Consolidation Committee
Final Report

Committee Details
Date: May 8, 2015
Committee Name: OWG 9 Distance Education (Academics)
Committee Co-Chairs: Michael Galchinsky (GSU), Margaret Ehrlich (GPC)
Functional Area: Related Non-Degree Academic Responsibilities

Function Area Coordinator: Tim Renick

List the major tasks your committee will need to take to accomplish your deliverables. Please provide more details for the tasks leading up to the SACSCOC Prospectus development.

Major Tasks for Committee Tracker from Final Planning Document and Recommendations

Task: Develop structure, function and role of Distance Education (in consultation with Committee 17)

Recommendation and/or Action Taken:
[Note: unless noted in red, the recommendation was approved by the CIC].

Structure

1. Recommends that the direction and pace of the growth of distance education at GSU should result from a planning process in which administration, faculty, students, and staff have a role. Distance education should both support and be reflected in the institution’s University Strategic Plan:

   The SACSCOC Policy on Distance Education states that “If an institution offers significant distance and correspondence education, it should be reflected in the institution’s mission.” Recognizing the new institution’s significant existing online courses and programs, and seeing the potential for growing this innovative part of the new GSU, the consolidated institution’s mission statement declares that GSU enrolls “one of the most diverse student bodies in the nation…online.” To ensure that the institution grows its distance education programs strategically and with the full support of its stakeholders, there should be a goal in the next University Strategic Plan on distance education.

2. Recommends that the University should explore mechanisms to ensure an appropriate balance between centralizing the administration of online education, and supporting innovations in distance education by individual faculty, departments, and colleges:

   Some distance education functions might be centralized while others left to the colleges and departments. The administrative structure should answer the question: to whom will instructors of hybrid and fully online courses report?
WITHDRAWN: Important ideas/recommendations for the future of distance education, but not directly focused on consolidation. Will be kept for future work after consolidation is enacted.

3. Recommends that the University Senate consider the most effective Senate mechanism by which to represent the interests and needs of distance education:

As distance education grows at Georgia State, faculty, staff, and students will need a Senate body for considering new policies and procedures affecting them.

4. Recommends that the university continue Perimeter’s Online Campus for two-year students in the access college, with dedicated online faculty, while undertaking initiatives to increase student success:

Perimeter’s online campus already provides 18 different fully online courses of study leading to A.A. and A.S. degrees. The Online Campus offers 58 courses in the core curriculum, taught by dedicated online faculty. Pending a determination of the larger structure of distance education in the new institution, Perimeter’s Online Campus should continue to operate in its current form, while reviewing opportunities to improve student success (DFW, Drop out, etc.) and overall quality, which should include adding a Student Success Advisor, initiatives on student readiness, instructor readiness, student and instructor support, standards for online course shells and all online courses, and sequencing.

5. Recommends that the university should explore whether to provide a unified online general education curriculum:

An online core curriculum would enable the institution to offer online B.A./B.S. programs.

REDIRECTED: Needs to go to Committee 7 General Education and Core Curriculum.

6. Recommends that the instructional method coding of courses in Banner should continue to follow the USG standards: “E” (“entirely at a distance”), “F” (fully at a distance), “P” (partially at a distance) and “H” (Hybrid):

The instructional method codes are mandated by the University System of Georgia and are consistent with practices at both GSU and GPC. The USG defines these instructional methods codes as: “E” (“entirely at a distance,” 100% online), “F”
7. **Recommends that the instructional method in a given course should not be listed on a student's transcript:**

Not listing instructional method on a student’s transcript is consistent with business practices and standards outlined by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. The institutions must guarantee the same high quality of instructions in its online courses as its face-to-face courses.

8. **Recommends that the university explore the location and pricing of proctored online testing:**

Proctored testing is a necessity in distance education, in order to comply with federal regulations requiring verification that the person taking the test is the same person as the student enrolled in the course. Electronic proctoring enables students at a distance to take tests from wherever they are, but is many times more expensive than on-site testing. The university should consider affordability, convenience, and price in its testing policy.

---

**Function**

1. **Recommends that instruction in distance education courses should demonstrate comparable quality to instruction in face to face courses, with rigorous expectations and assignments for which faculty assume primary responsibility:**

   SACSCOC requires that instruction be of comparable quality, regardless of instructional mode. Thus, whether instruction is entirely or partially online, synchronous or asynchronous, Georgia State should expect the same level of quality from its instructors. This expectation should be reflected in the attention paid to course development, and the review of instruction in the assessment of student learning outcomes, and in instructors’ annual evaluations and promotion decisions.

2. **Recommends that the university should keep comparative data on completion rates and DFW rates in online and face to face courses, by student level:**

   SACSCOC requires that instruction be of comparable quality, regardless of instructional mode. A national best practice in the measurement of comparable quality is to keep track of completion rates/DFW rates for both online and face to face courses.
Because DFW rates tend to be higher in online courses for lower division undergraduates than for upper division undergraduates or graduate students, the rates should be disaggregated by student level. These rates can be reported in the unit’s self-study during academic program review, among other uses.

