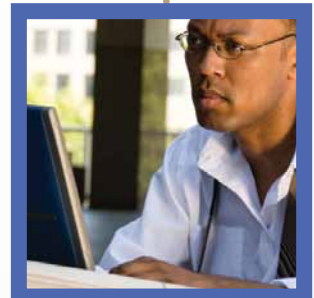
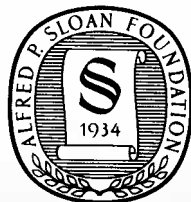


# Online Learning as a Strategic Asset

*Volume I: A Resource for Campus Leaders*

AUGUST 2009

ASSOCIATION OF  
PUBLIC AND  
LAND-GRANT  
UNIVERSITIES





# Online Learning as a Strategic Asset

*Volume I: A Resource for Campus Leaders*

A REPORT ON THE ONLINE EDUCATION BENCHMARKING STUDY CONDUCTED  
BY THE A•P•L•U-SLOAN NATIONAL COMMISSION ON ONLINE LEARNING

Sally A. McCarthy, Ph.D.

A•P•L•U-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning

Robert J. Samors

Project Director

A•P•L•U-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning

Association of Public and Land-grant Universities

**AUGUST 2009**



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Association of Public and Land-grant Universities  
1307 New York Avenue, N.W.  
Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20005-4722  
(202) 478-6040

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Layout and Design: Cutting Edge Design  
Printing: VMW Printing

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# Acknowledgements

Any major undertaking regarding online learning must first acknowledge the vision and leadership of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation under the guidance of President Emeritus Ralph Gomory, Program Director Frank Mayadas and current President Paul Joskow. Over the past dozen or more years, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation has single-handedly spurred the development, growth, and expansion of online learning across the nation. The Foundation's sustained commitment has created a vibrant community of practice among online faculty and administrators through the Sloan Consortium that will continue to serve this increasingly vital and constantly evolving field.

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (A•P•L•U), formerly the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), and the members of the A•P•L•U-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning are deeply grateful for the support of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation over the past two-and-a-half years in our efforts to engage public university leaders in a deeper consideration and appreciation of online learning as a strategic asset. We are hopeful that the Commission's work through its surveys of university presidents and chancellors across a broad spectrum of higher education institutions, and the Benchmarking Study summarized in the two volumes of this report, will help to ensure that the Foundation's contributions to online learning will be felt for many years to come.

We must also acknowledge the many contributions of Sam Smith, President Emeritus of Washington State University, who is a national leader in the online "movement." We wish to thank him for his wisdom, energy, and counsel that not only forged the relationship between A•P•L•U and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, but also was instrumental in the ultimate success of this endeavor.

Further, we owe special appreciation to A•P•L•U President Peter McPherson, whose leadership and encouragement were the catalyst for the formal creation of the Presidents' Commission. The establishment of the Commission not only made it possible for us to work with the presidents and chancellors of A•P•L•U member institutions, but also provided us with access to their administrators, faculty, and students. The participation of these individuals produced one of the largest and most comprehensive studies to date of online learning as a strategic asset.

The Online Commission spent two productive years probing the structural, cultural, and attitudinal issues that surround online learning on public university campuses. The perspectives, insights, and experiences of our fellow Commission members enabled the Commission both to con-

duct in-depth analyses of the complex issues surrounding online and to share our findings with a wide range of audiences across the higher education community. The time and energy members devoted to the numerous meetings, the conference calls, and, above all, the more than two dozen presentations around the country have been invaluable to the Commission's efforts and are greatly appreciated. (A full roster of the Commission membership can be found in Appendix A in this volume.)

In addition, the work of the Commission could not have been carried out without the tireless efforts of Jeff Seaman, Co-Director, Babson Survey Research Group and Survey Director, The Sloan Consortium, the Commission's survey "guru" for the past two years; and Sally McCarthy, PhD, whose tireless efforts, understanding of the academic world, interview talents, and editorial craftsmanship were essential elements of the Benchmarking Study and final report. We also thank Bob Samors, Project Director, for his passion, creativity, and professionalism in keeping the Commission on task. Bob promoted a collaborative environment and sense of purpose as he guided this project to a successful conclusion. The contributions of A•P•L•U staff members Chrisann Bramwell, Ayoko Vias, Daniela Garcia, and Philip Getz were also essential to the success of the Benchmarking Study and overall work of the Commission.

In addition, we want to thank Janet Poley and Gary Miller for their advice and counsel at several strategic points during the project, especially in reviewing early drafts of this report. We also acknowledge the contributions of Elaine Seymour and Anne-Barrie Hunter who provided instructive guidance essential to the integrity of the analysis contained in this report.

Finally, none of this work could have been possible without the time and effort expended by all of those individuals who took the time to fill out surveys, participate in interviews, and otherwise create the substance of the Commission's work. We are especially grateful to the individuals on the 45 campuses participating in this final study, who coordinated their institution's involvement in this important initiative.

**JACK WILSON**

Chair, A•P•L•U-Sloan National  
Commission on Online Learning  
President, University of Massachusetts

**BRUCE MAGID, CO-CHAIR**

Co-Chair, A•P•L•U-Sloan National  
Commission on Online Learning  
Dean, International School of  
Business, Brandeis University



# Executive Summary

Online learning is a complex undertaking that holds great potential as a teaching and learning mode that public colleges and universities may strategically employ to achieve broad institutional priorities and contribute to the attainment of national goals.<sup>1</sup> The A•P•L•U-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning Benchmarking Study was designed to illuminate how public institutions develop and implement the key organizational strategies, processes, and procedures that contribute to successful and robust online learning initiatives.

The Online Commission has developed a set of observations about successful strategic online learning initiatives. These observations are based on 231 Institutional Interviews with administrators, faculty, and students at 45 public institutions across the country and close to 11,000 responses from a national Faculty Survey.<sup>2</sup> These observations include the following:

1. Online learning programs may work most effectively as a core component of institutional strategic planning and implementation.
2. Online learning initiatives benefit from ongoing institutional assessment and review due to their evolving and dynamic nature.
3. Online learning activities are strengthened by the centralization of some organizational structures and administrative functions that support and sustain the programs.
4. Online learning programs overseen by academic affairs units may be more readily accepted and may be more easily integrated into the fabric of the institution.
5. Online learning programs need reliable financing mechanisms for sustainability and growth.
6. Online learning programs succeed with consistent and adequate academic, administrative, and technological resources for faculty and students.
7. Online learning programs have the capacity to change campus culture and become fully integrated if presidents, chancellors, chief academic officers, and other senior campus leaders are fully engaged in the delivery of “messages” that tie online education to fundamental institutional missions and priorities.

---

1 President Barack Obama recently has articulated a goal of leading the world in college degrees by 2020. “Rebuilding Something Better,” *The Washington Post*, Sunday, July 12, 2009. A•P•L•U has endorsed the goal of increasing tertiary degree attainment to 55 percent of 25–34-year-olds by 2025. <http://www.aplu.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=1672>.

2 For a more extensive analysis of the survey results, please see *Online Learning as a Strategic Asset: Volume II: The Paradox of Faculty Voices: Views and Experiences with Online Learning*.

The data compiled through the Institutional Interviews and Faculty Survey also identify a number of *key leadership and policy issues* for campus presidents, chancellors and chief academic officers to consider. These issue-specific recommendations include:

1. Campus leaders need to better understand the characteristics of the online teaching populations on their campus and use communication strategies that target and engage all faculty members.
2. Campus leaders should maintain consistent communication with all faculty and administrators regarding the role and purpose of online learning programs as they relate to academic mission and academic quality. Further, campus leaders, administrators, and faculty must all work together to improve the quality—or perceived quality—of online learning outcomes.
3. Campus leaders have the potential to expand faculty engagement by better understanding what motivates faculty to teach online.
4. Campus leaders and faculty governing bodies need to regularly re-examine institutional policies regarding faculty incentives, especially in this era of declining financial resources. Perhaps most importantly, campus leaders need to identify strategies to acknowledge and recognize the additional time and effort faculty invest in online as compared to face-to-face teaching and learning.

Finally, the Commission recognizes that some of these observations and recommendations may appear rudimentary for some campuses, especially those institutions that are further along in implementing or supporting more “mature” online learning programs. However, the institutional participants and faculty respondents reported that many of these fundamental issues of structure, finance, and faculty support and engagement have resurfaced or emerged in new ways as programs have matured over the years. Toward this end, A•P•L•U and the Online Commission are hopeful that the observations from the Benchmarking Study will provide fresh insights and perspectives to campus leaders, administrators, faculty, and students engaged in or interested in online learning and lead to an increase in the number of strategic online learning initiatives at public colleges and universities across the nation.

# Background and Overview

## Exploring the Role of Campus Leaders in Online Learning

In the spring of 2006, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (A•P•L•U), formerly the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation began a conversation about the role of public colleges and universities in the growth of online learning. This discussion was premised on two central issues: (1) Public institutions were the leading providers of online education in the United States, according to the annual Sloan surveys of chief academic officers; online learning enrollments were growing at a robust annual pace<sup>3</sup>; and yet, (2) there were persistent concerns as to whether public institutions were prepared to absorb such sustained enrollment growth in online education.

A•P•L•U and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation shared the concern that, as technology increasingly pervades our society, public colleges and universities risk becoming “obsolete” if they do not adapt to changing demographics and market forces, as well as to the expectations of both traditional and nontraditional students (e.g., career needs and lifelong learning goals). Furthermore, as the role of education in the economic growth and success of the nation and its citizens continues to grow in importance, it is incumbent upon the nation’s four-year public institutions to find new and creative ways—based in part on maximizing the potential of education-related technology—to address issues of access, relevance, and cost. However, some (if not many) public institution leaders appeared hesitant to enthusiastically embrace these new approaches. The true root reasons for that hesitancy were unclear.

A•P•L•U and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation determined that a constructive route to address this issue would be to engage presidents, chancellors, and other institutional leaders in a unique, comprehensive discussion of the challenges, opportunities, costs, and benefits of online learning, with a particular focus on how these new approaches relate to the overarching strategic goals and missions of their institutions. In addition, for A•P•L•U’s *Initiative in Online Learning* to be most successful, it must ultimately provide institutional leaders with the lessons and tools necessary to implement or expand online learning on their campuses.

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3 See Allen and Seaman, *Growing by Degrees: Online Education in the United States*, 2005.  
[http://sloan-c.org/publications/survey/pdf/growing\\_by\\_degrees.pdf](http://sloan-c.org/publications/survey/pdf/growing_by_degrees.pdf)

As a presidential-membership organization, A•P•L•U was in an exceptional position to engage the leadership of the leading public universities in the nation. With a legacy stretching back to 1887, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities is the oldest higher education association in the nation. The voice of America's leading public and land-grant universities, A•P•L•U encompasses:

- 188 public research universities, including 74 land-grant institutions and 27 state university systems
- 3.5 million undergraduate students
- 1.1 million graduate students
- 645,000 faculty and professional staff
- Nearly \$30 billion in annual federally-sponsored research
- More than 500,000 online students

At the same time, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation had played a singular leadership role in encouraging the development and adoption of online education, in particular through its support of the Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C), and numerous other high quality online initiatives. The *Initiative in Online Learning* would build on the significant work conducted during the spring/summer of 2006 by Sam Smith, President Emeritus of Washington State University, and Pete Smith, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of Texas at Arlington<sup>4</sup> that began to outline many of the underlying institutional issues and perceptions surrounding online learning that required more in-depth examination.

## Recognizing the “Disconnect” Between Strategic Value and Utilization of Online Learning

In April 2007, the A•P•L•U-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning (hereinafter referred to as the “Online Commission” or “Commission”) was created through a generous grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. The Commission was comprised of seven presidents and chancellors, two chief academic officers, two chief information officers, three directors of online learning programs, and several senior advisors with extensive experience in the online learning field. Jack M. Wilson, President of the University of Massachusetts, served as chairman of the Commission, and Bruce R. Magid, Dean of the International Business School at Brandeis University, served as co-chairman. Frank Mayadas was the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Program Officer who oversaw the Commission's work.<sup>5</sup>

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4 See Smith and Smith, “Positioning Online Learning as a Strategic Asset in the Thinking of University Presidents and Chancellors” 2006. <http://www.aln.org/node/1192>.

5 See Appendix A for the A•P•L•U-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning membership.

The Commission's strategy had several key objectives:

- Gain a better understanding of the attitudes and experiences of presidents and chancellors toward online learning
- Identify the key goals and priorities of campus leaders
- Analyze the potential of online learning to be a tool to achieve those goals
- Develop the resources to help presidents and chancellors fully utilize online learning to achieve institutional priorities.

The Commission's first focus was to gauge the attitudes and perspectives of A•P•L•U presidents and chancellors toward online learning as a strategic asset to achieve broad institutional goals and priorities. This inaugural survey of campus leaders was viewed as essential to the success of the project as it would enable A•P•L•U to engage the presidents and chancellors from the most appropriate perspectives and convey information of most value to them. Subsequently, the Commission conducted similar original surveys of the Tribal College and University (TCU) presidents, and the presidents and chancellors of National Association for Educational Opportunity (NAFEO) member-institutions.<sup>6</sup>

All three surveys of campus leaders revealed a striking gap: Close to, or *more than two-thirds* of the responding CEOs recognized that *online programs are strategically important* to the institution, yet close to, or *less than one-half* of respondents actually *included online programs in the campus strategic plan*. This gap exists even at a time when the number of students taking at least one online course continues to expand at a rate far in excess of the growth of overall higher education enrollments.<sup>7</sup>

The survey findings were presented to national audiences of more than 650 senior higher education leaders between June 2007 and February 2008.<sup>8</sup> During the presentations, Commission members engaged audiences in detailed and robust discussions of the possible reasons for this strategic “disconnect.” Questions explored included:

- 
- 6 President and Chancellor survey results can be found at <http://www.aplu.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=443>.
- 7 The most recent estimate, for fall 2007, places this number at 3.94 million online students, an increase of 12.9 percent over fall 2006. The number of online students has more than doubled in the five years since the first Sloan survey on online learning. The growth from 1.6 million students taking at least one online course in fall 2002 to the 3.94 million for fall 2007 represents a compound annual growth rate of 19.7 percent. Allen, I.E. and Seaman, J. *Staying the Course: Online Education in the United States*, 2008. <http://www.sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/index.asp>.
- 8 Subsequent presentations of this data and preliminary findings of the Benchmarking Study have meant that, between June 2007 and April 2009, the Online Commission has made a total of 27 presentations to more than 850 campus leaders, including more than 300 presidents, chancellors, and governing board members. A complete archive of the Commission presentations is located at <http://www.aplu.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=282>.

- Is it a function of a lack of strong direction coming from the president or chancellor?
- Is it related to the distance between the individual(s) responsible for implementing online and the senior leadership?
- Is it a lack of information and feasible strategies that could help institutional leaders utilize online learning more strategically?
- Were there other factors—such as faculty attitudes and perceptions—hampering more robust implementation of online learning strategies?

