

Report of the Online Learning Taskforce

Final Report, December 13, 2012

The Online Learning Taskforce includes members from academic units that currently participate in online and distance education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In addition to these academic units, representatives from the Office of the Provost, the Office of Information Technology, and the Tennessee Teaching and Learning Center offer the following report as our combined thoughts and direction for the future of online learning at UTK. Members are named in Appendix 1.

The taskforce was charged with the following:

This taskforce will focus primarily on how the university should support online courses and distance programs. The final report of the taskforce should include clear definitions of how these teaching modalities are/should be implemented at UTK. It should include a vision, mission, and proposed structure for support of online courses and distance programs. In addition, consideration should be given to both breadth and scope of revised teaching modalities.... While funding of programs may be a point of discussion, the focus should be on the types of support needed for faculty, students, and others rather than on the specifics of how online and/or DE should be funded.

This report provides draft mission, vision, and values statements and also provides a framework for the support needed to sustain and grow online learning.

Mission, Vision, and Values

After considerable deliberation and review of input from the Deans, Directors, and Department Heads retreat, the taskforce drafted statements designed to model the mission and vision for the Knoxville campus. The taskforce intentionally kept the mission and vision statements focused on broad principles rather than specific practices so that they can be sustainable in the ever-changing world of online technology and advancements in teaching modalities.

The value statements are intended to direct departments when planning for growth in online education. The value statements also further emphasize the major needs for the next steps of support in the growth of online education.

Mission

The primary mission of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville is to move forward the frontiers of human knowledge and enrich and elevate the citizens of the state of Tennessee, the nation, and the world. Innovative teaching is central to this mission. As technology evolves, new modalities build communities of learners in ways that increase flexibility and enhance access for motivated and qualified students. Most students will experience an immersive campus-based educational environment that is augmented with technology. Some students will also experience learning in virtual communities through online and blended courses. UT offers selected online programs that provide high-quality graduate and professional education to students whose primary learning environment is not on campus.

Vision

Aligned with the Vision of the University we embrace a three-part vision: Value creation, Original ideas, and Leadership.

Value creation by providing educational opportunities in areas that support the growing needs of the state, region, country, and world taught by top faculty and professionals while expanding the boundaries of our campus.

Original ideas that advance teaching, research, and service through non-traditional methods. Committed and diverse faculty members explore new methods in educational delivery and interact with students in ways that move higher education into the twenty-first century.

Leadership in enhancing the UT name and experience by using innovative teaching modalities. We strive for leadership in the use of technology to expand learning inside and outside the classroom for both on-campus and off-campus students.

Value Statements:

In online education we at UT value:

- Quality and accountability of the educational experience.
- Consideration for diversity; including people of all races, creeds, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, gender identities, physical abilities, and socioeconomic groups.
- Flexibility in offerings and presentation of courses and programs.
- Excellent service and support for the students, faculty, and staff.
- Maintaining and following established best practices for developing and delivering online instruction.*
- Appropriate assessment of educational opportunities and the value added to the student experience.
- Wise management of institutional resources and offering programs and courses that support a growing need both internally and externally.
- Maintaining the “UT Experience” for undergraduate students.

*Appendix 2 provides a link to a Best Practices document was developed prior to the work of the current taskforce and has been vetted by a broad spectrum of campus constituencies. Appendix 2 also includes a link to a glossary of key terms related to online learning that has had similar campus-wide review.

Summary of Support Needs

Table 1 summarizes support needs identified by the taskforce. The summary of student needs focus primarily on students who are not on campus.

Table 1: Summary of Support Needs

SUPPORT NEEDS	EXISTS	EXPAND	NEED
1) Faculty and Departmental Needs			
a) Clear policies and procedures for development and approval of online programs and courses		X	
b) Tools and processes for determining appropriateness of course/program offerings			X
c) Training and development support – including possible certification program(s)		X	
d) Technical support for teaching – need to stay current	X		
e) Assistance with assessing student learning and learner outcomes		X	
f) Proctoring of assessments			X
g) Tools for quality assessment of course (See Appendix 2)	X		
h) Process and procedures for quality assessment of courses and programs			X
i) Clarity of intellectual property issues			X
j) Website that offers faculty a one-stop service center for online teaching (<i>possibly part of a larger faculty one-stop web site</i>)			X
k) Clearly defined and implemented model for funding of online courses and programs		X	
2) Student Needs (Particularly for students who are not on campus)			
a) Support for transactions with the university (<i>e.g., bursar, registrar, financial aid</i>)			X
b) Library support	X		
c) Assessment of readiness to learn online		X	
d) Academic advising guidelines for online programs			X
e) Mentoring and career services guidelines			X
f) Disability services		X	
g) Tutoring Services			X
h) Bookstore	X		
i) Tech Support including test flights	X		
j) Clarity of labeling and expectations regarding course modality (<i>including technology requirements</i>)		X	
k) Ability to participate in “academic virtual communities”		X	
l) Ability to participate in the “UT Experience”		X	
m) Web site that clearly defines online offerings and processes			X

Support Needs Detailed

The following narrative provides more detail on items in the Table 1. The taskforce believes that the items marked as “Exists” are currently in place and meeting existing needs. Items marked “Expand” already exist but need to be expanded and those marked “Need” exist minimally if at all. Numbers in the narrative below refer to numbers in Table 1.

