

# The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Student Technology Fee Funding Request

## Proposal

*Beginning 2005-2006*

**Title:** Continuing Support for the Blackboard Learning System and Portal

Units Submitting Proposal: CECA and the Walker Teaching Resource Center

### **Briefly summarize the proposed project.**

Over the past three years, the Student Technology Fee has covered the costs of the license for the Blackboard Learning System to manage web-enabled and web-based courses at UTC, and for the Blackboard Community Portal System. The web portal is software that supports a web site that allows access to many resources and services, such as instructional materials, lesson plans, news about current events, instant messaging and e-mail, the creation of communities, and allows users to customize their view of the site according to their individual needs.

To support the expanding use of these systems, a support person dedicated to Blackboard was hired. This specialist manages the Blackboard course delivery system, develops methods of automating course creation and user registration, and assists faculty with using Blackboard. In addition, the specialist manages the Blackboard portal, and assists various groups in the UTC community to utilize the portal to build their communities, including academic, staff and student groups.

This proposal continues the use of the Blackboard license at UTC and the support person for 2005-2006, including the installation of updated software and new releases of Blackboard.

**Identify the project goals and objectives.** Briefly describe your goals and objectives. Include in the description how the outcomes of the project will improve teaching and learning. Indicate also the anticipated reach of your project. In other words, how many and what type of students will benefit from the successful execution of the proposed funding? How will they benefit?

This proposal directly addresses several of the Information Technology Enterprise Issues identified by the Technology Committee, and several of the Distance Learning Goals of UTC. The goals for this project are as follows:

1. Maintain the reliability and availability of the web-enabled course management software at UTC
2. Continue to support expanding web course offerings at UTC
3. Provide better support for the users of the course management system by assigning a full-time support person to Blackboard
4. Provide web-portal software to support improved access to information, enhanced flow of information for various groups at UTC, and a user-customizable view of the UTC online system

In the fall of 2004, 8188 UTC students were active in at least one Blackboard course, and 343 faculty members activated 881 courses on the Blackboard system. Eighty communities were created on the Blackboard portal. System availability has been over 99%. Overall, UTC has high reliability and

availability for the web course management system. Other than email, more students, faculty and staff rely on and use the Blackboard system than any other system at UTC.

**Describe the method with which you will achieve your goals.** Briefly describe your methodology. Include a calendar of target project dates. That is, when will the major steps in the project begin and end?

1. Student and faculty evaluations of the Blackboard system: Summer 2005, Fall 2005, Spring 2006
2. Continue automated course and account creation: every semester, including summer semesters
3. Continue support for the full utilization of the Blackboard Learning System: ongoing
4. Assist faculty in preparing courses for all semesters: ongoing
5. Continue training for groups using the portal: ongoing
6. Continue integration of the online course delivery portal with other UTC systems: ongoing

**How will you evaluate the success of the project?** Describe your evaluation criteria clearly. How will you determine whether the project is successful?

Evaluation mechanisms include the following:

- a. Collect and survey use statistics each semester utilizing BLS system capabilities (summers, fall and spring)
- b. Evaluate the management and operational requirements of the Blackboard Portal system
- c. Evaluation of the portal system by groups utilizing the portal

**Previous grant(s):** If you received a Student Technology Fee grant last year, have you submitted your final report?

A final report has been submitted to the Provost's Office. (August 1, 2004)

**Proposed location:** Describe the proposed location of the equipment, software, etc.

The current software utilizes an existing server located in the Computer Room in Hunter Hall. The Online technologies Coordinator's office is located in Teaching Resource Center space in the Lupton Library.

**Requested Budget:** Clearly identify one-time costs, such as equipment, shipping, and installation.

Clearly identify recurring costs, such as maintenance and support, and the source of the funds to cover the recurring costs.

All costs are annually recurring. If the portal concept proves its usefulness to UTC, a source of funds must be found to cover the recurring costs.

**Summary of projected costs**

Salaries (if any)	\$68,135 (including benefits)
Equipment (hardware and software)	\$82,000

Complete the following items as appropriate

Installation	\$
Construction/renovation costs	\$
Annual maintenance/support costs	\$
Training	\$1,500
Recurring costs per year	\$
Operating Supplies	\$2,000

**Total** project one-time costs \$153,635

**Estimated** recurring costs per year \$153,635

Identify the area(s) responsible for operating and maintaining the equipment.

The server has 24x7, 4-hour Dell service. Server operation and maintenance are provided by ITD and the Online Technologies Coordinator. The Online Technologies Coordinator also provides the operation and maintenance of the software. Additional Blackboard support is provided by Karen Adsit, Charles Hart, Clint Smullen.

