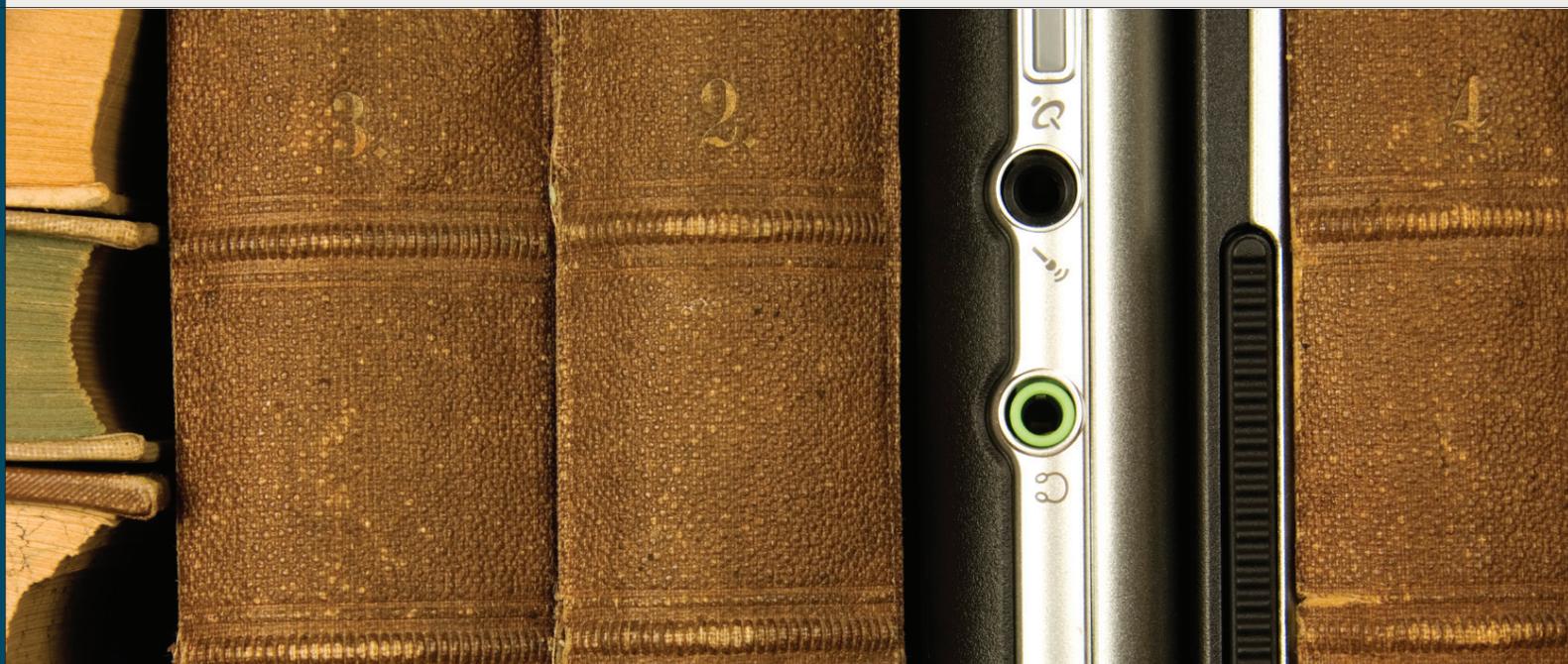


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STATE U ONLINE

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NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION AND EDUCATION SECTOR

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DeVry University’s advertising campaign is a deliberate appeal to the American Dream. One commercial for the university’s Keller Graduate School of Management begins with images of adults trying to balance their personal obligations with being a student—a mother comforting her baby while reading and highlighting a textbook, a woman studying during her commute on a packed bus, a man taking online courses on his sofa late at night. By the end, a graduate boards an elevator that is presumably taking her to a new and better future. She smiles confidently as the voiceover declares, “Because your moment is now. Let nothing stand in your way.”

Online learning has become a permanent fixture of post-secondary education—approximately 32 percent of all postsecondary students in the United States took at least one online course in 2010.¹ Many for-profit colleges have jumped at the opportunity online learning provides to reach more students. The University of Phoenix, with more than 300,000 online students, is now the largest accredited university in America.²

But the nation’s public higher education system—the two-year colleges and four-year universities that educate the large majority of all college students—has been visibly slower to embrace the potential of online credentialing.

But the nation’s public higher-education system—the two-year colleges and four-year universities that educate the large majority of all college students—has been visibly slower to embrace the potential of online credentialing. Many of these institutions were founded with a mission to serve their citizens, including those unable to attend in residence. Traditionally, this was done through a combination of extension services, correspondence courses, and other means. Yet even as the technological means to achieve this goal reaches new heights, many public universities are shying away from the challenge.

At a time when educational credentials are more important to individual and collective prosperity than ever before, stu-

dents need online courses and degree programs that are effective, affordable, and grounded in public values.³ This report includes an in-depth analysis of how public universities are contending with the challenges and opportunities of online education. It finds that state institutions have tremendous untapped potential to grow enrollment, increase revenues, contribute to economic development, and fulfill their historical missions—if they adopt a series of policies that a few innovative states and public higher-education systems have already pioneered.

To understand why more public institutions haven’t moved as quickly into the virtual world, it helps to begin with similar historical attempts to provide distance education. While the technologies of online learning are new, the underlying conflicts and challenges of serving students at a distance are anything but—indeed, some of them are older than the nation itself.

The Seeds of Distance Education

In 1728, one of the first known advertisements for a correspondence education course appeared in the *Boston Gazette*:

Persons in the Country desirous to Learn the Art [of shorthand], may by having the several Lessons sent Weekly to them, be as perfectly instructed as those that live in Boston.⁴

But it wasn’t until a major advance in information technology that these courses became widespread. That advance was the invention of the U.S. Postal Service, an accessible, reliable, publicly supported network for transmitting information over long distances.

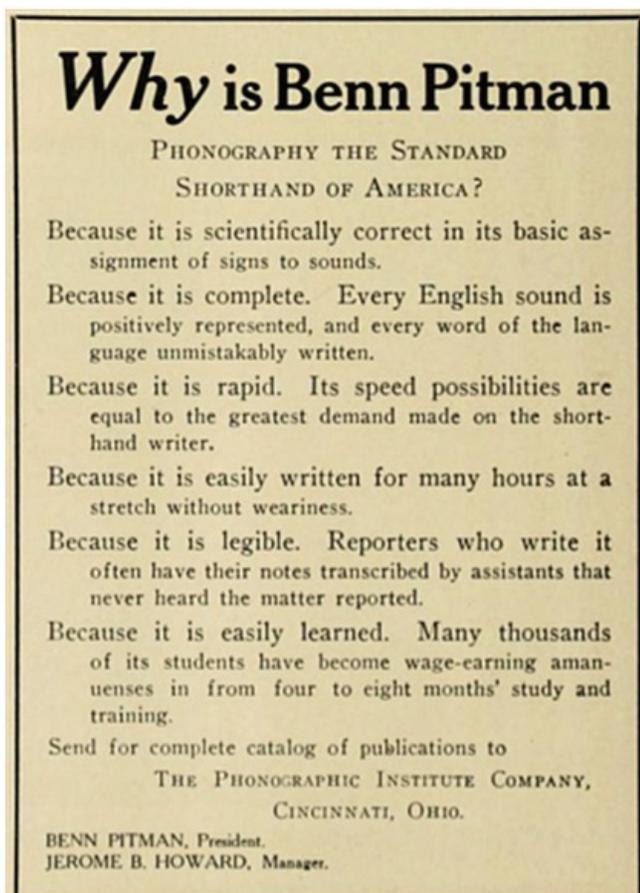


Image 1: Copy of Advertisement from *The Business Journal* from September 1910. Image Source: Zaner-Bloser Penmanship Collection, University of Scranton.⁶

One correspondence training program, Pitman Shorthand, became so widely used that it single-handedly brought advanced stenographic practices to the United States.⁵ Adapting a shorthand correspondence “Penny Post” course taught by his brother, Isaac Pitman in England, Benn Pitman sent postcards with instructions to students on how to transcribe written passages from the Bible into shorthand, which they would then send back to Pitman for correction. Pitman eventually founded a large provider of correspondence courses, the Phonographic Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio (see Image 1, above).

Commercial, skills-based courses like Pitman remained the most common form of distance education until the passage of the federal Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862. This law led to the rapid development and growth of state universities with missions to increase access to both the liberal arts curriculum and the scientific study of agriculture and mechan-

ics.⁷ As universities opened their gates to more people, those still prohibited from or unable to attend colleges or universities, such as women, began to seek out their own educational opportunities through distance education.

In 1874, Illinois Wesleyan University became the first university to offer college-sponsored correspondence instruction as part of the operation of the traditional university. Bishop Samuel Fallows, the president of Illinois Wesleyan University, made correspondence instruction a part of the existing university structure, lending it name-brand recognition. His hope was that “non-resident” degrees would bring educational opportunities to those adults who were precluded from collegiate course work because of personal and financial obligations.⁸

Even though the correspondence program became popular among students, Illinois Wesleyan’s own board and faculty soon questioned the quality of nonresident instruction and whether it could equal that of resident teaching.⁹ The program collapsed in 1911 because of quality concerns from the newly formed regional accreditor, the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (NCA). NCA and Wesleyan officials were unable to come to consensus on how to ensure quality. That spelled the end of the program.¹⁰

But while Illinois Wesleyan failed in its first foray into distance education, other institutions saw potential. Two Midwestern universities, the University of Chicago and the University of Wisconsin, were determined from the outset to cultivate their correspondence programs to nurture the strong roots necessary for sustainable growth.

The Extension System: The Universities of Chicago and Wisconsin

William Rainey Harper, a prominent professor of Hebrew at the Baptist Union Theological Seminary in Chicago and one of the founding fathers of New York’s Chautauqua summer and correspondence schools, met John D. Rockefeller in 1886.¹¹ Impressed by Harper’s energy and his ideas about reinventing undergraduate education, Rockefeller gave him what amounted to a blank check to found, build, and create the University of Chicago (see Image 2, page 3).¹²

With strong financial support from Rockefeller, Rainey Harper was able to establish the university in three



Image 2: John D. Rockefeller, front left, and William Rainey Harper, front right, at the cornerstone-laying ceremony for Hitchcock Hall at the University of Chicago in 1901. Photo Credit: Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.¹⁵

parts: the University Proper, University Publication, and University Extension.¹³ The University Extension housed a large correspondence program whose goal was to reach a diverse range of students, including those preparing for college, those unable to pursue continuous resident study, high school and college teachers looking for further training, businessmen looking for professional development, and clergymen.¹⁴

As a well-regarded academic, Harper was able to foster the growth of correspondence instruction and lend validity to the University Extension. But after his death in 1906, prominent critics launched a full-fledged attack on distance education. Noted economist and Chicago faculty member Thorstein Veblen was among them. As the father of the theory of “conspicuous consumption,” Veblen argued that individuals purchased highly conspicuous goods and services to publicize their wealth and increase their social status.¹⁶ It is unsurprising, then, that he viewed the goal of democratizing higher education as “frills to please and deceive an ignorant public,” given the status afforded to college-degree holders.¹⁷

While correspondence instruction at Chicago was eventually pushed aside, Harper had managed to put it on the

radar of progressive state university leaders looking to increase access to their institutions. The University of Wisconsin took note of Chicago’s program and proceeded to develop one of the nation’s most important extension programs, going to great lengths to connect its academic activities to local communities through an intense public outreach effort known as “The Wisconsin Idea.”

Born from the progressive policies of Wisconsin Governor Robert LaFollette and University of Wisconsin President Charles Van Hise, and developed further by Charles McCarthy in a book of the same title, “The Wisconsin Idea” extended the university’s reach to the boundaries of the state.¹⁸ Previously, distance education in Wisconsin had been under the purview of mostly for-profit providers. McCarthy believed public universities should take a strong role in providing distance education. “Private correspondence schools must make a profit while the state may be satisfied with a profit of improved conditions...” wrote McCarthy in 1912. “When the state enters into this field the private enterprise cannot long remain a competitor.”¹⁹

Under the leadership of Van Hise, who had been a lecturer at Harper’s University of Chicago, Wisconsin’s University



Image 3: E.L. Luther, representative of the Agricultural College and extension agent for the University of Wisconsin, 1912. Photo Credit: University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives #25-1323.²¹

Extension was significantly enhanced. Prominent professors were dispatched on lecture tours within the state, and Wisconsin residents were encouraged to enroll in correspondence programs through the university (see Image 3, above).²⁰

But like Chicago's, Wisconsin's extension ran into internal trials almost immediately. This time the debate was over curriculum. William Lighty, head of the Correspondence Study Department, believed strongly that everyone had the right to pursue the classic liberal arts curriculum and chose to elevate that curricular agenda above the vocational study of agriculture and dairy farming. This ideology ran counter to the direction that the head of the extension, Louis Reber, wanted to take.²²

Students voted with their feet. As an agricultural powerhouse, the university had attracted many Wisconsin residents who were looking for courses to improve their farming and dairy skills. As a result, a high proportion of students enrolled in vocational courses, and these courses elevated the popularity and ensured the sustainability of Wisconsin's extension system, which still exists today, with more than 40,000 students enrolled in credit-bearing course work and more than 100,000 in continuing education.²³

A pattern was emerging. The idea of college education at a distance continued to attract adherents. It made particular sense in a sprawling, striving nation. But its relationship with traditional, place-bound universities was tenuous and uneasy.

Still, with steadfast, well-regarded advocates and the establishment of the National University Extension Association in 1915, distance education through public universities began to gain traction.²⁴ And as the nation entered a period of rapid advancement in communications technology, the idea gained the potential to reach a much larger number of students.

The Increased Use of Technology for Distance Education

The first half of the 20th century saw the rapid advancement and use of radio, television, and other new communications technologies that were soon employed to improve the breadth and quality of distance education. Students listened to or watched recordings of a lecture, read an assigned text, completed assignments, and mailed them to their instructor for correction.

