitative measures of usage will form one part of a summative evaluation of the project as a whole.

While building quality services is one goal, it is our belief that quality academic support services for online students will lead to improved course completion rates and greater student satisfaction. We will work with Dr. Brown to select a cohort of degree-seeking students taking online courses to follow throughout the study using both qualitative and quantitative measures of success. These students will be recruited by each of the participating institutions and given a small stipend to compensate them for their time in responding to surveys and/or interviews and for giving us access to their demographic and academic data. We are interested in using this cohort to gauge the integration of these new academic support services into the institutions by asking questions such as whether they have heard of the electronic portfolio, whether they know how to get an ID and password for the online tutoring, and whether taking the technology literacy assessment was useful. We know, from our experience with another research project involving a cohort of online learners that some students will not want to continue to be part of the study and some will leave the institution. Part of the study will attempt to make at least one more individualized contact with such students to understand the reasons for these decisions and whether they are related to issues of online academic support services, technical problems, or issues in their online courses. New students will be added to the study to replace those, as they will provide a fresh look at what is being developed and how it is being integrated into each institution.

Each participating institution will also provide us with online course and program completion data for each course each semester. We will analyze this data over the three years of the grant to examine how the addition of a more comprehensive set of services has impacted course and program completions.

Ultimately, we note that this model is very dependent on the creation of collaborative partnerships. This process will be carefully documented by the project director and all documents including meeting minutes will be retained. Dr. Brown will conduct annual interviews with each of the institutional project directors in order to understand both how they perceive the external collaboration and how they have built the internal institutional collaborations necessary to integrate the new services into the institution. Dr. Brown will then analyze these sources of data to explicate the process of partnership creation and maintenance.

OUTSIDE EVALUATION PLAN	
Plan	Activities of Outside Evaluator
September 2002- August 2003	
Qualitative assessment of student participation, perception, and attrition through a sample cohort.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop survey protocol which CTDLC puts into a web based form. • Seek out students who have left the institution to complete the report • Analyze the data from the survey • Prepare report for internal use
Course completion data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze completion data from data supplied by participating institutions
Interview selected key project people at CTDLC and participating institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct interviews on the process of this project and its integration into the institutions • Prepare report for internal use
September 2003- August 2004	
Qualitative assessment of student participation, perception, and attrition through a sample cohort.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop survey protocol which CTDLC puts into a web based form. • Seek out students who have left the institution to complete the report • Analyze the data from the survey • Prepare report for internal use
Course completion data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze completion data from data supplied by participating institutions
Interview selected key project people at CTDLC and participating institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct interviews on the process of this project and its integration into the institutions • Prepare report for internal use
Survey of students, faculty, staff, administrators regarding use and satisfaction with the portfolio, tech assessment, and tutoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review survey • Review data • Prepare report for internal use
September 2003- August 2004	
Qualitative assessment of student participation, perception, and attrition through a sample cohort.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop survey protocol which CTDLC puts into a web based form. • Seek out students who have left the institution to complete the report • Analyze the data from the survey • Prepare final summary report
Course completion data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze completion data from data supplied by participating institutions • Prepare final summary report
Interview selected key project people at CTDLC and participating institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct interviews on the process of this project and its integration into the institutions • Prepare final summary report
Survey of students, faculty, staff, administrators regarding use and satisfaction with the portfolio, tech assessment, and tutoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review survey • Review data • Prepare final summary report

Conclusion

It is part of the CTDLDC's mission in the state of Connecticut to be an innovation leader in distance education. We explore, learn and develop best practices to increase resources and efficiency for the institutions of higher education and their students, statewide. This FIPSE project, an extension of our academic support services model that is already underway in CT, is just an example of what we do, and it represents our commitment to continue developing new opportunities in higher education not only across institutions, but with legislative support, throughout the state's governmental system, and through the Office of Workforce Competitiveness, throughout the state's greater community of businesses.

This project is innovative on two fronts: creating academic services for online students is an important area of new development for higher education, and developing administrative and technical solutions statewide should produce the synergies, cost savings, and efficiencies that are characteristic of FIPSE sponsored innovations.

If awarded this FIPSE grant, the CTDLDC will maintain its reputation for leadership while delivering quality, experience and success in developing this new opportunity—**Supporting Online Learners: A Statewide Approach to Quality Academic Support Services**—in higher education, nationwide.

