Recommendation of the Provost’s Task Force on Online Education

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Task Force Charges

- Determine the highest priorities (courses and programs) for online and blended learning at UTD.
- Determine the best process to ensure that online and blended course development occurs in a timely fashion with high quality results.
- Identify necessary campus support, software, and technology for effective online and blended course instruction.
- Identify outcomes to be assessed and by what metrics.
- Identify what models are best for providing faculty and unit incentives for course and program development, as well as periodic revision.

Recommendation 1, Determine the highest priorities (courses and programs) for online and blended learning at UTD: Strategically identify high-need online/blended undergraduate and graduate programs, courses, certificate programs, and workshops. Criteria to determine high need courses include (1) high enrollment, (2) revenue generating, (3) appropriate for online/blended delivery, (4) potential for dual use in blended and fully online formats, (5) school offerings not currently offered in the blended/online format, etc. A market analysis could be done internally (by individual schools or programs) or with the help of consultants.

Action Items:

- Determine if a consultant will be hired or if deans/department heads will conduct a market analysis.
- Conduct market analysis to determine the highest need programs, courses, certificates, and workshops.
- Set goals on how many online/blended courses will be offered each year according to a future timeline.

Rationale: This analysis should be done in the context of the University’s Strategic Plan and build on the strengths of our schools and opportunities presented by potential target markets. If done properly, this market analysis would result in identifying programs and courses that will potentially attract new students and also provide flexible options that may lead to higher retention and also enhance paths for current students to graduate, and perhaps graduate sooner. Offering more online courses during the summer semester will enable currently enrolled students to continue taking classes while home on break. Completion programs may attract transfer students and non-traditional students who have a substantial number of credits, but have not attained their degree due to life circumstances. New online programs may extend the reach of the physical campus, without the extensive investment in physical campus needed for these students.
Alumni and other non-degree seeking students may be served via online, revenue-generating boot camps and preparatory courses, and through certificate programs which could be offered to specific, targeted groups (such as military, corporations, and organizations).

**Recommendation 2, Determine the best process to ensure that online and blended course development occurs in a timely fashion with high quality results:** Implement a project management approach to course development in which an instructional designer oversees the design, development, and implementation of the online/blended course. Courses can be developed using one of two methods, a structured or an unstructured process. In the current structured approach, two semesters are required for course development. A faculty member would be encouraged to complete the already developed UT Dallas Online Teaching Certification to ensure a foundation in online/blended pedagogy and educational technology. The faculty member as a subject matter expert works with an instructional designer who handles all technical aspects of building the course to include video/lecture recording and editing, creation of assessments and assignments, organization of modules/units, technical review, etc. The course would undergo a peer review by another faculty member prior to the first offering. The course is built entirely by the instructional designer, through a collaboration with the faculty member, and then handed over to the faculty member.

In the unstructured approach, the course can be built on the faculty member’s schedule. The faculty member and a student worker would be encouraged to complete the UT Dallas Online Teaching Certification to ensure a foundation in online/blended pedagogy and educational technology. The instructional designer would work in concert with the subject matter expert (faculty) and the student worker in building the course. The student worker handles all technical aspects of course development. The course would undergo a peer review by another instructor and also a technical review by the instructional designer prior to the first offering. The instructional designer would be available for consultation while the course is being run. After each offering, the faculty member and designer would meet and review end of course evaluations and discuss/plan for improvements for the next offering. Major revisions are generally needed every three years. A course release and/or supplemental funding is recommended as revamping a course can be as labor intensive as developing a new course.

**Action Items:**

- Provost endorses course development processes.
- Implement compensation policy to include course releases and/or $5,000 course development stipends to be paid upon course completion and approval (or pro-rated stipend for revision).

**Rationale:** The eLearning Team has successfully employed the project management approach employing both a structured and an unstructured option for course development, resulting in nationally ranked online programs at JSOM. Student satisfaction and learning outcomes of existing blended and online programs are equivalent to their face to face counterparts. This team needs to be enhanced with skills and processes needed to deliver high-quality online and blended instruction.
Recommendation 3, Identify necessary campus support, software, and technology for effective online and blended course instruction: Broader background support structure is needed that includes (i) informative tutorials to educate students who are considering enrollment in online courses; (ii) staffing to facilitate outreach to faculty and administration in better communicating available resources and university plans for online education; and, (iii) under the large scale premise stated above, more staff, facilities and tools for broad implementation in a professional, state-of-the-art manner that will ensure high quality course delivery as well as academic integrity. The UT System is in the preliminary stages of forming a working group to identify potential system-wide technology agreements with vendors that would reduce costs for UT Dallas.

