

NLII Meeting Notes 2002

NLII Annual Meeting, January 2002 - Orientation

More than 270 higher education leaders, administrators, information technology specialists, faculty members, and business representatives met in San Diego in January to discuss emerging issues in the delivery of higher education at the eighth annual meeting of the National Learning Infrastructure Initiative (NLII) program.

Established by EDUCAUSE in 1994, the NLII was built on the conviction that technology had the power to transform teaching and learning. It is, according to EDUCAUSE vice president Carole Barone, a bridge connecting teaching and technology. “We want the conversations to begin here,” she said at Monday morning’s opening session. “We look for the emerging issues and then we follow them along the continuum from awareness to acknowledgement.”

The theme of the 2002 annual meeting—Innovative Practice, Policy, and Partnerships: A New Alignment—highlighted the new issues and priorities being felt and expressed by educators and higher education leaders. The sessions demonstrated the speed at which change happens as a result of the rapid pace of technology development. Last year, assessment and e-portfolios were barely on the radar screen. This year, they were key discussion points.

Other issues that held center stage at this year’s meeting included examples of learner-centered environments, collaborative business models, knowledge management, online communities, e-learning, policy, technology that is ubiquitous and transparent, pedagogy and learning theory, and student support services.

NLII Priorities

Cost continues to be an important issue for colleges and universities, many of which are wrestling with rising tuition rates and seemingly bottomless investments in technologies. As NLII Planning Committee chair Bill Graves pointed out during the opening session, “Back when the NLII was started, chief financial officers wanted to know what the return on investment—or ROI—was for all technology. We knew we needed to be about more than technology. We needed to be about the value of technology.”

Can IT be a lever for getting a higher ROI in higher education? In a relatively short period of time, education went from being a social good to becoming an economic good as well. Some say this occurred as a result of the advantages offered by new technologies. Through its work, the NLII is figuring out what questions need to be asked to help make higher education a better player in the global economy. The NLII Planning Committee is making those concerns a priority.

Graves based his comments on a paper titled *An Updated perspective on the NLII Agenda*, which appears on the Web at www.educause.edu/nlII/keythemes/an_update.doc and which will be published in *EDUCAUSE Review*.

These days, the NLII is also taking a closer look at its mission to see what it can do to help colleges and universities transform themselves in order to deliver education that is learning-centered, active, dynamic, life-long, collaborative, cost-effective, high quality, and accessible. The NLII has developed a list of key themes for the transformation of teaching and learning, which is the basis for its programs and projects and a **Concept Map (figure 1)**, which describes the NLII’s research space and the relationship between themes.

The program is investing heavily in providing professional development in new forms through its **Transformative Assessment Project**, a collaborative effort that brings together the NLII, the **Flashlight Program of the TLT Group**, and the **Coalition for Networked Information** (see article titled **Transformative Assessment Systems**) for eliciting new ideas about assessment practices and systems that will transform teaching and learning and help institutions of higher education put those ideas into action. A focus session in March 2002, cosponsored by the University of Colorado at Boulder, served as a kickoff workshop for those who wanted to initiate assessment projects at their institutions. An online workshop/learning community to help them develop those projects is currently being implemented.

Focus Sessions

In 2001, the NLII ran two successful focus sessions: one in March called **Alignment of Planning** and one in May called **Partnering in the Learning Marketplace**. Alignment has become a central theme for the NLII this past year because of its relevance to the new ways that colleges and universities operate. The meeting

sought to advance the body of thought on how to align action—including policy setting, project selection, and assessment—with strategic goals, and it helped identify success factors. The NLII is developing a branch of the READY system on this theme. See a description of the project below and the Web site at www.educause.edu/ready for more information.

Partnering in the Learning Marketplace identified the characteristics, types, and evolution of partnerships as well as their impact on systems, institutions, learners, faculty, and participants such as higher education institutions, corporations, and state agencies. Some of the characteristics of partnerships were discussed, such as the drivers in the first and second waves of need, new structures and values of partnerships, new forms of partnerships, the evolution and life cycle of partnerships, the true costs in relation to task, and the need to establish a new style of thinking. The focus session managed to identify the key issues that drive partnerships, such as student preparedness, portability of learning, application to lifelong learning, student satisfaction, and regional versus global reach.

In 2002 the NLII is planning three focus sessions. In addition to Transformative Assessment Systems, there is one called **Learning Environment Design**, which is scheduled for May 31 in Vancouver and is cosponsored by WebCT and the University of British Columbia. Another one, titled **E-Portfolios**, is scheduled for October 25 in Evanston, Illinois. That one is being planned by E-PAC, an NLII working group, and is cosponsored by Northwestern University.

Fellowships and Strategic Tools

The **NLII Fellowship Program** continues to thrive, with two new fellows named for 2002. Colleen Carmean of Arizona State University West and Jeremy Haefner of the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs will study, analyze, and assess specific aspects of the transformation of teaching and learning in higher education that are of relevance to the NLII.

The **READY Project** also continues to figure prominently into the activities of the NLII. The READY—or the READiness InventorY—tool is a decision engine designed to help higher education institutions determine their organizational, cultural, financial, and philosophical readiness to expand their use of technology in various realms of instructional and administrative activity. To date, two content areas have been developed: (1) delivery of online learning and partnering in the learning marketplace. Three others are under development in 2002: (1) alignment in planning, (2) transformative assessment, and (3) student services (sponsored by IBM). By using the tool, institutions can expect to gain insights into how to apply scarce resources more strategically and how to address weaknesses and take advantage of strengths, respond to the current environment, move the institution further along the transformation topography, and create a common vocabulary.

The NLII annual meeting serves as a central meeting place for participants interested in hearing about emerging issues and in engaging in discussions to help move forward with solutions. Next year's meeting is scheduled for January 26–28, 2003, in New Orleans, Louisiana. For more information, see www.educause.edu/nlii/meetings/.