APPENDIX

Key Project Personnel

Equitable Access Statement

Commitment Letter from Davis Participants signed by Presidents from:

Charter Oak State College

Manchester Community College

Naugatuck Valley Community College

Northwestern Community College

Sacred Heart University

Teikyo Post University

Three Rivers Community College

Commitment Letter from Non-Davis Participants signed by Presidents from:

Capitol Community College

Central Connecticut State College

Eastern Connecticut State College

Quinnipiac University

Tunxis Community College

Sample Letters of support from participants (4)

KEY PROJECT PERSONNEL

Dr. Diane Goldsmith, FIPSE Grant Project Director: Dr. Diane Goldsmith is Director of Institutional Research for the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium and directs CTDLC's initiatives to provide quality academic support services to online students including managing the Davis Education funded Quality Services Initiative. Prior to coming to the CTDLC, she spent ten years directing a program for adult students at Manchester Community College. She chaired the distance learning and technology committee and was MCC's representative to the CTDLC. She incorporated web-based technologies into her face-to-face courses and developed and taught women's studies courses online. Dr. Goldsmith has a Ph.D. in Evaluation and Measurement from the University of Connecticut.

Catherine Manly, Director Technology Assessment Project: Catherine Manly received an MBA in Technology Management with the University of Phoenix Online in 2000, which gave her 3 years of direct experience as an online student, including writing a capstone project plan for online education development at a university. She has worked closely with the Student and Academic Affairs divisions at Manchester Community College over the past year and a half to expand online services to students. She has advised faculty developing online courses and online components to traditional courses for four and a half years, both at Manchester CC and Amherst College. She administered a Technology in Teaching Mellon Foundation Grant for Amherst College for 2 years, directs Manchester CC's Davis-CTDLC Online Quality Initiative grant participation, and is directing CTDLC Summer Faculty Training Grants both for Manchester CC (for 2 years) and for the entire Community College System.

Edward Klonoski, Executive Director Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium: Ed Klonoski is Executive Director of the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium and serves on the Board of Directors of the American Council of Virtual Education. Klonoski spent 15 years teaching Composition & Rhetoric in a networked classroom and 5 years teaching faculty to create interactive multimedia. From 1994-1997 he was the co-principal investigator and the project director for a FIPSE funded Advanced

Educational Computing (AEC) project, which involved training faculty in interactive multimedia authoring to facilitate pedagogical innovation at the University of Hartford. He has produced various sorts of educational media, published and presented on using the new media in teaching and learning, and consulted with a variety of institutions in both education and industry.

Dr. Jennifer Brown, Outside Evaluator: Dr. Jennifer Brown has worked for 20 years in higher education, beginning with establishing the institutional research function at the Connecticut State University system office. In her sixteen years at CSU, she was responsible for the implementation of a system-wide data base containing information on students, courses and degrees, for the development of a regular series of reports and publications and for the development of a comprehensive, system-wide set of student surveys used for assessment and program improvement efforts. Since January 1999, Dr. Brown has served as Director of Institutional Research and Policy Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston. As IR director Dr. Brown was integrally involved in the Urban University Portfolio Project (UUPP), a three-year project funded by the Pew Charitable Trust in conjunction with AAHE that explored the use of web based portfolios for assessment and accreditation activities. Dr. Brown received her Ph.D in Sociology from the University of Connecticut and serves as an adjunct faculty member of the Sociology Department at UMass Boston.

Kevin Corcoran, Director of Web Technologies and Corporate Services for CTDLC: Kevin Corcoran manages the CTDLC technology infrastructure: operating 7 web servers and 3 course management systems (WebCT, Blackboard, WebMentor); and supervising application development and technical support.