Action Items:

- Develop student tutorials.
- Increase outreach to faculty and administration.
- Hire additional staff (the number and timing will depend on how many courses and also the level of production value desired).
- Install new recording lab, implement other educational technologies as needed.

Rationale: Instructors should be provided resources, motivation and know-how to consider making this transition by converting traditional face-to-face instruction through hybrid offerings leading eventually to full online courses. Currently 8% of credit hours at UTD are blended/online. In order to increase this number, new resources should be allocated proportionally. For example, the eLearning Team has six instructional designers, two trainers, and one multimedia production studio. An instructional designer generally oversees the design/refreshing, and offering of 20 online/blended courses per semester. A student worker is assigned to each course for the initial development, and the instructor implements minor updates in future semesters. A student worker would be assigned to a course for major updates (which generally occur every three years). To increase bandwidth, a second production studio will be needed, as well as additional capabilities to support production.

Recommendation 4, Identify outcomes to be assessed and by what metrics: Learning outcomes should be assessed within online courses (e.g. how/what are students learning) and there should be assessments in place about the process of online education. Outcomes to be assessed for online/blended courses and programs should be comparable to their face-to-face counterparts to include learning outcomes that tie into program outcomes, enrollment, completion/drop rate, and student and instructor satisfaction. Additional outcomes to be assessed include year to year increase in online/blended sections offered, number of credit hours, geographic location of students, satisfaction with technology, training, and technical support, and also revenue generated. GPA and other metrics should be tracked as to compare between online, blended, and face to face offerings of the same course.
**Action Items:**

- Modify existing student surveys to collect new data.
- Work to create mechanisms to collect data (to include SPA, IT, and outside vendors).

**Rationale:** Online and blended courses/programs must be of the same rigor and breadth as face-to-face offerings. One way to insure this is by using the same outcomes and metrics currently in place, and also those to measure areas unique to the online/blended environment. Additional metrics should be tracked to measure growth and financials to determine the need for potential future resources.

**Recommendation 5, Identify what models are best for providing faculty and unit incentives for course and program development, as well as for periodic revision:** The university should undertake a concerted effort to understand the marketplace through benchmarking, recognizing that a viable business model makes the most sense if it attracts new students to UT Dallas. A suggested model is a cost and revenue sharing model for course development and implementation for programs, schools, and the Provost’s Office.

Given the traditional resistance to convert courses to online education formats, UT Dallas should implement actions to educate faculty on the value of and on what is involved with converting content to online formats, perhaps using a “formula” for the return on investment (in terms of time) for such conversion. As the development of a high-quality course requires substantial time and effort, a $5,000 course development stipend and/or course release is recommended. For high-impact/high-enrollment online and blended courses, a Provost’s Online/Blended Course Development Award (in which winners would be identified by a competitive campus-wide selection process managed by the Center for Teaching and Learning) is recommended. The winners would receive a cash award (above and beyond the $5,000 course development stipend) and formal recognition from the Provost. This new award would be in addition to the President’s Teaching Excellence Award in Online/Blended Instruction.

A clear message that the expansion of online/blended courses, where appropriate, is a critical part of UTD’s mission from the President and Provost would encourage schools and faculty to venture into this area. Financial incentives will further encourage faculty to develop online/blended courses.

**Action Items:**

- Develop and implement a cost/revenue-sharing model for course development and redevelopment.
- Implement a campus-wide competition in which the winners would receive a cash award and formal recognition from the Provost.
- President and Provost communicate to faculty that online and blended course delivery is a priority.
Rationale: Online/blended course development should be financially self-sustaining and the revenue should be shared with faculty to provide incentive. There is a concern among faculty that the administration frowns upon online and blended learning. When faculty understand that this is important to the UT System and UT Dallas leadership, as well as to the students, they will be more apt to teach online.

Additional Considerations

The committee made three recommendations beyond the initial Task Force charges.

- The Committee on Distance Learning periodically assesses the instructional design efforts as a whole to determine effectiveness, efficiency, and adequacy of resources.

- The Student Code of Conduct (UTDSP5003) should be updated to include an academic integrity policy specific to online/blended courses.

- Enhance accessibility to online and blended courses. While online and blended courses currently meet the legal standard for accessibility, there is more that can be done to better align with best practices. Examples include proactively captioning or providing transcripts of all videos and lectures, using tools such as Blackboard Ally to identify and correct inaccessible documents and assessments, and raising awareness and disseminating information on existing or needed capabilities/resources. These challenges are recognized, have been discussed, and some are being addressed. The committee recognizes that this will require additional tools and/or resources. The Campus Accessibility Committee, the Office of Student Accessibility, the Committee on Distance Learning, and the eLearning Team should be engaged to ensure that universal design and accessibility are considered and applied in the development of online learning courses at UT Dallas.