

Wichita State University

Distance Education Strategic Plan

January 2011

As part of the Kansas Board of Regents *Foresight 2020* strategic plan, each Regents institution is to develop a strategic vision for the use of distance learning technology within their mission. This is the plan for Wichita State University (WSU).

Distance Education at Wichita State University

Background.—Wichita State University (WSU) has engaged in limited distance education for many years. Most of this engagement was in the form of individual courses in selected programs. In 2007, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) granted approval for WSU to offer five online degree programs: RN-BSN completion program; M.A. in Criminal Justice; M.A. in Gerontology; M. Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction and the M.A. in Teaching. During the ten-year HLC accreditation visit in 2007, the commission expressed some concern about the sustainability of additional fully on-line programs. In particular, the report highlights the following areas of concern:

- 1) The Institutional infrastructure is minimally adequate to support the proposed programs.
- 2) Many of the faculty members directly involved are well advanced in their careers.
- 3) There is no evidence that the senior administration supports online learning.
- 4) There is no university-wide plan for online learning.

In response to this, the Provost appointed a university-wide task force to address these concerns and to develop a strategy for on-line learning at WSU. The Task Force submitted their findings and recommendations in 2008 and actions were initiated immediately to build better support structures and strategic indicators for the future. Severe budget reductions have slowed this implementation. However, the upward trajectory of enhanced support and use of on-line learning continues.

On-line learning and the Urban Serving Research Mission – WSU is the only urban serving research university in Kansas and one of a select group of such universities in the United States. The university is classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a “high research” university, joining some thirty-six other universities in that category. As a research institution, the university competes nationally and internationally for resources and faculty. The international reputation for the WSU research programs is built upon a deep commitment to the industry and business sector of Wichita, which is the center of the Kansas economy.

Wichita is the largest metropolitan area in Kansas and presents the typical urban complexity of wealth and circumstances. The undergraduate programs of the university thus serve a broad diversity of students representing many different personal situations, career motivations, and educational background. The university serves a high proportion of students with substantial numbers of credit hours, increasingly more adult students and large numbers of students who work while attending school.

The urban research orientation of WSU presents a dual imperative with respect to distance learning. Because of the international importance of some of our graduate and professional programs (particularly in engineering, health professions and business), there is a market for graduate degree programs delivered over long distance (including between continents).

At the undergraduate level on the other hand, WSU's urban mission requires an e-learning strategy that is predominately locally focused and designed to increase flexibility of opportunity and learning approach in order to meet the needs of our students.

The distance education strategy of the university is focused vigorously in both of these areas.

Current On-line Offerings. –WSU does not offer any degree programs fully online, although programs in Gerontology, Criminal Justice, RN-BSN completion, and Curriculum and Instruction are each within a course or two of having their graduate programs available online.

There has been significant growth in online course offerings and enrollment over the past three years. Student credit hour production for courses that are 100% online increased from 4,494 in 2007 to 10,000 in 2010. There has been similar enrollment growth in hybrid courses as well. The sharp increase in online course enrollment is a direct result of initiatives established in 2008 that are coordinated within the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research. These initiatives will be discussed in more detail within the sections below.

Academics

Currently, all online courses at WSU are offered within the structure of the traditional three semester format (fall, summer and spring). On-line courses are approved by the faculty in the same way traditional courses are approved. Course design and quality are promoted and supported by staff within the Media Resources Center that includes a recently hired instructional designer, who joins two educational technologists, an interactive technology coordinator and other support staff.

Together with the Executive Directors of the Media Resources Center (MRC) and the Office for Faculty Development and Student Success (OFDSS), this collection of individuals offer professional development programs that include a twice yearly intensive training program—Reboot Camp—for faculty to create new online courses. Each Reboot Camp accepts a dozen faculty—nominated by the six College deans—and immerses them in five full days of discussions and hands-on explorations of new delivery tools. Emphasis is given to course objectives, learning styles, electronic submission of assignments, copyright guidelines, and assessment. Each faculty member is given a laptop computer and a stipend for the course development and is asked to offer the course within two semesters.

The curriculum review and approval processes for distance education adhere to established university processes that share responsibility between faculty and university administrators. These processes begin at the department level and advance through the college and university administrative units to ensure consistency within the curriculum and alignment with the university mission.