Institutional Project Directors:

Capitol Community College – **Harry Moriber**, Director of Distance Learning and Professor, Computer and Information Systems

Central Connecticut State University – **William Kleinert**, Dean of Sponsored Programs

Charter Oak State College – **Linda Larkin**, Director of Academic Services

Eastern Connecticut State University – **Stephen Frazier**, Information Center Manager

Manchester Community College – **Catherine Manly**, Director of Distance Learning and Educational Technology

Naugatuck Valley Community College – **Sandra Valenti**, Assistant Professor of Psychology and Chair of the NVCC Distance Learning Committee

Northwestern Connecticut Community College – **Kathleen Fox**, Director Institutional Technology

Quinnipiac University – **Cynthia Gallatin**, Academic Technical Support Specialist

Sacred Heart University – **Ed Donato**, Associate Dean of University College

Teikyo Post University – **Judith Slisz**, Dean of Accelerated Programs

Three Rivers Community College – **Stephen Goetchius**, Dean of Information Technology. **Tunxis**

Community College – **Margi Winters**, Director of Instructional Technology

Equitable Access Statement Section 427 of GEPA

The Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium and all participating institutions will provide equitable access or participation to all individuals regardless of race, color, religious creed, sex, age, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, learning disability, present or past history of mental disorder, marital status, mental retardation, or physical disability, as provided by Connecticut State and Federal laws. CTDLC ensures that use of all federal funds will comply with the provision and spirit Section 427 of the Department of Education's General Education Provisions Act (GEPA). If CTDLC discovers or is made aware of any barriers to access or participation of students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries with special needs, immediate action will be taken to remove the barriers. In particular, as the proposed program is developed and implemented, steps will be taken to ensure equitable access and participation by persons with disabilities. All CTCLC web sites are Bobby Compliant and when at all possible are designed to serve the needs of all persons with disabilities.¹¹ In particular the electronic portfolio and technology assessment will be designed to be adaptable to persons with disabilities.

¹¹ We are aware of the work done by WEBAIM (<http://www.webaim.org/>) and the help it provides in creating accessible web sites.

**CTDLC-FIPSE Student Services Initiative
Institutional Commitment Form
Davis Participating Institutions**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium FIPSE proposal which is designed to provide collaborative, innovative, cost effective solutions to providing student services for both online and onsite students. We will need back a signed copy of this institutional commitment form to include in our grant application.

The grant funded project includes:

- An expansion of our collaborative online tutoring project with special emphasis on disseminating information about this project on a statewide and national basis.
- The creation of a technology assessment instrument which can be used by individual institutions to determine whether its students have the technological literacy and competencies to successfully complete online and technologically enhanced onsite classes, and to use an electronic portfolio.
- The creation of an electronic portfolio which can be used by institutions for:
 - Advising (specifically designed to facilitate advising for students who cross institutional boundaries)
 - Outcomes assessment which use developmental, co-curricular or capstone portfolios
 - Extended resumes

Your institution’s participation in this FIPSE project would require primarily staff time to:

- help design these products and processes
- to use them including marketing them inside your institution and training staff, students, and faculty,
- supply the data and or access to students (subject to informed consent and FERPA requirements) as required to evaluate this project.

Since this grant project builds on work we have already started, participation in this project would also require you to continue your participation in the collaborative tutoring project.

Specifically we are asking for staff time from faculty and staff involved in tutoring, advising, assessment, testing, training, and distance learning. The FIPSE grant would pay for half of the hours each year (calculated at \$25.00 per hour) with your institution matching the number of hours as your in-kind contribution to the grant. We are also asking you to pay small stipends to students to participate in any required evaluation activities to a total of \$500 a year.

Grant Year	Total Staff Hours	FIPSE hours @ \$25/hour	Stipend for students to participate in Evaluation Activities	Total Grant Money for the institution
2002-2003	280	(140*\$25)=\$3500	\$500	\$4,000
2003-2004	280	(140*\$25)=\$3500	\$500	\$4,000
2004-2005	160	(80*\$25)=\$2000	\$500	\$2,500

Staff representatives from your institution would be required to:

- Attend meetings on the project to help design and implement the project
- Bring appropriate other individuals to meetings when appropriate
- Work within the institution to inform and train others about the project
- Work within the institution to implement the products of this project – portfolios, technology assessment instruments.
- Work within the institution to “market” the use of these products to students, staff, and faculty.
- Participate in disseminating information about this project within the institution, state, and nationally.

