Distance and Online Education Task Force  
Recommendations and Next Steps  
December 14, 2012

Background

The College of Charleston has been offering online courses since 2009, primarily in the summer. The number of course sections offered each summer has grown as have enrollments in online courses. By summer 2012, average enrollments in online courses were slightly higher than in face-to-face summer courses. At the same time, unique online courses have been developed and employed strategically within undergraduate academic programs.¹ A federal grant funded the initial development of two English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) graduate certificates, enabling individuals all over South Carolina to receive advanced training in language instruction through a hybrid program format. In September of this year, President Benson announced that he and the Provost intended to create a task force charged with preparing a series of recommendations for the future of online education at the College, consistent with the Strategic Plan.²

The Distance and Online Education Task Force was formed and met for the first time on September 28, 2012. The Task Force was charged with “developing a plan for advancing the College of Charleston’s participation in the distance and online environment.” More specifically, the Task Force was asked to investigate and make recommendations on five broad issues including interest in and support for the development of online programs, the need for new policies and processes, the resources required to expand online education throughout the academic year, the mechanisms for quality assurance, and a timeline for implementation. The full charge and membership can be found in the Appendix. The second meeting of the Task Force featured a showcase of three online courses presented by Task Force faculty, each at a different level and serving a different function in the curriculum.³ The Task Force divided into working groups, met several times, accumulated and considered thousands of pages of research, drafted recommendations, solicited constituent responses at two campus-wide open forums and the December meeting of the Faculty Senate.⁴

This report concludes the preliminary phase of our work. We offer these recommendations to inform the first of many important conversations, decisions, and action steps relative to advancing a strategic plan for online education at the College. The Task Force has agreed, if asked, to remain active in support of this ongoing effort.

¹ For example, in implementing the First Year Experience requirement in 2011, the institution needed a way for students who failed to complete the requirement in fall and spring to enroll in the summer without bearing the additional cost of residence. An online seminar was developed and offered successfully in summer 2012. Moving DSCI 232, a core School of Business requirement online in spring 2013, resuscitated the dormant 2+2 program in Hospitality and Tourism with Trident Technical College.
² September 11, 2012 Faculty Senate minutes.
³ Jannette Finch, LIBR 105 Resources for Research (largely a skills course); Robin Zemp, MUSC 131 Music Appreciation (a general education humanities course); and David Desplaces, MGMT 325 (a course designed for Business majors).
⁴ The Working Group Reports are available elsewhere along with additional cost information and student support services requirements.
“What is it?”

For our purposes, online learning takes place when the teacher and learner are separated by space, time or both. Instruction is conducted primarily online (via the Internet) or through videoconferencing; and in a synchronous (live, real-time communication) and/or asynchronous (time-delayed interaction) mode. “Online” can be distinguished from “hybrid” or “blended” instruction depending on how much of the course material is delivered at a distance. Some faculty at the College already use hybrid instruction to “flip the classroom” so that content is delivered online and face-to-face interaction is devoted to synthesis and application activities. Similarly, faculty are effectively using online modules and adaptive assessments (often provided by publishers) to enhance the effectiveness of their face-to-face courses.

Current research distinguishes “traditional” and “new paradigm” online instruction. As one report notes, “The biggest obstacle to innovation is thinking it can be done the old way.”\(^5\) Traditional online instruction, the vast majority of online courses today, largely replicates on-campus courses and long-standing academic patterns and practices. New paradigm innovations break those molds and are characterized by flexible “anytime” enrollment options for students; just-in-time learning models; individualized, on-demand, 24/7 student services; innovative curricular design created and supported by teams of professionals; and learner assessment that is integrated throughout the curriculum by diagnosing students’ knowledge and skill levels as the begin their programs of study and responding accordingly.\(^6\) As one of the nation’s oldest institutions of higher learning the College of Charleston is deeply invested in the old paradigm of higher education; truly embracing the promise of online learning is a significant challenge.

“Why do it?”

- Experience with the online learning environment is essential to preparing students to be lifelong learners, regardless of major, and to engage effectively in the modern workforce, regardless of occupation. There is student interest in and demand for online education.
- Online courses and programs offer faculty opportunities to develop new pedagogies and skills, to revisit and revise courses, and they provide increased flexibility in when and where faculty teach. There is faculty interest in and demand for online education.
- Online education increases access to the College’s courses and programs, especially non-traditional, non-residential, and under-represented groups.
- Consistent with the Strategic Plan, online learning promotes the core value of a highly personalized education in that it requires students to be highly engaged with the material and with the instructor through regular communication and feedback.

**Recommendation:** The Task Force recommends moving forward deliberately and with energy to expand online education at the College of Charleston once the necessary policies, infrastructure, and resources are in place.