Fiscal, Governance

Much of the cost for online courses/programs is currently borne within the budgets of academic and support units. There is, however, a slight difference in cost to students between courses taught online and face-to-face in that online courses are assessed the “Off-Campus Course Fee” rate as opposed to the regular tuition rate. The Off-Campus rate is currently \$20.00 more than on campus rates.

This fee structure for online courses has two advantages: one, it is residency neutral and two, \$20.00 per credit hour flow directly to the Provost’s Office. This small revenue stream has provided the seed money to expand online learning, but it is insufficient to properly support the program as it continues to grow. The evolving maturation of online learning at WSU will require the development of a tuition model that is more in line with national trends and allows for the full cost of online learning to be appropriately budgeted and supported.

Faculty

WSU’s faculty members work with their department chairs and deans to determine which courses and programs will be developed as online offerings. With over 100 courses in a variety of disciplines now available online, it is evident that many of our faculty have accepted the need for new modes of delivery. Our challenge, at WSU, is to better plan course sequencing, so that students can anticipate regular offerings of online courses in their transcript strategy. For instance, a goal should be to offer the majority of our General Education courses as online options.

At present, there are no significant differences between faculty assignments to teach a course in a face-to-face (F2F) environment or as an online offering. There is no difference in compensation, teaching load, class size, or seat time. That is not to suggest that those factors should remain the same. We will continue to evaluate class size, for instance, listening to our faculty and watching national trends for best practice.

Course *development*, on the other hand, is approached in a different manner. Currently, there is an administrative-sponsored initiative to identify twelve faculty per semester, to participate in an intensive five-day workshop (Reboot Camp). Two faculty are chosen from each of the six WSU Colleges. Staff members from the MRC and OFDSS, led by the instructional designer; provide the structure and guidance for the five days of activities. Each of the faculty members are given a stipend of \$3,000 and a new laptop computer, with the understanding that a new online course will be offered within two semesters.

The Rebooters are repeatedly reminded to *over-communicate*. Students’ expectations for the course and instructions for each assignment must be detailed in ways that seem oversimplified, since the teacher and the students will not have the luxury of the F2F classroom. Faculty are encouraged to use a variety of tools that are embedded in the Course Management System (CMS), namely announcements, e-mails, blogs, chats, and discussion boards. The CMS used at Wichita State is Blackboard, with Version 9.1 being the latest upgrade. Reboot faculty are shown how to construct tests, with or without instant feedback, how to conduct surveys, and how to accept/grade/return electronic assignments. They are asked to experiment with a new presentation-capture tool, called Panopto, which allows them to record lectures or demonstrations, including screen captures, and to upload those to Blackboard, to be streamed and reviewed by students at any time and from any

location. Ironically, the most valued outcome of the Reboot Camps has been the F2F interaction between faculty members from different disciplines. They have been required to share their syllabi and their teaching strategies and have found common ground across the academy. They have left the week of discussions both energized about new ways of teaching and anxious about the challenges—everyone agreeing that course preparation for an online class is intense and time-consuming.

Legal

As WSU increases its online offerings, it does so with an excellent support staff already in place. Three entities reporting to the Chief Information Officer—the Library, the Media Resources Center, and University Computing and Telecommunications—provide the foundation for the Reboot Camp and offer ongoing seminars and workshops throughout the year.

One of the topics emphasized by the Library staff, in association with the Office of General Counsel, is copyright and Fair Use. Even though copyright restrictions have been eased in recent years, deciding what can and cannot be distributed online is an ongoing challenge, especially when access to rich media is so easy. Our faculty are assured that the Blackboard system is password protected, a basic requirement for distributing copyrighted materials. The Library and MRC assist faculty in licensing some teaching materials, and the Library is aggressively acquiring and making accessible more of its books and journals in an electronic format.