**Approval** by Dean or Vice Chancellor: \_\_\_\_\_

**Individuals** responsible to complete proposal if funded: \_\_K. Adsit, C. Smullen\_\_\_\_\_

**Priority** established by Dean or Vice Chancellor: \_\_\_\_\_

**Deans and Vice Chancellors should return** completed forms (along with 20 copies) to Provost John Friedl, Chair of the University Technology Committee, prior to **December 13, 2004**.

## Rationale

The course management system used at UTC for the past three years is the Blackboard Learning System. Blackboard describes itself as “The industry’s most intuitive and easy-to-use course management system, offering course and content authoring tools, a robust assessment engine, synchronous and asynchronous collaboration tools, and much more.” Over 1500 academic institutions currently use Blackboard, including all other campuses of UT and some of the TBR schools. The UTC courses currently on the Blackboard system utilize the services of Blackboard in many different ways. Most are web-enabled courses, where course material is made available to students for the course. Most of the Blackboard courses use the various communications options offered by Blackboard (email, discussion boards, chat rooms, etc). A few of the courses are entirely web-based; these depend on Blackboard for course presentation, management, and testing. The Blackboard software directly supports the teaching and learning processes of the University.

To date, over 410 faculty members have been trained to use the Blackboard system. For the period fall 2003 through summer 2004, a total of 1426 courses were activated in Blackboard; 673 faculty and 17174 students used Blackboard; and 22 communities were active. For the fall semester of 2004, every course offered at UTC was created in Blackboard with the course enrollment. Faculty members then activated 881 courses in Blackboard in 30 different academic departments (97% of all academic departments). 343 faculty and 8188 students used Blackboard in the fall and 80 communities were active. Only one department had no Blackboard courses active for the fall 2004 semester.

Due to the number of users and courses, for UTC to continue to move forward with online learning it must use the more advanced Blackboard Learning System. During the fall of 2002, the Blackboard Basic Edition software exhibited numerous problems, interrupting normal usage and causing outages. These were caused by a combination of hardware and software problems. UTC had reached the limits of the Basic License for Blackboard software in terms of the number of courses. Reliability and availability for the Blackboard system is essential; it is the primary means of course delivery for a substantial number of courses. Students and faculty must be able to access the system on demand, and the system must be available. To provide adequate safety margins for increased usage, the more advanced BLS license must be used. The licensing fee for BLS is based on student FTE; the cost for UTC to license the Blackboard Learning System and Portal is estimated to be \$82,000 for 2006.

As the number of Blackboard courses increases, so does the administrative management load needed to operate the Blackboard system. Courses must be created, instructors assigned, and students imported from the University’s records system into Blackboard. Computer system resources must be managed. Faculty need assistance beyond what is possible without a dedicated support person. The Blackboard specialist provides improved management of Blackboard for all users and allows the Teaching Resource Center to focus on the important teaching and learning issues and strategies for faculty who use Blackboard. The responsibilities of this person include administration and daily operations of the BLS system, working closely with the Information Technology Division to link administrative systems to the online learning systems, problem determination and resolution for the online learning systems; archiving and backups of these systems; consulting with faculty, staff, students and administrators on web-based course management systems. During the fall semester the Blackboard specialist handled over 900 telephone consultations for Blackboard assistance and over 895 email support questions.

A Web portal is a web site that allows access to many resources and services, such as materials, schedules, announcements and a calendar, news about current events, list-serves and e-mail, and the ability to create communities of shared resources. A community gathers a variety of useful information resources into a one-stop web site that helps users avoid becoming overwhelmed by information overload.

A portal provides an opportunity to unify academics, communities, and administrative services online through one, integrated and customizable enterprise portal.

The Blackboard Course & Portal software allows for the development of an online campus, giving distance learners, on-campus students, and commuting students the ability to participate in on-campus life without needing to be physically present. Customization options within the portal environment allow the creation of a home page that serves as the gateway to the online campus from course offerings, to social and other extracurricular activities, and could lead to administrative functions like registration and financial aid. At the same time, the portal is fully integrated with the online course management system, ensuring that the teaching and learning platform integrates smoothly with the same user look-and-feel and with a single login. The Blackboard specialist also manages the development of the UTC portal. An important part of this is to assist various groups at UTC to utilize the Portal to provide information and interaction with their group members. In the fall semester of 2004, there were eighty-eight communities in the Blackboard portal, with eighty active users of the Blackboard portal in the fall. Fifty-one communities were organized by academic departments, five by student groups (e.g. SGA), sixteen by UTC committees and task forces (e.g. Mission Review, Catalog, Advisement, Distance Education), and eight others (e.g. Honors, Counseling, Student Life). Blackboard communities have become an important Communication tool for UTC groups to share information and discussion. It is expected that the number of communities will grow in the future.