Exists

The taskforce believes technical support for teaching (1d), and tools for quality assessment (1g) are currently being met. The best practices document referenced in Appendix 2 is an excellent tool developed by a former UT taskforce that represents an in depth assessment of best practices in online education. Both of these areas of faculty support must be kept current and we have resources in OIT committed to meeting this need.

Three areas of student support are also currently met. Offerings from the library (2b) include research support and the continued support of document scanning and delivery services. The book store (2h) has created an online marketplace for textbooks including E-text books. OIT and the help desk provide good technical support for students (2i) including the program of test flights for BlackBoard. Again, it will be important to continue to monitor these service areas to make sure they continue to meet demand.

Expand: Faculty

Some areas of service to faculty exist, but not at the full level needed. One of the highest priorities is for more clarity of policies and procedures (1a) for development and approval of online programs and courses. The decisions for changing the teaching modality should originate with the department and instructor. However, creation of a group of policy documents clearly outlining the procedures for developing programs and courses should be considered. Included in these documents should be a set of guiding principles and instructions for obtaining approval for offering online courses. Approval should include approval processes for state, regional, and professional accreditation.

Some training and development support (1c) currently exists in the form of a summer teaching institute and a variety of training programs provided by OIT and the TennTLC. ITC currently has seven instructional designers – some of whom also do other IT work. However all training programs and resources should be expanded and promoted to faculty and departments. Consideration should also be given for formal certification programs and development of faculty learning communities and mentorship programs for faculty involved in online learning.

Assistance with assessing student learning and student learning outcomes (1e) is something that should happen on all levels of teaching. Both the ITC and the TennTLC have provided support for faculty who are developing assessment tools, but faculty need additional assistance in developing appropriate student outcomes and student assessments. Professors should be working on developing assessments that test higher levels of learning beyond simple recall from multiple choice exams. Expansion in this area will also allow for a smaller need for proctored examinations. While proctored exams should not be avoided and are discussed more in depth

below, there is some recognition that testing higher levels of learning is a way to combat opportunities for plagiarism and cheating.

Currently, academic units receive 50% return of tuition generated for programs that offer full programs to students who are not on campus. That return is only for students who take all of their coursework via online modalities. Those students pay a DE fee in lieu of some of the campus-based fees paid by on-campus students. This model is not well understood. It also needs to be refined to reflect current realities of online education (1k).

Expand: Students

Student needs that require some expansion begin with an assessment for online readiness of students (2c). Some departments currently offering distance education use such a tool, but many do not. Some students are more likely to succeed in an online environment than other students and assessments should be implemented to help our students determine if an online environment is right for them. In addition expansion of minimum technological requirements should be considered and promoted with students and faculty. This could also include providing support for students and faculty to gain access to the latest in technological tools.

Consideration for students with disabilities (2f) is a high priority in the needs expansion category. This consideration will require a change in mindset among the faculty and a need for additional support and resource from the university. As online programs and courses expand it is increasingly important to include ODS in early development conversations to allow for proper support mechanisms to be in place on the front end when students need them. ODS currently works with faculty who are developing online programs, but too often they are called in very late in the process – often only when a student with special needs enrolls.

We currently have minimal, and often confusing, labeling of online courses (2j). Clarity is needed on course modality in both the catalog and timetable. Expansion in this area will allow for students to know what kind of courses they are signing up for and for those students who need online courses to easily find the courses they need. It will also clarify technology requirements as appropriate.

Consideration should be given to providing support for developing academic virtual communities (2k) that are related to online courses and programs. Many of these are created by the students, but in some cases a platform and a location for creating these communities is necessary. It is the recommendation of this taskforce that support for these virtual communities should begin with the faculty but should ultimately be monitored, developed, and controlled by the students. This will allow for these communities to develop without fear of retribution from university administration.

In addition to academic virtual communities, more access should be available to distance students for activities that make up the “UT Experience” (2l). This includes online streaming of guest lectures, concerts, sporting events, or other campus experiences. This already exists for the larger campus events and campus media vehicles also have a strong online presence. This taskforce would like these opportunities to be expanded. We also suggest some student activities

should encourage connections between distance students and on-campus students. This could be through interactive discussion groups, or any other means to allow online students to feel that they are participating in the “UT Experience.”

Needed: Faculty

Tools and processes for determining appropriateness of program/course offering (1b)

Programs need more support for making appropriate decisions about when and how to offer programs and courses online. This should include support for market research and continued support for the Best Practices document supplied in Appendix 2. Included in this effort is a need for accurate and timely data demonstrating a need for certain courses to move to an online modality. Through this support departments will be capable of making decisions that support university goals for relieving bottlenecks and supporting the needs of the university community.