Additionally, during these discussions, participants consistently requested examples of “best practices” or exemplars of how institutions with successful strategic programs address the organizational, administrative, cultural, financial, and related issues surrounding online learning.

## Identifying Key Factors Contributing to Successful Strategic Online Programs

These two elements—the need to address the “disconnect” and to meet the strong desire for information on “best practices”—prompted the Online Commission to consider how it could add the most value to the online learning field. Accordingly, the Commission initiated a study that could broadly identify the “key factors”—including faculty attitudes and experiences—underlying successful strategic online programs.

The Online Commission’s two-part Benchmarking Study was designed to capture the data needed to define and illustrate these “key factors.” The first component was a series of in-depth interviews with key senior campus leaders, as well as administrators, professional staff, and faculty most directly involved in the development of online content and administration of online programs. The second component was the first national, cross-institutional survey of faculty attitudes towards online learning. Both parts of the study were premised on the definition of online learning as pertaining to *only those courses in which all or virtually all the content is delivered online*.

The scale and scope of this study is unprecedented. Between July 2008 and January 2009, the Commission conducted 231 interviews with one or more institutional representatives across 45 discrete institutions<sup>9</sup> representing almost 1 million students and at least 100,000 online enrollments. Institutional interview participants included presidents and chancellors, chief academic officers, online learning administrators, faculty leaders and professors, and online students. The interview questions were developed through a series of preliminary conversations and background questionnaires exchanged between Commission staff and campus representatives. These

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix B for a list of campuses participating in the Institutional Interviews.

discussions and responses were evaluated by the Commission in order to help identify the most relevant and important areas of inquiry to pursue, ultimately focusing on:

- Faculty Incentives
  - Financial Support and Intellectual Property Agreements
  - Non-Financial Support and Incentives
- Student Life Cycle Issues
- Senior Administration
  - Strong Central Leadership
  - Reporting Relationships
- Academic Quality and Effectiveness
  - Orientation
  - Assessment
- Administrative and Financial Models
  - Structure
  - Development and Sustainability
- Technology

The faculty survey is the most comprehensive survey of its type ever conducted. The instrument was distributed to approximately 50,000 individuals across the spectrum of teaching positions—tenure/non-tenure track, full and part time, those who have taught online and those who have not. The survey was designed to mirror the Sloan-C annual surveys of chief academic officers in order to compare the views of the provosts with those of the faculty. Close to 11,000 surveys were completed by faculty at 69 campuses.<sup>10</sup> In addition, respondents provided more than 21,000 free-form responses.<sup>11</sup>

The 45 institutions participating in the Benchmarking Study volunteered in response to a solicitation from the Online Commission and A•P•L•U leadership that was sent to 95 A•P•L•U member institutions viewed as having the highest potential for growth in online learning enrollments.<sup>12</sup> The participating campuses represent a cross-section of four-year public institutions with a range of missions, scope, and size including research, doctoral, land-grants, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

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10 The number of campuses participating in the Faculty Survey is larger than the number participating in the Institutional Interviews as several “institutions” included more than one campus—including one entire state system.

11 A detailed analysis of the Faculty Survey data is contained in *Volume II: The Paradox of Faculty Voices: Views and Experiences with Online Learning*. Volume II also contains information concerning the design and methodology of the Faculty Survey, and a list of participating campuses.

12 See Appendix C: Summary of Institutional Interview Design and Methodology for a detailed explanation of the composition of the Benchmarking Study cohort.

## Benchmarking Study Purpose, Limits, Report Presentation, and Content

The primary focus of the Online Commission has been to provide a venue for the consideration of the strategic use of online learning as well as to offer potential strategies for campus leaders. The Commission recognizes that faculty and student experiences with online learning vary greatly and have been accounted for in disaggregated ways in previous research conducted by others.<sup>13</sup> The Commission believes that this report contributes to the field in two central ways. First, the study's size and scope are unparalleled. Second, the study creates an aggregated picture of the opportunities and challenges facing key decision makers and administrators involved in online learning at public institutions. This report is meant to provide a framework for a constructive dialogue around these issues, as well as to foster future thinking and research on the topic. Given these conditions, the overarching purpose of the Benchmarking Study was to:

- *Investigate and understand the major organizational components and processes that have contributed to successful strategic online learning activities as identified through the wide range of practical experiences of institutional participants.*
- *Capture the experiences, attitudes, and motivations of faculty involved in and not involved in online learning.*
- *Provide senior campus leaders with potential strategies that could help them develop, implement, and/or sustain successful and strategic online learning initiatives at their institutions.*

In keeping with this intent, chapters one through four of this volume present the Commission's observations regarding the broad issues involved in institutional planning, organizational structure and restructuring, allocation of institutional resources, and leadership communication related to online learning. These observations are drawn directly from the Institutional Interviews<sup>14</sup> and the Faculty Survey conducted and administered by the Commission. Chapter five summarizes the primary findings from the Faculty Survey and highlights several key issues that campus leaders should consider as they implement or expand online learning initiatives at their institutions, including matters of faculty motivation, support and engagement, and their views on the relative quality of online learning.

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13 See Sloan-C, WCET, WICHE, ADEC, EDUCAUSE, ELI, ECAR Web sites for extensive research on the teaching and learning aspects of online learning, as well as the overall use and impact of technology in higher education.

14 The authors excerpted interviewee quotes directly from transcripts and researcher notes. In many instances, the authors modified quotes for grammar and readability but did not alter the content and substance of the quotations. The authors attributed all quotes with general institutional titles in order to safeguard participant anonymity. For a complete explanation of institutional titles and definitions, please see Institutional Interview Methodology, Appendix C.



Finally, the Online Commission cannot overemphasize that, for most institutions, successful online learning programs usually operate across a wide range of academic and administrative units, which in many ways run counter to the traditional, often “siloed,” manner in which campuses conduct business and teach students. These innovative methods of teaching and learning require the support of technologists, the engagement and expertise of academics, the interest of students, and a strategic and financial commitment at every level of the organization.

Yet, even if all of these essential elements are in place when a program is launched, the Commission believes that sustaining a robust online learning initiative is still a challenging undertaking because the fundamental issues of structure, support, and engagement may re-emerge or evolve in ways that may have been unpredictable or undetectable at the outset. Further, there may be situations where the culture of a particular institution may not allow for the implementation of robust, strategic online initiatives.

The Commission is hopeful that the observations and findings included in this report will provide campus leaders with insights that help unbundle the complexities of organizational processes and strategies and lead to more successful, strategic online teaching and learning experiences for faculty and students alike.

# Chapter One

## Engaging in Institutional Planning with Strategic Purpose

*Institutional planning* of online learning initiatives is essential at today's public colleges and universities. If done thoughtfully and strategically, these plans can identify the purpose and goals of endeavors such as online learning programs, as well as describing evaluation methods, benchmarks, and specific outcomes. Institutional Interview participants commented on the need, perhaps even the imperative, for institutions to engage in broad, inclusive planning processes, given the amount of time and money that must be invested to develop and sustain these programs. The remarks of institutional participants below reflect the sentiments that online learning initiatives should be well thought out and be a component of or be anchored within the institution's strategic planning process:

*I see a big challenge in what I call the “infrastructure stack.” What is the combination of technical, academic policy, economic, and institutional priorities that all have to be aligned when you start thinking about things like online learning?*

–Faculty and Online Learning Administrator

*It is not just a “Lone Ranger” single-handed decision to offer online courses...We have to have the assurance from the department and college that the faculty member's own investment, as well as our investment in the faculty member, feeds into the larger plan.*

–Senior Non-Academic Administrator

### Steering the Planning Process: Campus Advisory Groups and Task Forces for Online Learning

Repeatedly, institutional participants described the benefits of forming a *task force* or *advisory committee* to prepare their campus for online learning. They stressed that the most productive composition of this cross-cutting group would include: representatives from academic affairs, faculty—particularly those already experienced in online learning, deans and department chairs, representatives from faculty and student support units, information technology specialists, and representatives from other areas of the university that would be directly or indirectly impacted by online learning.

## THE ENTERPRISE APPROACH

### Integrated Strategic Planning at the University of Montana

In 2008, the University of Montana, Missoula sought to revise its prior approach to online learning. In collaboration with the campus's Academic Information Technology Committee and other campus stakeholders, Continuing Education leadership crafted a strategic plan for UMOOnline, a large-scale, branded effort to integrate online learning into the fabric of the university's academic operations and support campus and state strategic plans. The statewide Montana Board of Regent's plan had already recognized the inefficiencies in the state's sporadic online learning efforts and the unmet higher education needs of many of Montana's citizens (MT BOR Strategic Plan, Revised 2008, [http://mus.edu/data/strategic\\_plan.asp](http://mus.edu/data/strategic_plan.asp)). Likewise, the university's comprehensive strategic plan, developed by the provost's Academic Planning Council, charged the campus with finding ways to better serve students while at the same time "reducing the resident undergraduate population." The campus strategic plan also tasked the institution to "develop the capability and infrastructure for use of information technology to increase the efficiency and productivity of the campus and the state" (University of Montana 2008 Strategic Plan, [www.umt.edu/plan/stratplanning.html](http://www.umt.edu/plan/stratplanning.html)).

Together, these statewide and campus goals presented both a challenge and an opportunity for the campus at Missoula. According to the Strategic Plan, the campus' long engagement in online learning was an "experimental" endeavor, and while there was value in the experimentation this approach afforded, it was no longer sufficient in light of state and campus needs. During this time, the campus was undertaking a review of its internal structures, services, and overall capacity for online learning. The response was a comprehensive plan for academic enterprise integration of online learning through UMOOnline. This plan laid out a detailed framework to support these overarching goals:

- Modify and improve faculty development and training
- Improve student life cycle issues and support
- Expand the scope of selected degree programs
- Develop marketing strategies for UMOOnline
- Implement "careful and continual" examination of financial and resource investments

These core planning elements not only reflect a commitment to integrate online learning as an avenue for success, but also embody the key large-scale questions that are critical components of successful strategic planning and implementation efforts.

This advisory group may take on various configurations, planning charges, and oversight responsibilities with the goal of identifying and exploring the various issues and decisions that could arise concerning the implementation of online learning on campus. This group also may be charged with making recommendations to senior campus leaders on the policies and procedures that should be implemented to assure successful adoption or expansion of online learning.

To be of most value, the recommendations or reports issued by these task forces would become a part of the broader institutional planning or decision-making process. Many participants commented that, if online initiatives had not been included in these larger strategic planning processes—indeed, had those initiatives not been recognized as an institutional priority both in writing and rhetorically by campus leadership—they would have waned. Some said such programs had already waned for want of substantial institutional planning and support. Interviewees specifically commented on the value of an integrated and well-conceived institutional planning process:

*Now that all the stakeholders are at the table—the collaborators here on campus—we have more knowledge. I think it is going to be a much smoother process, a more deliberate process, and just better for everyone. I think that the planning is very important in directing how these programs evolve.*

—Senior Non-Academic Administrator

*As is the case with most people who start a distance learning program, we were pretty much flying by the seat of our pants when we first started doing this...and we were just doing a lot of experimentation. Over the past couple of years, however, we have worked hard to plan an elaborate process for development. This process is something that I do not see a lot of other people having developed. ...It [our plan] works with what the overall university plan is doing.*

—Senior Academic Administrator

*I think the key to these task forces, in my experience, is what you do with the report.*

—Chief Executive Officer/Governing Board member

The experiences of institutional participants strongly suggest that these planning groups are instrumental to the successful development and initial execution of online learning initiatives. In addition, several participants referenced the benefit of maintaining *standing committees or task forces after online programs have been established and have begun to grow and mature*. These oversight groups address new or unforeseen issues that arise or examine and advise campus leaders on proposed changes in financial and administrative structuring, or policies and procedures. These standing advisory committees have either been appointed by the president or provost or formed by the faculty senate.

## **The Substance of the Planning Process: Who Participates and What Matters Most**

The strategic planning organizations outlined above may approach online learning planning from a variety of angles: as a component of a larger strategic plan, as part of an academic or IT plan, in response to stated campus goals, or all of the above. Institutional Interview participants repeatedly noted that, in any of these forms, this process must be as *inclusive and transparent* as

possible in order to thoroughly engage faculty and affected administrative and academic units. For example:

*You need to include as much of the faculty in the process and be as transparent in the process as possible. ...You also have to understand that everybody feels they've got something at stake in this process. And as you go along, you have to make certain that you're letting everybody know what is happening, [and] why it's happening, and then get the feedback as much as you can...this is the part that is not always easy.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*It takes a lot of involvement of the faculty. This involvement includes faculty already using online teaching and those who are going to be expected to get involved in online teaching... So that they understand the positives...about where we're headed and why, exactly. I think too often they [faculty] feel decisions are sprung on them after the fact, and they haven't had enough participation in the decisions.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

Similarly, interviewees noted that the *substance* of the actual plan could have crucial implications for programmatic success. These participants believe that institutions benefit when such fundamental issues as structure, cost, and curriculum are discussed at the forefront of the planning process:

*You have to have a very clear picture of what you're trying to get into. ...We're really trying to take our existing courses and make these courses available in a different format for accessibility reasons and other reasons. You must make sure you have different components within your strategies to achieve this. If you want to add more degrees online and offer them off campus, if you want to strictly use it to try to increase enrollments—that's another type of strategy. All of these strategies, however, should not violate your academic goals and your academic mission of whom you're after.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*I think, at the outset, you need to consider the centralized structure and to ask if you are a particular college: How are you going to do this? And, this question means going beyond just knowing how to use the technology. It is all the curricular and budgetary issues, administrative issues, student services coordinators, program coordinators, faculty instruction...how do you set-up that whole structure?*

–Online Learning Administrator

*[You need to] spend your time thinking about the structure and the business model that might make a faculty member or department want to teach classes online. Thinking through the structure and business model is really what is important. I mean, whether you use Moodle or WebCT6 or whatever—that's trivial.*

–Senior Non-Academic Administrator

These comments also reflect broader institutional participant responses regarding the specific *strategic considerations* administrators need to address during these planning processes. Participants consistently commented that essential elements of planning conversations must include key “big picture questions,” which drive development and budgeting and provide critical assurance that the endeavor reflects the institution’s mission and reach. Further, Faculty Survey data suggest that campus leaders crafting and refining online strategic plans should also consider such issues as adequacy of resources and support for faculty training and development, recognition of the additional time and effort it takes to develop and teach online courses, and faculty concerns about online learning outcomes.

In light of these findings, the Online Commission believes that successful planning processes need to consider the complexity and breadth of a wide range of issues that will impact the *development, sustainability, and expansion* of programs, including:

- Enterprise- and unit-level technology needs
- Academic oversight
- Programmatic scope
- Financing for all programmatic aspects, including faculty and student resources
- Nonfinancial faculty and student support
- Quality control and assessment

These findings reinforce the continuous and fluid nature of planning for online learning initiatives. While many issues appear to be resolved prior to launch, the Commission believes that campus leaders must remain sensitized to the many issues that may resurface or emerge in previously unanticipated ways once a program is underway or as it has matured.

