

BC Learning Gateway

Our students deserve the best

The Campus 2020 *Thinking Ahead* report set high expectations for the British Columbia post-secondary education system, emphasizing that BC’s learners must have access to the broadest array of learning opportunities so that they can learn where they live. The report noted that different components of the education sector would need to operate less in isolation and more as a system to provide opportunities for learners to move at different speeds along more creative and flexible paths for lifelong learning.

The report proposed a BC *learning gateway* as a design metaphor for providing information and services from multiple sources in the higher education sector. The gateway was described as a unified approach that would give learners “new integrated methods of accessing the student services, the learning resources and the credentials needed to enroll, study, and succeed in a high-quality post-secondary system.”

The Campus 2020 report proposed that BCcampus be developed as the agency responsible for the delivery of online student information and education resource services. At BCcampus, we believe that this proposal is an excellent starting point for describing an even more comprehensive learning gateway concept—one that could effectively serve all citizens of British Columbia through a federated approach to service provision that builds on the expertise of multiple institutions and agencies.

A gateway to opportunity

A BC Learning Gateway could broadly serve the education and training aspirations of all British Columbians as well as prospective students from other parts of Canada and from international locations. What is needed in British Columbia is a focus for harnessing the Internet as a gateway to all of the academic and training opportunities provided by public and private institutions in a manner that demonstrates BC’s educational excellence and innovation.

Contents

BC Learning Gateway	
Our students deserve the best	1
A gateway to opportunity	1
A gateway that crosses sectors	2
A modern gateway	2
A federated approach to service	3
A rallying point for services	3
Make it real. Make it green.	4
A call for collaboration	4
Respond to Student Needs	
Respond to student needs	2
The best minds agree	3
An agenda for action	4



A gateway that crosses education sectors

A gateway to educational services has many audiences including students, educators, employers, and the public.

At the moment, BCcampus, the Industry Training Authority, and LearnNowBC are developing information and resource services in the post-secondary, trades training, and K-12 sectors. These are services that could become components of a more comprehensive, unified cross-sector BC Learning Gateway.

In the post-secondary sector, the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) maintains websites for the BC Transfer Guide and Education Planner,

and BCcampus manages and operates the Post-Secondary Application Service of BC (PASBC).

Further, the Campus 2020 report recommended that BCcampus develop *KnowledgeBC*, a clearinghouse for centralized access to the diverse research centres, agencies and institutes operating within British Columbia.

A true learning gateway for British Columbia would seek to unify all of these information sources and services through a single powerful BC brand that conveyed a unified message about access, excellence, and innovation.

...the 2020 learner will be less interested in the boundaries between institutions than their inter-linkages... (Campus 2020: Thinking Ahead Report, April 2007)

Respond to student needs

Whether they are 18-24 year olds or adults upgrading their educational qualifications, today's students all have expectations that online systems will provide agile, effective services that can be personalized or customized to meet their needs.

Studies of government websites worldwide confirm these preferences and recommend a switch from organization-centric to citizen-centric information management strategies to ensure that today's students are served by online systems with qualities described as:

- *Simple to navigate*
- *Easy-to-use*
- *Friendly*
- *Participative*
- *Trustworthy*

Source: NAO (2007). *Government on the internet: progress in delivering information and service online*. London, UK.

A modern gateway that attracts students

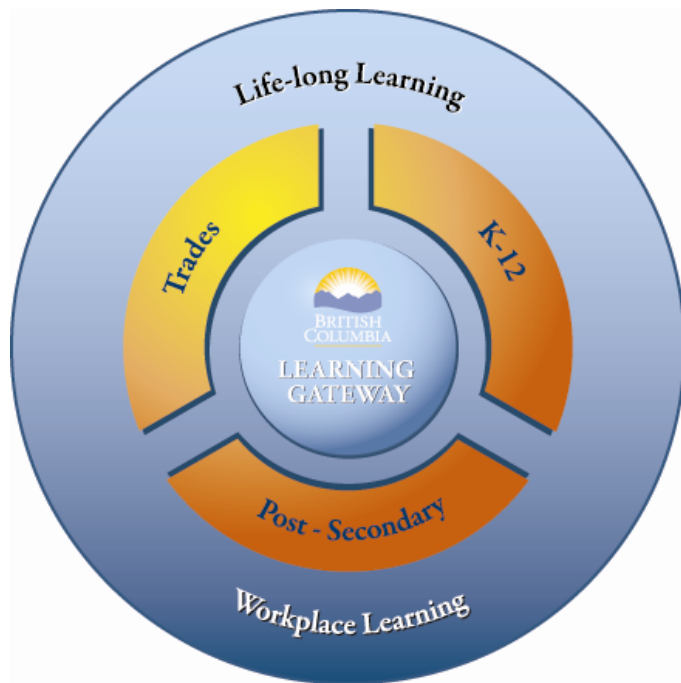
Today's students are busy people. They have little appetite for inconvenience or poorly organized information directed at them. Their response to poor service or a poor user experience is not to complain about it, but simply to avoid it and tell all their friends. Service excellence it would seem is as important as academic excellence in today's online world.

Clearly, any new learning gateway must be designed to attract and provide value for students. It must also be structured with information, services, tools, and features that directly meet student and citizen needs.

A modern learning gateway can be built for British Columbia, but it must be organized around learner-centric experiences, requiring its designers to focus on the aspirations and needs of learners in organizing institutional information and service functions. Such an approach will also require system partners to truly think *systemically* when providing institutional information or facilitating linkages between institutions and the learning gateway.

Building such a gateway will require a participatory design strategy that actively engages learners from all demographic groups in describing the features and functions that an ideal learning gateway should demonstrate. Without actively engaging the audience for the learning gateway both before and during its use, we will not truly be able to make any claims for its quality and effectiveness, or demonstrate analytical data to support improvements or new features that claim to be user-centric.