But in 1964, a more comprehensive approach to distance learning emerged in the United Kingdom. With no com-

munity college system to provide access to a growing middle class, Great Britain's higher-education system experienced intense growing pains. The solution was to provide an open-access "university of the air[waves]" with very few mandatory in-person course sessions. Thus, British Open University (BOU) was established in 1969 and became one of the first successful stand-alone, degree-granting distance-education universities in the world not affiliated with another university (see box: The Development of British Open University, below).²⁵

Educators and policymakers in the United States took note of BOU's success as an innovative way to provide broad access to a bachelor's degree and beyond. But America's system of accredited open-access community colleges and hodgepodge of distance and extension programs prevented the "open" university from taking a strong foothold in the American higher-education market. BOU imitators like North American Open University and Campus Free College failed.²⁶ One new university that borrowed heavily from the BOU model did manage to carve out a place for itself and still exists today—Empire State College, part of the State University of New York.

By 1978, the computer had become another tool that distance-education providers used to communicate with

students. At first, it was used in much the same way as previous technological advancements like the radio and television, as just another method to communicate and disseminate information.

But with the growth of high-speed telecommunications networks and changes in the federal regulations that governed distance-education programs, a new generation of distance learning emerged—one in which a virtual university was feasible (see box: A Timeline of Distance-Education Regulations, page 8). Not only could students communicate in real time with their instructors and peers, but now they could also access textbooks, course materials, lecture videos, even student services like advising through a digital platform known as a Learning Management System (LMS)—all at a place and time of their convenience. By the late 1990s, technology had advanced to the point where its impact on the nature of learning was no longer one of magnitude, but of intention. Modern online courses weren't just the old Pitman correspondence courses transmitted at the speed of light. Their richness and pedagogical complexity could rival—and even surpass—what students receive on campus. (See Appendix B for examples of today's online courses.)

New educational ventures popped up in all market seg-

The Development of British Open University

Founded under the direction of the Labour Party, British Open University (BOU) opened its "doors" to students in January 1971. As the first open-admissions university in Great Britain, BOU did not have any prerequisites. Instead, students were required to take two foundation courses before moving on to the higher-level course work that would lead to a bachelor's degree. Most of BOU's lectures were delivered via well-produced, late-night TV programming that became famous on BBC. Lectures were supplemented by independent work with BOU tutors (known as "Associate Lecturers") and at residential schools. As enrollments and demand increased, BOU added graduate degrees, including opening a separate Open Business School in 1983.³³

Always at the forefront of using technology to reach students, BOU was teaching with computers as early as 1986. BOU has consistently used its resources to develop high-quality learning tools for students, from online tutorials to virtual microscopes to learning platforms that lower the barriers to communication between course instructors and students. As the Open Education Resource movement has taken hold, BOU has stood by its open-access mission, providing many of its resources free of charge to a global audience via OpenLearn (www.open.edu/openlearn).³⁴

OpenLearn has already had more than one million unique visitors since its inception, and BOU remains one of the largest universities in the world with over 250,000 students.³⁵ BOU ranked ahead of both Cambridge and Oxford in terms of student satisfaction, according to the 2012 National Student Survey.³⁶

Table 1: Total Enrollments in Online, College-Level, Credit-Granting Distance-Education Courses at 2-Year and 4-Year Title IV Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions

Institutional Type	Total Distance Education Online Enrollments	Percent of Online Enrollments
All institutions	9,357,810	
Public 2-year	3,875,200	41%
Nonprofit 2-year	11,000	<1%
For-Profit 2-year	69,120	<1%
Public 4-year	2,451,400	26%
Private 4-year	1,371,960	15%
For-Profit 4-year	1,626,030	17%

Source: Data from Table 5 in *Distance Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions: 2006-07*.³⁰

ments: from Columbia University’s launch of the Fathom consortium (including the Universities of Michigan and Chicago); to the unveiling of Cardean University, a for-profit/nonprofit collaboration to provide high-cost/high-prestige online business education; to the development of Western Governors University, a competency-based online program. Not to be left out, Princeton, Yale, and Stanford collaborated on an online effort known as AllLearn. Even public universities and colleges banded together, pooling their resources to create “Virtual College and University Consortia” (VCUs), including the SUNY Learning Network and Minnesota Virtual University.²⁷

But the dot-com bust of the early 2000s deflated some of the enthusiasm and capital that had funded new e-ventures.

But the dot-com bust of the early 2000s deflated some of the enthusiasm and capital that had funded new e-ventures. By the mid-2000s, many had either failed or had to adjust models, going through multiple transformations to keep up with a changing market. Despite this, the thirst and expectation for online education remained, both from distance-education students and from traditional students who wanted flexibility to combine online course work with face-to-face instruction. Many of the public virtual consortia broke apart to build up their own campus-based models to individually capitalize on and provide for the needs of their student bodies. (See box: The Demise of the University of Illinois Global Campus, page 7.)

Some fully online institutions and virtual consortia managed to survive. Exact data on just how many students are enrolled in online courses and degree programs are hard to come by since there are other ways to deliver distance education besides the Internet. The most recently available federal statistics are six years old, a lifetime in the fast-changing technology arena. They show that by the 2006-2007 academic year, 9.8 million undergraduates were enrolled in online distance-education courses.²⁸ Community colleges, which teach large numbers of adult and nontraditional learners yearning for flexible degree programs, constituted the largest share of online distance-education enrollments at 41 percent (see Table 1, above). Public, four-year institutions had the next largest online course enrollment at 26 percent.²⁹

For-profit colleges were disproportionately represented in online course enrollment—only 6 percent of all students were enrolled in for-profit colleges that year, yet they accounted for 18 percent of online distance enrollment.³¹ The elimination of two federal regulations created new business opportunities. These regulations were: the federal 12-Hour Rule—a regulation that required programs that did not follow a standard semester to provide a minimum of 12 hours of course work a week for students to be eligible for federal financial aid—and the 50 Percent Rule—a regulation that prevented institutions from receiving federal student aid if more than 50 percent of its courses were offered at a distance or if more than 50 percent of its students take a course at a distance. For example, Grand Canyon University and Bridgepoint Education, both publicly traded companies, grew to enroll tens of thousands of students each in the late 2000s, nearly all of them online.

Public universities, by contrast, have for the most part pursued less-aggressive online education strategies. As a result, student access to high-quality, low-cost online courses varies widely across the nation. In some states and localities, students can take online classes—or whole online degree programs—from public colleges and uni-

versities, pay regular subsidized prices, and earn credits that are easily applicable for college degrees. In many other places, few if any of these options are available. Navigating the patchwork collection of public online options can be difficult and confusing, particularly in assembling credits from different sources, online and

The Demise of the University of Illinois Global Campus

In 2006, the University of Illinois system decided to create a new, stand-alone, fully online campus. Known as the University of Illinois Global Campus, the venture would operate as a for-profit entity, with separate accreditation and a faculty pool of mostly non-tenured, part-time adjuncts.³⁷ In addition to being a new revenue stream, Global Campus was predicted to enroll as many as 9,000 students by 2012, and 70,000 by 2018.³⁸ Instead, just three years after it was conceived and after borrowing about \$7 million from the university system, Global Campus dissolved, rolling its 500 students into existing programs in the system, and laying off most of its staff. In an *Inside Higher Ed* article about the demise of Global Campus, CEO Chester S. Gardner, commented, “It’s over. I wish people would just leave it alone.”³⁹

What doomed Global Campus? While there was no single problem that caused its collapse, there were warning signs that the online venture was on the road to disaster. From its inception, there were vocal concerns from faculty about its quality. Meanwhile, Global Campus officials underestimated the competitiveness of the online market.

When Global Campus was still in development, one faculty leader said the plan endangered the university’s value of shared governance and academic freedom: “If people are all part-time and non-tenure track, is that a university? Is that a faculty? It’s certainly the University of Phoenix, but it’s not traditionally what has been the University of Illinois.”⁴⁰

Part of the problem was that the faculty, departments, and individual campuses had already been developing their own online efforts. Faculty at the University of Illinois at Springfield, for example, already had a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to figure out how to put liberal arts courses online, and ensure quality every step of the way.⁴¹ Global Campus, however, had no faculty oversight over course and degree development, which increased faculty suspicion about quality and decreased buy-in and support.

In addition to mounting faculty concerns, Global Campus never was able to deliver on its enrollment and revenue promises. During its March/April 2009 term, it had only managed to enroll 366 students. A big hurdle was that the field was already saturated with well-known online providers like UMassOnline and the University of Phoenix. Furthermore, because of its “separate but equal” status with the other campuses in the system, Global Campus ended up being in direct competition with other online efforts housed at each individual campus.⁴²

While Global Campus may have been shuttered in 2009, the University of Illinois Online sprang up in its place. It’s a university-wide initiative that focuses on helping system campuses develop and deliver fully online degrees. Unlike Global Campus, Illinois Online does not admit, register, or offer the programs themselves, leaving that power to individual campuses. Instead, it provides a streamlined point of entry for students interested in receiving a University of Illinois degree online, whether it’s through the Chicago, Urbana-Champaign, or Springfield campuses.

traditional, into credentials. In a nation with a large and growing number of nontraditional college students who need flexible educational options, the inconsistency and non-availability of publicly supported online higher education are major barriers to helping more students earn the degrees they need.

However, a review of online offerings at public colleges and universities reveals consistent patterns that can help institutional leaders and state policymakers chart a path for the online future.³² There is a continuum of organization among public online offerings. In some states, like Nevada and Alabama, online education remains at the institution and course level. Whether a student with a particular educational need can access online learning at a public institution depends on the whims of colleges, departments, and even individual professors. Course availability and pricing can be difficult to understand, and credit-transfer policies are poorly defined. Sometimes online courses cost the

same as similar courses at residential colleges, sometimes less, sometimes more.

Other states, by contrast, have developed a set of state policies and institutional practices for online higher education that remedy these problems. More-organized states, like Georgia and Florida, have taken a series of steps that build on one another to make public online higher education more rational and accessible for different student populations. Taken together, these steps result in something that looks less like an unorganized collection of Internet-based classes, and more like a true public university built around the tools of the information age—a kind of State U Online.

The findings show how states have advanced to progressively higher levels in building State U Online—and in doing so, have tackled the underlying tensions and conflicts that have faced distance learning in a variety of contexts over the last 200 years.

A Timeline of Distance-Education Regulations, 1998-2006

1998: Distance-Education Demonstration Program

As part of the legislation to renew the Higher Education Act, Congress creates the Distance-Education Demonstration Program. The program waives the regulations that largely denied eligibility for aid to students participating in distance-education programs at Title IV institutions. The waivers take effect first for 15 colleges or consortia, including Western Governors University.⁴³ Soon after the program is established, pressure starts mounting for Congress to get rid of the rules that block all students in distance education from receiving federal aid.⁴⁴

2001: The Internet Equity and Education Act

Rep. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., introduces the Internet Equity and Education Act that would eliminate the 12-Hour Rule and the 50 Percent Rule for schools that have default rates of less than 10 percent for three consecutive years.⁴⁵ The 50 percent rule prohibits an institution from receiving federal student aid if more than 50 percent of its courses are offered at a distance or if more than 50 percent of its students take a course at a distance. The 12-hour rule requires students to take at least 12 hours of course work a week to receive federal financial aid. Supporters of the bill argue that current regulations prevent the growth of distance education by limiting students' eligibility for financial aid. Critics argue that the regulations were created to prevent fraud and abuse by distance-education providers.⁴⁶ The bill died in the Senate.

2002: The Elimination of the 12-Hour Rule

The Education Department rewrites its student aid rules to eliminate the 12-hour rule.⁴⁷

2006: The Elimination of the 50 Percent Rule

Congress eliminates the 50 percent rule for all colleges—including those with high default rates—as part of the Deficit Reduction Act.⁴⁸ This leads to the proliferation of many for-profit entities.⁴⁹

Collaborative Practices of State U Online

This analysis identifies five steps that a state can take to build State U Online (see Figure 1, next page). Each step builds on those before it, leading toward increasingly integrated systems in which students can move freely among institutions within a state and eventually beyond state lines. This section includes descriptions of the five steps, and profiles of individual states that have reached each level. For each step, we feature a state and/or system profile to show how it overcame obstacles that have hindered distance education throughout the nation's history—including finance, faculty buy-in, leadership, curriculum, and quality control. Additional profiles can be found in Appendix A. The steps are:

Step One: Clearinghouse

State institutions collaborate to provide a clearinghouse of courses and degrees that students can easily search. Students should be able to use one search portal to find the online courses and degree programs offered at just about every public postsecondary institution within the state system. Once the student decides on a course or program, however, she proceeds to apply and enroll through the individual institution that offers that course or degree program. In this step, transfer between courses and programs among the colleges and universities is not seamless, meaning credits may not easily transfer.

Featured Profile: University of Wisconsin System's eCampus. Additional profile available in Appendix A: Montana University System Online

Step Two: Shared Contracts

In addition to having a clearinghouse, state institutions join together to purchase shared contracts for resources like a Learning Management System (LMS), or faculty development resources like Quality Matters. Many of these contracts can be expensive for an individual institution to purchase, so by participating in cost-sharing agreements, institutions are able to save money. For a student, this might mean that the LMS he uses at his two-year campus is the same used at the four-year institution where he will eventually transfer. But once again, even though it may reduce his learning curve for online education, it doesn't nec-

essarily ensure easy transfer of his credits.

Featured Profile: Minnesota State Colleges and Universities' Minnesota Online

Step Three: Shared Student Services

These state systems provide a variety of online student-support services at all institutions within the system. No matter where the student is enrolled, she can receive services like advising and e-tutoring at one central online location. This helps institutions provide more centralized and targeted support to meet the needs of online students.

Featured Profile: Florida Virtual Campus. Additional profile available in Appendix A: University of North Carolina Online

Step Four: Shared and Articulated Credentials

This step includes state systems that have managed to create fully articulated efforts that include easy transfer of credit among institutions and shared credentialing. A student enrolled in this type of online system would enroll in a "home" campus but would be able to take courses from any institution in the system. The courses would transfer back to the student's home institution with no extra paperwork burden for the student and no loss of credit. The student's transcript would reflect the credits as if they were all taken at one institution, even though she may have taken courses throughout the system.