Lastly, the Online Commission notes the central importance of addressing faculty concerns about incentives and support and about online course quality in the planning process and beyond. These issues are raised directly by the nearly 11,000 faculty respondents participating in the Faculty Survey. Analysis of the Survey data reveals several key findings (See Volume II, Figures 24 and 29), including these:

- Faculty are generally dissatisfied with the level of support they receive in developing and teaching online courses and programs, specifically with regard to incentives, as well as promotion and tenure policies; and
- Faculty who have not developed or taught online courses overwhelmingly perceive their learning outcomes to lag behind traditional modes of instruction; faculty with online experience still harbor concerns, but are much more positive about all aspects of online instruction.

A critical picture emerges, then, for campus leaders when these findings are assessed in combination with other Faculty Survey findings such as these:

- Roughly 64 percent of faculty surveyed believe that online learning takes more effort to teach: and
- Almost 85 percent believe it takes more effort to develop online courses (See Volume II, Figure 21).

The Commission encourages campus leaders to address these issues head-on in order to maximize faculty participation in online learning initiatives. Campus leaders also may want to consider a range of strategies for engaging faculty. These are suggested by the data about *faculty motivations for teaching online* gleaned from the Benchmarking Study. Those potential strategies are discussed in more detail in the ensuing chapters.

## STRATEGIC DEPLOYMENT OF ONLINE LEARNING IN THE COMPLEX PUBLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

### The (Re)structuring of Oversight at Clemson University

Many large public universities face the simultaneous challenges of fostering robust research agendas, teaching graduate and undergraduate students, and serving the needs of the region and the state. These challenges may add layers of complexity to the planning mix as campus leaders consider mission-appropriate ways to integrate online learning on campus. This complex landscape, however, has not deterred institutions from figuring out a “best fit” approach for the strategic use of online learning. For example:

In 2003, Clemson University considered the reorganization of its existing Continuing Education unit in conjunction with the university’s strategic planning process. The campus strategic plan reorganized academic oversight into five colleges that coordinated “strategic emphases” across academic units (“Planning for Clemson’s Future,” 2003). Since then, distributed learning, which includes online offerings, has assumed a targeted approach through the provost’s office. Online learning now is coordinated through the College of Health, Education and Human Development (HEHD). HEHD is charged with handling the administrative operations of approximately five graduate programs and over 200 courses for undergraduates. Individual colleges and departments handle the curricula oversight for these programs and courses.

Accompanying this reorganization, Clemson has taken deliberative steps to integrate its distributed education efforts into its strategic plans. In December 2008, President James Barker commissioned several “budget task forces” to explore ways to increase generated revenue and decrease costs. One of those groups was tasked with exploring the various distribution systems for learning opportunities. This group was comprised of both academic and administrative staff and a student representative, and its charge was completed in February 2009. As an outgrowth of those efforts, President Barker has charged three steering committees to continue the effort and implement the appropriate recommendations. One of the steering committees is examining continuing and professional development efforts; another is looking at the possibility of adding a winter session between the fall and spring terms. The third steering committee is charged with looking at all of the policies, procedures, and processes related to distributed education. All three of the committees are exploring ways to expand and extend learning opportunities to students both on and off campus while streamlining processes and providing effective support systems for teachers and learners.

[www.clemson.edu/provost/documents/cuacademicplan.pdf](http://www.clemson.edu/provost/documents/cuacademicplan.pdf)  
[www.odce.clemson.edu](http://www.odce.clemson.edu)



# Chapter Two

## Designing Effective Organizational Structures

While planning provides a road map for most institutions when launching and sustaining online learning initiatives, it is up to campus administrative and academic units to carry out these plans. This section of the report highlights institutional participant views on these *organizational structures*, including insights about 1) how these structures are organized, 2) how these structures oversee and support online programs, and 3) how these structures may benefit online learning programs most when they are aligned under academic affairs.

### Essential Organizational Elements: Central Structures that Bolster Online Learning Programs

*Our structure is a little bit of a hybrid. ...Each unit works on their own online proposal, but setting up and launching the program is done through continuing education. ...I am not a big fan of centralization, but I think our system works very, very well.*

—Senior Academic Administrator

How do institutions manage to get the complex organizational aspects of online program operations to “work very, very well?” How do individual campuses strike the right balance between too much or too little central oversight? Many of the institutional interviewees who believe their programs are effective and successful noted that some form of centralization was a key factor in that success. Participants from these institutions described common organizational elements that emphasized

- Administrative oversight and faculty support housed within academic affairs;
- Curricular control as a fundamental responsibility of academic departments; and
- Technological elements as the responsibility of IT units.

The development of these organizational structures can take a variety of paths. First, institutional participants cited the creation of administrative units, which maintain some degree of *central oversight of the development and implementation* of online learning. For some campuses, this has not meant the creation of a brand new organizational structure. Rather, it often has meant the

reformation, reorganization, or reclassification of an existing unit.<sup>15</sup> For example, several participants noted the long and successful history of their Distance Education unit, and they viewed it as a natural evolution for that office to undertake oversight and support of online learning.

Where this type of online administrative and support unit exists, it typically resides within academic affairs and may be responsible for issues of needs assessment, marketing, student support, registration, budget, and contract management. Only in a few cases did institutional participants remark that these units were stand-alone entities or reported to technology units and/or the chief information officer.

Several institutional participants noted that a direct connection between online administration and academic affairs maintains curricular “legitimacy” and may promote wider acceptance by faculty. These participants emphasized this relationship in the following manner:

*I think that some of the barriers and concerns we have to address (include) the administrative structure of the online approach and how well that structure is integrated into the academic part of the university. Is the person in charge of online learning an integral part of the academic discussions or is that person held off at a distance because of the administrative structure or something like that?*

—Senior Academic Administrator

*[Having the online learning unit within academic affairs]...I think it just strengthens... and shows in concrete ways that the institution—at the highest levels—is supportive and views online learning as a strategic part of the institutional mission.*

—Online Learning Administrator

*But until you include online learning as a regular part of what you do in your academic program, online learning simply will be an auxiliary or by-product. It won't be something that is [central] and is directly on the same footing as everything else that you do academically on the campus.*

—Senior Academic Administrator

A second organizational path, *curriculum development*—the central element of online learning—always resides within academic affairs, colleges, and departments, according to institutional participants. Their remarks revealed that, while the design and delivery of the academic curriculum may be a collaborative effort between the academic affairs and technology divisions, decisions regarding which online learning courses and degrees would be offered follow established academic

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15 As campuses move toward more program-focused online offerings and grow enrollments, some participants reported difficulty in building up the operational infrastructure to support new online offerings. These interviewees also noted that in these cases, external entities such as accrediting bodies pushed the institution to make the structural changes in order to support this expansion.

channels for approval. Participants described common rationales for this traditional structure, including the need to uphold academic standards, to maintain quality control, and to recognize curriculum development as a core faculty responsibility. Highlighting the critical necessity of this structural relationship, a number of participant comments emphasize the relationship between faculty content control and the quality of online learning programs:

*We've been patient and now our patience is paying off. Departments are now willing to participate and are very committed to the programs they are developing. By accepting that this is departmental territory—understanding that they need to own it—I think we have much more successful programs because they are very academically driven.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*Everything we do here in online or any kind of distance learning format, we have the content approved by the related academic department. We do not do anything here separate from the academic mission of the university. I think that's important and one reason we have been successful.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*We are really concerned about making sure we have the quality courses, not necessarily the quantity. Having that specialist in instructional design can make that happen, but you strongly have to partner with the subject matter specialist so they understand it's their course, it's their content; we are just experts in putting it together to increase learning.*

–Senior Non-Academic Administrator

Lastly, as the third segment of the organizational path, the Online Commission asked institutional participants about the structure of IT support units in relation to the academic infrastructure for online learning. These respondents reported that online learning programs usually use and rely on the services of the central information technology unit, rather than providing the IT support for themselves. These services often include technological infrastructure support at the enterprise level and, at some institutions, include instructional design support at the course or programmatic level. Reporting lines and subunit responsibilities vary widely by institution, based on such factors as the overall capacity and administrative responsibilities of the IT units, as well as the scope of existing or newly formed teaching and curriculum support units.

Whether IT or academic affairs should have primary responsibility for instructional design and support in the course development phase appears to be a question open to further consideration. At some institutions, the role of the technology division in course design raised some concerns around staffing and expertise, while at other institutions it did not appear to be an issue. The majority of institutions sampled provide instructional design through academic affairs or a separate distance education unit.

# Chapter Three

## Developing Sustainable Funding Mechanisms and Allocating Sufficient Institutional Resources

In the context of this study, the Online Commission defined *institutional resources* as the combination of financial, administrative, and technical allocations made to support online learning initiatives. This broad definition and the related Institutional Interview questions attempted to capture not only the range of institutional resources but also the fluid nature of structural and financial support for online learning programs as they develop, launch, grow, and mature.

Specifically, the Commission asked Institutional Interview participants about the broad picture of budgeting for online learning, as well as the mix of resources and support available to faculty and students, based on the definition of institutional resources given above. Institutional participants described a desire to move toward more stable, reliable revenue models, which also may help bolster the ability to provide adequate resources for faculty and student support structures.

Faculty Survey results compound the complexity of this resource mix. As this report noted previously, faculty respondents believe that online courses take more time and effort to develop and deliver. Faculty surveyed also believe that, outside of technological infrastructure, institutions do not typically provide adequate incentives and support for online learning. At the broadest level, institutional participant observations and faculty respondent data together indicate that campus leaders must consider multiple approaches to institutional resource allocation, including strategies that take into account the difference between *resources needed to **start** a program and resources needed to **sustain and/or grow** a program*.

## Institutional Resources in a Constrained Environment: Orchestrating the Financial Viability of Online Learning

When asked about how their campus structures the financing of online learning, institutional participants often commented that securing and distributing financing was the most pressing issue they faced in developing and sustaining online learning programs. The Commission queried interviewees directly about program financing, with questions including: 1) How does your institution fund the development of online programs and 2) how do/did you design and implement institutionally appropriate mechanisms that enable programs to become revenue neutral or, in some instances, revenue generators?

The Online Commission acknowledges that in the current and foreseeable fiscal climate, outright funding of new programs at public institutions will be severely constrained. Nevertheless, the Commission maintains that upfront funding for online programs is essential for the development of robust strategic online initiatives. Further, institutions must provide the necessary resources to sustain and to grow established online initiatives. This ongoing need for funding holds true for institutions that are in “start up mode” or “re-start mode” with their online learning efforts, as well as for those running more mature programs.

When they spoke of resources that sparked both the development and the sustainability of online programs on their campus, many institutional participants cited external foundation or federal government grants (U.S. Department of Education Title III and V programs), state or system appropriations, and seed money from the chief academic officer’s office:

*The System office made the initial investment to develop online learning programs. ...There were dollars put upfront...costs that were fronted so this program could come to be.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*Over the last five years, we have been very aggressive about allocating general institutional support funds to the division of continual learning for the purpose of helping development of our online infrastructure. This level of support has been critical.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

One option that campuses have pursued in order to fund both start-up and ongoing delivery costs is to devise *alternative fee structures* for online learning programs. These fees may include technology assessments or altogether different tuition structures charged to students enrolled in online courses.

*Technology fees* may be charged only to online students or to all students regardless of delivery mode. These fees are used primarily to support campus-wide technology environments and related technology purchases necessary to support and grow these programs. On the other hand, special tuition structures, often termed “*e-rates*,” may be used exclusively to offset the cost of support for specific online courses and programs. These tuition structures appear to provide departments with some degree of autonomy by establishing a fixed financial mechanism for cost recovery, as well as a timely response mechanism to programmatic growth and contraction. One participant highlighted the benefits of these exclusive tuition rates:

*Any time you have a completely online program, the students pay the increased cost, and tuition dollars come back to the department. It is expensive to gear up. [Also,]...once you start online, you don't know from one semester to the next if you are going to have 30 or 300 students. However, when the word is out there and somebody does a good job marketing a program, you may be able to gear up in a hurry and have to have the funds available in order to do this. You cannot wait for the next budget cycle to do it.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

Other campuses have turned to both *intra-departmental* revenue-sharing plans and *stand-alone* revenue plans in order to sustain their online learning efforts, especially when technological and instructional design costs are supported by multiple units on campus. These revenue-sharing plans range in complexity. Some are designed to be as straightforward as “money in–money out” tuition derived from enrollment, which is returned directly to the department offering the courses. Other plans are more complex. They often involve sliding-scale schematics that reward returns on risk and complexity of delivery supported by academic departments, online learning units, or both. According to some institutional participants, risk is generally evaluated by considering financial and staff investment in development, student demand, and the potential market and/or enrollment opportunities over time. With these models, academic units usually negotiate with technical support and/or distance learning units for revenue proportionality as a part of the program development, and they review revenue-sharing agreements on an annual basis.

Interview participants also described several overarching reasons institutions select and find success with revenue-sharing models. First, participants remarked that these types of plans engage all the players in the decision-making process. As a result, everyone is accountable for, and vested in, the success of the program. Second, revenue-sharing plans localize decision making by allowing units and departments to decide how they will reinvest the money. Third, revenue-sharing models provide an empirical undergirding that makes decision making fiscally transparent.

Perhaps most importantly, given the tough fiscal landscapes that public institutions face, institutional participants viewed fixed financial mechanisms as reliable tools for sustaining online learning programs. Some campuses face huge enrollment surges and are struggling to meet demand; others are looking to offset declining traditional enrollments through online degree

offerings. Participants viewed student fees, tuition structures, and revenue-sharing plans as various means to manage the ebb and flow of organizational and infrastructure demands.

## **Institutional Resources for Faculty: Professional Support for Curriculum Design, Faculty Incentives for Development, and Policies about Intellectual Property**

Online learning programs cannot meet stated strategic goals without an engaged and supported faculty. Earlier in the report, we described several central yet unresolved issues illuminated by the Faculty Survey data. Among these critical challenges for campus leaders are:

- *Faculty view online learning as taking more time to develop and teach;*
- *Faculty have concerns about adequate support for online development and teaching; and*
- *These supports do not appear to include sufficient incentives and policies to promote the broadest possible engagement of faculty in an institution's online learning endeavors.*

In light of these findings, the Commission believes opportunities exist for campus leaders to expand their thinking about what constitutes support and incentives for faculty who teach online. The Commission asserts that faculty resources and supports must assume many forms in order to foster integrated and robust online learning programs. This need for multiple (and creative) resource and support mechanisms is especially pressing as fiscal climates become increasingly constrained, as external sources for financial incentives (such as federal and state grants) disappear, and as online learning programs mature out of “start-up mode” operations. The approach a campus takes to engage and support its faculty must be well thought out and at the forefront of institutional leaders’ thinking.