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\(^6\) See Twigg, pp. 6-7; See also University Business Roundtable, “The Promise and Perils of Innovation: Competitive Challenges to the Traditional Higher Education Model” The Advisory Board Company, 2012.
An expanded online presence consistent with our institutional mission and culture is possible and indeed desirable; however, with the exception of new online graduate programs and expansion of online summer courses, we do not find that online education will provide the College with a new revenue stream nor that the College will be competitive in attracting true distance students (those who will never set foot on campus). The reason to expand online education is to improve the overall quality of the education offered at the College of Charleston.

Careful attention should be paid to faculty and student perceptions of online education at the College as it expands. We recommend that focus groups be conducted with students to assess their expectations of and experiences with online courses here and elsewhere. There is tremendous variation in the quality of online instruction. Nationally, there is evidence of a higher DFW (Drop/Fail/Withdraw) rate in online courses and students must be given the proper tools to determine if they are prepared to succeed in an online course. Likewise, courses that fit multiple learning styles must be developed and offered at the College to meet the goal of expanded access.

“What must be in place prior to expanding online education?”

- IT, Computing, and Administrative Infrastructure
- Expanded Faculty Development and Training
- Local (Departmental) Control of Development and Growth of Online Education
- Quality Assurance at the Course and Program levels
- Expanded Online Student Support Services
- Expanded Online Library Resources and Services
- Online Orientation for Students
- Integrated Assessment of Student Learning
- Ownership and Compliance Policies

The Task Force recommends a phased approach to expanding online education coincident to the expansion of required resources.

Responsibility and accountability for execution of Phase One should reside jointly with the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Executive Vice President for Business Affairs. A status report should be delivered to the Faculty Senate and campus community every 3 months until Phase One is complete.

Phase One: Infrastructure, Positions, Faculty Development, Policies

Phase One must be focused on improving the IT, computing, and administrative support infrastructure, developing policies, and significantly expanding faculty development and online student support services to meet “best practice” standards appropriate to the current minimal level of online engagement. Although the Task Force has prepared some preliminary cost estimates for staff positions and basic software, estimating the additional IT requirements is beyond our ability. The execution of Phase One is essential to affirming the College’s commitment to seriously engaging in the online environment. Without adequate infrastructure, key positions, and necessary policies, progress will stall as it has in the past.
**Infrastructure**

The Task Force recommends that the College engage Huron Education consulting in a specific assessment of the additional IT requirements (bandwidth, computing power, technical support for students and faculty, stabilizing the My Charleston platform, etc.) and positions necessary to support the current needs of online education as well as future expansion. Specific cost estimates should also be provided. Although the recent Huron report noted that the College was unprepared for and faced several challenges related to online education, it did not specifically detail those challenges nor did the report estimate the costs of ameliorating the problems.

The final Huron report makes minimal mention of distance education, but alludes in several places to the College’s lack of an academic technology foundation to support the expansion of distance education. For example, wireless service is slow and spotty; over 45 percent of classrooms are currently equipped with little or no technology (slide 60, Huron Education, October 2012). Citing trends to build a foundation for future growth and academic advancement, the Huron report recommends that the College address several key issues related to instructional delivery online: faculty engagement in adoption and use of technology platforms; adequate learning technologists to support transition; lecture capture; support services to provide adequate help for students; effective LMS management; and improvement in LMS functionality, adoption and integration (slide 63, Huron Education, October 2012).

These improvements are essential to effectively delivering the curriculum at the College; the desire to expand online education increases the urgency of these needs. Faculty and students, by and large, have expressed interest in increasing their participation in online learning. However, we will quickly exhaust the supply of faculty with the technical skills to trouble-shoot for students and the patience of faculty and students to endure multiple unscheduled IT outages during a course.

**Positions**

Several new positions are required immediately to provide essential support for faculty and students.

a) **Faculty Coordinator of Online Education** (immediately) and **Director of Online Education** (Phase Two). Although we embrace a local control model for the expansion of online education, the research clearly argues that support services such as faculty training in online pedagogy and instructional design should be managed and provisioned centrally to ensure that access to them is both adequate and prioritized according to institutional goals. The Task Force has reviewed a number of models and recommends that a Faculty Coordinator be appointed immediately to begin this work. The primary duties of this position include coordinating the preparation of faculty and courses, assessing the effectiveness of online instruction in meeting institutional goals, and reporting regularly to the faculty and administration about the growth of online education at the College. **COST ESTIMATE:** Faculty Coordinator for Online Education, $41,130 (.25 FTE of average $65,000 + 34% benefits, 2/9 stipend).