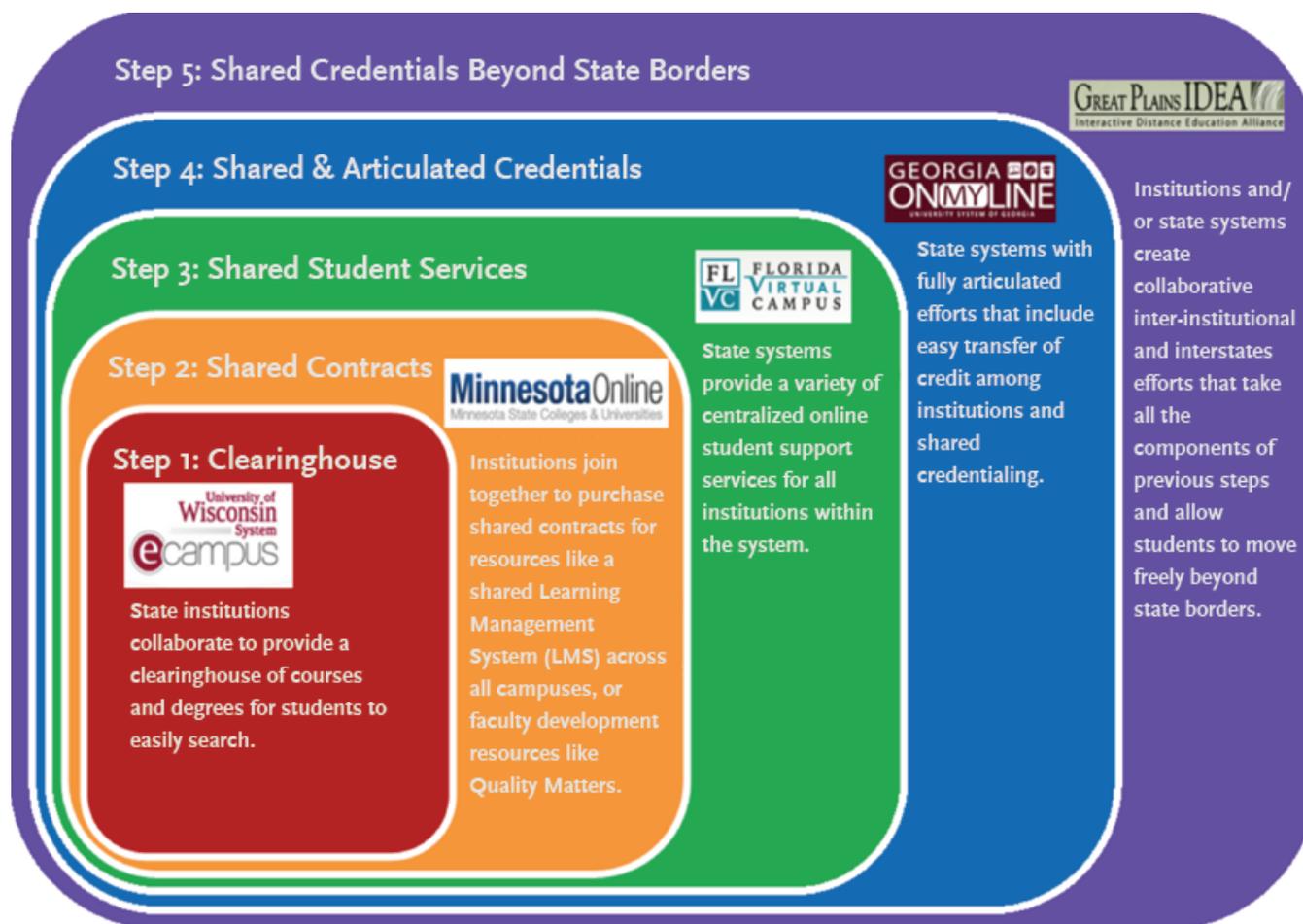
Featured Profile: Georgia's ONmyLINE. Additional profiles available in Appendix A: Kentucky's Learn on Demand, Tennessee's Regents Online Campus Collaborative

Step Five: Shared Credentials Beyond State Borders

In this step, systems create collaborative inter-institutional and interstate efforts that take all the components of previous steps, and allow students to move freely beyond state borders. For instance, a student enrolled in an online program would be able to enroll at a "home" institution within their state, pay the in-state rate, take classes anywhere within the consortium of states or institutions, and "transfer" those courses back to the home institution.

Featured Profile: Great Plains IDEA

Figure 1: The Steps of Online System Collaboration



Step One: A Streamlined Clearinghouse

Many states or state systems already have achieved Step One of Online System Collaboration by providing a searchable clearinghouse for students. This clearinghouse is a database of online courses and/or degree programs offered by public postsecondary providers within a state. By having a “one-stop shop” of online options, students can easily find in-state, affordable providers that suit their needs.

*University of Wisconsin’s eCampus*⁵⁰

History & Development:

The University of Wisconsin System encompasses 13 four-year universities, 13 two-year colleges (known in the system as UW Colleges), and the statewide University Extension, the traditional distance-education provider and legacy of Charles Van Hise’s pioneering efforts in the 19th century. The UW system is one of the largest in the nation, serving 181,000 students each year and employing more than 39,000 people statewide.⁵¹

But even in a state with a long tradition of cooperation, each UW institution maintains a high level of autonomy and independence. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, each UW System campus developed its own online courses and programs, with no articulated statewide goal for online education. Even though the Extension was traditionally the largest provider of distance education, all the other institutions were also interested in developing online courses.

Understanding that a diffuse system of online offerings didn’t serve students well, a working group was tasked with centralizing the system’s online offerings. In 2009, the dean of the UW-Extension led the working group to create what would eventually become the UW System eCampus, which was made available to students starting in 2011.

UW System eCampus is a one-stop online shop for students interested in online education from any and all of the

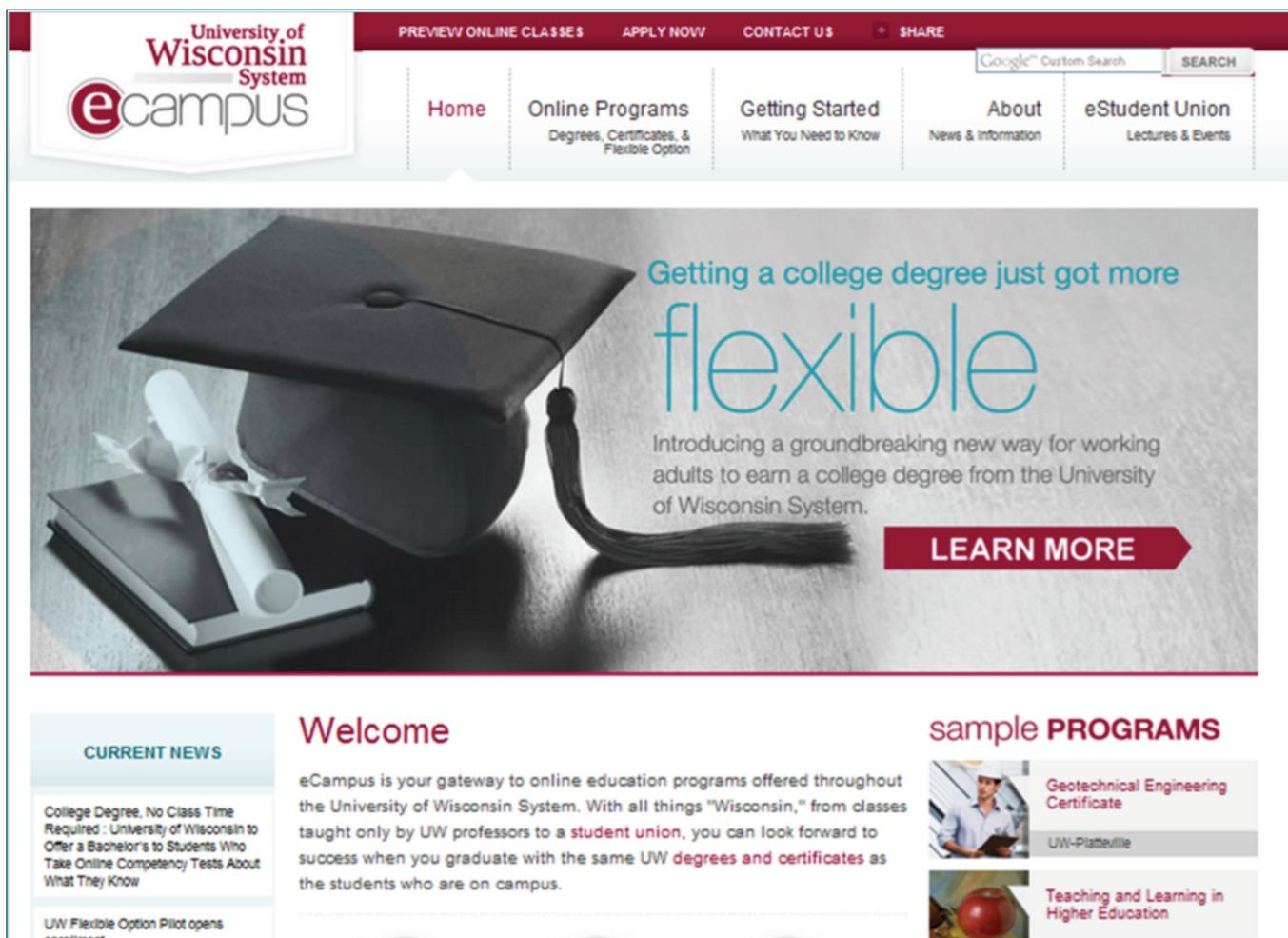


Image 4: Screen Capture of Launching Page for Wisconsin's eCampus (Taken 3/4/2013).

institutions within the UW System (see Image 4, above). One click takes students from one online university program to another, depending on their needs. All this is accomplished using a single brand identifier that students trust, similar to how Illinois Wesleyan University branded its correspondence courses almost 140 years ago.

Strengths:

Competition with for-profit institutions and the opportunity to share marketing costs are what largely drove the development of a searchable clearinghouse of online postsecondary options, according to Rovy Branon, associate dean of Online Learning and Technology at the University of Wisconsin-Extension. Although each campus within the UW System may not have the money to spend on advertising campaigns for online courses and programs, having one online portal helps the entire system effectively target its marketing approach such as search engine marketing campaigns that benefit all UW System online programs.

Once it was decided to make one portal of online learning options, a marketing firm with previous experience working with the UW System developed one eCampus brand to represent all campuses in the system. The initiative launched in November 2011 and has already been successful in bringing more students into online credential programs. In addition, as an unintended—but positive—consequence, eCampus has been one of the top 10 referral websites for enrolling on-campus students at each individual institution.

Unlike Illinois' Global Campus, crediting, credentialing, transferring, and admitting students still remains in the power of each individual campus, helping to achieve faculty buy-in. And because eCampus is a marketing and coordination initiative, not a provider of new online courses, faculty members maintain sole discretion over the development and teaching of their online courses. This has reduced the risk of faculty buy-in problems that have plagued distance-education efforts in the past.

Students apply for and enroll directly into courses and programs from the eCampus portal. Additionally, eCampus has one person who writes and edits brief descriptions about each online program to ensure that they are consistent for students, linking back to the institutional program websites. eCampus offers a single 1-800 number for all students to call where they can get independent information about which program best suits their needs.

Crediting, credentialing, transferring and admitting students still remains in the power of each individual campus, helping to achieve faculty buy-in. And because eCampus is a marketing and coordination initiative, not a provider of new online courses, faculty members maintain sole discretion over the development and teaching of their online courses.

Challenges:

Even though eCampus goes a long way in helping students easily locate online programs and courses, students who want to take courses from different campuses have to apply to each campus separately. Additionally, the UW System is only one of two systems of higher education in Wisconsin. Therefore, eCampus does not meet all the needs of Wisconsin students. Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), Wisconsin's other system of higher education, has more than 380,000 students enrolled in

16 technical colleges.⁵² Unlike the UW System, WTCS does not have a clearinghouse for its online courses and degree programs—a missed opportunity to reach a large segment of Wisconsin's postsecondary population. At minimum, WTCS should have its own eCampus and the two systems should link to one another. But to maximize impact, the two systems should collaborate in creating one online eCampus so that it really is a one-stop shop for all of Wisconsin's public online postsecondary options.

Step Two: Pooling Resources to Share Contracts

In order for a state to reach Step Two of Online System Collaboration, the entire state—or public higher-education system within the state, has to have a searchable clearinghouse for students *plus* it must share contracts for resources, like Learning Management Systems (LMS), across all campuses. By spreading one expensive contract among multiple institutions, campuses can do more with less, providing resources to students and faculty that they wouldn't be able to offer individually.

*MNSCU's Minnesota Online*⁵⁵

History & Development:

Historically, there were four separate public higher-education systems in Minnesota—the University of Minnesota, the state universities, the community colleges, and the technical colleges. To streamline this complicated governance structure, the legislature decided in 1991 to merge three of the four systems into two systems: The Minnesota State Colleges and University System (MNSCU) and The University of Minnesota System (UMS).⁵⁶

The merging of Minnesota's systems took more than

Innovation in Focus: Wisconsin's Competency-Based Degree

In June 2012, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, University of Wisconsin System President Kevin Reilly, and UW Colleges and UW-Extension Chancellor Ray Cross announced that a new affordable, online, competency-based "Flexible Degree" offered through the UW System campuses in partnership with UW-Extension.⁵³ This new degree will let students work at their own pace and earn credit for what they already know. This provides an opportunity for students to use free Open Educational Resources (OER) like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) offered via providers such as Coursera and EdX to accelerate their time to degree in a more affordable way. It's important to note, however, that the Flexible Degree is still very much in the planning stages—the first programs will be offered in fall 2013.⁵⁴ Since Wisconsin has a strong (and constitutionally protected) shared-governance system, there will have to be many system-wide faculty groups to discuss the development of this new effort. Once created it will be one of the first degrees of its kind offered by a public university.



Image 5: Screen Capture of Launching Page for Minnesota Online (Taken 3/4/2013).

four years to accomplish. One of the positive results of a difficult process, however, was the development of one of the first collaborative iterations of Minnesota’s online offerings—Minnesota Virtual University (MnVU). Before 1995, any online attempt by a college or university within the system was essentially voluntary. MnVU was created to offer inter-institutional support to the early pioneers of any e-learning efforts, instead of creating a new, stand-alone effort.