Given the centrality of this issue and its connection to successful online learning efforts, institutions need to consider the range of resources and support that most effectively encourage and sustain faculty engagement in online learning. The remainder of this chapter deals with three major resource/support issues: professional support for course design and delivery, faculty incentives for development and delivery of online content, and institutional policies concerning intellectual property.

### *Professional Support for Course Design and Delivery*

Institutional participants remarked that faculty involved in online learning usually seek the assistance of professional staff for course design and delivery. They described two different types of support units providing this help:

- *Instructional design units or centers* dedicated to assist with both curriculum *design* and technical support of course *delivery*; and
- *Comprehensive teaching and learning centers* that assist with online learning.

While both types of faculty support units offer training and instruction to faculty, instructional design units tend to focus primarily on support for online or hybrid course design.

In some instances, participants noted that the training these units provide for course development is not required by the institutions and is completed on a purely voluntary basis. In other cases, institutional participants described courses, such as tutorials or technical training, that faculty members must complete in order to prepare to teach an online course—and to be certified to do so. Participants said courses covered the use of technology applications and the development of course modules and evaluation pieces, as well as offering the opportunity to work with more experienced colleagues, sometimes called “Web vets,” through seminars and one-on-one mentoring.

Regardless of institutional requirements and scope of training, interviewees’ comments note the perceived benefits of these faculty training and course development programs, including removing the sense of isolation that teaching online might create. Some institutional participants spoke highly of these types of training processes and their impact on online learning efforts in terms of advancing institutional interests and building a sense of community among online faculty. For example:

*The (training) course builds a sense of community about the process of teaching. In teaching an online course, there may be only an instructor working with teaching assistants, but there is a whole community of faculty facing similar challenges and opportunities. This (community) becomes a resource for the faculty. In addition, the training course builds ties across units because faculty learn from faculty that they do not normally interact with. The faculty development courses not only help foster successful online teaching, but also build these ties among faculty that last for years after the training is complete.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*We cover a lot of ground in the course. A lot of faculty who take the course tell us it is one of the most valuable things that they have ever done. These benefits are not just for the online aspects, but also for how they can apply techniques and learn from other faculty, going forward to their other courses. ...They [faculty] also are students themselves in this course—so they get to experience being a student, and I think that is sort of like a ‘Eureka’ moment for them. They understand what it is like to be a student online. They even exhibit all the same behaviors students do, like they’ll be late on an assignment!*

–Online Learning Administrator



## FACULTY TRAINING FOR ONLINE TEACHING

### A Program for Beginners and Experts Alike

The University of Central Florida (UCF) has endorsed online learning as a strategic priority to increase educational access for all of its students. UCF's fully online offerings include graduate degrees, graduate certificates, and undergraduate degree completion programs, with additional programs in development. Online learning at UCF comprises three delivery modalities: (1) fully online courses where there is little or no requirement for students to be physically present on campus; (2) mixed-mode or hybrid offerings where part of the course is delivered in a traditional classroom environment and part of the course is delivered via technology; and (3) traditional, face-to-face courses that include Web-based technology enhancements to expand and improve the student experience.

UCF has established a comprehensive, tiered professional development plan for faculty who wish to teach online. This program satisfies regional accrediting requirements for online instruction and, just as importantly, ensures that the expected level of quality is included in every distributed learning course.

The first tier of UCF's faculty development program is called IDL 6543. This award-winning program presents a model to faculty users of how to design and deliver an original online or mixed-mode course using a combination of seminars, labs, consultations, and Web-based instruction. It is cohort-based and delivered to faculty in a mixed-mode format. The curriculum addresses broader technology skills, pedagogy, and logistics than other faculty development programs related to distributed learning, and it requires approximately 80 clock hours to complete. UCF's Center for Distributed Learning (CDL) collaborates with the university's academic units to select participants for IDL 6543 and provides meaningful incentives for them to complete the course. Faculty who successfully complete IDL 6543 receive a financial stipend for their participation and a laptop computer to use during their online teaching experience.

The second tier is a self-paced online program titled, ADL 5000. This program is designed to prepare faculty to deliver a course that has been previously developed by another faculty member. The purpose of ADL 5000 is to help faculty understand the design of the existing course and succeed in its delivery. ADL5000 addresses many of the important pedagogical, logistical, and technological issues involved in delivering effective online courses. The time commitment is approximately 35 clock hours, and participants may begin at any time.

The third tier is entitled Essentials. This self-paced online workshop is designed to ensure that faculty possess the basic knowledge and technical skills required to develop and deliver a traditional course that contains Web enhancements.

Once faculty have completed these development programs and begin to teach online, they are encouraged to continue to work with the UCF instructional design team on future course development. Many participants also are recruited into the role of "Web vets" who make themselves available as mentors to others who are just beginning to teach online.

#### LINKS

UCF: <http://www.ucf.edu>

Center for Distributed Learning: <http://online.ucf.edu>

Teaching Online at UCF: <http://teach.ucf.edu/>

IDL 6543: <http://reach.ucf.edu/~idl6543>

ADL 5000: <http://reach.ucf.edu/~adl5000>

Essentials: <http://reach.ucf.edu/~essentials>

Additional preparation for teaching online:

<http://teach.ucf.edu/resources/training>

In response to questions regarding faculty support, institutional participants commented on the value the faculty place on having access to good professional support, which were echoed by responses to similar areas of inquiry in the Faculty Survey. Many institutional participants, however, observed that these critical units are only able to maintain small staffs to provide both training for course design and delivery support—and this is a source of concern if demand for those services grows in the future. Nevertheless, the comments below show that institutional participants recognize the essential role of the connections between the faculty and instructional support professionals in making online programs work:

*I think the mere presence of someone who will help a faculty member walk through the process of either converting a course or developing a new course for online delivery serves as a great reassurance to faculty.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*In the past, we had what was supposed to be called an institute for instructional technology. That unit was run by an individual who attempted to initiate [online learning] courses. The unit under this individual's direction did not go as well as our current director who is a faculty member. She (the current director) is well-regarded by the faculty because she takes the faculty perspective on this development process. We saw a difference immediately between how this was initially started and then how it is being done now. It has been much more successful.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*Once faculty have started teaching online courses, they need a place, an email, a phone number, or a human being that they can go to if they have issues or problems. Otherwise, a problem that may actually be really minor may stop the flow of activities.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*Technical support, phone number and email addresses, Web forum and Listserv...I think these things are a lot more useful for faculty. At the end of the day, if something isn't working right, faculty will think--whom do I call? The support makes all the difference, and hopefully they get a timely reply and things are resolved quickly.*

–Online Learning Administrator

In light of the Faculty Survey data about the time and effort required to develop and deliver online courses, the Commission cannot emphasize enough the importance of *providing sufficient support for faculty design and delivery of online courses and programs*. Also, the Commission concurs with the views of several interviewees that any potential deficiency in or diminution of support services could have direct implications on faculty engagement and overall course and program quality. These impressions, coupled with the Faculty Survey data, reveal a critical issue for campus leaders as they consider strategies to improve online learning efforts at their institution. Participant comments highlight the crucial issue of resource allocation and support in online learning:

*An individual from another institution said, “You know, at our institution, we wrestle with quality assurance. You don’t wrestle with quality assurance at your institution because you have invested everything on the front end. You have invested in the faculty development and course development process.”*

–Online Learning Administrator

*I think it is absolutely vital to invest in staff resources—the resources and the technological infrastructure in order to make this a success. For faculty, there is nothing more frustrating than using a new technology and not having someone there whom they can talk to, who can help explain how it works that way, why it works the way it does, and really to hold their hand in the beginning until they are comfortable. The frustration levels and the trade-offs made for the benefits of using a new technology or new method are elevated in higher education settings, even more so, I think, than in other settings. I just think it is well worth the investment of people and resources to make sure that this side of it—and the technology—run smoothly.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

### *Faculty Incentives for Development and Delivery of Online Content*

The Online Commission believes that the issue of incentives is a critical unresolved policy matter on campuses that may hinder faculty engagement in online learning. Interview and survey data highlight the need to resolve this issue, whether the incentives are offered for the development of online courses or teaching online courses, or both. As the Faculty Survey data point out, a majority of faculty believe that teaching online courses is a labor-intensive process and that their institutions do not do a good job of providing incentives to compensate for this effort.

Historically, campuses have offered faculty a range of financial and nonfinancial incentives and rewards for *developing* online courses. Participants described approaches to financial incentives for developing online courses that varied widely by institution. Through the Institutional Interviews, the Commission found that many campuses have provided stipends to faculty to develop online courses, most often when the institution is in the early stages of implementing an online initiative or is seeking to generate a “critical mass” of interest among faculty. Fewer institutions provide supplementary compensation to faculty who *teach* online.

Interview data do not suggest any standard amount paid to faculty for *course development*, with respondents reporting amounts ranging from \$2000–\$7000 per course. The high stipends often were offered a number of years ago, or when the institution had secured an external grant to support online development (e.g., U.S. Department of Education Title III or V grants or state awards). When offered, stipends are commonly paid at the beginning of the course development process; in a few instances, they are paid at course completion and/or at the time of course delivery. Several institutional participants commented on their institution’s rationale for financial compensation:

*We have what I think is a fairly innovative and certainly very generous policy to recognize faculty for the extra effort it takes to design and develop a very rich learning environment for online courses. ...We give a stipend to faculty to develop the course and a stipend each time the course is taught in order to recognize the extra effort. I think this financial recognition is pretty extraordinary. I know a lot of universities that do not do this.*

–Online Learning Administrator

*I think the fee reflects an entrepreneurial standpoint. If you are going to help the university generate additional revenue, then perhaps faculty members should benefit from the additional revenue that comes in through tuition and fees.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*Initially, just about every faculty [member] teaching online received stipends because we wanted to get a critical mass going. We wanted to have some success stories to showcase.*

–Faculty and former Online Learning Administrator

*[Developing an online course] is basically the equivalent of writing a textbook. It is kind of an electronic courseware or electronic material. So just as you would draw royalties for the textbook that you might write with a publisher, so too should a faculty member draw a little bit of compensation from the electronic version of that instruction.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

Looking forward, as state and federal resources for online learning continue to decline, it may be a greater challenge to offer faculty financial incentives to participate. Given the financial realities, some institutions have turned to *nonfinancial incentives* to encourage the development of online courses. These incentives include training, course release time, or provision of hardware or software to faculty interested in developing an online course. Similarly, institutions that do not offer monetary incentives for teaching online might sometimes opt to count an online course as more than a face-to-face course when determining semester or quarterly course loads. Finally, some institutions offer faculty no specific considerations for course development or delivery. The following participant comments capture this range of approaches and the issues each represents.

*Our problem is we have a 12-credit load. We have difficulty finding time to do a lot of this innovation. Faculty have to really want to teach online, and [they] tend to be the people that already know how and are computer savvy. The people that really don't like computers usually don't get into it [online learning], so—I guess they would need release time to [be involved]...so the only problem is release time and money.*

–Faculty

*We are going to have to find other things that are perhaps not as tangible that stimulate faculty to put courses up and online. ...The only way I can see that happening is to make sure that there is time available for training and time available for development.*

–Faculty

*There is a legitimate need for faculty to have time to develop online courses. It is probably a good investment to give faculty course release time to allow them to do it.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*This [online learning] does not operate in a vacuum. You need to celebrate faculty accomplishments in online learning. It is critical to the initiative. Without providing the incentives for faculty, without rewarding them, without celebrating them, there are no pathways to action.*

–Online Learning Administrator

An additional issue concerns engaging faculty in online learning in the early stages of their careers. Time preparing for online teaching may translate into time away from preparing grant proposals and securing external research funding, which is especially critical for tenure-track faculty in a climate of constrained state resources and endowment losses. Comments from institutional participants reflect this dilemma, the barriers campuses face, and the need for resolution. In addition, some participants suggested that some campus promotion and tenure policies lag behind the teaching and curricular innovations represented by online learning. As a result, campus policies that do not expressly acknowledge these efforts may in fact discourage or serve as a barrier to entry for *junior faculty on a tenure track* who wish to teach online courses. Several participants noted:

*I see a lot of younger faculty that are very interested in online delivery. Some of them taught online while they were graduate students. I would tend to dissuade some of my folks—unless they have their research programs already up and running smoothly—because in the scheme of things, tenure decisions are based much more on research and scholarship than on the transformation of a course from face-to-face to online. I would rather younger faculty focus their time and energy getting tenure first.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*We've got so many young faculty coming in that want to develop new courses, and their chairs or the older faculty have not been real crazy about that. It doesn't play...they don't get any credit for it [online teaching] in the promotion and tenure area. They don't get any credit for their participation in distance learning activities. ...I wish I could really get that changed. ...We do mention it briefly in the criteria for promotion and tenure, but it is not encouraged and doesn't have any weight. This is a big issue for a lot of people here.*

–Online Learning Administrator

*Faculty online coursework must be respected and be held up as an exemplar of the type of work that is valued during the promotion and tenure process, or even during reappointment for individuals such as lecturers or non-tenure-track individuals.*

–Faculty

The Benchmarking Study has also revealed an apparent “disconnect” between *faculty expectations* for support and incentives and *faculty motivations* to teach online. This gap reveals an opportunity for campus leaders searching for creative ways to encourage faculty to design and deliver online courses as financial options dwindle. The Faculty Survey data indicate that incentives and support are important to faculty, though not necessarily as *motivating factors* for teaching. Rather, the Survey data indicate faculty are primarily motivated to teach online for student-centered reasons. (See Volume II, Figures 27 and 28) The fact that faculty are teaching online in spite of the weakness of support and resources indicates that they may respond to incentives that promote, enhance, and enrich opportunities to teach courses online for the benefit of students.

For example, about 61 percent of Faculty Survey respondents indicated inadequate compensation remains a real barrier to teaching online. (See Volume II, Figure 28) Yet, only 36 percent indicated that “earn additional income” is an important motivation to teach online. (See Volume II, Figure 27) This data suggests that campus leaders might explore a combination of financial and non-financial incentives to encourage faculty to engage in online teaching and development.

Adding to the conflicting data on incentives and motivation, the Commission heard from institutional participants who do not view financial incentives for course development as a long-term solution to the issue of engaging faculty in online learning. Instead, some participants suggested possible *alternative financial incentive approaches*—such as technology accounts for faculty and instituting revenue-sharing models—that could be effective approaches to gaining collective buy-in in the early stages of online implementation and maintaining levels of faculty engagement as institutional budgets tighten:

*Especially in tough budgetary times...maybe it would be possible to use the money to better effect. I would like to see the financial incentive not be paid directly to the faculty member, but rather put into an account that the faculty member could use. Faculty could use the money to upgrade their own technology, buy a new computer or a laptop for themselves, or buy some other technology that would not only make their job more enjoyable, but also improve their ability to offer online courses.*

–Faculty

*[I think a] collaborative approach would be a better model right up front, rather than the [faculty] incentives:...[D]ealing with the whole unit; dealing with the chair of the department and the dean of the college and the faculty of that program; and having all the players on board and going in the same direction and understanding the financial model and financial implications of doing what they're doing.*

–Faculty and former Online Learning Administrator



## SUPPORT AND SUCCESS WITH FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR FACULTY TRAINING AND TEACHING

### The California State University, Fresno

At the California State University, Fresno, campus efforts to support and engage faculty participation in online learning are institutionalized within *The Digital Campus*. This all-encompassing support unit was established with the assistance of a Title V grant from the U.S. Department of Education. *The Digital Campus* includes instructional designers, technology trainers, and systems and technical support and is staffed by career professionals and student assistants.