b) **Academic Computing Application Administrator.** This role is responsible for the day-to-day management (front-end administration) of Desire2Learn, Kaltura (video platform), and Echo 360 applications (and other academic applications as assigned). This position will work closely with
Teaching, Learning and Technology, Information Technology, and the application users. It will also be critical for this position to collaborate with the System Administrator(s) in IT to coordinate upgrades, installs, scheduled outages, and ensure maintenance of server hardware, databases, security, backup and performance. COST ESTIMATE: $ 61,640 ($46,000 + 34% benefits)

c) Instructional Design Specialist. The instructional designer will work with faculty and TLT to design, develop, and support high quality courses that incorporate best practices in pedagogy, methodology, use of digital content and assessment of course outcomes. COST ESTIMATE: $71,020 ($53,000 + 34% benefits)

d) Multi-Media Specialist. This position is required to take online course development beyond the current state. The multi-media specialist would have training and strengths in programming, graphics, animation, and support for advanced video production. COST ESTIMATE: $61,640 ($46,000 + 34% benefits)

INITIAL COST for four critical positions: $ 235,430

Additional positions will also be required in the Library and in the Center for Student Learning to provide appropriate academic support for students in online courses. SACS accreditation requires online library and other student support services (e.g. advising and tutoring) comparable to those provided to students in residence.

New lines are needed nearly everywhere on campus, and some faculty have expressed the concern that a new initiative like online education will attract an inordinate share of scarce resources. The Task Force acknowledges these concerns; however, these positions are required to improve teaching and learning regardless of whether or not we significantly expand online courses or programs.

Faculty Development
A significant infusion of resources into faculty development and training is required prior to expanding online courses and programs. A Center for Faculty Development must be created in Academic Affairs incorporating TLT and the new positions in support of online education.

Developing and teaching a high-quality online course is a substantially different enterprise than preparing and teaching a face-to-face course. In addition, the workload is greater for faculty in an online course than in a face-to-face course.⁷ Expanded faculty development and training will be essential to the successful growth of online education and to recruiting the best faculty for online instruction. Acquisition of additional software, expanded lecture capture capacity, web-conferencing functionality, institutional licenses for commonly used online course tools like Voicethread, and captioning capability will be required to support course development.

The Library will continue to play an important role in developing high-quality online courses. There are already plans to re-purpose an existing position to create new capacity with an Online

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Instruction/Instructional Design Librarian. Collaboration across units in providing support to faculty and students is essential to avoid duplication of effort. Locating all of the collaborators in Academic Affairs makes practical sense.

The Teaching, Learning, and Technology (TLT) unit’s mission is to support the faculty in the integration of educational technology into pedagogy, assessment, and academic research to enhance student learning and promote effective and innovative instructional practices. TLT also assists in the planning and implementation of academically-focused college-wide initiatives. Currently, TLT is the only support for faculty teaching online courses; however, with the addition of new positions their role will likely change. Because their mission is first and foremost academic support, we recommend that TLT be moved into Academic Affairs while maintaining a close working relationship with Information Technology.

The Task Force reviewed several models of faculty development and training. Many of the elements of effective faculty preparation are being implemented by TLT and should be expanded including the use of DE faculty mentors and training and course development offered through online modules. Training and course development support must be offered in anticipation of every semester and at present we lack to the capacity in TLT to do so. Current compensation levels for course development should be compared with benchmark data and peers with adjustments made as appropriate. Best practice research on faculty compensation recommends that faculty receive additional pay for the development of an online course but no extra compensation for teaching online.

Although we strongly recommend hiring an instructional design specialist to assist faculty, we believe that faculty should be primarily responsible for developing the courses they intend to teach. Although we support cohorts of faculty developing courses in collaboration and rotating the teaching responsibilities, we do not support a model in which a faculty member is handed a pre-packaged online course to facilitate. We do not believe all faculty will be equally interested in or adept at teaching an online course. Faculty must not be “assigned” to teach online when not suited or prepared to do so effectively.

All of these positions as well as the online education initiative itself might find a home in the conception of a new building located near the library and dedicated to learning innovation.

Policies
A formal policy on ownership and intellectual property must be developed by General Counsel in consultation with faculty and the Task Force.

The issue of Ownership and Intellectual Property policy requires immediate attention. The Task Force recommends, consistent with AAUP guidelines and College culture, that online courses and instructional material belong to the faculty member with limited use by the institution. Online course development and delivery is substantially different than the traditional model of instruction. If and when the College develops online programs, once operational, those courses require regular online delivery. We recognize that the institution must retain the ability to serve

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students responsibly should the faculty member who developed the course be unavailable and thus recognize a period of limited use of a course.