As well, the world that we now live in values mobility, personalization, and social networking as qualities associated with information services. Such a reality requires us to build in functions and features that allow for mobile devices and a higher degree of user personalization than is currently possible with existing online educational services.



A federated approach to service provision

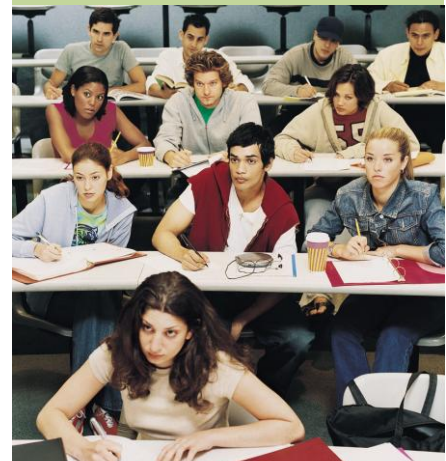
Multiple institutions and organizations regionally and provincially have a stake in ensuring that BC citizens have access to the best educational opportunities. Some of these organizations are academic and training institutions; others are government agencies or provincial partner agencies providing library services, financial aid, application services, and course transfer information. Each has valuable information to organize and provide to citizens. Each is an expert in a particular information or service domain. Each needs to participate fully in the BC Learning Gateway while maintaining its autonomy and its ability to develop new and enhanced services.

Learners and citizens want to be assured that the information they receive about BC educational opportunities and services is up-to-date, high-quality, and authentic. Learners want to put their trust in a system that will provide them with timely and useful information geared to their actual needs for formal learning through accredited institutions. Learners also want assurance that learning opportunities can be available to them throughout their lives at home or in their workplaces.

The best way to provide these assurances to BC citizens is to demonstrate a federated information service model that draws upon trusted education information sources and provides these information resources and services through a unified gateway, as well as through agent software tools identified with a powerful BC brand.

A rallying point for service development

To ensure that all citizens are known to the BC Learning Gateway, a *BC learning identity system* should be used to ensure that a lifelong learning pathway can be provided to all BC learners in a manner that accounts for prior learning and the customization of information services to meet personal aspirations, academic goals, and workplace or lifelong learning needs.



The best minds agree...

“BC lacks a province-wide unifying vision for leveraging learning technologies to provide better services to citizens. There is a need for a unified, cohesive network with stable funding and clear mandates. This vision should clarify linkages and transition from K-12 to advanced education.

A modern vision should encompass K-12, advanced education, continuing education, and trades training. The vision would need to:

- *incorporate long term targets;*
- *reduce duplication in the programs and services being offered;*
- *foster collaboration and communication between key bodies;*
- *clearly establish roles and responsibilities in legislation;*
- *incorporate accountability measures;*
- *be combined with the appropriate infrastructure (an online mechanism that unifies systems and processes).”*

Source: Premier’s Technology Council
10th Report, September 2007, Victoria, BC.

An agenda for action

"In the short term, however, one specific step that can be taken to improve the use of technology in education is the development of a common Website or single window for accessing all of British Columbia's educational programs and services, from K-12 through post-secondary.

A single window that would promote easy access for citizens to all learning services that are available to them throughout the province. This is a simple step that would not negatively impact the broader plans that the PTC is recommending.

In the longer term it would ease the integration of the learning portals already offered by the secondary and post-secondary systems and make them much more user-friendly."

Source: Premier's Technology Council 10th Report, September 2007, Victoria, BC.

BCcampus
200 – 555 Seymour St.
Vancouver, BC
+1 604 412 7657
+1 604 677 6273
dporter@bccampus.ca
<http://www.bccampus.ca>



Make it real. Make it green.

Making the BC Learning Gateway *real* will require a compelling vision with resonant value for its intended users. The Campus 2020 report invites the BC post-secondary sector to review existing approaches and services and think ahead with a view to organizing the education system to improve access, excellence, and innovation in all that we do.

A direct step along that path would be to better organize access to BC educational information and services through a greener, federated services approach using an online learning gateway with a powerful BC brand.

Offer more online courses.

I would like to see more courses available online. I really like being able to make my own schedule and not have to sit through classes. I really like it for myself and would recommend it to anyone who doesn't want to move to wherever the courses are held.

I utilized BCcampus to apply for a program, which meant I did not have to stand in line, in person, at my local college.

Create more online courses through partnerships with UBC, SFU, UVic, etc.

Would be great if BCcampus could provide its online students financial or course advisor for completing their degrees or certifications within BC institutions or university. For convenience, I am hoping if BCcampus could provide more general arts program courses transferrable into various institutions in BC.

I love learning online. I don't know that I would even have taken courses if they were not offered online. It's great for busy schedules.

Source: BCcampus (2007). Survey of students taking online courses. Vancouver, BC. <http://www.bccampus.ca/Visitors/OnlineLearningInBC/StudentSurveys.htm>

Government has challenged post-secondary institutions with the goal of moving towards carbon-neutrality. The development of better online systems and services means that we can actively work towards decreasing the need to travel or engage in repetitive manual processes that can be replaced with more energy efficient online processes. Federating online services will help move students and institutions towards this goal, as will the expansion of opportunities for online learning generally.

A call for collaboration

All of the component pieces for a BC Learning Gateway exist or could be quickly and iteratively be built, but only through the willingness to collaborate on a federated approach to service that recognizes the required contributions of all system partners across the education sectors.

BCcampus is prepared to work in an agile manner with partner agencies and organizations to coordinate the requirements and the development process for a new BC Learning Gateway that would be put into service in 2010, or earlier.