*The Digital Campus* provides *financial incentives* to faculty and ties those incentives directly to its *eScholars* training program, a project-based professional development opportunity. To receive a \$2,500 stipend, participants are required to complete training sessions and participate in online or face-to-face discussions with their colleagues. With the help of an instructional designer, they are expected to complete a project (an online course, hybrid course, media course module) and report the results of their efforts at the university's annual Conference on Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Projects completed by *eScholars* have included:

- Development of an online course
- Use of Web 2.0 tools for presenting and organizing course materials
- Production of animated presentations by the founders of Sociology (in talk-show format)
- Production of information literacy tutorials
- Captioned interviews with professional signers concerning ethical dilemmas encountered when translating between signed and spoken English.

The *eScholars* program has successfully built and expanded online faculty expertise and capacity on campus. The first cohort of *eScholars* was open to faculty members just beginning to teach online. This cohort was required to complete four Blackboard training sessions, a workshop on Universal Design (accessibility), a session on copyright, and a semester-long hybrid course with three face-to-face meetings. The second *eScholars* cohort focused on faculty members with extensive online teaching experience. The goal was to produce exemplary online instructional materials and to prepare a cadre of faculty mentors. "Education for a Digital World: Advice, Guidelines, and Effective Practice from Around the Globe" was used as the text, enhanced with relevant resources and experiences. The advanced *eScholars* explored the Blackboard Greenhouse award-winning courses and completed Sloan-C online workshops. Overall, *eScholars* have benefited from:

- The opportunity to reflect on their own teaching practices
- The direct, immediate impact of the program on their own teaching
- The opportunity to network with like-minded colleagues from other disciplines.

[www.csufresno.edu/digitalcampus](http://www.csufresno.edu/digitalcampus)

## *Institutional Policies Concerning Intellectual Property*

The Online Commission also views intellectual property policies with regard to ownership of online course content as an area of concern for public colleges and universities, in particular for those faculty members who develop course content. When asked to rank institutional support, Faculty Survey respondents rated intellectual property issues only slightly better than incentives for development and delivery and tenure and promotion issues (those two were consistently ranked average to below average). (See Volume II, Figure 29)

Intellectual property also was one of the ten “areas of inquiry” explored in the Institutional Interview portion of this study. Across the subset of institutions that engaged in this discussion, there is no common practice, nor does one appear to exist across the higher education community. However, it does appear that institutions are generally *unlikely* to provide ownership rights to faculty who develop online courses. The comments of some institutional participants who were faculty members suggest there is concern on some campuses:

*If a person spends a tremendous amount of time in terms of developing an online course, even though they are paid under a university contract during the time that they are working on the course, it would seem to me that we need to do a better job of creating a greater benefit for that individual in terms of the intellectual property of the course.*

–Faculty

*As time has gone on and online offerings have become more important to the university, some departments have encouraged teams of faculty members to develop online courses. And, when this development takes place, it becomes a little bit more unclear who has ownership of the online courses. Speaking from the faculty [perspective], I think faculty members are pretty adamant in their belief that if they develop a course, they should have ownership of that course.*

*My suggestion—and what I think is really important—is [that,] before any course is offered, there must be an a priori decision as to who’s going to own that course. ...I think if there is this kind of “prenuptial agreement” about who owns the course, I think it would avoid a lot of problems and it [the agreement] would make both the faculty and the administration feel a lot more comfortable.*

–Faculty

How might campus leaders tackle the issue of intellectual property, given the apparent dissatisfaction with current practice that the study revealed? In an effort to strike a compromise on this issue, some campuses have moved toward a joint ownership model that gives both the institution and the faculty member intellectual property rights. As one institutional participant described it:



*The rationale behind choosing a joint ownership model is that we really wanted the faculty member to take ownership of the course, and because we were paying for it, we wanted to have access to the course if the faculty member left. ...This model seemed to be a win-win for everybody.*

–Faculty and former Online Learning Administrator

Yet even under a joint ownership model, institutional leaders may need to consider the possibility that a faculty member might develop an online course or specific learning object or media module that could be marketable. In the intellectual property agreement, some kind of allowance might be made for that possibility, whereby the university would pay for continued use of the teaching elements if the faculty member commercialized the course or left the institution.

### *Institutional Resources for Students*

The Online Commission considers student support services to be another key resource that fosters the stability and success of online learning initiatives. The Commission asked a variety of institutional participants, including some students enrolled in online learning programs, to describe the range of services offered to online students. The participants described these services, and in some cases offered their perspectives about the *quality* of a variety of academic and technical support services.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding academic support, institutional participants remarked that some campuses assign each online student one academic advisor who remains with that student throughout the course of his or her program. Students who were interviewed for this study and who were enrolled in institutions using this approach expressed satisfaction with it. One student went so far as to state that she found the consistency and knowledge of her online learning advisor superior to prior experiences with face-to-face advising:

*Advisors were responsive. ...If I had a question, they were quick to answer it, quick to get back to me on the telephone—all the time—they're almost always available—if not through telephone, then via email. It is very nice. Yes, my advisors are much better, more helpful, more responsive, and more knowledgeable. I have had other advisors [at residential institutions] who were not helpful and did not know the curriculum plans...and [were] very condescending. ...My advisors here have just been very consistent with what they have told me. They have gone out of their way to help me.*

–Online Student

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16 Institutional [student] participant comments reflect individual perspectives and experiences. The Commission acknowledges that these observations are drawn from a small group of students and may suggest the need to examine further student experiences with academic and technological support in online learning. For additional information, also see [www.sloanconsortium.org](http://www.sloanconsortium.org) for more topic-specific references about online learning, quality and student support.

## THE CENTRAL ROLE OF STUDENT SUPPORT COUNSELORS AND ACCESS TO STUDENT SERVICES

### Tennessee State University

Student academic and support services are a key component of the Tennessee State University (TSU) distance education (DE) program. Student support counselors are assigned to assist both undergraduate and graduate DE students. The role of the counselor is to ensure the process for entering the program is seamless and to act as a liaison to admissions, financial aid, health services, and other appropriate university departments. The counselor also works closely with the academic units and the assigned faculty advisors.

Student support service counselors ensure that students enrolled in TSU online or Regents Online Campus Collaborative (ROCC) courses receive academic, admission, and financial advising via email, telephone, or face-to-face appointments. The role of a student support service counselor is to:

- Evaluate students' readiness and learning styles for online learning
- Monitor students' academic progress
- Assist with financial aid packages and scholarships
- Provide counseling about programs of study
- Inform students of available student services, program expectations, program costs, and the university's academic policies and procedures
- Disseminate university communications via email, mailings, and the student portal.

TSU DE students are provided information on available student support services by email, direct mailings, via the TSU DE Web site, the DE tab in *MyTSU*, and direct contact with student support service counselors. A hyperlink to a listing of available student support services is embedded in each *eLearn@TNSTATE* course. Prior to the start of each semester, the Office of Distance Education and Multimedia Services hosts an orientation session for students and faculty who are registered for TSU online courses. (Notification of this event is sent to students via email and published on the TSU Distance Education Web site and the Distance Education tab in *MyTSU*.) Students enrolled in online courses for the first time are required to participate in this orientation to become acquainted with the modality of instruction and meet participating online faculty. The session covers information regarding access to the TSU e-learning environment, proper login procedure, course communication, netiquette, and general participation expectations within the virtual classroom. Students learn about all of the TSU student support services available for the distance learner.

Students who are unable to attend the face-to-face orientation have access to an online tutorial and student support services information. Within the framework of each course, communication tools such as email, discussion boards, instant messaging, and chat forums are used so students may interact asynchronously with faculty and other students. TSU and ROCC Online faculty are advised to adhere to the referenced teaching and learning standards and maintain constant communication with students throughout the semester.

<http://mytsu.tnstate.edu>  
<http://elearn.tnstate.edu>

Another student gave equally high marks to her advisor:

*I have been completely satisfied. ...It [the advising] is pretty much as close to real time as you can get, considering it is online. ...My advisor is really helpful and his advice is great. We do teleconferencing. I know him by name. I tell him what my needs are, my interests. He has a good idea of what is available for me, what prerequisites I need, and things of that nature. We sit down and knock it out. He is on top of it.*

—Online Student

In addition to advising online, many faculty members hold virtual office hours. Student interviewees remarked that they are often quite comfortable contacting professors electronically to ask questions, and virtual office hours help them “speak” with faculty at consistent, pre-set times. One student described the level of accessibility as more immediate and more open than a face-to-face setting:

*[Faculty are] really accessible, yes. They all listed office hours. In one class in particular, I was there probably every other week. And then online, well she [my instructor] always made herself available. The other professors I had—I don’t know that there was ever a time that I did not email that I didn’t get a response in 24 hours. They always responded and also gave us a heads up and said, “I will not be available for the next four days.” I think that they are more accessible than a traditional professor.*

—Online Student

Like students, faculty participants interviewed for this study commented on their own efforts to be accessible and to stay in contact with students in order to discuss academic matters by both phone and email. This observation is congruent with Faculty Survey data, in which over 80 percent of respondents indicated they are motivated to teach online because of the benefits—such as access and flexibility—it offers students. (See Volume II, Figure 27)

For technology support, students receive assistance primarily from “help desks.” These IT resources are usually dedicated to aiding students with technical difficulties in both online and face-to-face classes/programs. Like academic support services, students noted general satisfaction with the help desk services at their institutions. The one drawback that both students and faculty cited was the limited hours of operation. Often the desk was only open until the evening and sometimes was not open at all on weekends. Generally, student and faculty participants commented that the help desk should be open longer or ideally should operate 24 hours a day.

Finally, comments by institutional participants highlight the fact that campuses need to be continually identifying improvements needed in the delivery of student services, especially as programs grow and mature. As one interviewee noted, their campus struggles to keep up with these needs, especially when online learning programs and services are decentralized:

*We really have very limited services for students online, which has been one of the major challenges for us in the past. Every department that has created distance learning courses has had to provide [its] own student services. And, you cannot grow distance learning programs this way.*

–Online Learning Administrator

Some campuses use routine student satisfaction survey data to identify needed improvements to online student orientation, student advising, and overall accessibility of such services. In some instances, institutions have responded by moving toward centralization of services offered to online students. This centralization seeks to tether the academic, administrative, and technical services so students have a seamless encounter across campus support units.<sup>17</sup> A few institutional participants noted that this bundling of services is one of their institution's best practices in the effective delivery of online learning programs:

*One thing we are doing really well is that “one-stop shop” for students. We have really made an effort to advocate for and be available for these online students. We have a service center. ...We do our best when they give us a call for whatever they may need with registration, advising, etc. And I mean just one phone call; they only have to call one place and they don't get a lot of passing around.*

–Online Learning Administrator

*I think the other thing that we do very well here is that we tie our student services in with the online class. Students are not only enrolled in the class, but they have the support services in case they do have problems with their technology,...don't receive things correctly, ...have trouble with an exam, and so on. I think in order to make online learning work well and give the student a quality experience, not only does it require dedicated faculty, it requires dedicated staff to help a student with their problems if they have a need.*

–Online Learning Administrator

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17 A few participants noted that technology transitions may impede online course development and student support. Specifically, interviewees cited the frustration some faculty and students may experience when particular courseware is shifted or changed, especially on campuses where specific courseware is mandated. On the other hand, some campuses do not mandate the use of one specific courseware application, and this might create technical hurdles for students taking online courses across departments.

# Chapter Four

## Forging Strong Institutional Leadership and Effective Communication

For most institutions, launching online learning courses and programs represents a significant cultural and operational challenge. Online learning has the capacity to alter an institution's administrative decision-making processes and structures, as well as its methods and modes of teaching and learning. As with any large-scale change—especially one that requires the enthusiastic engagement of faculty—a critical and ongoing task for campus leaders is to provide effective *leadership and communication* of institutional plans and decisions.

The Online Commission asked institutional participants to describe and characterize the role of senior leadership on their campus, the means by which university leaders communicate messages to the campus community about online learning, and the substance of those messages. This chapter explores the perceptions and experiences of institutional participants regarding these issues and offers a few instructional insights for campus leaders.

### Front and Center: The Institutional Leadership Imperative in Online Learning Initiatives

On one level, the data from this study indicate that the development of online learning programs should not be rocket science for seasoned campus administrators and faculty leaders. Skills such as planning, organizing, curriculum development, budgeting, and communication are already in the toolkits of most administrators and organizational units within the academy.

So what makes online learning such a unique and challenging organizational endeavor, and perhaps more difficult to implement as a strategic initiative on campus? Are there other ways in which campus leaders can contribute to or promote the success of online programs?

Many Institutional Interview participants said a key element of successful online initiatives was the strength of the campus leaders' commitment. In particular, many participants noted that

active support from the president and chief academic officer are *essential* ingredients to making online learning programs work. For example:

*I think if we are going to do online learning, I think we need the backing of the president. I think we need the full backing of the provost. I think that their buy-in certainly ensures the rest of the university's buy-in and support in creating these courses and degree programs.*

–Faculty and former Online Learning Administrator

*I think the role of central leadership is key. ...It needs to come from the provost level, if not the presidential level. Clearly, the provost has to see this as important for the university, has to believe that it presents a good alternative to the traditional classroom, and has to believe that students can get a great education through online modes.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

Participants who considered their institutions' online activities successful often said their campus leaders possessed a number of critical skills that were instrumental to launching and integrating online learning into the academic and administrative fabric on campus. These skills included the keen ability to recognize and articulate the value of online learning, relate it to campus mission, and seize organizational changes and planning as opportunities to solidify institutional commitment to online learning.

## **Chief Communicators and the Message: The President and the Chief Academic Officer**

Institutional participants commented on the central role of communication at every stage of the design, implementation, and in some instances revision of their institution's online learning initiative. Further, they emphasized the importance of repeated messages from the president or chief academic officer about the role and connection of online learning to the overall academic mission.