After the initial e-learning boom in the late ’90s, Minnesota Online—basically MnVU 2.0—was launched by MNSCU’s vice chancellor for academic affairs as a means to coordinate the rapid development of online education. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association (NCA), a regional accrediting agency, strengthened Minnesota Online’s reach by allowing it to review new online programs, significantly streamlining the process for program approval by HLC. With this power, Minnesota Online was able to effectively combine resources among

campuses and encourage them to develop online courses and fully online degree programs.

The merging of Minnesota’s systems took more than four years to accomplish. One of the positive results of a difficult process, however, was the development of one of the first collaborative iterations of Minnesota’s online offerings—Minnesota Virtual University (MnVU).

But after many e-learning initiatives of the early 2000s failed to live up to their promises, HLC rescinded Minnesota Online’s ability to review programs, seeing it as encroaching upon the traditional role of the accreditor. This wasn’t the first time NCA inhibited distance-

education attempts from taking hold at a university—it was NCA’s concerns over quality that caused the shuttering of Illinois Wesleyan’s external degree program in the late 1800s. While this move could have easily dissolved Minnesota Online, as it did Illinois Wesleyan, the system instead forged a new path. Not only would it provide a clearinghouse for students, but it would also use a combined pool of funds to buy contracts for online tools and resources that would otherwise be too expensive for one institution (see Image 5, page 13).

Strengths:

The budget for Minnesota Online is generated by an assessment on each institution in MNSCU’s system, based on its online enrollments. Currently, the fee is \$4.50 per online credit hour. In return for this fee, MNSCU is able to leverage the system’s buying power and provide a variety of services to all campuses, saving money overall for each

institution by combining contracts. These services, which would be more costly for each individual campus to buy separately, include providing each campus with an LMS, an online personalized tutoring service for students (provided by the company SmartThinking), and professional development for faculty members looking to develop and teach courses online (a peer review process called Quality Matters that certifies the quality of online courses; read more about Quality Matters in Appendix B, page 34). Since funding has historically been a problem for distance-education ventures, this shared-contract approach helps ensure that campuses have the resources they need to run effective online programs.

Once Minnesota Online began to subsidize each campus’ contract with Quality Matters, membership jumped from eight institutions of 37 in the MNSCU system to 31. As Quality Matters membership has grown, more faculty

Innovative Institution: Metro State University

In 1971, Minnesota’s state legislature established Metropolitan State University to provide educational services to underserved adult populations. Metro State was founded as a “University without Walls” and had no campus or grades. Classes were held throughout the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area in libraries, church basements, and other college campuses. At first, Metro State was just an upper-division college, presenting a path to a bachelor’s degree for working adults who had some college credit but no degree. It eventually has grown to serve 11,000 mostly transfer adult students in 50 bachelor’s and 11 master’s programs, and two applied doctorates.⁵⁷

In 1999, MNSCU provided funding to Metro State to create an online Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. Since then, Metro State has developed 24 fully online programs, including a bachelor’s-degree completion program for Peace Corps volunteers. As an institution dedicated to providing alternative higher education options for adult students with busy lives, Metro State is the largest provider of online bachelor’s degrees in the MNSCU system.

Along with offering a variety of online degrees and certificates, Metro State continues to provide students with multiple avenues for completing their degrees through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). Students can receive credits through such options as a portfolio of prior learning and/or nationally normed evaluations from Thomas Edison and Excelsior Colleges. These colleges offer competency-based assessments at a relatively low cost (approximately \$100) that do not require a student to take specific courses. Students prepare for the exams by whatever means works for them. Traditionally, this meant that students would learn the core competencies through textbooks and other costly print resources. Now, with the wide availability of Open Educational Resources, including MOOCs, students can prepare for these examinations for free and in a much more interactive way.

Metro State, as a part of Minnesota Online, goes a long way in helping Minnesotans obtain affordable degrees in innovative ways. It allows students to break away from the seat-time model of higher education to efficiently fulfill the competencies needed to get a credential.

members are participating in professional development for e-learning and online education, including how to appropriately design and deliver an online course.

According to an administrator from Minnesota Online, the more faculty members that go through the Quality Matters process, the more they tell other professors to consider developing and teaching an online course.

According to an administrator from Minnesota Online, the more faculty members that go through the Quality Matters process, the more they tell other professors to consider developing and teaching an online course. This is where Minnesota Online has seen its biggest gains—faculty persuading other faculty about online education. In a unionized system that has a tradition of strong shared governance, this has been one of the most effective ways to achieve faculty buy-in.

Challenges:

Given that MNSCU only merged as a system in 1995, it is unsurprising that entrenched institutional interests remain barriers to collaboration. Minnesota Online is essentially just a clearinghouse with shared contracting to help provide faculty and student support. But MNSCU may eventually be able to move beyond Step Two of Online System Collaboration, given that there exists a highly articulated online-education consortium within Minnesota Online. Known as Distance Minnesota, this consortium includes Northland Community College, Alexandria Community and Technical College, Northwest Technical College, and Bemidji State University and acts as a ladder between two- and four-year degree offerings.

Because the consortium members' online efforts are linked, they've managed to improve the rate at which they fill open seats for courses. If an online introductory English course at Northland Community College is full, for example, the overflow of students can automatically enroll at Alexandria Community and Technical College, regardless of their "home" campus. This has helped to both expand access to heavily enrolled courses and prevent duplication of other courses with low fill rates.

The Distance Minnesota consortium would be more efficient and effective if it was able to expand its reach to the whole of Minnesota Online. The complexity of the state higher-education system's governance structure, however, continues to make this a challenge. But Distance Minnesota's consortium offers hope that it can at least be replicated on a regional basis within MNSCU, among similar institutions. As the idea spreads, it may be scalable to the entire MNSCU system.

The Distance Minnesota consortium would be more efficient and effective if it was able to expand its reach to the whole of Minnesota Online. The complexity of the state higher-education system's governance structure, however, continues to make this a challenge.

Step Three: Providing System-wide Online Student Services

For a state to reach Step Three of Online System Collaboration, the entire state—or a system of public higher-education institutions within the state—has to have a searchable clearinghouse for students, shared contracts for resources, *plus* provide online system-wide student services. This way, no matter which "home" institution students are enrolled in, they can receive services like advising and e-tutoring at one central virtual location. This helps institutions provide more centralized and targeted support to meet the diverse needs of online students.

Florida Virtual Campus⁸

History & Development:

In spring 2012, Florida statute established the Florida Virtual Campus (FLVC) to serve as a clearinghouse and resource for students interested in online distance-education courses and degree programs offered through Florida's public colleges and universities. One of the other central missions of FLVC is to provide access to online student-support services, such as advising, and library support services—components critical to ensuring a state system is proceeding through the steps that will lead to a system-wide approach to its online education efforts.

FLVC launched in July 2012, combining four existing orga-

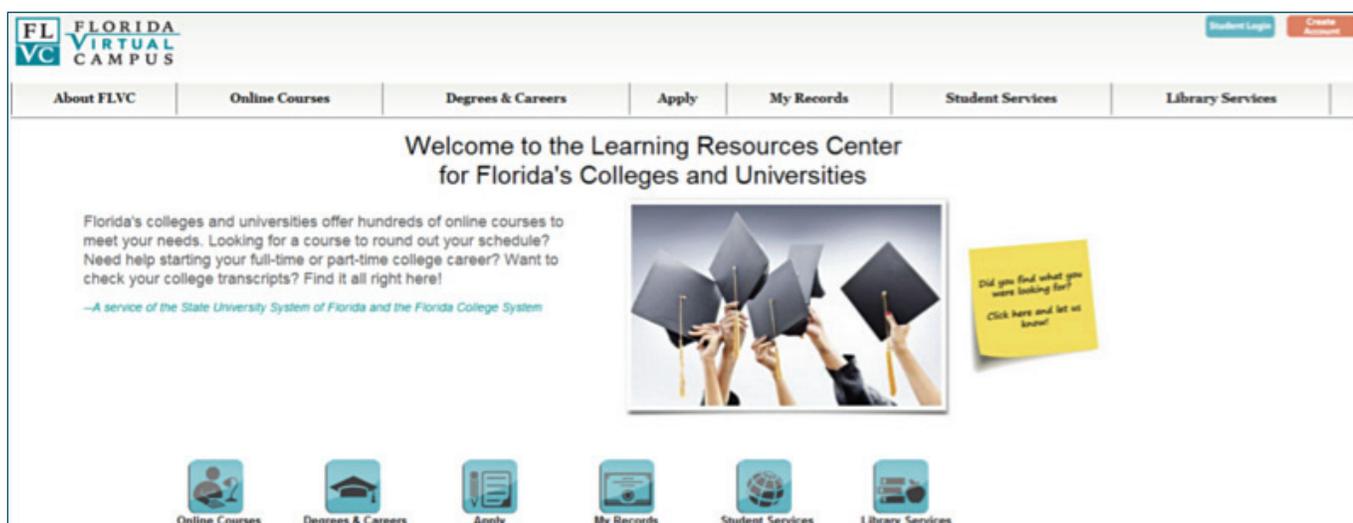


Image 6: Screen Capture of Launching Page for FLVC (Taken 3/4/2013).

nizations that provide access to distance learning courses and programs, library resources, and student advising and support services. By combining those services into one web portal that serves both the State University System of Florida and the Florida College System, FLVC plans to provide a unified focus of online efforts from advising to course and degree enrollment to library services, for students as they increasingly move online (see Image 6, above).

Strengths:

Students who visit FLVC and are interested in enrolling in an online course or degree program are put in touch directly with the institution that offers that course or degree program. This way, the institutions themselves offer all the direct instruction. FLVC's primary relationship is with each individual institution rather than the individual faculty members. This allows for faculty to maintain control over the content and teaching of their classes, whether they are online or face-to-face.

By keeping direct instruction and course development with the faculty and departments, faculty have a better understanding that the quality of online courses can be the same as any course offered by the university.

According to administrators at FLVC, by keeping direct instruction and course development with the faculty and

departments, faculty have a better understanding that the quality of online courses can be the same as any course offered by the university. Student transcripts reflect this understanding and do not designate whether courses are fully online or not. To help ensure that the faculty develop quality online courses, FLVC offers a discounted contract agreement with Quality Matters (the organization also used by Minnesota Online). By giving faculty the freedom to pursue online teaching and providing them the support to develop high-quality courses, FLVC administrators say faculty buy-in has been easier to achieve.

As FLVC has appeared in course catalogues, it has helped students (and prospective students) realize that they have a variety of online options throughout the state.

Advertising is another financial challenge for public institutions. One state requirement has been critical to putting FLVC and its services on student's radar at little to no cost: Any public institution in Florida that charges a distance-learning fee for its online courses or degrees must put links within their catalogue to FLVC. In addition, these schools are required to provide specific links to students for FLVC resources. As FLVC has appeared in course catalogues, it has helped students (and prospective students) realize that they have a variety of online options throughout the state.

Innovative Practice: Common Course-Numbering System and Transfer

Florida created a common course-numbering system in the 1960s as a way to make clearly articulated pathways in Florida's K-20 system. The system provides a database of courses offered at all public postsecondary institutions in Florida and also includes some participating nonpublic institutions. Similar classes have the same course number, regardless of institution. For example, Algebra 1105 is the same across all public postsecondary institutions. This common course numbering helps with research and program planning, and, most importantly, with ensuring that the credits of students will easily transfer.⁶¹

Several years ago, as many of Florida's public institutions began to experiment with online courses and degree programs, they discovered that more than half the cost of going online was couched in the development of the course. Since the common-number system existed, Florida established a repository of course content and modules for online courses so that faculty at different campuses do not have to reinvent the wheel when developing their own online courses. This has allowed institutions to save time and money as they build their online presence.

Challenges:

In July 2012, the Florida Board of Governors of the university system selected an outside consultant—the Parthenon Group—to evaluate the current online offerings of Florida's colleges and universities and present several options to expand online distance-education opportunities.⁵⁹ By November, Parthenon offered four models to expand online higher education in Florida: Institution by Institution (a model where each institution maintains its own online courses and degree programs); Institutional Collaboration (a model similar to FLVC); Designated Lead Institution (a collaborative model where one institution in the system is chosen to maintain online programs); and New Online Institution (an online-only institution similar to the University of Maryland-University College).

While each model has its own pros and cons, institutional collaboration is the model with the lowest start-up costs since most of the structure is already couched within FLVC. Yet some influential Florida lawmakers are interested in creating an online-only school or designating a lead institution. The price tag for a new online university, according to the Parthenon report, would be \$70 million—much higher than the collaborative approaches suggested.⁶⁰ This difference of opinion reveals the tension between balancing the desires of the state legislature to expand online degrees and continuing the existing online structures already in place. With more than 700 online degree programs at public colleges and universities in Florida, it will be up to FLVC to navigate this tension and show the state the value of the existing system's approach to online education and how it

can be improved to meet the state's needs with a smaller investment and much less duplication.

With more than 700 online degree programs at public colleges and universities in Florida, it will be up to FLVC to show the state the value of the existing system's approach to online education.

Step Four: Easy Transfer of Credits and Shared Credentialing

For a state to reach Step Four of Online System Collaboration, the entire state—or a system of public higher-education institutions within the state—has to have a searchable clearinghouse of online courses and degrees, shared contracts for institutional resources, system-wide student services, and fully articulated efforts that give students the ability to easily take classes within the consortium. In this model, a student is enrolled in a credential program at one “home” institution, but can take courses for credit anywhere within the consortium. Students do not have to worry about whether their credits will transfer since everything is done automatically through the agreements among the institutions in the system.