**Timeline for Phase One:**

3 month intervals, report on progress from Provost and EVP for Business Affairs

**Spring 2013:**
- Develop and approve policy on intellectual property and course ownership (April)
- Request information from Huron Consulting on IT infrastructure with costs (April)
- Hire Faculty Coordinator for Online Education (March hire; start July 1)
- Hire Instructional Design Specialist (March)

**Summer 2013:**
- Hire Multi-Media Specialist (July 1)
- Hire Academic Computing Application Administrator (July 1)

**Fall 2013:**
- Expanded training and faculty development opportunities in place (August 15)
- Develop Online Education Strategic Plan for Phase Two

**“How should Distance and Online Education Grow at the College?”**

Phase Two, predicated on the accomplishment of Phase One, is focused on expansion of online education through the development of selected online graduate programs and a more robust and strategic development of online courses at the undergraduate level, and the expansion of summer school. We have referred to this as “opening the door” to departments and programs to begin planning for expansion.

- **Graduate programs, certificates, non-credit professional development programs**

Consistent with national trends, the greatest interest at the College of Charleston lies in graduate programs and certificates. Graduate programs in four of the six schools have expressed interest in migrating existing degree and certificate programs online or in developing new academic programs. Curriculum development and program approvals can take some time; planning should begin immediately.

**Recommendation:** Give graduate programs the “green light” to begin the planning necessary to mount online degrees and certificates. This includes providing new resources immediately for market analysis and curriculum development.

- **Undergraduate Education**

At the undergraduate level, faculty are most interested in expanding online education to enhance existing programs and goals, provide additional flexibility for students and faculty, and take advantage of powerful new adaptive technology to accelerate student learning.

Some courses and curriculum lend themselves better than others to online delivery; the Task Force recommends faculty work through departments in determining which, if any, courses in a
program will be offered online. A de-centralized approach will require careful monitoring and reporting of the percentage of each program offered online to comply with SACS and CHE requirements.

Online courses during fall and spring semesters should be taught as part of load and therefore may necessitate hiring more faculty if the course is offered in addition to rather than instead of existing courses.

Departments and programs should determine appropriate enrollment recognizing that faculty workload associated with online teaching is greater and more intense than with face-to-face courses. Enrollments in an online course should rarely exceed enrollments in comparable traditional courses, unless the course constitutes a larger share of faculty teaching load or the course is developed and supported by a team of faculty.

**Recommendation:** Expansion of online education must be driven by faculty working with colleagues through the normal curriculum development process within departments and programs.

- **Summer School**

Unlike fall and spring semesters, summer online courses offer a way to advance student learning and increase revenues by increasing total enrollments and attracting non-College of Charleston students. Many institutions nationally see a robust demand for summer offerings, and courses developed for summer can subsequently be offered during the fall and spring semesters. A revenue-sharing plan is already in place for summer school and should be widely shared with faculty to incentivize active engagement in developing creative new ways to accelerate student progress (e.g., offering course sequences or high-demand courses; providing students with the flexibility to complete requirements while studying abroad, etc.) and enhance academic success through online education.

**Recommendation:** Expand the number of summer courses and encourage strategic online course-sequence development such that summer plays a more integral role in advancing retention and time-to-degree goals.

**Conclusion and Next Steps**

The Distance and Online Education Task Force has worked quickly in getting this conversation started but because of the short timeline, there are inevitably many important issues remaining. Perhaps the most significant of these is a financial model for online education. As stated earlier, there is no evidence that expansion of online learning opportunities for existing students (outside of summer school) will generate new revenue to cover the additional costs associated with online education. At the graduate level, there are many opportunities to expand access to new constituencies and serve important community and state interests by expanding online education. The College is currently equipped to recruit and effectively serve true distance students and it may prove too costly to ever compete in this market at the undergraduate level. Instead, online
education offers a way to enhance and improve the quality and value of teaching and learning at the College.

Phase One recommendations necessarily focus on resources, IT and administrative infrastructure, and support positions because much of the work necessary to advance and expand online education is required to support the status quo; online and face-to-face. Faculty and staff feel strongly that they will only feel comfortable moving forward with this initiative if and when the necessary resources and infrastructure supports are in place. The College is significantly behind many other institutions in developing an online presence and the ground is constantly shifting even as we begin to take the smallest steps. Leaping forward will require a bold vision and a major investment.

Many of the detailed plans, policies, and measureable performance benchmarks remain incomplete. The time allotted for this initial work was too short to develop a detailed plan with benchmarks and the Task Force is missing critical information. The Task Force is prepared to continue working on these as steps are taken to address Phase One issues.

Online education holds the promise of radically transforming higher education as we know it. There have been a number of previous reports regarding online education generated by faculty and ad hoc committees without significant innovation or action. Inevitably resources, advocacy, and institutional will are required--not just open the door, but to embrace the concept.