

# Distance Learning Summary Report

## September 2007

### Sections

1. Introduction	page 1
2. First Iteration - DEBLS	page 1
3. National Strategic Planning Discussion Sept 2006	page 3
4. National Association Forum Discussion, CCLS AGM, October 2006	page 4
5. Summary and Current Status	page 5
6. Conclusion	page 5

### 1. Introduction

The national distance learning initiative has had a long and somewhat convoluted history. Throughout its various phases, it has been moved forward by a steering committee with representatives of all of the associations so that input and communication was possible throughout the process. It is an example of two challenges that arise with most of not all national issues: National consensus is an elusive goal, and the devil is in the details.

### 2. First Iteration – RFP for Distance Learning Products

The idea of providing distance education opportunities for Canadian land surveyors was first championed by the ACLS and discussed at a Presidents' Forum in February 2000. A committee consisting mainly of executive directors of the associations was formed and several conference calls took place. Consensus at the time was that the initiative should concentrate on survey law and should be entirely web based. A request for proposals was sent out to the academic community in 2001. There were initially four respondents. One was chosen, however when the business and funding modes were presented to the associations, the project fell through and there was little progress in 2002.

### 3. Second Iteration - DEBLS

A steering committee was formed under the auspices of CCLS and information on continuing education programs, requirements and plans were collected through a questionnaire to all associations.

A working paper dated March 2003 and titled, Towards the Implementation of Distance Education in Boundary Law and Surveying for Canadian Land Surveyors as part of Continuing Professional Development programs of Member Associations – A Working Document, began with the introduction as follows.

The Canadian Council of Land Surveyors is proposing a new working partnership to implement a Distance Education model in Canada. This model is designed to serve as a valuable resource for Continuing Professional Development programs of our member associations. A resource meant for the benefit of our member

associations both in terms of the truly meaningful distance learning program itself and its subject matter experts, as well as the funding opportunities to make the program accessible to their members. This partnership approach involves the Distance Education for Boundary Law and Surveying Group (DEBLS), CCLS, member associations and RedVector.com. As a backgrounder and working paper, the following will describe the vision, partnership, individual roles, objectives and next steps.

The approach was further described as follows.

The vision is to develop a two pronged approach to boundary law and surveying education delivery within a member association's CPD program. The goal is to achieve

Three particular working themes drove the creation of the model described in the working paper:

1. Continuing Professional Development (variously called continuing education, life long learning, etc.) was a high priority of the majority of the associations at the time. Many associations were implementing formal CPD programs, both voluntary and mandatory, and governments were putting a high emphasis on life long learning as a social goal and a professional responsibility.
  2. CCLS itself was going through a strategic planning and governance review process that recognized that CCLS as an organization did not have resources to 'do' but was a forum and a facilitating body. The member associations were seen as the organizations that were responsible for service delivery to individual surveyors.
  3. Recognition of a lack of human resources within the surveying community lead to the model of a self funding process using expert consulting services.
4. **Third Iteration – Creating a National Distance Learning Memorandum of Understanding**

Terms of reference for a reworked steering committee were written May 2004 and approved by the CCLS Board of Directors June 2004. The committee was made up of a core of four members and a resource group with representatives from all associations.

The committee's aims and objectives were described as follows.

Development of a *consensus based national strategy* for distance learning for Canadian land surveyors.

There has been significant work and limited progress on the issue of distance learning for Canadian land surveyors over the past several years. There is a need to develop a consensus based national strategy to move forward. The initiative must be based on CCLS's vision of an enabling organization which develops strategies for its member associations rather than an organization which has significant resources for development and implementation of projects.

The DLSC will:

- review previous work on distance learning for Canadian land surveyors;

- gather input from member associations through a strategic questionnaire and a resource group made up of representatives of each member association to be selected by the member associations;
- compile and analyze the input received;
- develop potential strategies including descriptions of specific aims and objectives, required resources and possible sources, and operational outline;
- present strategies to the CCLS Board for consideration.

In a briefing to the CCLS Board of Directors one year later in April 2005, the work to date was described as follows.

Over the past year the committee has polled member associations, compiled and discussed the feedback, and distilled it into basic themes embodied in a Memorandum of Understanding on developing national learning opportunities for Canadian land surveyors. In essence the MOU represents a consensus across member associations of the vision we are striving for and how it will be achieved, operated and maintained. We are at the stage now where we need to ratify the vision, as well as the strategy on how this vision will be realized as embodied in the MOU. Once the MOU is ratified, the steering committee's mandate as per its terms of reference will have been completed and as such the committee will dissolve.

Through the remainder of 2005 the CCLS Directors and the Distance Learning Resource Group members presented the MOU to associations councils, received feedback, and made amendments. A final version of the MOU was presented in December 2005 and March 31, 2006 was targeted as the date for the associations to indicate their intentions with respect to signing. At the end of that process, most associations signed the MOU.

#### **5. Fourth Iteration – A National MOU in Place**

With the MOU now signed by the majority of associations, the process was in the hands of the signatory bodies. Each association, in signing the MOU, agreed to assign an individual to a steering committee which would implement the terms of the MOU and drive the national process for their association. Several attempts were made by CCLS Director and Champion Derek French to facilitate the initiation of the steering committee but the group did not coalesce and the initiative did not progress despite each association being on record as agreeing to the process. The initiative was intended to be association driven once the MOU was signed and this has not happened.

#### **6. Roadblocks**

An analysis of the reasons for this failure to progress leads to a number of conclusions which were recorded at a working session of the CCLS Board of Directors in May 2007.

- There has been little discussion at the association council level since the signing of the MOU. It was very apparent from the CCLS Directors that CPD materials and distance learning is no longer a priority issue at the associations level.
- A demand for distance materials to satisfy a CPD program does not seem to be there as associations have grappled with the issue and now successfully provide

seminars at annual and regional group meeting. Most are still provided at minimal costs and by members or contacts within an association or region.

- The initiative has moved down the list of priorities on the national agenda articulated by the CCLS strategic plan. Attracting new professionals (embodied in the career awareness harmonization and future initiatives topping the priority list on the last national strategic plan approved by CCLS Board in October 2006 and reconfirmed at the national working session in May 2007.
- There is a large amount of poor quality distance learning material out there and to do it right is very expensive. Different learning styles are a consideration as some simply do not learn well with an on-line platform. This further reduces the target audience. There has been lots of talk about web based material that in theory would be easy and inexpensive but this is not reality.

#### **7. Opportunities to reconfigure the initiative include:**

The following opportunities were identified at the national working session of the CCLS Board in May 2006.

- Shift to cataloguing of existing course offerings, including opportunities for surveyors to broaden their knowledge into other areas, would offer value to surveyors.
- The distance learning issue may come back onto a priority list with a younger more on-line demographic.
- Shift to providing content to those with capability to provide the platform/tools. Example: AOLS is providing an on-line course for real estate professionals through Terranet– AOLS has the content – Terranet has the infrastructure.
- Shift to entrance requirements rather than continuing education and include with harmonization initiative.

#### **8. Conclusions**

Much work has been done and much has been learned throughout the history of this national initiative. As noted at the beginning of this report national consensus is an elusive goal and the devil is in the details. All those who have worked on this initiative on behalf of the associations, with special mention to Serge Bernard and Derek French, are to be thanked and commended for their efforts. Current association leaders and those individuals participating in the national forum of associations through CCLS, should understand the process, the successes and the challenges of this initiative and use that knowledge in future cooperative efforts. Signatories to the existing MOU should consider their commitment to that document and take steps to clarify their current position.