3. Recommends that wherever online general education courses exist at both the downtown campus and Perimeter, the disciplines at both campuses should meet to ensure that overlapping courses are aligned in terms of their Common Course Outlines:

   Of the 149 general education courses in the core curriculum, eight are currently taught online by both GSU and GPC (Math 1111 College Algebra, Math 1113 Precalculus, Math 1070 Elementary Statistics, POLS 1101 American Government, POLS 2401 Global Issues, ECON 2105 Macroeconomics, ECON 2106 Microeconomics, and PSYC 1101 Intro to General Psychology). Chairs from the relevant disciplines at both campuses should ensure that these shared courses are comparable in terms of their learning outcomes, assignments, and expectations.

4. Recommends that the university should invest in and require professional development for all distance education instructors, offering continued exposure to best practices in the development and delivery of online courses, as well as to federal, accreditation, and BOR standards:

   It is much more likely that online courses will be successful if distance education instructors have been exposed to best practices in ‘what works’ in online settings and made aware of the rules and assessments governing online education.

5. Recommends that the university should define a certification process for faculty to be able to teach online. Faculty with significant prior online teaching experience—or verifiable comparable training—should have alternate paths to certification:

   A certification process will make it more likely that all distance education instructors know how to teach in online settings and abide by the rules governing online education spaces. Offering alternate certification paths respects the experiences of veteran online educators.

6. Recommends that students should be oriented to the LMS and support services; offered a means to self-assess the adequacy of their academic/technical/organizational skills for online learning; given course-embedded assessments of their online-readiness and progression; and advised as to their capacity to succeed in the online environment:
Given the high drop-out rates in online courses nationwide, the university needs to expend special efforts to ensure that students in Georgia State’s online courses succeed. Students who can focus on course content and experiences rather than using technologies, finding resources, and getting themselves organized, are more likely to stay in and succeed in online courses.

7. Recommends that distinct professional development and incentive options should be available for faculty who design and develop an online course:

Initial design and development of online courses requires a significant investment of time, not only to create the course content and build the online environment but also to develop familiarity with the required educational technologies, online pedagogies, and rules governing online education. Related professional development and incentives will make the initial course creation process less onerous and more successful.

8. Recommends that new online course descriptions and syllabi should be approved through regular department/college procedures, and new course templates should be reviewed by CII for adherence to university accessibility, security, and design standards:

Proposals for new courses are to be made by faculty who have completed GSU certification/training in distance education. The OWG envisions a two-step approval pathway. Evaluation of subject content remains with the discipline and college; evaluation of the template's compliance with federal and accreditation standards regarding accessibility and security, as well as university-wide design standards, is a central function to be performed by CII.

9. Recommends that online course developers should consult with instructional technologists/designers at CII to ensure compliance with accessibility and security standards, and incorporate best practices related to content design and delivery:

Instructional designers help speed the course development process, ensure that the course shell is federally compliant and meets university-wide design standards, introduce instructors new to distance education to best practices in this instructional modality, and enable even seasoned instructors to improve their use of online education technology.

10. Recommends that academic and student support services should be offered virtually and in person during extended hours. Investment in the growth of such services should keep pace with that of online programs, and all online programs and workshops should comply with ADA:

SACSCOC’s Policy on Distance Education requires that academic support services be
“specific and appropriate” for distance education. Because distance students are often not on campus and are disproportionately adult learners, they often require extended weekday and weekend hours for such services. These services include: registration, advisement, financial aid, disability services, instructional design, technology support, tutoring, proctoring, computer facilities, library services, and career services.

**REDIRECTED: Outside the purview of the CIC, because it relates to personnel allocations.**

11. **Recommends that the University should ensure continuous quality improvement and effectiveness of its distance education programs by instituting appropriate and specific processes of systematic course evaluation, student evaluation of instructor, student learning outcomes assessment, and academic program review:**

The University should develop a method for ensuring course quality and student learning outcomes. In the meantime, the access college would continue to use the Quality Matters rubric until and unless a university-wide methodology is developed. Student evaluation would be based on an instrument similar to that used in face to face courses but modified to capture the unique online characteristics. Curriculum development and program review would remain the responsibility of college-wide disciplines.

12. **Recommends that the university's distance education programs should continue to comply with state authorization requirements for online students:**

Administration of state authorizations is, at present, an onerous task, and should be the joint responsibility of the head of GSU’s centralized administrative structure for distance education and a representative of the Office of Legal Affairs. To ease the authorization burden, the university should become a member of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement as soon as the state of Georgia joins.