Numerous participants indicated that clear and supportive messages from senior campus leadership contributed significantly to success in introducing and adopting online learning at their institution—and some noted that the absence of these messages, including transparency of goals and policies, hindered the endeavor. Participants also stressed the need to garner constituent support (i.e., deans, chairs and faculty), so it was important that the president and/or chief academic officer be the primary messengers:

*It is really important that the provost send the message [to the academic officers, the deans and departments] that online learning...has become a priority for us [the university]...so we need collectively to put our energy and our knowledge into it.*

–Senior Academic Administrator

*I think it is a critical necessity to have strong leadership from the top down in order to successfully engage this [online learning] from a strategic standpoint. We constantly discuss online learning throughout the academic year. We express our support for online learning every chance we get so people know that we are strongly committed to the success of our online learning programs.*

–Chief Executive Officer/Governing Board member

Institutional participants also noted the importance of the medium as well as the message: *How* the campus leaders delivered their message could affect the success of their communication. Communication delivered in the form of directives or executive fiat was considered ineffective. Participant comments indicate that senior leaders are more effective if they couch online learning as a *strategic asset* that has the capacity to help the institution meet specific opportunities or challenges. For example, at some institutions, the campus leaders’ strategic plans and statements articulate how online learning is another form of teaching and learning, is part of the campus mission of serving student needs, is a means to reach populations thus far underserved by the institution, etc.

Conversely, attempts to implement online programs could be hampered or jeopardized if the message is not a nuanced and positive one, or if it alienates faculty by leaving an impression that they are being directed to teach online. Finally, senior leaders appear to be more effective when they serve as the cheerleader or champion for the program by articulating institutional direction rather than becoming involved in the day-to-day implementation or operation of online learning.

## Integrating Online Learning: Clear Communication with Faculty

On the operational level, the *role of the messenger* and the *message content* appear critical to integrating and implementing online learning programs, especially for the curricular architects of online learning, the faculty. At those institutions where implementing online learning represents a fundamental culture change, it could be useful to identify and enlist a respected faculty member with experience teaching online to be a “messenger” and help assuage some faculty concerns about the role and impact of online learning at their institution.

The Commission further believes that the *content of the message* relayed by campus leaders could be tailored so it resonates with faculty, spurs an open dialogue about online learning, and results in broader faculty engagement. Tailoring the message will require campus leaders to examine the faculty population at their own institution, asking basic questions, such as what are faculty perceptions about teaching online and which faculty are currently teaching—or not teaching—online courses (see sidebar).



## LEADERSHIP/FACULTY DISCONNECT

### Who Is Actually Teaching Online Courses?

Interview participant observations and Faculty Survey data reveal a possible “disconnect” or misperception between the faculty and administrators regarding the identity of faculty who have taught or are teaching online.

Some interview participants noted the apparent reluctance of senior faculty to engage in online learning:

*[Online learning] is a harder sell when you are dealing with senior faculty...Whatever we can do to improve the information and knowledge and exposure for senior faculty may open up greater opportunities in terms of distance education.*

—Faculty

*I think the senior faculty need to have greater exposure to online learning, while at the same time protecting the integrity of the academic quality of courses. They need to be able to understand the value [of online learning] and how academic integrity can still be protected.*

—Faculty

However, Faculty Survey data indicate that even the most senior faculty (those with more than 20 years' experience) report teaching online at rates similar to those of their junior counterparts. (See Volume II, Figure 6)

For example, Faculty Survey data indicate that faculty—even those who have developed and taught online courses—still believe that online learning outcomes do not match the outcomes for face-to-face courses. Messaging from the leadership might be most effective if it can address common faculty perceptions as well as reported faculty rationales for teaching online:

- Online learning will *not* replace face-to-face learning;
- Online learning will *not* make faculty irrelevant;
- The institution is committed to maintaining the integrity and quality of its academic offerings regardless of whether they are delivered in person or online; and
- Online learning offers faculty and students more access and flexibility.

These messages provide yet another chance for campus leaders to tie the message of online learning back to the broader campus academic mission and purpose.

Some institutional participants observed that faculty enthusiasm for online learning could be dampened if it is separated in some ways from central academic operations. For example, when online course revenues are budgeted and collected through a completely separate process



from regular university funds, that procedure may reinforce the perception that online classes are somehow “different” from face-to-face teaching. Planning or advisory committees should consider this distinction, especially as institutions move to be revenue neutral with online learning and/or institute the financial mechanisms described earlier in this report.

Finally, several institutional participants cited the advantages of direct and intensive communication with faculty. They said that, especially in the early stages of implementing an online learning initiative, communication should be “close up and personal,” with leaders engaging in a sustained internal recruitment, marketing and/or orientation effort that includes extensive face-to-face contact with individual faculty members. Also, this direct communication may help the leadership to better understand some of the faculty perceptions about online learning.

*The most important part of online learning is the structure that supports an online learning community so that those folks bond and [also] bond with the university. When this structure and community work, it makes a marvelous experience for the students, the staff and the faculty. When it doesn't work...nothing quite goes right.*

–Faculty

*To be honest, we got so little help from the institution [at first]. We have pretty much been doing things on our own. But that has changed. The institution has acknowledged online learning programs by establishing an office, putting someone in charge who is proactive, reaching out to people, supporting us, and really, really putting the weight of the university behind it.*

–Faculty

## **Integration into the Academic Structure: Additional Communication Issues**

The Online Commission's interviews revealed several additional communication issues that may surface during the complex process of integrating online learning into the academic structure. Respondents noted that it is important to understand that the choice of *who* communicates information depends on the type of information and the particular circumstances. Study participants said that, at least in some circumstances, the online administrative unit or advocate communicating directly with the faculty could convey certain information (e.g., changes in policy or procedures) more successfully than the office of the dean or the department chair.

Another communication issue deals with reporting structure—where the institution places online learning. For example, the Commission repeatedly heard about the importance of placing the administration of online learning within the chief academic officer's purview to integrate it into the mainstream of the academic life of the institution. Some participants described situations where the existence of multiple reporting structures—e.g., academic affairs and either

information technology or a separate distance/continuing education unit—hampers the smooth integration of online programs into the existing academic structure. This bifurcation may create problems regarding who has “jurisdiction” when a particular issue arises, what level of attention the office of academic affairs will pay to programs not under its direct purview, and how to resolve questions of workload and compensation when courses are administered through separate units at the same institution.

Another way to integrate online learning into the academic structure may be through the language of employment contracts: To include expectations about online learning in position descriptions and contracts for future faculty hires. Administrators at more than one participating institution indicated an interest—even desire—to do this. However, judging from interview participant comments about incentive issues, this does not appear to have been done at many institutions. This is an area that should be further explored. It could be a source of increased momentum in the growth of online learning.

# Chapter Five

## Dispelling Myths, Raising Questions, Creating Opportunities for Dialogue: Potential Strategies for Campus Leaders

To this point, the substance of this volume has been drawn primarily from the 231 Institutional Interviews the Online Commission conducted across 45 four-year public colleges and universities, with several additional observations from the Faculty Survey included where relevant. This chapter will explore in more depth areas where the experiences of the institutional participants differ from the views of faculty as reported in the Faculty Survey, and whether those areas of divergence present opportunities for campus leaders and administrators to more fully engage faculty in online learning at their institutions.<sup>18</sup>

The Commission highlights these issues below and offers potential directions and strategies for campus leaders.

### **1. Campus leaders need to better understand the characteristics of the online teaching populations on their campus and use communication strategies that target and engage all faculty members.**

The common perception is that teaching online is of most interest to, and most likely to be done by, younger faculty who have taken online courses themselves or are more familiar and comfortable with technology. However, data from the Faculty Survey suggests that this is false.

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18 A detailed analysis of the Faculty Survey data is contained in *Volume II: A Paradox of Faculty Voices: Views and Experiences with Online Learning*.

Individuals with the least amount of teaching experience (0–5 years) appear to be least engaged in teaching online courses when compared with more experienced faculty. In contrast, senior faculty (20 plus years of experience) are teaching at rates equivalent to the rest of the faculty (those with 6–19 years' experience). (See Volume II, Figure 6) There is a stark contrast between this data point and interview participant observations that, at least on some campuses, engaging the more experienced senior faculty in online learning remains a problem. Further, Faculty Survey data also indicate that a significant majority of faculty believe that developing and delivering an online course requires more effort than a comparable face-to-face course. The more experienced faculty hold that view most strongly. (See Volume II, Figure 23)

Given what may be a real gap in grasping the participation levels and needs of more experienced faculty, the Commission recommends that campus leaders and administrators consider all faculty members as potential online instructors and communicate with them accordingly about the role of online learning in achieving institutional goals and missions. The Commission also encourages campus leaders to provide the resources necessary to make it as easy as possible for faculty at all levels of experience to engage in online learning.

## **2. Campus leaders should maintain consistent communication with all faculty and administrators regarding the role and purpose of online learning programs as they relate to academic mission and academic quality. Further, campus leaders, administrators, and faculty must all work together to improve the quality—or perceived quality—of online learning outcomes.**

Faculty Survey data reflect continuing *hesitancy and skepticism* about online learning. For example, when asked about learning outcomes, less than a third of faculty replied that online courses are the same as or superior to traditional face-to-face environments (See Volume II, Figure 24). Those numbers improve among faculty who have designed or delivered an online course, representing a small majority of that segment.

However, the Faculty Survey data point to potential opportunities for institutional leaders as they communicate the purpose and role of online learning on campus, or as they develop and/or revise strategic plans. For example, *in spite of concerns about quality*, more than one-third of all faculty surveyed are teaching or have taught online. Furthermore, about 57 percent of faculty surveyed who hold reservations about online learning outcomes (believe it is “somewhat inferior”) have recommended an online course to a student or advisee, and more than 80 percent of faculty who have developed or taught—or are currently teaching—an online course have recommended online to their students. (See Volume II, Figure 25) Perhaps even more telling is data indicating

that more than 40 percent of those faculty who have *never* engaged in online teaching have still recommended an online course to their students or advisees. (See Volume II, Figure 25)

Data from the Faculty Survey indicate that faculty believe online learning serves students' needs which, coupled with the willingness of a significant portion of the faculty to engage in online instruction, appears to provide the foundation for a dialogue among campus leaders, administrators, and faculty on ways to improve the quality of learning outcomes from online courses. This dialogue should move beyond "perceptions" and focus on the direct assessment of the learning outcomes associated with online courses. The Commission encourages the campus community to initiate, if not accelerate, this conversation.

### **3. Campus leaders have the potential to expand faculty engagement by better understanding what motivates faculty to teach online.**

As campus leaders consider faculty views about the effort required to design and teach online courses and about learning outcomes and quality, they might examine what *motivates* faculty to teach online. The data indicate that the primary motivations for faculty to engage in online learning are student-centered. Respondents to the Faculty Survey cite "meet student needs for flexible access" and "best way to reach particular students" higher than any other reason, including earning additional income. (See Volume II, Figure 27)

The Commission did not ask institutional participants directly about faculty motivations for teaching online. However, interviewees consistently spoke in terms similar to those in the Faculty Survey about the advantages of online learning for students and faculty, frequently citing: 1) the flexibility online instruction provides to students in terms of access and delivery; and 2) the flexibility it provides to faculty, including the ability to respond to student needs outside of instructional time and the ability to teach while away from campus. This apparent confluence of views on the motivations and advantages for faculty could provide fertile ground for messages and strategies that will increase faculty engagement in online teaching and learning.

### **4. Campus leaders and faculty governing bodies need to regularly re-examine institutional policies regarding faculty incentives, especially in this era of declining financial resources. Perhaps most importantly, campus leaders need to identify strategies to acknowledge and recognize the additional time and effort faculty invest in online, as compared to face-to-face, teaching and learning.**

The Commission's conversations with interview participants and the Faculty Survey data reveal that faculty identify significant barriers to teaching online that may be directly related to their dissatisfaction with *incentives* provided for developing and teaching online courses. Both institutional interview participants and Faculty Survey respondents believe that developing and teaching online courses requires considerably more time and effort than traditional delivery modes. Compounding this time/effort investment, some interview commentary indicated dissatisfaction with campus promotion, tenure, and course release time policies that fail to reflect the time investment, curricular expertise, and technical innovations that online faculty contribute to the institution's online initiatives.

In addition, interview participants and Faculty Survey respondents raised concerns regarding other incentives, such as intellectual property and direct financial payment for course development and teaching. There was no consensus on how these issues should be resolved. The Commission believes, however, that these matters remain issues for discussion on campuses where leaders perceive a need or faculty have identified an area of concern. Given the complexity of faculty incentives and the importance of incentives to an online program's growth and success, the Commission encourages campus leaders to engage in a robust dialogue on these topics.

Finally, the Faculty Survey results indicate that faculty members overwhelmingly believe it takes more effort to develop and teach an online course than a comparable face-to-face course. This view is held across every classification of faculty—and is felt most strongly about developing an online course. (See Volume II, Figure 21) Coupled with this data, comments by institutional participants indicated a level of frustration on the part of faculty that their institution does not acknowledge the greater investment of time and effort that online courses require. In addition, for faculty responding to the survey, “earning additional income” was of considerably less importance than other factors as a “motivator” to engage in online education. What these findings suggest is that campus leaders and administrators must acknowledge and recognize—if not celebrate—the time and effort element and put in place some visible strategies (policies, programs, or procedures) to address this issue. While financial issues remain important for faculty, creative approaches could combine these with such nonfinancial incentives as course release time, workload considerations, technological support, and promotion and tenure and intellectual property policies that might encourage more faculty participation in online learning.

### *Concluding Comments*

Online learning is another mode of teaching and learning that, when employed strategically, has assisted A•P•L•U members and other institutions in addressing issues of access, retention, completion, and other priorities directly related to institutional missions. The progress that public colleges and universities have made in online education has made them the leading providers of online courses and degrees. As a result of this innovation, online learning now is embedded in

the fabric of public higher education. Yet, while demand for online learning continues to accelerate, concerns persist that these institutions are not fully prepared to take strategic advantage of online to meet continuing challenges, such as access, retention, and completion.

Through its work of the past two years, the A•P•L•U-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning has attempted to engage presidents, chancellors, and other campus leaders in viewing online learning as a strategic asset and to provide them with appropriate and useful implementation tools. We have no illusions that this is an easy task. Online learning represents major changes to the traditional conduct of our institutions across all areas of administration, instruction, professional development, finance, and student support. We are hopeful, however, that the information contained in the two volumes of this report will promote robust dialogue on campus that leads to thoughtful and collaborative development, implementation, and continued growth of online courses and programs at public colleges and universities across the country. This report clearly demonstrates that there is much to discuss and that there are many areas ripe for further investigation regarding the state of online learning at public colleges and universities.