The institution is responsible for:

- Changing or adding elements to their institution’s web site where necessitated by the implementation of the various elements of this project.
- Supplying data where necessary to evaluate this project
- Recruiting and providing a stipend (up to a total of \$500 each year) for students to participate in projects designed to evaluate this effort (subject to informed consent)
- Supporting the institutional use of:
 - the collaborative tutoring project
 - electronic portfolio for advising and outcomes assessment
 - the technology assessment instrument

In order to confirm your participation, we will need the signature of the President of the institution and the names of the people who will be responsible for the various aspects of the project. We will also need a one paragraph description of the background and experience of the person who will be directing the project for your institution to include in the grant application.

President of the Institution:

Name

Signature

Date

**CTDLC-FIPSE Student Services Initiative
Institutional Commitment Form
Non-Davis Participating Institutions**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium FIPSE proposal which is designed to provide collaborative, innovative, cost effective solutions to providing student services for both online and onsite students. We will need back a signed copy of this institutional commitment form to include in our grant application.

The grant funded project includes:

- An expansion of our collaborative online tutoring project with special emphasis on disseminating information about this project on a statewide and national basis.
- The creation of a technology assessment instrument which can be used by individual institutions to determine whether its students have the technological literacy and competencies to successfully complete online and technologically enhanced onsite classes, and to use an electronic portfolio.
- The creation of an electronic portfolio which can be used by institutions for:
 - Advising (specifically designed to facilitate advising for students who cross institutional boundaries)
 - Outcomes assessment which use developmental, co-curricular or capstone portfolios
 - Extended resumes

Your institution's participation in this FIPSE project would require primarily staff time to:

- help design these products and processes
- to use them including marketing them inside your institution and training staff, students, and faculty,
- supply the data and or access to students (subject to informed consent and FERPA requirements) as required to evaluate this project.

Since this grant project builds on work we have already started, participation in this project would also require you to participate in the collaborative tutoring project. However, no FIPSE funds are allocated for paying tutors or platform costs.

Specifically we are asking for staff time from faculty and staff involved in tutoring, advising, assessment, testing, training, and distance learning. The FIPSE grant would pay for half of the hours each year (calculated at \$25.00 per hour) with your institution matching the number of hours as your in-kind contribution to the grant. We are also asking you to pay small stipends to students to participate in any required evaluation activities to a total of \$500 a year.

Grant Year	Total Staff Hours	FIPSE hours @ \$25/hour	Stipend for students to participate in Evaluation Activities	Total Grant Money for the institution
2002-2003	600	(300*\$25)=\$7500	\$500	\$8,000
2003-2004	280	(140*\$25)=\$3500	\$500	\$4,000

2004-2005	160	$(80 * \$25) = \2000	\$500	\$2,500
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Staff representatives from your institution would be required to:

- Attend meetings on the project to help design and implement the project
- Bring appropriate other individuals to meetings when appropriate
- Work within the institution to inform and train others about the project
- Work within the institution to implement the products of this project – portfolios, technology assessment instruments.
- Work within the institution to “market” the use of these products to students, staff, and faculty.
- Participate in disseminating information about this project within the institution, state, and nationally.

The institution is responsible for:

- Changing or adding elements to their institution’s web site where necessitated by the implementation of the various elements of this project.
- Supplying data where necessary to evaluate this project
- Recruiting and providing a stipend (up to a total of \$500 each year) for students to participate in projects designed to evaluate this effort (subject to informed consent)
- Supporting the institutional use of:
 - the collaborative tutoring project
 - electronic portfolio for advising and outcomes assessment
 - the technology assessment instrument

In order to confirm your participation, we will need the signature of the President of the institution and the names of the people who will be responsible for the various aspects of the project. We will also need a one paragraph description of the background and experience of the person who will be directing the project for your institution to include in the grant application.

President of the Institution:

Name

Signature

Date

Signed by all institutional participants:

Institutional FIPSE project director
*(Please attach a short description
of their background and experience)*

Name

Signature

Contact for Portfolio Advising

Name

Signature

Contact for Portfolio Outcomes Assessment

Name

Signature

Contact for Technology Assessment

Name

Signature

Contact for Tutoring

Name

Signature

Distance Learning Coordinator

Name

Signature

Institutional Researcher/Person
Responsible for data

Name

Signature

Please return this institutional commitment form to Diane Goldsmith at
CTDLC, 55 Paul Manafort Drive, New Britain, CT 06053-2142
or by fax to Diane Goldsmith at 860 832-3999. Forms are due by 4 pm on May 13.