13. **Recommends that the university should review and adjust existing policies and procedures that ensure Rehabilitation Act/ADA, student identity verification, and FERPA compliance in online courses with respect to the learning management system and online education technology, including third party vendors and services:**

Policies and procedures to ensure compliance should include: an online request form for online students with disabilities seeking services (accommodations); review of current online education technology to ensure compliance; a mandatory procurement procedure for all online education technology addressing compliance, regardless of cost; a visibly posted description by CII of compliance requirements for courses that use online education technology; faculty orientation, training, and support in adhering to compliance requirements; and a certification procedure for ensuring course
14. **Recommends that the university examine the best mechanism to assure compliance with accessibility and privacy regulations in distance education:**

Ensuring compliance with federal standards regarding accessibility and privacy is a key central function of a university offering significant amounts of distance education. As the recent high-profile case involving Harvard and MIT demonstrated, the federal government is scrutinizing online accessibility and privacy, and federal funding of the university is at stake.

**WITHDRAWN: University must comply with federal regulations.**

15. **Recommends that the all campus-based testing facilities should provide test-takers with workstations equipped with regularly updated accessibility software and hardware:**

Online education technology changes rapidly, and this is true for both testing software and hardware. The director of campus online testing facilities should work with the compliance officers to ensure accessibility and privacy requirements are met.

**WITHDRAWN: Important ideas/recommendations for the future of distance education, but not directly focused on consolidation. Will be kept for future work after consolidation is enacted.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Recommends that Georgia State's distance education programs should enable a diverse student body—including adult learners, military veterans, students with disabilities, and first-generation college students—to obtain an affordable and accessible education:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the advantages of online programs is that it appeals to a diverse population of students in pursuit of higher educational degrees that have previously been inaccessible due to work schedules, family demands, or expense. Online education will attract more diverse students to GSU by granting access to those who were previously denied entry due to these factors.

**WITHDRAWN: Important ideas/recommendations for the future of distance education, but not directly focused on consolidation. Will be kept for future work after consolidation is enacted.**
2. Recommends that online education at GSU should contribute to the affordability of a student’s education through the use of e-rates, e-texts, and Open Educational Resources. Existing courses should be encouraged to include OER or low-cost, non-textbook content wherever desirable:

Affordability is a key tenet of GSU’s mission as an urban public university. By using e-rates, e-texts, and Open Educational Resources, online education at GSU will contribute to the affordability of a student’s education. Existing courses should be encouraged to include OER or low-cost, non-textbook content wherever possible and desirable.

WITHDRAWN: Important ideas/recommendations for the future of distance education, but not directly focused on consolidation. Will be kept for future work after consolidation is enacted.

3. Recommends that Georgia State’s distance education programs should, first and foremost, serve students in Atlanta, in the state of Georgia, and in the states administered by the Southern Region Education Board:

As an educational institution in the state of Georgia, GSU’s distance education programs need to first serve students in the Atlanta area, in the state of Georgia, and in the states administered by the Southern Region Education Board. Additional State Reciprocity Agreements should be pursued for future expansion of GSU Online.

WITHDRAWN: Important ideas/recommendations for the future of distance education, but not directly focused on consolidation. Will be kept for future work after consolidation is enacted.

4. Recommends that investment in distance education programs should target units with a cogent rationale to use this instructional mode and a robust capacity to develop a high-quality program; as well as the program’s local, national, and international reach:

Georgia State Online has the potential to use distance education methods to make significant pedagogical contributions, and reach out to student populations to which the university might not otherwise have access. Students enrolling in distance education programs might be in-state, in the region, or further afield, on military bases or overseas. When considering where to invest funds for course and program development, technology, marketing, and so on, administrators should be guided both by the program’s pedagogical value and its outreach potential.
WITHDRAWN: Important ideas/recommendations for the future of distance education, but not directly focused on consolidation. Will be kept for future work after consolidation is enacted.

5. Recommends that as part of its commitment to adult learners and the USG’s Complete College Georgia initiative, the university should look for entrepreneurial opportunities to partner with major employers to give their employees the opportunity to pursue high quality online degrees:

According to the USG in announcing their Go Back Move Ahead program, there are more than 1.1 million Georgians of working age that have some college credit but have not finished a degree. Many employers offer their employees Tuition Assistance Programs for this purpose. GSU should pursue partnerships with major employers to give their employees the opportunity to pursue high quality online degrees as part of our commitment to adult learners and the USG’s Complete College Georgia initiative.

WITHDRAWN: Important ideas/recommendations for the future of distance education, but not directly focused on consolidation. Will be kept for future work after consolidation is enacted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task: Identify eCore role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation and/or Action Taken</strong>: Determined not to affiliate with eCore at this time, to give the consolidated institution the opportunity to develop its own online core curriculum, considering that Perimeter already offers 58 of the 149 core courses online, and GSU currently offers 12.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task: Combine Online Course and Program Offerings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation and/or Action Taken</strong>: See Recommendation #3 under Function above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation and/or Action Taken:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation and/or Action Taken:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation and/or Action Taken:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other/Final Comments (if any):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>