*Georgia ONmyLINE and eCore*⁶²

History & Development:

Back in 1999, the University System of Georgia (USG)

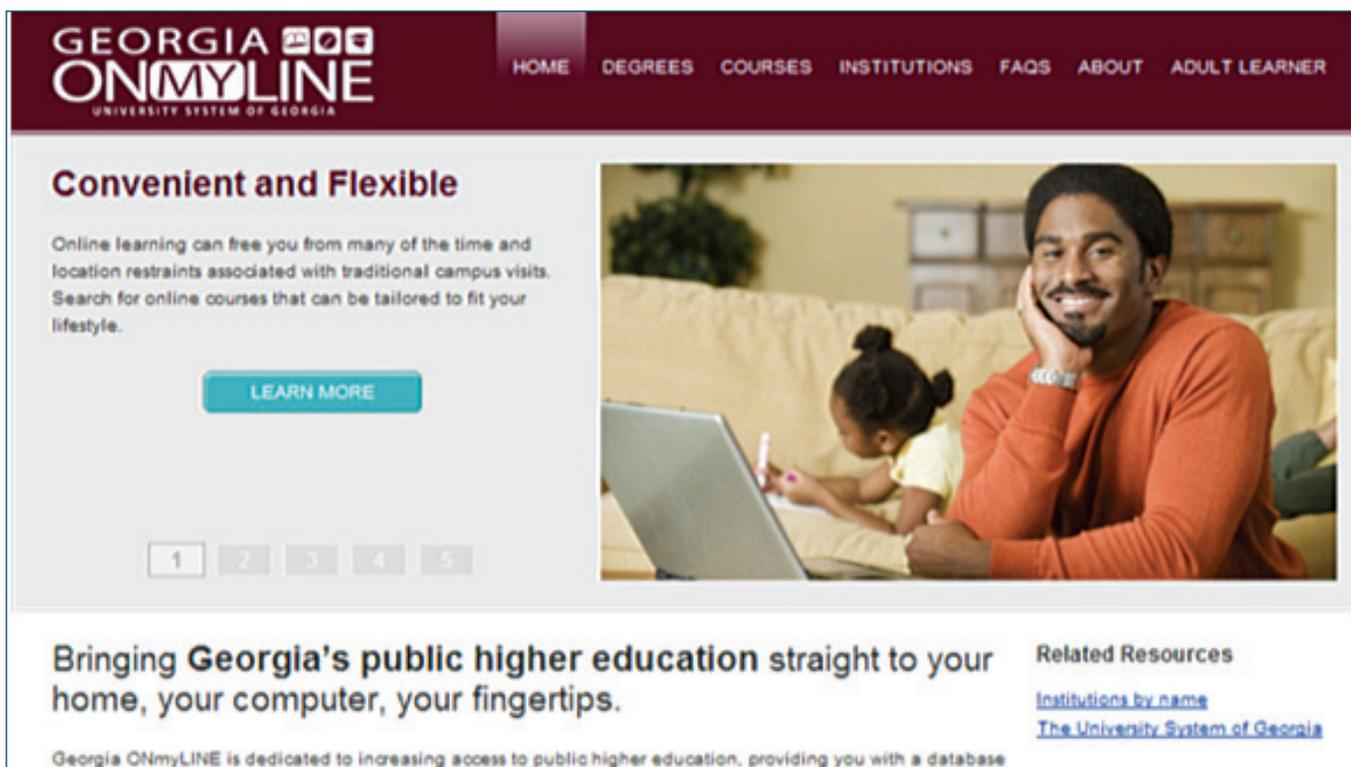


Image 7: Screen Capture of Launching Page for Georgia ONmyLINE (Taken 3/4/2013).

decided there wasn't a need for every institution to develop its own separate online core courses, especially for highly enrolled, lower-division courses. USG decided instead to develop an online core curriculum, subject to approval by the faculty governance structure at each institution. Known as eCore, this general education core of classes would provide broad access to overenrolled general education requirements at the institutions of the USG system.

As the demand for other online courses and degrees increased, USG intensified its online efforts, offering such collaborative programs as the Bachelor's of Science in Information Technology (WeBSIT) and an executive-level MBA (WebMBA). Later in the decade, USG found that many k-12 teachers from Georgia were enrolling in out-of-state online master's degree programs in education that made them eligible for an increase in pay. As in Wisconsin during the late 19th century where students were looking for vocational distance education instead of a liberal arts curriculum, education students in Georgia were voting with their feet to find the credits and credentials they needed. Georgia, like Wisconsin, had to adapt. To raise student awareness of in-state online opportunities, USG created a portal called Georgia ONmyLINE, through which students could find as accurate as possible a complete listing of all online courses

offered by USG institutions (see Image 7, above). In turn, USG institutions developed a series of online master's degree programs offered through the Georgia ONmyLINE portal targeted specifically to k-12 teachers.

Strengths:

Attrition can be one of the biggest problems for online courses. USG was no different. At one point, 45 percent of students did not complete an eCore course in which they were enrolled. This changed when USG had the University of West Georgia take over as the administrative unit for eCore. Through retention initiatives that focus on the outcomes of online students, West Georgia has been able to retain around 85 percent of all students in eCore classes. If a faculty member is unable to get a response from a student who hasn't been logging into the course and completing course work, the eCore student-support administrators will track that student down, even if that means calling her, to understand her situation and why she has not been to class.⁶³ There are six to eight people whose job is to call students and ask about the problems they're having with their courses and connect them to the resources to make sure they're retained and have positive outcomes.

When eCore started, USG paid faculty about \$5,000 apiece

Innovative Program: eCore in Focus

USG's general education committee determined in 1999 that there were 36 highly enrolled general education classes that most students in the system needed to take to fulfill their graduation requirements. By putting these courses online, students could take their core requirements easily if they were distance-education students or if they found that a course was full at their home campus. At a time when state institutions enjoyed higher investment from their state budgets, USG was able to put 24 of the 36 courses online before running out of development money (see Table 2, page 20). Despite the loss of monetary resources, these 24 courses represent a majority of core classes for Georgia students and still undergo major revision every two-and-a-half years. eCore classes remain some of the most highly enrolled online classes. In the spring semester of 2012, more than 2,100 students took an eCore class, and there are new revenue-generating courses proposed for this year.

to develop online courses. Eventually, special funding for eCore was exhausted and as online course development has become more common, monetary incentives for course development has suffered significant reductions as well. But professors still continue to develop online courses because, according to Dr. Mike Rogers the assistant vice-chancellor for faculty development, it helps faculty reach a larger student population and has become a “normal” part of their job. USG does continue to offer broad support and professional development for those faculty already engaged with online learning and teaching. Every year, for example, USG has 12 workshops about online teaching—six are taught face-to-face, and six are taught online. Each workshop has its own theme or competency—such as, for example, how to teach using USG's LMS. These workshops look to improve professors' skill sets by giving them an opportunity to attend training they might not have an opportunity to attend on campus. Additionally, like other systems, many USG campuses are members of Quality Matters.

Professors still continue to develop online courses because, according to Dr. Mike Rogers the assistant vice-chancellor for faculty development, it helps faculty reach a larger student population and has become a “normal” part of their job.

Challenges:

Most of Georgia ONmyLINE is funded through regular state budgetary means, leaving it vulnerable to cuts from

the state legislature. Over the last several years, the legislature has cut institutional budgets significantly, leaving less money for institutions to develop online courses for Georgia ONmyLINE. eCore, however, is entirely self-sustaining and has a service-level agreement with each institution. Students pay \$189 per credit hour for an eCore course. Of that, 40 percent goes to the eCore administrative unit to cover their online student-support services and revision of online courses. Another 40 percent goes to the institution that provides the faculty member teaching the course. The faculty member teaching the eCore course is paid a flat rate of \$1,200 per credit hour. The remaining 20 percent goes to the administrative unit from which the student enrolls. Any profit that the institutions make is invested back into eCore, either to develop more courses or to redesign existing courses. USG should look into whether it can pursue a similar model for course development for Georgia ONmyLINE programs.

eCore is entirely self-sustaining and has a service-level agreement with each institution.

Step Five: Moving Beyond State Borders

To reach Step Five of Online System Collaboration, institutions within a state, or ideally entire state higher-education systems, join together to provide a searchable clearinghouse of online courses and degrees, shared contracts for institutional resources, system-wide student services, and fully articulated efforts that give students the ability to easily take classes within the consortium, even if the consortium crosses state borders. In this model, a student is

enrolled in a credential program at one “home” institution, but can take courses for credit anywhere within the consortium, even across state borders. Students do not have to worry about whether their credits will transfer since everything is done automatically through the agreements among the institutions in the collaborative.

Great Plains IDEA⁶⁶

History & Development:

Arguably, no effort has truly made it to Step Five in that it offers a clearinghouse, shared contracts, student services, and full articulation and credentials, all beyond state borders. This would require consortia of strong state systems

already online. However, the Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (IDEA), has come close to providing a fully articulated effort, offering degree programs made up of courses across institutional lines, all at a common price to students (see Image 8, page 21).

IDEA developed as a consortium of 20 regional, public distance-education programs in states with a common interest in providing education to rural professionals through collaborative online courses and degree programs (see Table 3, page 22). When the consortium began in 1994, the goals included training faculty to use technology to promote and disseminate distance education, and to develop

Table 2. eCore Course Enrollment and Five-Year Trends

Course	FY 2007	FY 2012	Pct. Change – FY 2007 to 2012	Percent of total enrollment in 2012
American Government	482	549	14%	7%
American Literature II	146	195	34%	3%
Calculus I	51	111	117%	1%
Chemistry I	58	157	171%	2%
Chemistry II	34	76	124%	1%
College Algebra	233	403	73%	5%
Electronic Tech in Ed. Environments	20	30	50%	<1%
English Composition I	193	365	90%	5%
English Composition II	275	608	121%	8%
Geosciences I	186	184	(1%)	2%
Human Communications	234	381	63%	5%
Integrated Science I	71	152	114%	2%
Intermediate Spanish I	36	153	325%	2%
Intermediate Spanish II	15	124	726%	2%
Math Modeling	82	164	100%	2%
Philosophy	199	298	50%	4%
Physics I	31	59	90%	<1%
Physics II	4	Not Taught	--	0%
Pre-Calculus	167	334	100%	4%
Psychology	389	438	13%	6%
Sociology	290	463	60%	6%
Statistics	146	273	87%	4%
U.S. History I	450	659	46%	9%
World History I	471	820	74%	11%
World Literature I	285	566	99%	7%
Total Enrollment	4548	7562	66%	~100%

Source: eCore 2012 Factbook.⁶⁵



Image 8: Screen Capture of Launching Page for Great Plains IDEA (taken 3/4/13).

a shared marketplace for distance-education courses.⁶⁷ Start-up costs were covered in part by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC), and the Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnerships (LAAP) program of the federal Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE).⁶⁸

Strengths:

One of the strongest features of this consortium is the development of inter-institutional programs. Students select and enroll in one “home” institution that provides the degree program that they need. They then take online classes toward their degree at any institution in the consortium, all at a common price. Curricula are developed inter-institutionally by faculty teams. Revenue from the programs is distributed among the home institution, teaching institution, and central administrator for the programs, ensuring financial sustainability.⁷⁰

The IDEA consortium has effectively been able to overcome the state-border divisions that prevent institutions from collaborating, to provide more than 15 degree programs for students offered by 19 universities from Montana State to

California State-Chico to Ohio State.

Challenges:

As noted previously, there is no perfect example of an interstate consortium. While IDEA has been exemplary in cross-institution and interstate collaboration, it is limited in scope. IDEA only offers graduate degrees and undergraduate certificates—it does not offer any bachelor’s degrees. Student services are provided through the student’s “home” institution. Since there are no shared contracts, as an example, students experience different LMS as they move among the institutions within the collaborative.

The Path Forward

Residency requirements will soon make little sense, as students, even those attending residential colleges, want the flexibility to take online courses wherever and whenever they want. While the Great Plains IDEA holds potential for what collaboration beyond state borders and into the virtual world can bring for students, it still does not fully deliver. Students need to be able to find streamlined, affordable pathways to a degree. The proliferation of new

Table 3. List of Institutions that Participate in Great Plains IDEA and its affiliate AG*IDEA

University of Arkansas	Michigan State University
Auburn University	University of Missouri
California State University, Chico	Montana State University
Clemson University	University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Colorado State University	North Carolina State University
Iowa State University	North Dakota State University
University of Florida	The Ohio State University
University of Georgia	Oklahoma State University
Kansas State University	South Dakota State University
University of Kentucky	Texas Tech University

Source: *Great Plains IDEA website*.⁶⁹

and better technology infrastructure and the explosion of Open Education Resources can help students get to a credential more efficiently using online education, but only if higher-education institutions work together to share their resources and reduce the barriers that prevent students from moving seamlessly from institution to institution in the virtual space. Moving through the steps of Online System Collaboration will help public colleges and universities achieve this goal.

Each state is different in how it organizes its higher-education systems. No one method of delivering online education, therefore, is right for every state. Even so, public institutions should strongly consider adopting a system-wide or consortia approach, in a manner that fits their unique contexts. Arguably, this State U Online model works only if states combine and streamline existing efforts in order to achieve a fully articulated system where students can move—with credits in hand—among institutions in the system. This way, states can ensure that their online systems are on a strong footing that will help them climb the steps toward effective, sustainable online efforts. We recommend the following:

1) *Create a Sustainable, Self-Sufficient Cost Structure*

For years, states have been disinvesting from their higher-education systems, and this trend does not appear to be reversing anytime soon. **No matter what the online system effort, whether a clearinghouse, shared contracting, or full articulation and credentials, systems and institutions should not rely on line-item budgeting from state**

legislatures. By creating a sustainable, self-sufficient cost structure, systems ensure that their online efforts have staying power. Also, since online higher education can save money, no extra funds may be needed in the long term. Take Georgia, as an example. The money to develop eCore dried up, but because of the shared tuition revenue cost structure, it has managed to maintain its courses and ensure its availability to students year after year. And in Florida, the implementation of a separate distance-learning fee is critical to funding the expansion of its online courses and degrees.

The mission of an online system matters: state system and individual institutional actors should determine where best to target their efforts. Different states have different priorities and needs. In Georgia, students clamored for an online master’s degree in education. In Tennessee (featured in Appendix A), students wanted to take core education classes online to make sure they were progressing toward their degree in a timely manner. In North Carolina (featured in Appendix A), state officials wanted to better serve community college students looking to turn their associate degree into a bachelor’s. To be successful, states and systems need to start where demand is: where students are leaving the state; or where students are being shut out of seats at the brick-and-mortar institution. This will help to ensure that there will be enough enrollments to break even after development costs, and maybe turn a profit.