# Appendix A

## A•P•L•U-SLOAN NATIONAL COMMISSION ON ONLINE LEARNING

### Membership List

**SUSAN C. ALDRIDGE**, President, *University of Maryland University College*

**CARRIE L. BILLY**, President and CEO, *American Indian Higher Education Consortium*

**GEOFFREY L. GAMBLE**, President, *Montana State University*

**CHESTER GARDNER**, Special Assistant to the President, *University of Illinois Global Campus*

**JOEL HARTMAN**, Vice Provost, Information Technologies and Resources,  
*University of Central Florida*

**MELVIN N. JOHNSON**, President, *Tennessee State University*

**BRUCE R. MAGID**, Dean, International Business School, *Brandeis University*, Co-Chair

**JAMES B. MILLIKEN**, President, *University of Nebraska*

**M. DUANE NELLIS**, President, *University of Idaho*

**MURIEL K. OAKS**, Dean, Distance and Professional Education, *Washington State University*

**RISA I. PALM**, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, *Georgia State University*

**MARK PARKER**, Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs,  
*University of Maryland University College*

**MICHAEL RAO**, President, *Virginia Commonwealth University*

**ROBYN RENDER**, Project Director and IT Strategist, *Nevada System of Higher Education*

**SAMUEL H. SMITH**, President Emeritus, *Washington State University*

**SAMUEL H. "PETE" SMITH**, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs,  
*University of Texas at Arlington*

**JAMES D. SPANIOLO**, President, *The University of Texas at Arlington*

**KENNETH UDAS**, Chief Executive Officer, *UMass Online*

**JACK M. WILSON**, President, *University of Massachusetts*, Chair

**ROBERT J. SAMORS**, Associate Vice President for Innovation and Technology Policy,  
*A•P•L•U*, Project Director



# Appendix B

## Institutional Interviews: List of Participating Institutions

Auburn University	Purdue University
Boise State University	San Jose State University
Bowling Green State University	South Dakota State University
California State University System	Southern Illinois University
California State University at Chico	Tennessee State University
California State University at Fresno	University of Central Florida
California State University at Fullerton	University of Maine
Central Michigan University	University of Maryland Baltimore County
Clemson University	University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Florida A&M University	University of Memphis
Fort Valley State University	University of Michigan
George Mason University	University of Montana
Granite State College (NH)	University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Idaho State University	University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Kent State University	University of North Texas
Michigan Technological University	University of South Dakota
Middle Tennessee State University	University of Southern Mississippi
Montana State University	University System of Georgia
Northern Arizona University	University of Texas at Arlington
Northern Illinois University	University of Washington
Oakland University (MI)	Wichita State University
The Pennsylvania State University	Wright State University
Portland State University	

# Appendix C

## Summary of Institutional Interview Design and Methodology

### Study Purpose

In the spring of 2008, the A•P•L•U-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning convened a steering committee to design and to implement a national Benchmarking Study. The Commission established the study's overarching goal as identifying the key factors that contribute to successful strategic online learning programs at four-year public colleges and universities. In order to support this goal, the Commission outlined a two-pronged approach that included: 1) institutional interviews in which researchers conducted a series of interviews of a select group of campus administrators, faculty, and students engaged in online distance education; and 2) a national, cross-institutional survey of faculty, both those teaching and those not teaching online.

The Commission viewed the focus on A•P•L•U institutions as fitting for an examination of online learning because A•P•L•U member institutions closely match many of the characteristics of institutions that have the most extensive experience with online education, represent the greatest online enrollments, and represent the greatest potential for future growth. According to the Sloan-C 2008 Annual Survey, "the evidence from this and previous reports has demonstrated that it is the public institutions that are in the lead when it comes to online offerings. They began their programs earlier and have the greatest current enrollments, so it is no surprise that online program penetration rates are highest among these public higher education institutions. Public institutions have online program penetration rates considerably higher than other types of institutions in virtually all of the discipline areas."<sup>19</sup>

### Study Design

The Commission and A•P•L•U leadership sent an initial invitation letter and fact sheet (Appendixes D and E) to the presidents/chancellors and chief academic officers of 95 A•P•L•U member institutions. The Commission's initial selections targeted those A•P•L•U institutions that had the characteristics of the "Engaged" category of the Sloan-C Online Learning Framework.<sup>20</sup> This category

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19 Allen, I.E. and Seaman, J. *Staying the Course: Online Education in the United States*, 2008. <http://www.sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/index.asp>.

20 Allen, I.E. and Seaman, J. *Online Nation: Five Years of Growth in Online Learning*, 2007. [http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/online\\_nation](http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/online_nation).

was not a strict inclusion criterion, however, as the vast majority of A•P•L•U-member institutions would be classified as “Engaged” or “Fully Engaged” using this classification scheme. The Commission added a few additional A•P•L•U institutions beyond those initially invited. The Commission also formed a steering committee, comprised of a subset of its members, to oversee the study.

As a condition of participation, the Commission required each campus to designate an individual (“campus contact”) to serve as the campus liaison with the Benchmarking team. Once the overall study cohort was finalized, the Commission’s research team conducted a preliminary interview of each campus contact to learn more about the institution’s current online learning activities, areas of strengths and weakness, and what the campus hoped to learn from and/or contribute to the study. The researchers took notes and prepared campus “briefs” for the steering committee to review. The goal of this phase of the study was to identify common themes that could be used to frame the subsequent Institutional Interviews.

In April/May 2008, steering committee members and research staff reviewed, analyzed, and discussed the campus briefs and identified six critical issue areas for investigation:

- Faculty Incentives
- Student Life Cycle Support
- Strong Leadership
- Assessment and Outcomes
- Financial Models
- Technology

## Institutional Sample

Since time and budget constraints made it impossible to interview personnel on all 45 campuses about each topic, the Commission asked each institution to identify those areas where it felt it had the most relevant positive or negative experiences—and was prepared to discuss publicly.

Accordingly, the steering committee developed an initial “campus questionnaire” (Appendix F) designed to further refine the issues of most interest within each thematic category, as well as to determine which institutions would be the best subjects to interview in particular areas. The research team compiled the responses from the campuses according to each theme or sub-theme and provided that information to the steering committee. Over the course of two lengthy telephone conference calls, the committee and staff finalized both the specific “areas of inquiry” and the cohorts of institutions for each area. The “areas of inquiry” and noted sub-areas were:

- Faculty Incentives
  - Financial Support and Intellectual Property Agreements
  - Nonfinancial Support and Incentives
- Student Life Cycle Issues
- Senior Administration
  - Strong Central Leadership
  - Reporting Relationships
- Academic Quality and Effectiveness
  - Orientation
  - Assessment
- Administrative and Financial Models
  - Structure
  - Development and Sustainability
- Technology

The steering committee constructed cohorts of five to seven institutions in each of the ten “areas of inquiry” to provide the greatest possible breadth of institution type, level of engagement in online learning, and potential value of the contribution the institution would make to the study (i.e., unique or exemplary practice or experience).

Subsequently, the steering committee and research team designed “interview protocols” or “guides” for each of the ten areas of inquiry. The interview protocols ranged from 7 to 13 questions each and were designed to provide a level of focus and consistency across the interviews conducted within each area of inquiry.<sup>21</sup> Several external reviewers with extensive experience in the development and administration of online learning activities at four-year public institutions critiqued the guides. The steering committee and researchers made modifications to the interview guides based on the input of these external reviewers.

## Interview Sample and Interview Data Collection Process

Once the interview guides were complete, the research team contacted each campus by email requesting that the institution participate in the cohort of the specific area of inquiry. The response was 100 percent affirmative. The email also included a brief description of the area of inquiry and the text of the institution’s response to the initial Campus Questionnaire relating to that area of inquiry. Researchers then developed the institutional sample using a convenience sampling technique based on two primary reasons. First, site contacts expedited the data collection process given the time constraints and size of the intended sample. Second, site contacts were proximate informants with direct and knowledgeable access to potential participants, the institutional setting, and its history with online learning.

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21 Interview protocols can be found at <http://www.aplu.org/netcommunity/onlinelearning>.

Researchers asked site contacts to identify four to eight individuals (administrators, faculty, students, etc.) who might best address the specific issue. For example, in the category “Senior Administration: Strong Central Leadership” the suggested list of interviewees included president/chancellor, chief academic officer, senior administrator for online distance learning, faculty leadership (senate, assembly, etc.), and chair of governing board, if possible. The campus contact provided the names and contact information of each person to be interviewed to the research team member responsible for the specific area of inquiry. A•P•L•U staff and research team members communicated with these individuals to schedule interviews. Institutional Interviews began in mid-July 2008 and concluded in mid-January 2009. In total, the interview sample comprised 231 interviews with one or more institutional representatives. The interview pool included statewide system leaders, campus presidents, chief academic officers, technology officers, academic and non-academic administrators, distance learning administrators, information technology and instructional design professionals, deans, department heads, faculty, and students.

Researchers scheduled each interview for 30 minutes, but some interviews lasted 20 minutes while others lasted up to one hour. Prior to the interview, researchers read each participant a statement outlining the project, its intents and purposes, the known risks, and the researcher safeguards. A sample statement is attached as Appendix G. Researchers activated digital recordings of each interview, and a professional transcription service provided both written and audio transcripts of the interviews to A•P•L•U. Researchers reviewed one initial interview transcript with the transcription service to clarify process and thoroughness. Transcribers were instructed to, and provided, word-for-word transcriptions of each interview. Researchers also took notes both to confirm and to review the content, as well as to back up the interview data in case the recording failed—which occurred in only three instances.

All interviews were semi-structured. Researchers utilized the interview protocols described above. Each area of inquiry protocol had 7 to 13 open-ended questions. These questions were designed to be guideposts for the conversations. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences and discuss the facets of online learning that were unique or particularly relevant to their campuses.

Throughout the interview process, the research team convened weekly conference calls to discuss the process and emerging themes and to troubleshoot technical and process issues as necessary. Each researcher conducted interviews in two to four areas of inquiry.

## Interview Analyses

Once researchers had completed the Institutional Interview process, they began to read through the transcripts, initially to gauge the substance of the answers in light of the questions asked. Each researcher constructed notes both internal to and external to the transcripts regarding concepts and issues that were repeated across interviews. In addition, researchers noted issues raised by

interviewees that fell outside of the questions asked, reviewed internal campus documents when available, and confirmed interview data with participants.

The research team discussed transcript reviews and initial findings on weekly calls, which included the principal Faculty Survey researcher. Following a preliminary analysis of the transcripts, each member of the research team submitted to the research group 15 to 20 broad, frequently used concepts or issues raised by interviewees.

Researchers undertook a multi-phase textual analysis of the interview transcripts in order to gain a better understanding of where particular concepts were included in interviews that were primarily targeting another topic (e.g., where a discussion of budget issues would also include a discussion of faculty support structures). First, researchers created a frequency list of all terms used in the interviews, both an overall list for all interviews and a list for each major question topic. Second, based partly on these lists and largely from review of interview transcript content, researchers derived a list of themes and issues most frequently stated or referred to in the interviews. Third, these themes were used to produce a set of Key Word in Context (KWIC) lists for each major topic area, using both the specific wording of the theme and the root words. Finally, researchers used these lists to quickly locate portions of other interviews that discussed the same or similar topical areas. These lists were not, however, used to conduct a direct text analysis of each individual transcript.

Research team members created a preliminary summary of the key findings by pooling the analysis and input. They presented the summary to the steering committee in late January 2009 and to the Online Commission leadership in early February 2009. Both the Steering Committee and the Commission leadership approved the general construct of the report.

The body of the report and the observations contained therein are based on a detailed analysis of the transcripts and reporting material. In addition to notes taken on the transcripts, researchers compiled selected quotations from interview participants according to the conceptual themes outlined in the first four chapters of this report. Researchers identified these quotes as relevant to a particular theme and as potentially useful illustrations of a specific idea, practice, or experience common to at least several interviewees within an individual campus and/or across multiple institutions—often encompassing several different “content areas.”

As the research team proceeded through the drafting and review process, researchers analyzed and re-analyzed the transcripts to confirm observations and identify any inconsistencies and potentially important issues raised by the report review team. Researchers convened weekly conference calls post-data collection and throughout the drafting of the report. Researchers consulted the steering committee via conference call on a regular basis, and the steering committee reviewed multiple drafts of the final report.

Researchers also contacted participants regarding the use and review of excerpted transcript data. Each participant had the opportunity to review and comment on the quotes. Participants were not identified by name, title, or institution. The research team developed a generic rubric of titles according to administrative and academic responsibilities. These titles and number of participants<sup>22</sup> in parentheses include:

- Chief Executive Officer/Governing Board member (11)
- Senior Academic Administrator (Provost, Dean, etc.) (101)
- Senior Non-Academic Administrator (CIO, Business, Finance, Budget) (22)
- Online Administrator (Responsibility for Online Programs, Support, Delivery, etc.) (59)
- Faculty (37)
- Student (6)
- Former Senior Academic Administrator (1)

## Study Validity and Data Set Limitations

Researchers used campus screening data to devise the interview questions and participant interview data and campus documents where available to support any observations made about the issues surrounding online learning. Given the scope and size of the study data sets, researchers did not attempt to extend observations or conclusions beyond this (i.e., relating the study findings to a broader theory or generating working propositions or hypotheses about the phenomenon).

## Comparability Across Data Sets

Researchers only compared the two data sets with regard to issues related to faculty support and engagement. Researchers cited the descriptive data identified by Faculty Survey respondents that held the potential to shed light on the observations made in the Institutional Interviews. Where appropriate, researchers highlighted both faculty survey and interview data that pointed to unresolved issues that might be ripe for consideration by campus leaders and could be the subject of further academic study.

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22 The Online Commission conducted a total of 231 Institutional Interviews, but some individuals were interviewed in more than one area of inquiry.

# Appendix D

## Benchmarking Study: Letter of Invitation

March 17, 2008

Name

Title

Institution

Address

Address

Subject: Request to Participate in NASULGC-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning  
*Benchmarking Study of Selected NASULGC Institutions*

Dear:

The NASULGC-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning would like to invite your institution to participate in an important benchmarking study to identify the key factors that lead to “successful” strategic online programs at public colleges and universities. The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation is underwriting the project, so *there is no direct cost for your participation, other than, of course, the work necessary to prepare the appropriate material. Information on participation follows:*

To date, much of the research regarding online learning has focused on the questions of “what are campuses doing” and “why are they doing it.” There has been little attention to the question of “how do campuses with successful online programs organize themselves” (revenue/business models, organizational structure, faculty incentives/support, etc).

To begin to answer this question, the Commission is inviting selected NASULGC members to be part of a groundbreaking initiative that will use both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the plans, objectives, strategies and attitudes of the senior academic leaders at participating campuses. Interviews will document the range of institutional approaches that have been the most successful in the strategic uses of online courses and programs. Special attention will be paid to the barriers that had to be overcome and the strategies used to do so.

A second aspect of the study will be the first detailed cross-institutional examination of faculty experiences, attitudes, and beliefs towards online learning conducted in the United States. This will build on the long history of Sloan Consortium campus constituent surveys. Faculty represents a major constituency that is critical to building a high-quality online learning program.



Both national studies and single-institutional examinations have demonstrated that faculty attitudes are critical to the success of any online learning program. There is, however, a large vacuum of reliable information on the exact nature of faculty attitudes and their influences. The Commission will work with your institution to ensure that all surveys meet your institution's IRB requirements.

The expectation for participating institutions is that they provide information on the objectives, strategies and operations of their online activities, facilitate access to key decision makers, endorse the project, and encourage participation by key academic administrators and the faculty.