On the opposite side of the *copyright* coin is the issue of intellectual property. Who owns this new heavily-scripted course—the faculty member or the University? This has been addressed in the University's Policies and Procedures, Chapter 9 (http://webs.wichita.edu/inaudit/ch9_10.htm):

- (a) The University shall assert limited rights to mediated courseware (that is, course materials disseminated through electronic media). Self-initiated courseware, developed without a specific work-for-hire contract, shall remain the property of the creator(s), unless otherwise negotiated; provided, however, that no royalty, rental fee, or other consideration shall be paid to the creator(s) when that mediated courseware is used for instruction at Wichita State University. Such mediated courseware shall not be used or modified without the consent of the creator(s), nor shall it be sold, leased, rented, or otherwise used in a manner that competes in a substantial way with the for-credit offerings of Wichita State University, unless otherwise negotiated.
- (b) Mediated courseware developed as a specifically contracted work-for-hire, unless otherwise negotiated, shall be the intellectual property of the University. In such cases, when the University expressly directs the creation of mediated courseware and provides materials and time to develop the mediated courseware, the University shall reserve the right to revise and decide who will utilize such mediated courseware for instructional purposes.

Student

WSU recognizes that student support services are more important than ever in the retention and success of online students. Online classes require students to be self-motivated and disciplined. Because these students may never come to the physical campus, extra efforts must be made to make them aware of the services that are available.

The university has an impressive staff of professionals in Advising, Financial Aid, Counseling and Testing, Student Health, Career Services, and Disability Services. While these offices are appropriately staffed for the campus community, they are not, as yet, focused on the online community. For now, the faculty member is the most likely link between the online student and university service areas. If a faculty member senses a student is falling behind in writing skills, it is his or her responsibility to direct that student to the Writing Center. The online student, who may already have a high-stress profile, may need a faculty referral to the Behavioral Intervention Team. This is an area of coordination that the University will need to address, as the online population grows. The services, in most cases, can still be office-based, with interaction by way of Skype-like videoconferencing.

Technical

Online learning today is a far-removed cousin of the old correspondence courses. Those courses, which were at the mercy of the U.S. Postal system offered no immediate feedback and little in the way of group interactions. Today's students take the Internet for granted and expect instant feedback. The technology that makes WSU's online courses happen has an evolutionary history of several decades. The Library is as old as the University; the Media Resources Center is nearing its seventh decade; and the Computing and Telecommunications Center began its life in the mainframe era. Several of the professional staff in those areas have served WSU for over 25 years. They have found ways to keep pace with the exponential changes in technology, mostly in a state environment that has not acknowledged technology costs. This has been accomplished at Wichita State by centralizing information and technology support services, by endorsing one Course Management System (Blackboard), one desktop production software (Microsoft Office), and one enterprise system for conducting university business (SunGard's Banner). Departmental servers have been centralized in the Computing Center. A unified Help desk has recently been reorganized in the Library.

The Instructional Designer position is new at WSU, with Dr. Mark Porcaro having been hired in August of 2010. Dr. Porcaro is housed in the Media Resources Center, where he works in collaboration with educational technologists, Blackboard administrators, and a video production team. The MRC staff members are skilled in video capture and editing, digitizing, and streaming. They consult with faculty on test construction and grade center management. Their newest challenge is to evaluate the proliferation of mobile devices and help faculty design secure pages that can be accessed in a variety of settings.

The University Library has made impressive strides in transitioning from a mostly print-based environment to one that builds gateways to electronic databases. Currently users have access to a number of electronic databases giving students more than adequate access to books, journals, and other periodicals. Both the Library and the MRC are closely aligned with University Computing and Telecommunications services (UCATS).

Data Collection for Planning and Reporting Purposes

For planning and reporting purposes, WSU will add to their data collection the following measures to establish baseline and change activity as well as goals for distance education. The data from these measures would then be used to determine how future resources might be used to expand or modify the current distance education offerings. The likely outcome for the foreseeable future will be modest gains in course offerings, with limited online program expansion.

The 2011 spring and summer semesters will be spent collecting data for the table below with continual assessment of the distance education environment as summarized in this report.

	AY 2010-2011 (Actual)		AY 2011-2012 (Goal)		AY 2012-2013 (Goal)		AY 2013-2014 (Goal)	
SCH generated by online courses								
Number of online courses								
Number of online programs								
Online course availability	Available Slots	Actual Registrations	Available Slots	Actual Registrations	Available Slots	Actual Registrations	Available Slots	Actual Registrations
Net revenue generated by online courses								
Number of new faculty trained to teach online courses								