Institutions should leverage existing Open Education Resources (OER) when developing new courses, or redesigning existing ones. The proliferation of high-quality OER, like MOOCs, is growing daily. Those who develop and teach online courses often don't have the time or knowledge, however, to sift through these resources and pick the ones that will be the right fit for their class. OER will help to drive down the price of developing a course only if course developers can quickly find and make use of the resource. It is important, therefore, that systems create a repository, like Florida did, of tried-and-true OER and course modules that faculty can search when developing their courses. Ideally, Florida and other states with repositories of vetted OER could open these databases up to other university systems to use.

2) Provide Incentives and Support for Faculty

When possible, institutions should provide monetary incentives to help faculty teach online. Developing online courses takes much more time and effort from faculty members on the front end compared with developing a face-to-face class. For those institutions interested in expanding their online offerings, it may be helpful to provide a stipend to encourage faculty members to move online. When cost structures for online course development are thoughtfully crafted, as with Georgia's eCore, a small stipend is built in to the development of the course.

Institutions should give weight to online teaching in promotion and tenure. Professors on the tenure track who have an interest in trying to develop an online course may find themselves with little incentive to do so in a tenure system weighted heavily toward research before instruction. While instruction is given significant weight in most tenure reviews, there usually isn't any added benefit for developing online courses, even though they often take extra time and effort to create. Tenure reviews that give significant value to teaching should also give credit for teaching online. Faculty members shouldn't have to wait until they have been granted tenure to begin experimenting with teaching online.

Institutions and systems should provide professional development and course design help. Once faculty members decide to develop online courses and teach online, they must be supported through professional development and course design instruction. Online teaching is different from face-to-face instruction, and it's important to avoid just replicating face-to-face courses in an online atmosphere. To assure high-quality online courses, institutions should offer professional development seminars and course development support like Georgia does, both in-person and online. In addition, state systems should, at a minimum, look into sharing contracts like Minnesota Online does for such external review programs as Quality Matters.

3) Actively Promote Online Efforts

All state systems should provide at least a clearinghouse of online courses and degree programs. For-profit online institutions are incredibly savvy at advertising, spending revenues on television and print campaigns. Public universities often cannot afford to spend as much money on marketing. As a result, students may not realize that affordable public online options are open to them. As the for-profit market comes under increased regulation from the federal government, many students will turn to public institutions. By providing a clearinghouse of online courses and degree programs, like Wisconsin's eCampus, state systems can advertise one portal to meet a student's online education needs.

4) Collect Robust Data on Online Students

Currently, the National Center for Education Statistics defines a distance-education student as one who "took a course for credit during the academic year that was not a correspondence course but was primarily delivered using live, interactive audio or videoconferencing, pre-recorded instructional videos, webcasts, CD-ROM or DVD, or computer-based systems delivered over the Internet."⁷¹ This definition measures distance education within a smorgasbord of models, including online education. **As online education has grown significantly over the past decade, and as more brick-and-mortar**

students take a hybrid of online and face-to-face courses, it has become necessary to designate the difference between a fully distance-education student and a student enrolled in online courses and/or degree programs in order to better understand online student movement and outcomes. Not only would better measurement of online student participation help the federal government understand trends in online education, it would also help institutions and states set goals for online programs to measure their progress against. This could help institutions and states bring more focus to their efforts and help colleges make their case to states about the need for greater resources to support expansion of their online programs.

5) *Give Credit Where It's Due*

According to a study from the National Association for College Admissions Counseling, one in three undergraduate students will transfer at least once during their academic careers. During the transfer process, many students lose credits or have to retake credits along the way. **As the borders between institutions (and states) blur, it will be all the more necessary for state systems to have robust articulation agreements to ensure that credits follow students toward swift completion.** This can be achieved through institutionally stated articulation agreements between and among state institutions (especially between two- and four-year colleges and universities), common course numbering as seen in Florida, and the development of common learning outcomes such as in Tennessee. Institutions and state systems should also encourage partnerships beyond state borders like the Great Plains IDEA.

6) *Support Students*

Institutions and state systems should provide support and retention efforts given the attrition problems that can occur with online course-taking. This includes meeting students' needs before, during, and after enrollment in an online program. There are numerous examples of best practices such as the University of Wisconsin's eCampus informational 1-800 number, which provides students

with neutral information before they enroll in an online program, and Georgia's dedicated student-support administrators, who track down students who have not been logging into their courses or turning in assignments.

As state systems and institutions look to update their Learning Management Systems and incorporate new online resources, they should be cognizant of the impact of new upgrades on students. Not all students have access to the fastest Internet connections and the newest computing technologies. While the latest technology may improve course functionality and learning outcomes, it will only work if students can actually use it. As an example, Montana University System, featured in Appendix A, takes a cautious approach when updating new technology in order to both save money and ensure that students will be able to use it with their existing computing resources.

7) *Experiment with Innovative Course and Credit Delivery*

State systems and institutions should incorporate innovative credit models that will hasten a student's time to degree. There is a significant population of students who have attended college but not earned a degree. It will be necessary to get these students back on track if the United States is to once again become first in the world for the percentage of the population with post-secondary credentials. Online efforts that include Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) options, such as in Minnesota, and competency-based modules like Kentucky's Learn on Demand (see Appendix A) go a long way in offering students innovative, accelerated pathways to a credential. In addition, as MOOCs continue to grow and thrive, they provide a window of opportunity for highly motivated students to quickly fulfill degree requirements. Institutions should consider how best to incorporate MOOCs and award credit for MOOCs, whether through developing an internal assessment for students to take or using a third-party service like Pearson's VUE.

At the federal level, term- and credit-hour-based allocation of federal financial aid should be

reconsidered. Currently, financial aid is distributed through an archaic system based on seat-time. Though seat-time became a way to easily measure time to degree, it has become a relic of the past with the introduction of asynchronous online learning models, such as Kentucky’s Learn on Demand competency-based instruction (see Appendix A). Although the credit hour was recently redefined by the U.S. Department

of Education to incorporate non-time-based measures of learning, institutions have been hesitant to adopt the new definition, instead overlaying the time-based credit hour onto asynchronous and competency-based pathways. To encourage wider adoption of the redefined credit hour, the Education Department should work with accreditors and institutions to remove uncertainty surrounding federal financial aid eligibility. ➤

State Authorization and Moving Beyond State Borders to Provide Distance-Education Programs

State authorization, the federal requirement that distance-education programs obtain permission to operate from every state in which they enroll at least one student, was put forth as part of a package of “program integrity” rules by the Department of Education in October 2010. The rule came about in part due to the collapse of state authorization in California, where the state law authorizing the bureau overseeing for-profit colleges expired with nothing to replace it. Most states already had rules on the books governing distance-education providers operating within their borders, but the definition of “operating” could vary widely, and the rules were rarely enforced.⁷² The Department created the rule to ensure that existing state laws were actually followed.

Colleges that offer distance education fought the rule in Congress and in the courts, arguing that complying is too difficult and often expensive, given the widely varying application processes and fees among states. Some states, like Hawaii, are relatively lenient when it comes to state authorization, requiring only that providers have regional or national accreditation. Others can be much stricter. Minnesota, for example, requires schools to complete a nine-page application for every program and pay stiff fees.⁷³ A federal judge struck down the state authorization rule in July 2011, part of a ruling that otherwise upheld the department’s “program integrity” regulations. Even though that ruling was upheld in an appeal a year later, the Education Department had already achieved its goal: states are now more likely to enforce their own authorization requirements and many colleges had already sought to comply with them.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the requirement for state authorization already spurred many states and institutions to collaborate on reciprocity agreements.⁷⁵ Given the murkiness surrounding the future of state authorization.

States and institutions should continue to pursue reciprocity agreements. In addition to ensuring program integrity, reciprocity agreements will help to open the lines of communication between states. This can potentially lead to articulation agreements for students who are increasingly crossing state borders when they enroll in college, and will also help lay the groundwork to Step Five of Online System Collaboration: Shared Credentials Beyond State Borders.

Any new state authorization rule put forth by the Department should aim to reduce regulatory burden and expense, not increase it. Many state authorization laws currently on the books predate online learning. Instead of creating a rule to ensure existing state laws are followed, the Department should require that institutions either follow a state’s authorization rule or have a reciprocity agreement in states where at least one (or another minimal threshold to be determined) student is enrolled.

Appendix A: Supplemental Case Studies

Case Study #1: Montana University System (MUS) Online⁷⁶

MUS Online offers another glimpse into Step One of Online System Collaboration. Because MUS includes all public institutions in the state, its clearinghouse of online courses and degree programs has a broader reach than Wisconsin's eCampus.

Montana, a geographically large and sparsely populated state, has been involved in online higher education since the 1990s. The majority of the state's adult population—62 percent—has some credits in higher education, but no degree, compared with 22 percent of working-age adults nationwide.⁷⁷ Montana state officials saw online education as a means to help citizens who already had some credits get a

credential. As a result, the institutions that comprise MUS had developed their own online efforts by the early 2000s.

In the spring of 2005, Montana's legislature provided seed money to MUS to coordinate its online offerings. With funding from the legislature, MUS tasked an administrator with coordinating the system's online effort through MUS Online (see Image 9, below). To achieve buy-in from the campuses, a university system advisory committee composed of individual campus representatives was created with a representative from each campus.

Unlike Wisconsin's bifurcated higher-education system, Montana's system includes all of the state's colleges and

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- More than **8000** students enroll in Distance Learning courses each semester;
- Over **700** courses are offered each semester; and
- **Nearly 100** degree and certificate programs are offered on-line.

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Image 9: Screen Capture of Launching Page for MUS Online (Taken 3/4/13).

universities. As a result, Montana’s MUS Online provides one online clearinghouse for *all* public institutions in Montana. Students can choose from more than 100 online academic programs and certificates, and over 700 courses. In addition, all general education requirements are available online to any student in the system, and board of regents policy allows students the ability to transfer these core credits to any other institution in the system.

The ability to integrate high-quality technology in online learning when that technology is constantly changing has been a challenge for every state system, including MUS. According to one Montana system administrator, “it feels like the minute that a new course or service is up and running online, there’s a new, updated, and potentially more efficient platform or service that enters the market.”

Adopting the newest technology can be expensive and may not work with a student’s existing computing technologies and Internet speed. For state systems that have seen a consistent decline in state support, it may not be in their best interest to pursue the newest technology on the market.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), for example, are a more recent innovation in distance education. These online courses are free to students and there is no cap on enrollment—hundreds of thousands of students can take these classes at the same time. But as interested as some of Montana’s campuses appear to be in the MOOC phenomenon, all are awaiting the development of a business model that shows the true cost of belonging to and sup-

porting such an effort, especially because there is no revenue stream from students or the state to offset the costs of MOOC development.

MUS has chosen not to be an early adopter of the latest technologies and delivery systems like MOOCs. Instead, MUS takes a more conservative approach. This allows MUS time to identify alternatives that campuses might engage with in order to meet identified objectives, such as growth *and* sustainability.

Case Study #2: University of North Carolina (UNC) Online⁷⁸

UNC Online is another example of a state system that has reached Step Three in Online System Collaboration: Shared Student Services. UNC Online is currently undergoing strategic planning and is looking at ways to provide shared credentials or a way for students to move easily among online institutions while still being enrolled at a “home” institution.

The University of North Carolina system, one of two public higher-education systems in North Carolina, consists of 17 institutions that serve more than 220,000 students. UNC Online was first established as an attempt to create a comprehensive, system-wide approach to online courses and programs and to direct the public and currently enrolled students to online programs offered by universities in the UNC system. This has resulted in an online portal that offers comprehensive descriptions of more than 240 online programs in 22 fields of study offered by 16 UNC member universities (see Image 10, page 28).⁷⁹

Innovative Program: Providing a Library of Foreign Language Offerings

While larger campuses like UNC-Chapel Hill may have comparatively large enrollments in Advanced Greek, smaller campuses in the UNC system may have only one or two students taking this course. To address a rising concern among world language instructors that programs at individual campuses could be eliminated due to low enrollments, UNC Online is in the process of providing a library of articulated foreign language courses to increase overall fill rates at individual campuses. This new “World Language Consortium” will give students the opportunity to take those classes even if they are not offered at the students’ home campus.

Currently, there are only two languages—Russian and German—with formal articulation agreements among campuses in the system. The World Language Consortium being developed for UNC Online 2.0 will radically simplify the process on the student end. Eventually, UNC Online hopes to develop other course and degree consortia to help improve the ability of students to get the classes they need when there may not be enough enrollments at their home campus to ensure that a course gets taught.



Image 10: Screen Capture of Launching Page for UNC Online (Taken 3/4/2013).

Between 2007 and 2011, online-student credit hours at UNC grew more than 88 percent. If these trends continue, university officials predict that within a few years every student in the UNC system will have taken at least one online course before graduation. With this realization in mind, UNC Online is currently undergoing strategic planning to figure out how best to effectively present its course and degree offerings to students while also providing them one-stop online support services.

The university system office created a new director of e-learning in charge of launching an improved version of the UNC Online website that will provide a variety of online support services to students, such as e-mentoring and test proctoring. The newly hired director has a distance-education background, both as a faculty member and an administrator, and bridges the divide that can

sometimes occur among faculty, administrators, and the system office when re-imagining an existing effort.

One important bridge the director is charged with building is to increase and enhance communication between the UNC system office and each campus' distance-education representatives. In fall 2012, the director invited distance-education representatives from each campus to convene as a group for the first time in Chapel Hill. At that meeting, the representatives got acquainted with each other and broke into small working groups to discuss online quality, distance-education pedagogy, faculty development, and barriers to a seamless UNC Online registration system. In November, 50 faculty members and administrators attended a mini workshop in Chapel Hill on using social media, course redesign, and faculty certification.



Image 11: Screen Capture of Launching Page for Kentucky Learn on Demand (Taken 3/4/2013).