### *Why participate?*

1. Participating institutions will influence the topics addressed in the study. The first phase of interviews will guide the development of the research agenda for the project.
2. Participating institutions will receive a full external analysis of their own institution's online strategy, using a proven standardized approach, and receive an institution-specific report.
3. Participating institutions will be able to view their own results in comparison to those of their peers. You will be able see how you are the same and how you differ.
4. Participating institutions will gain access to successful approaches being used by their peers to address common issues and problems.
5. Participating institutions will be able to identify key contacts at peer institutions who are dealing with issues that are similar to their own—and perhaps to share experiences and build relationships that will be helpful in the long-term.

Additional details of the project are provided in the attached fact sheet. We urge you to consider joining this important effort. A response form and return envelope are enclosed. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Bob Samors at NASULGC at 202-478-6044 or [rsamors@nasulgc.org](mailto:rsamors@nasulgc.org).

Sincerely,

Jack Wilson,  
Chair  
NASULGC-Sloan National  
Commission on Online  
Learning  
President, University of  
Massachusetts

Bruce Magid,  
Co-Chair  
NASULGC-Sloan National  
Commission on Online  
Learning  
Dean, International  
School of Business  
Brandeis University

M. Peter McPherson,  
President  
NASULGC, A Public  
University Association

cc: Chief Academic Officer

# Appendix E

## Benchmarking Study: Fact Sheet

### Project study universe

- Representative group of NASULGC institutions with any form of online learning activities (fully online, blended, hybrid, etc.).

### Participation requirements

- Willingness to provide in-depth and broad-based information on objectives, strategies and operations of the institution's online activities. (See Confidentiality Policy below.)
- Willingness to identify and facilitate access to key decision makers and administrators at the institution. This would include the president, chief academic officer, and additional individuals as appropriate for each institution.
- Willingness to endorse the project and encourage participation by key academic administrators and the faculty.
- Willingness to share information with other participating benchmarking institutions, subject to the project's confidentiality policies.
- Specific activities include:
  - Provide guidance on which topics related to online learning the institution would find the most interesting and useful.
  - Identify the key academic leaders to be interviewed as part of the project. Those being interviewed will be provided in advance with a list of topics, with the interviews scheduled at their convenience.
  - Agree to telephone interviews of these key academic leaders (up to a half-hour in length). The institution will provide the contact information of those to be interviewed and will endorse the study.
  - Agree to provide access to faculty members for a short (about 5 to 10 minutes) online or paper-based survey. The institution will endorse the study and undertake its best efforts to encourage as wide faculty participation as possible. The Commission will work within each institution's IRB guidelines; the survey can be conducted online or paper-based, administered either externally by the Commission or internally within the institution. Ideally, this survey would be provided to all faculty, but the commission will work with participating institutions to make the most appropriate arrangements for each case.

**CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY:** No institution-identifiable information will be provided to anyone outside of the benchmarking group without the express permission of the participating institution. Individual interview transcripts will not be shared outside of the Commission’s research team. Reports released to the wider community will use only aggregated data and “sanitized” references to individual institutions, unless the participating institution and/or individual provides advance approval.

## Deliverables

- Full profile of all collected data for each institution
  - Summary of key issues identified in the interviews.
  - Presentation of survey results in a standard format.
  - Comparison of institutional results to those collected study-wide.
  - Participating institutions only—individually-identifiable information is not shared with anyone outside of those participating in the project. Full interview transcripts are not shared outside of the Commission’s research team.
- Summary report of results
  - Overall patterns across all institutions
  - Focus on the key findings
  - Wide distribution, to both those participating in the project and those in the broader higher education and education policy community.
- Topic-specific reports
  - Short reports highlighting key findings
  - Driven by specific results
  - It is assumed that three to four topics will emerge, one of which will be faculty-specific
  - Wide distribution, to both those participating in the project and those in the broader community.

## Timeline

- Recruit and educate (March)
- Define key issues for study, begin interviews (March–April)
  - Telephone conversations/structured interviews with key contacts at each participating institution. These will be short calls, used to outline the scope of the project, identify the key individuals at the institution, determine the institution’s objectives for participating, and establish next steps.
- Data collection (April–June, with most ending by May)
  - Telephone interviews of key contacts at each participating institution.
    - Each interview of approximately one-half hour in length.

- Interviewer will work from a standardized, structured questionnaire.
  - Interviews will be recorded and then transcribed.
  - Selection of those to be interviewed should cover areas of responsibility that include:
    - Objectives and planning
    - Offerings and enrollments
    - Financial
    - Faculty support/incentives
    - Administrators, Technology support and others—Only if required based on topics that arise during the initial interviews.
- Surveys of both those interviewed and faculty members at the participating institution.
  - Two types of surveys:
    - The “numbers”—offerings and enrollments for the institution over a number of years
    - Short (5 to 10 minutes) survey—addressed to faculty members.
  - Institutions will be offered multiple options for the faculty surveys; online or paper-based, administered by the Commission or directly by the institution, so the institution can select the approach that best matches its culture and IRB requirements.
- Data assembly and analysis (Beginning as data is collected in April, completed by August)
- Site visits to conduct in-depth analysis of specific issues—limited in scope and duration; only if necessary
- Report creation (September–Mid-November)
  - Create overall analysis and summary report based on all data collected (Master Report—to be presented at NASULGC Annual Meeting, November 9–11, 2008).
  - Use Master Report as a model for the creation of a unique report for each participating institution to include:
    - Results from the surveys and interviews for that institution
    - Summary data from all institutions for comparison
- Release of topic-specific reports and further outreach efforts. (December 2008–June 2009)

# Appendix F

## Benchmarking Study: Campus Questionnaire

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN TO BOB SAMORS ([rsamors@nasulgc.org](mailto:rsamors@nasulgc.org)) or complete online at [www.sloan-c.org/survey/](http://www.sloan-c.org/survey/) BY C.O.B. Wednesday, June 11, 2008.

### Introduction

Thank you again for volunteering to participate in the NASULGC-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning Benchmarking Study. Based on the preliminary interviews we recently conducted with each participating institution, we have identified six major thematic areas that we will explore in greater detail over the next several months: Faculty Incentives and Support; Student Life Cycle; Senior Administration Leadership and Support; Academic Quality and Effectiveness; Administrative and Financial Models; and Technology in Online Learning. Now, we need to identify those institutions whose experiences and perspectives in each of the thematic areas could provide valuable guidance to the broader higher education and online community.

To help us realize that goal, please complete the following questionnaire by identifying the two or three specific thematic areas in which your institution could make the most significant contribution, based on its experiences (positive or negative). We are seeking *exemplary best practices or hard-learned lessons* that will be widely disseminated across the higher education and online learning communities. We are not able to explore every institution's experience in each of the thematic areas, so we ask for your assistance and guidance in identifying those areas where you feel your institution could make the most significant contributions. We will conduct in-depth, follow up interviews with selected administrators and faculty regarding each issue area during the summer.

Please return the completed questionnaire to Bob Samors at [rsamors@nasulgc.org](mailto:rsamors@nasulgc.org)—or complete the questionnaire online at [www.sloan-c.org/survey/](http://www.sloan-c.org/survey/) C.O.B. on Wednesday, June 11, 2008. We plan to begin follow up interviews shortly thereafter. Please feel free to contact Bob Samors at the email address above or (202) 478-6044 if you have any questions.

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

## Faculty Incentives and Support

The online learning environment brings a host of new and existing faculty issues to the forefront. The ability to “capture” the backbone of a delivered course and offer it repeatedly brings along the opportunity to access new populations but also concerns for many faculty and departments regarding who “owns” the course, the content, the right to teach the course, and even faculty in-class requirements and how a faculty member is evaluated. We are seeking to identify “best practices” across a range of faculty-related issues and across a range of institutional contexts (e.g. unionized faculty, existing policies on IP, and your staffing structure for full and part-time faculty).

Do the experiences of your institution (positive or negative) in the areas of **faculty incentives, content ownership, faculty training and development, expectations and evaluation** offer lessons and insights that might be of value to other campuses/systems? If so, please provide a brief description.

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## Student Life Cycle Issues

Online courses and degree programs have allowed institutions to reach out to and serve student audiences that differ from those typically found on residential campuses. Although there are signs that this pattern is changing, many universities still report that it is the older, working adult who is most likely to take advantage of the convenience (in terms of both time and place) of online education opportunities. Universities with active online programs have had to develop and implement new types of services and processes for this student body. The Commission is interested in your institution’s experiences with online student services and issues. Specifically, we would like to examine the following issues: adjustments to marketing/recruitment strategies based on the characteristics of a new type of student; provision of student services such as registration, advising, financial aid, and library resources to online students; adjustments to service delivery toward students who are more likely to study part-time and therefore take a longer time to complete academic programs; practices regarding student retention and success in the

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

online environment; and verification of student identity and the administration of proctored examinations and other issues specific to technology-mediated education.

Do the experiences of your institution (positive or negative) in areas related to **student life cycle** offer lessons and insights and that might be of value to other campuses/systems? If so, please provide a brief description.

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## Senior Administration Leadership and Support

The most successful utilization of online learning as a strategic tool by a college or university is often—but not always—a product of strong leadership and support from senior campus leaders, including the Provost and President or Chancellor. An additional factor may be the reporting relationship that exists between those responsible for the institution’s online program and the institution’s senior leadership. The Commission would like to explore the relationship between senior leadership support, reporting relationships and the overall “success” of online programs at various types of institutions.

Do the experiences (positive or negative) of your institution in **developing and/or capitalizing on strong central leadership** in online offer lessons and insights that might be of value to other campuses/systems? If so, please provide a brief description.

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Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Do the experiences (positive or negative) of your institution regarding the **reporting relationships** surrounding online learning offer lessons and insights that might be of value to other campuses/systems? If so, please provide a brief description.

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## Academic Quality and Effectiveness

There are significant differences between traditional face-to-face and modern technology-mediated higher education. The techniques that make a faculty member particularly successful and effective as a face-to-face instructor are not necessarily transferable to the online environment. Course design and development must be driven by the exigencies of the particular delivery technology chosen by an institution. Successful online learning is not intuitive; students require certain specific skill sets in order to succeed and get the most benefit from online courses. Finally, the assessment of student learning outcomes in the online environment poses specific challenges to institutions. The Commission is seeking insights into effective approaches related to the quality of online courses and programs, specifically: providing specialized training and orientation programs for new online faculty and students; and the assessment of student learning outcomes in online courses, and how such assessment differs from that of face-to-face courses.

Do the experiences (positive or negative) of your institution regarding the **training and orientation of faculty and/or students** new to online learning offer lessons and insights that might be of value to other campuses/systems? If so, please provide a brief description.

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Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Do the experiences (positive or negative) of your institution regarding **the assessment of learning outcomes** in online courses (and how that compares to face-to-face offerings) offer lessons and insights that might be of value to other campuses/systems? If so, please provide a brief description.

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## Administrative and Financial Models

Campus online learning initiatives often pose real challenges to existing administrative and financial structures. These new programs challenge traditional methods of course development, tuition structures, revenue flow, and in some instances, intra-institutional financial planning. As a result, institutional success may hinge on the ability to centralize or realign administrative structures and resources in order to expand institutional capacity and meet the evolving demands inherent with on-line learning programs.

Do the **administrative and structural** experiences (both positive and negative) of your institution offer particular models or specific insights that might be of value to other campuses? If so, please provide a brief description.

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Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Along those same lines, and perhaps interconnected, has your institution's approach to **funding the development and sustainability** of online learning resulted in outcomes (both positive and negative) that might offer guidance to other campuses? If so, please provide a brief description.

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## Technology in Online Learning

Engagement in online learning has required the alteration of course delivery, assessment, and management in several ways. Online learning technologies can be employed to deliver course content, to enhance specific course content, or to improve the administrative dimensions of course management. The Commission is seeking to learn how institutions have integrated online learning technologies into the teaching and learning process, and as an accepted means of educating students. What technologies have your institution adopted, how are they supported, and how do you measure the success of the resulting technology-enhanced or technology-mediated learning opportunities that result?

Do the experiences (positive or negative) of your institution regarding the **implementation of online technologies in teaching and learning** offer lessons and insights that might be of value to other campuses/systems? If so, please provide a brief description.

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PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN TO BOB SAMORS (rsamors@nasulgc.org) or complete online at [www.sloan-c.org/survey/](http://www.sloan-c.org/survey/) BY C.O.B. Wednesday, June 11, 2008.

# Appendix G

## Institutional Interviews: Introductory Script

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in the NASULGC-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning benchmarking study on online learning.

The Commission was established in April 2007 and has conducted several surveys of Presidents and Chancellors on the strategic use of online learning. The Commission determined that while much of the research to date regarding online learning has focused on the questions of “what are campuses doing” and “why are they doing it,” there has been little attention paid to the question of “how do campuses with successful online programs organize themselves.”

To answer those questions, the Commission is conducting a cross-institutional study to identify the key factors that lead to “successful” strategic online programs at public colleges and universities. Based on preliminary interviews and a questionnaire recently completed by the participating institutions, we have identified six major thematic areas that we will explore in greater detail through in-depth interviews with key administrators, faculty and others at select campuses over the next several months.

**(Institution name)** has been selected for the interview phase in the area of **(title of topic area)**.

This interview will take approximately 30 minutes. I will first read a brief statement of the question we are trying to answer and then ask you a series of questions—most of which are designed to encourage open-ended responses. In addition, I will ask you a final broad question designed to solicit your view as to the **best** feature of **(institution name)**’s online distance learning program.

While online learning covers a wide range of activities—including distance learning by off-campus students, blended learning and other uses of online technologies in teaching and learning—the focus of this study and this interview is primarily on **online distance education**. Other variants of “online learning” will hopefully be the subject of future studies conducted by other researchers.

A summary report of the data collected in this study will be presented at the NASULGC Annual Meeting in November, and detailed reports on each topic area will be prepared and distributed in early 2009.

This study has been funded and supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and is conducted by researchers at NASULGC and the Sloan Consortium. This conversation is being recorded and will be transcribed for further analysis.

All responses will be held in strictest confidence and at no time will respondents be identified by name. We are seeking the highest level of candor possible so that other institutions may benefit from the experiences—positive or negative—of **(institution name)**. Only aggregated data are reported, no individual responses are released.

No individual responses will be shared with personnel within your institution or any other organization, nor will they be used for any other purpose. There are no known risks associated with participation, only the researchers will have access to the data.

I am happy to answer any questions about the Commission or the study. Do you have any questions?

Let's begin.....I will now begin to record our conversation. You will hear a couple of clicks and then silence, but you have not been disconnected, so please do not hang up. I will be back on the line in 15-20 seconds.

—end—









1307 New York Avenue, N.W., Suite 400,  
Washington, D.C. 20005-4722  
[www.aplu.org](http://www.aplu.org)



630 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2550  
New York, NY 10111  
[www.sloan.org](http://www.sloan.org)