Proctoring of assessments (1f)

Efforts and processes to combat plagiarism and cheating need to be developed, implemented, and provided to faculty. Administrative support for proctoring of assessments is a high-level need for many areas and should be studied further. Many administrative models exist but investigation into these is beyond the scope of this taskforce.

Process and procedures for quality assessment of courses and programs (1h)

A plan for quality assessment for all teaching needs to be developed. A separate taskforce is working on suggested enhancements for review of teaching that should apply to all learning environments. However, because of the unique nature of online learning and the resources needed to develop an online program, quality assessment that focuses specifically on technology-enhanced learning modalities is strongly encouraged. A variety of assessment models exist and should be studied further. This assessment should be modeled on the peer review process that already exists in other areas of academe, and should be implemented for all programs new and old.

Clarity of intellectual property issues (1i)

Clear policies on intellectual property in relation to online courses and online learning modules needs to be developed by the General Counsel’s office in cooperation with the faculty senate.

Website that offers faculty a one-stop service center for online teaching (1j)

A singular portal for faculty using online learning modalities should be developed. This may be a part of a larger faculty one-stop website. This portal should also be a source for frequently asked questions, and a source for listing online courses and program offerings. It should also include a section for faculty to share ideas about online teaching.

Needed: Students

Support for Transactions with the University (2a)

The new One-Stop student services center will need to support students that are unable to come to campus. This office should consider developing methods of support that match the needs of our online students, including live chat, video support, and extended hours to support the flexible schedule of online students.

Academic Advising Guidelines for Online Programs (2d)

Because most programs will be taught at the graduate level, guidelines for faculty advising need to be developed so faculty and students will understand the requirements and necessary support online and distance students will require. In addition current undergraduate advising needs to support students that are at a distance from the university for short periods of time. Advisors also need to learn to work with students to help them if an online course would be better than taking an on campus course.

Mentoring and Career Service Guidelines (2e)

Similar to supporting students in academic advising, faculty and career services should work together to provide career support for online and distance students. This may require adjustment of the current fee structure to provide this support.

Tutoring Services (2g)

This includes the need for developing tutoring support for students taking both graduate and undergraduate online courses. Tutoring services should work towards providing support in a medium that works with online students. Adjustment of the current fee structure may be required to provide this support.

Website that Clearly Defines Online Offerings and Processes (2m)

This should be included with the faculty website for online processes. In addition a simple search tool should be developed for students to discover courses that are offered online. Web tools should also help market existing programs.

Recommendations

Table 2 provides a summary of recommendations for next steps in moving forward with enhancement of online courses and programs at the University of Tennessee.

Table 2: Recommendations

What	Who	When
Review Mission, Vision, and Values and seek input. If changes are suggested, review those with the taskforce to finalize language.	Share these with the following groups: Faculty Senate Graduate and Undergraduate councils Academic Deans and Department Heads Representative student groups Administrative and support groups	Fall 2012 and early spring 2013
Develop a plan to communicate better about existing services in support of technology-enhanced programs.	Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Coordinator of Online Programs with input from online taskforce.	Fall 2012 and early spring 2013
Continue to develop services noted in the “expand” column of Table 1 and communicate more effectively about those services as well.	Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Coordinator of Online Programs with input from online taskforce.	Fall 2012 and early spring 2013
Hire a Director of Online Programs, reporting direction to the Provost’s office, to assist with prioritization and development of all services.	Taskforce serves as search committee for new position.	Spring 2013
Refine, clarify, and communicate about funding model for online programs.	Provost office and office of the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration	Summer 2013
Hire administrative support staff person for the director of online programs	Director of Online Programs	Fall 2014
Make recommendations to hire additional staff in online office and/or related areas (e.g., TennTLC, ITC, ODS) as needed	Director of Online Programs	TBD

Appendix 1: Taskforce Members

<u>Member</u>	<u>Department/College</u>
Suzie Allard	Information Sciences/College of Communication & Information
Chuck Collins	Mathematics/College of Arts & Sciences
Sherry Cummings	Social Work/College of Social Work, Nashville
Jean Derco	Office of Information Technology
Wes Hines	Nuclear Engineering/College of Engineering
<i>Sally McMillan (Chair)</i>	Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Taimi Olsen	Tennessee Teaching & Learning Center
Tami Wyatt	College of Nursing
Lisa Yamagata-Lynch	Instructional Technology/College of Education, Health, & Human Sciences
Jason Smethers	Office of the Provost

Minutes recorded by: Mindy Koon, Administrative Coordinator for Sally McMillan

Appendix 2: Best Practices Document

The best practices document referenced earlier in this report can be found at:

<https://oit.utk.edu/instructional/strategies/Documents/Course%20Standards.pdf>

A glossary of terms related to online education and how those terms are used at UTK can be found at:

<https://oit.utk.edu/instructional/strategies/Documents/CourseStandardsGlossary.pdf>