The system is looking to shift UNC Online to the next digital generation—beyond just being a catalogue of online course and program options for students, to a more unified and collaborative means of offering services that will better serve students among institutions in the system. UNC officials do not plan to stop their ascent at Step Three. Their intent is to continue to Step Four so that in the future students will be able to transition from one institution to another in the online environment, while receiving one-stop support services along the way.

Case Study #3: Kentucky's Learn on Demand⁸⁰
Kentucky's Learn on Demand is an innovative approach to providing shared and articulated credentials—Step Four of

Online System Collaboration. Institutions within Kentucky's Community & Technical College System develop competency-based courses that allow students to move through at their own pace once they've mastered certain competencies. This can cut a student's time to degree if he already has mastery of some course concepts through prior learning.

In 2006, Kentucky's Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) conducted a study that found that the state had the potential to triple the number of adults able to return to college by offering a flexible, modular curriculum where busy working adults could start anytime and progress according to their needs and competencies. The study also found that businesses wanted their employees to obtain training

to upgrade their skills without interrupting work. Based on these findings and demands, KCTCS developed the robust online system Learn on Demand (see Image 11, page 29).

Learn on Demand students access online programs through a single, streamlined website to begin, continue, and complete their online program, with little or no need to be physically present at any campus location.

Learn on Demand students access online programs through a single, streamlined website to begin, continue, and complete their online program, with little or no need to be physically present at any campus location. Learn on Demand courses are developed to be fully online and modularized. Students can work at their own pace within the start and end dates of the particular module. So, for example, a module with a credit-hour value of 0.6 to 1.0 would have a maximum length of time for completion of five weeks. Each of the course modules and instructors has been certified through a formal peer review process. And all students have access to a 24/7 Online Student Services Help Desk, where they can ask questions about anything having to do with their program, from admissions and financial aid to course requirements.

Current course offerings include certificate and degree programs, such as an associate degree in nursing and a certificate in small business administration, plus some ini-

tiatives to help those students who are not yet college-ready get onto a path that will lead them toward credit-bearing courses. This “College Readiness” program is available for reading, writing, and math. It features pre-assessment to determine which competencies the student already possesses, learning content aligned with any remaining course competencies the student needs to master, interactive learning activities to get the student to the competencies they don’t know, and a post-assessment. Additionally, each student is assigned a student success coach who provides 24-hour support as they move through the system. All credits earned through Learn on Demand are portable among KCTCS’ 16 colleges and the public four-year universities in Kentucky.

KCTCS Learn on Demand students pay the same tuition as in-state students. Online course materials are paid for through a required fee when tuition is calculated. The college that delivers the course receives the tuition revenue from the student since it incurs the instructional expense, and the home college from which the student is enrolled receives credit for the student via head count. Even though getting credit for head count doesn’t impact funding, it does influence the analysis the colleges run to show their impact. Any central services provided by Learn on Demand are covered by the remaining revenues.

Colleges and faculty that are interested in becoming a part of Learn on Demand submit extensive course proposals through an RFP process from KCTCS. In return for being chosen to develop and provide Learn on Demand courses, faculty and the institutions are given various incentives and

Innovative Practice: A Well-Designed and Iterative RFP Process

Learn on Demand’s well-developed RFP process ensures that the proposals KCTCS receives from faculty and institutions are thorough and will yield high-quality courses for students. This includes the expectation that the course and/or program will be delivered online, unless there is justification for requiring students to be on site (i.e., in the case of hands-on labs when simulation-based learning won’t suffice). Additionally, no course’s enrollment can be capped—colleges need to be able to provide a staffing plan that allows courses to be available to all students who wish to enroll, ensuring broad access to student demand.

The institution offering the course must adhere to quality assurance guidelines as developed by KCTCS, and any faculty members providing instruction must participate in a Learn on Demand certification training. Moreover, the lead college must establish a course review process that includes conducting a review and refinement of course components more than once during each term the course is delivered to ensure that it’s up to date.

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Image 12: Screen Capture of Launching Page for Tennessee's ROCC (Taken 3/4/2013).

professional development opportunities. Instructors who develop the courses, for example, are paid a stipend. And instructional designers help support faculty as they develop their courses. The KCTCS Faculty Senate approves the competencies of Learn on Demand users, ensuring faculty buy-in. KCTCS' eLearning Services, meanwhile, maintain control over the course design and intellectual property.

Case Study #4: Tennessee's Regents Online Campus Collaborative (ROCC)⁸¹

Tennessee's ROCC is another example of a state higher-education system that is at Step Four of Online System Collaboration. ROCC offers stand-alone, fully online credentials that combine courses from different institutions in the system.

Due to its diverse population and numerous rural communities, Tennessee has historically struggled to provide

broad access to higher education to its citizens. In 2001, Tennessee's Board of Regents (TBR), which is one of two systems of public higher education in Tennessee, noticed that requests for authorization to provide online education to Tennesseans had been increasing from outside state and private institutions of higher education. It was clear to TBR that significant demand for online education existed, but the students and tuition revenues were going elsewhere. As a result, the regents decided to create an online collaborative in the hope that it would not only expand access to state residents, but also would bring more revenue to the system.

Every campus had to give seed money to the collaborative to get it up and running, and in exchange received a certain percentage of revenue. By mandating that all campuses in the system participate in the creation of Regents Online

Campus Collaborative (ROCC), TBR was able to get online relatively quickly and reach wide swaths of students (see Image 12, page 31). TBR is the nation's sixth largest system of public higher education, with 27 institutions and an annual enrollment of over 200,000 students.

While ROCC was in development, it was decided that the collaborative would offer stand-alone, fully online credentials that wouldn't duplicate what was available online for existing campus programs. Students have a choice to apply and enroll through one home campus that houses the online degree. The degree is awarded from this "home" campus, and not ROCC. This has helped to prevent ROCC from becoming a separate institution, competing with other in-state institutions. It has also allowed the schools to keep a close handle on not duplicating their efforts.

ROCC has no funding from the state budget. It's entirely a self-sufficient model. Each campus gets paid approximately \$6,000 to develop a ROCC course. Some of that money, as determined by the campus, goes to the faculty member who develops the course. The tuition always stays with the home campus of the student. This means no matter what courses a student takes and no matter if it is taught by another campus in the system, the tuition revenue will go to the home campus where the student is enrolled. A portion of this fee goes back to ROCC to support its operations and IT infrastructure, the other portion is given to the campus teaching

the course. The more ROCC courses that a campus houses, and the more students who enroll in those courses, the more revenue the campus receives from ROCC.

ROCC has no funding from the state budget. It's entirely a self-sufficient model.

Currently, ROCC has 400 courses and has been able to expand at a rate of 10 to 15 courses a semester since campuses have realized it's a way for them to make some revenue and build their enrollments. It is win-win-win: State policymakers don't have to worry about funding, campuses see the fruits of their labors in the form of added revenue, and ROCC is able to provide a wealth of resources about online education to campuses and students.

ROCC was also launched with the agreement that the collaborative would offer the entire general education core online. This became a tremendous boost for campuses and students, since all students in the TBR system need to take a similar general education core. Since these classes tend to be overenrolled and under-resourced, putting them online relieved some of the pressure campuses were under.

Additionally, by putting the general education core online,

Innovative Practice: Mapping Student Learning Outcomes

All courses in ROCC have standard learning outcomes no matter how many sections are offered, no matter who is teaching the class, and no matter where the course is housed institutionally. These competencies provide a road map for students to better understand what they are expected to learn during the course. More importantly, this allows these courses to eventually be translated into a competency-based model if and when TBR decides to move away from seat-time learning and toward competency-based learning for its classes. For example, ACCT 1010: Principles of Accounting I has the following learning outcomes:

- Analyze, journalize, and post business transactions and use appropriate accounting terminology
- Prepare a multiple-step income statement, an owner's equity statement, and a classified balance sheet
- Analyze existing account balances, prepare end-of-period adjusting entries with or without a worksheet; prepare closing entries and a post-closing trial balance
- Account for cash and petty cash including internal controls over cash
- Account for merchandising companies including costing and internal control over inventory
- Account for receivables; plant assets, natural resources, and intangibles; current liabilities and payroll accounting

ROCC helps two different types of students on the road to completion: those completing fully online degrees and those who are supplementing their residential campus instruction. If a student, for example, needs to take English Composition I at Tennessee State University, but all sections are full or he needs more flexibility, he has an opportunity to take it online through ROCC. His credits for this ROCC class are universal—they will be accepted back into any campus of the TBR system. His transcript makes no distinction that this was an online course. This allows students to fulfill their degree requirements and move around within the system. Indeed, the general education core courses are among some of the highest-enrolled classes in ROCC.

To ensure course quality, ROCC's curriculum committee, which consists of one faculty representative from each campus, is tasked with approving courses for the collaborative. Once a faculty member decides that she wants to design an online class, she has to submit a proposal with a syllabus to the curriculum committee. If the committee approves

the course, the faculty member must go through a two-day online-course development training by ROCC. Once developed, the course goes through a thorough quality review process using a modified Quality Matters rubric. For each course, two instructional designers use this adapted rubric to evaluate the course. Since the ROCC wishes course development to be an iterative process, the designers provide feedback on how to make the course better for students to ensure that the course is ready for online delivery.

TBR is also completing a state-wide Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) initiative to help support adult students by helping them translate college-level learning earned outside of the classroom into college credit. While TBR has historically allowed granting of credits for prior learning, the implementation has always varied by campus. Starting this fall, TBR will roll out a new website on ROCC that will make PLA consistent across campuses. This will go a long way in helping smooth the path to a degree for adult students who may have significant work and life experience that could count for credit. 📌

Appendix B: Online Courses and Quality Control

Higher education often involves students passively receiving information, no matter if the course is online or in person. Students can sometimes find themselves in cavernous lecture halls with little to no opportunity to interact with their professor. Similarly, students online might encounter a replicated lecture-hall experience where they just watch a lecture through an online platform and take notes. Indeed, the limitations of communications technology have been such that this has often been the very nature of distance education. But this is increasingly not how online courses work today.

Just like with face-to-face courses, some online courses are better than others. There are those that use technology more as a supplement, by basically replicating face-to-face instruction. Others fully integrate technology, using it as a tool for learning, not just for delivery. The latter have the potential to lead to innovative practices that yield the same, if not better, learning outcomes than face-to-face instruction. The nonprofit National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT), for example, helps colleges redesign traditional face-to-face courses using online instruction. NCAT reports that its redesign of math courses at partner institutions has led to a 25 percent increase in successful course completion among students and a 37 percent reduction in instructional cost.⁸²

Just like with face-to-face courses, some online courses are better than others.

NCAT is one of many organizations that help colleges and universities successfully incorporate online teaching and learning into their courses. Other organizations help colleges and universities ensure that their online courses meet certain quality benchmarks. Quality Matters (QM) is a nonprofit that provides faculty resources and training to ensure the quality of online courses for subscribing members.⁸³ QM started in the fall of 2002 when MarylandOnline, a consortium of 19 public and independent two- and four-year colleges and universities, came together to discuss how to address quality concerns and accreditation issues for online courses.⁸⁴ Over the next four years, a faculty-centered course review and improvement system emerged, funded

in part by the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE).⁸⁵

QM focuses its efforts on improving course design, rather than on the academic content of the class. This helps ensure broad support from faculty members who are interested in moving online but are concerned about maintaining control over course content.⁸⁶ QM uses a rubric that includes eight categories with multiple subparts to evaluate the design of online courses:

- *Course Overview and Introduction*—The course design helps students understand how to get started in the course
- *Learning Objectives*—Course and module learning objectives are easy to understand and help students focus their efforts on the course
- *Assessment and Measurement*—Assessments measure the learning objectives and are an integral part of the learning process
- *Resources and Materials*—Instructional materials are prepared by qualified personnel and are sufficient to cover the learning objectives
- *Learner Engagement*—The course is designed to encourage interaction between instructor and students, among students, and between students and the course materials
- *Course Technology*—Navigation in the course ensures student access to instructional materials, and technology is used to foster student engagement
- *Learner Support*—The course offers resources to institutional services to ensure student success
- *Accessibility*—All students have access to the course components⁸⁷

Once a faculty member has designed a course using the QM Rubric, a QM Peer Review team, consisting of trained and certified faculty members from the same institution, scores the course. If an online course receives a score of 85 percent or better, it passes the peer review process.⁸⁸

Many colleges and universities use QM either in whole or in part to help ensure the quality of their online courses and provide support for the faculty developing these courses.

But what exactly do online courses look like? How is online

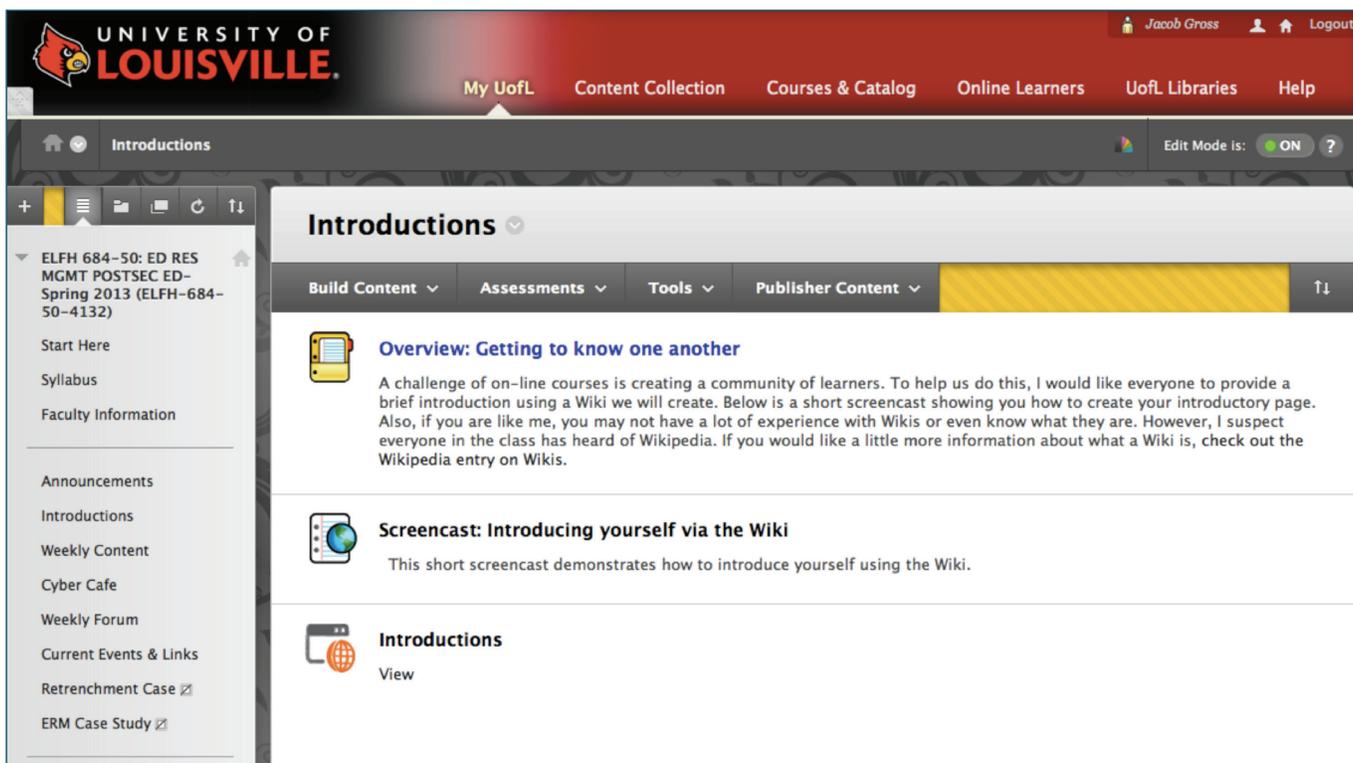


Image 13: Screen Capture of Lesson from Professor Jacob Gross' Educational Resource Management in Postsecondary Education graduate-level course at University of Louisville.

instruction different from face-to-face instruction? To better understand what online education looks like, both on the student and faculty side, below is an example of how one professor has developed and taught online courses. Since there is no “typical” online course, additional examples are provided to illustrate what online courses may entail at other institutions.

Jake Gross, University of Louisville⁸⁹

Jake Gross, assistant professor of higher education at the University of Louisville, has been teaching both online and face-to-face courses to undergraduates and graduate students since 2005. Currently, he teaches graduate students both online and face-to-face courses about educational resource management, the history of higher education, and the organization and administration of higher education online. (See Image 13, above.)

According to Gross, two principles guide the development of his courses, whether they are in-person or online: 1) Create a sense of community; and 2) be a “guide on the side” who facilitates the conversation. To create a sense of community for his online students, Gross has students introduce themselves through a Wiki—a website that is co-created by users,

allowing anyone to share and edit content. Gross' students use the Wiki as a means to communicate both professional and personal information in an informal setting. Think of it as a way to try to capture the pre- and post-class chitchat that occurs among students. Gross has noticed, through using web analytics that show the number of views of the Wiki, that students come back to it throughout the semester.

To help facilitate the conversation online, Gross organizes his assignments in a clear and concise way, creating a road map for students in multiple areas on the course website so they won't get lost. This includes setting up the reading materials and videos into learning modules by week, so everything a student needs can be found in one place. In addition, Gross makes a short video for each module to help orient students to the materials for the week, giving them some key points to focus on. As much as possible given the tools available to him, Gross tries to replicate the discussion that happens in a classroom. This includes giving students multiple venues for discussion and interaction, including discussion boards, wikis, blogs, and peer review of papers.

But while Louisville provides many tools and professional development to help guide and facilitate the creation of

online courses, Gross has had trouble learning and utilizing them to their full potential. As a professor on the tenure track, he has had to spend most of his time focusing on research instead of teaching. This has led him to combine the online learning tools available through Louisville, with free tools like YouTube and Google Analytics. “I’m a big fan of some of the free tools out there that don’t take much time to learn,” Gross explained. “There’s a myth that online teaching is cheaper, easier, and faster. But it takes much more time on the front end and I don’t get paid to be a technology person. I had to figure out the efficiencies myself.”

The biggest difference that Gross has noticed between in-person and online instruction is that discussions can evolve and change much more quickly in-person. That doesn’t necessarily mean that face-to-face instruction is inherently better, just that the asynchronous nature of the online courses can make it more difficult for interaction to develop harmoniously. He has noticed that students in online courses do tend to be more consistently engaged than their face-to-face counterparts. For example, an online student may post to discussion forums daily, as opposed to face-to-face students who participate in discussion only three days a week via lecture.

Other Examples of Online Course Formats

Just as courses vary at brick-and-mortar institutions—from large lectures that use PowerPoint to small seminars that

involve informal group discussion to hands-on science labs—so too do online courses. While there may not be a “typical” online course, Jake Gross’ courses are similar to other online courses in that they combine different content delivery and discussion methods. Online courses are rarely simply watching a streaming video of lecture and taking online quizzes and tests.

The University of Texas-Austin offers numerous self-paced online courses that allow students to take the class at any time convenient to them. Each course is organized into multiple lessons with objectives. For example, the objective of a lesson from Second-Year Spanish I is to learn “vocabulary about nature and the environment and practice writing while exploring the culture of Argentina.”⁹⁰ (See Image 14, below.) Students listen to audio of the vocabulary for the lesson while looking at labeled illustrated images. After learning the vocabulary, students proceed through activities in a textbook and watch an embedded video with follow-up questions. For an assignment, students complete a written activity in a Word file and upload it within the course platform (UT-Austin uses Blackboard LMS). Students also create an audio MP3 to submit as part of an assignment to fulfill a speaking requirement.

At Southern Crescent Technical College in Georgia, an online Introduction to Humanities class provides a “Start Here” folder to help orient students to the course, with a syllabus, opening lecture, and study guides. (See Image 15,

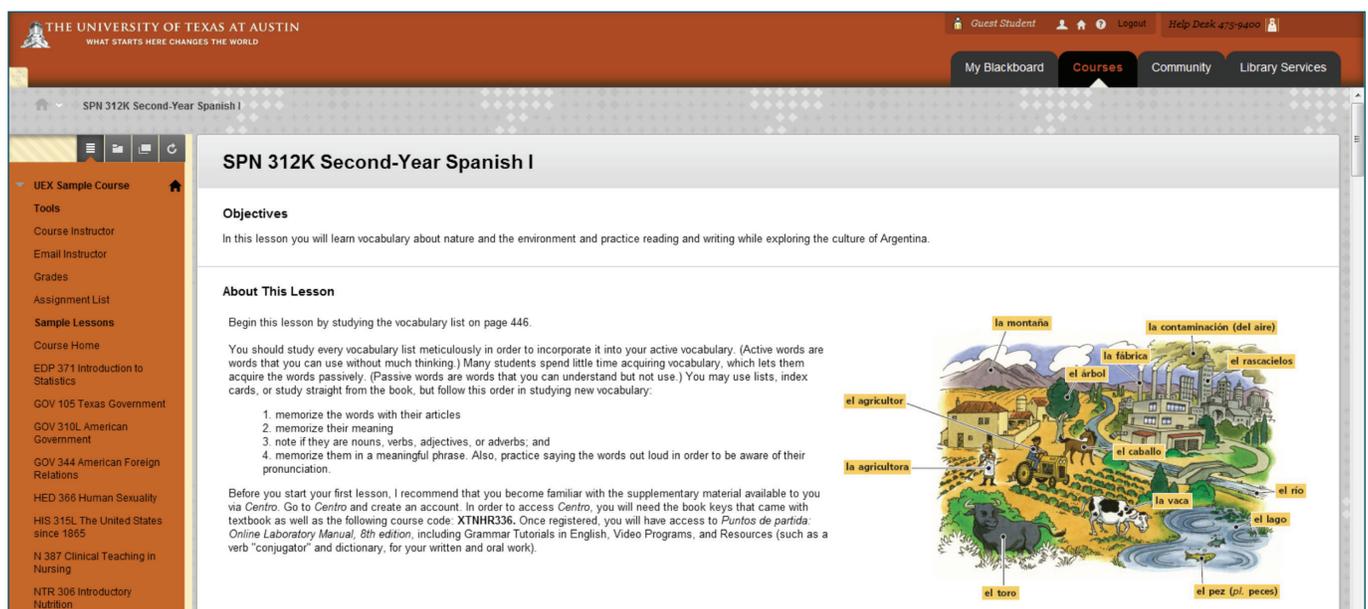


Image 14: Screen Capture of Lesson from Second-Year Spanish I at University of Texas-Austin..

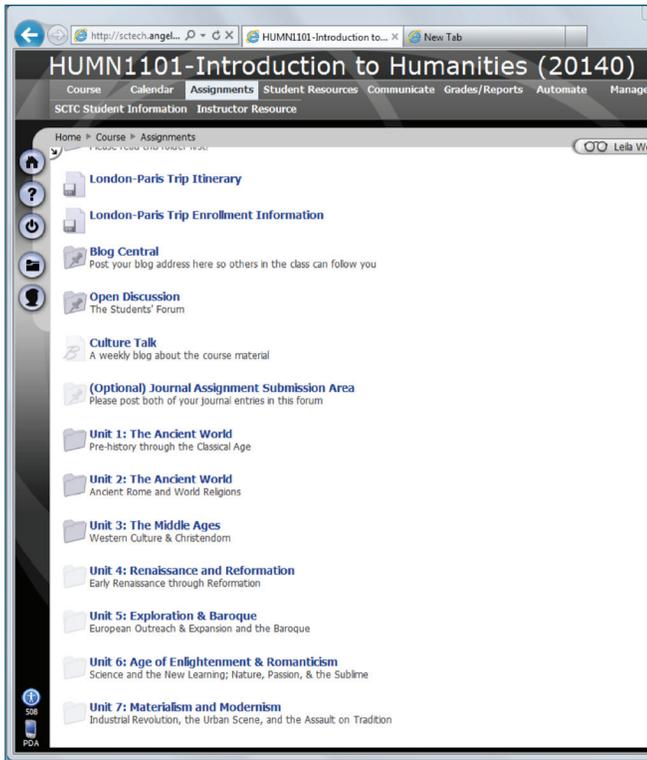


Image 15: Screen Capture of Lesson from Introduction to Humanities at Southern Crescent Technical College.

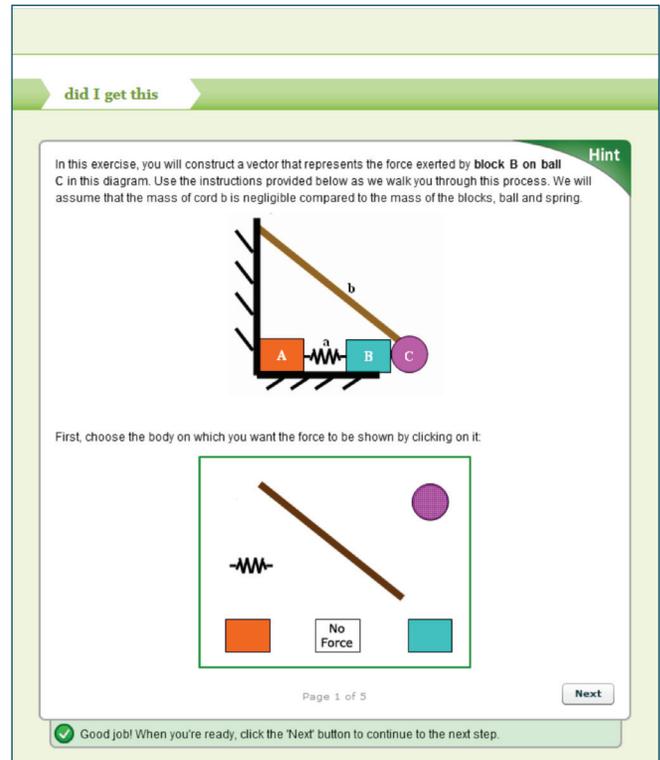


Image 16: Screen Capture of Unit from Engineering Statics, part of an online course from Carnegie Mellon's Open Learning Initiative.

above). The course content is organized through sub-modules within units to help students navigate through the materials in consecutive order as they master concepts. To encourage communication with each other, students use discussion boards and write blog posts. They also review each other's writing assignments. Course assessment depends on nine quizzes, three blog posts, journal assignments and discussion responses.⁹¹

Still other institutions use adaptive-learning software to deliver their online courses. This software tailors course materials to students' needs depending on how they

answer questions from embedded course assessments like mini-quizzes.⁹² One of the best-known examples of adaptive learning is Carnegie Mellon's Open Learning Initiative (OLI) (see Image 16, above). Using funds initially coming from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Carnegie Mellon offers mostly free courseware that has been adapted by faculty at more than 100 public universities and community colleges.⁹³ By using adaptive-learning software, faculty get actionable data from the constant assessments students take. They can then modify the rest of the course content to address the specific learning needs of the class, or the individual student. ➡

Interviews Conducted

Mark Adams, Manager—Product Communications, Florida Virtual Campus

Jay Box, Kentucky Community & Technical College System Chancellor

Rovy Branon, Associate Dean —Online Learning and Technology, University of Wisconsin-Extension

Alisa Chapman, Vice President for Academic and University Programs, University of North Carolina

Sandy Cook, System Director—Distance Learning, Kentucky Community and Technical College System

Thomas Gibson, Director—Academic Processes and eLearning, Montana University System

Jacob Gross, Assistant Professor, Department of Leadership, Foundations and Human Resource Education,
University of Louisville

Jane Hayes, Interim Executive Director, Florida Virtual Campus

Raylean Henry, Associate Vice Chancellor of the Regents Online Campus Collaborative

Richard S. Jarvis, Professor —Geological Sciences, University of Texas-El Paso

Manuel Lopez, Executive Director, Minnesota Online

Katrina Meyer, Professor—Leadership, University of Memphis

Don Muccino, Deputy Executive Director, Florida Virtual Campus

Margaret O’Hara, Director of E-Learning, University of North Carolina

John Opper, Director—Division of Distance Learning and Student Services, Florida Virtual Campus

Michael S. Rogers, Assistant Vice-Chancellor, Academic Affairs, University System of Georgia

Jon Sizemore, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Distance Education, University System of Georgia

Lauren Sproull, Executive Communications Specialist, Florida Virtual Campus

Holly Zanville, Program Director, Lumina Foundation

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