Summary of Recommendations, Responses and Implications:

Audit recommendations followed by President Hamilton’s initial response from June 26, 2009 include in summary form:

1. The UA President should ensure that distance education recommendations are implemented.
   
   Response: (1) Progress on distance education goals and strategies will be incorporated into the biannual management reviews for each MAU. (2) All new and modified programs recommended to the Board of Regents will include analysis of the program’s distance delivery plans and potential. (3) Distance education has become a standing agenda item for the Board of Regents’ Academic and Student Affairs Committee.
   
   - Implications: (a) Those responsible for initiatives involving “DE processes”¹ are monitored and held accountable for implementation of approved recommendations. (b) “DE committees” should also periodically provide progress reports which include measurable outcomes and timeframes to the president.

2. The UA President should develop incentives for MAUs to collaborate on distance education initiatives.
   
   Response: UA will continue to identify and remove barriers through the implementation of the Distance Education Plan. (e.g. single sign-in, registration, student support, etc.)
   
   - Implications: Develop appropriate incentives which encourage MAUs to collaborate in DE delivery.

3. The VP for Academic Affairs should ensure that the faculty receives sufficient DE technology training and technical support.
   
   Response: Senior academic leadership has identified faculty preparation as its highest priority for enhancement of distance delivery. A detailed description of the first phase of training, which includes budgets, timelines and options for instructor training and technical support, is being prepared.
   
   - Implications: Ensure that faculty training needs (relative to DE) are met, and adequate technical support is available for faculty teaching DE courses.

4. The VP for Academic Affairs should develop, implement and enforce the use of standard DE course parameters and uniform course description information recorded on the management information system.
   
   Response: Stronger use of standard course parameters in the management information system will provide valid and reliable listings of available distance education offerings. Continued refinement of UA’s management information systems is essential to monitor and manage distance education activity.
   
   - Implications: Develop, implement and enforce use of standard parameters and uniform description information for course sections² recorded on the management information system.

¹ Referred to in the Audit as including various aspects of DE including, student access to UA online systems, software application systems, course registration, text book purchasing, accessing financial aid, IT assistance, etc.
² Actually, “course” is not the item of interest but rather “course section”. A single course may have multiple sections in a single semester, only a few of which may be DE sections.
Summary of Actions Proposed

Three priority actions are identified. Together, they respond to the above audit recommendations. All actions should be initiated immediately but completed in priority order.

Priority Action 1: Definition and Coding – Begin immediately, target completion date: March 31, 2010 – (a) Assemble an appropriate systemwide development team reporting to SAC; (b) Develop a simple, shared definition for distance education course sections; (c) Develop and employ appropriate coding in Banner, based on these definitions; and (d) Implement a UA-wide workflow to ensure consistent application of the definitions and coding scheme. Update gateway and course schedules, and provide regular reports of delivery, student attendance and student performance in distance courses. Responds to audit recommendation #4 and supports Provost Driscoll’s draft proposal on Coding (October 30, 2009).

Priority Action 2: Faculty Development and Support - Begin immediately, target completion dates noted for individual items – (a) Each MAU conducts a detailed investigation of faculty development programs internally and at other universities [March 31, 2010]. (b) Working groups appointed at each MAU evaluate or design faculty development processes for implementation at that MAU [December 2010]. (c) Each Provost selects those processes promising the greatest effectiveness and providing access to the most successful methods at each MAU [June 2010]. Investments from the UA System and individual MAUs support the establishment and sustainability of these processes. Assessment of faculty training and support on course and program effectiveness conducted by responsible faculty groups [on-going]. Responds to audit recommendation #3.

Priority Action 3: Collaboration – Begin immediately, target completion dates noted for individual items - (a) Develop a survey of existing mechanisms and their characteristics for collaborative development and delivery of programs that include appropriate compensation and credit for contributions of various units [March 31, 2010]. (b) Determine the principles and desired outcomes of collaboration and the characteristics of processes that will facilitate collaboration among departments, colleges and MAUs [June 30, 2010]. (c) Select or design appropriate processes and recommend to SAC for implementation across the UA system [December 31, 2010]. Set goals for collaborative delivery of courses and programs. Track delivery statistics and student performance in collaborative programs. Market programs on regional and wider basis. Responds to audit recommendation #2.

Discussion of Actions Proposed

Priority Action 1: Definition and Coding – A theme interleaved through all four Audit recommendations is the current lack of consistent definition of Distance Education and UA’s inability to present complete and accurate course information to students, or to collect and report management information on DE courses and those students who take them. A solution to the “Definition – Coding” problem is of paramount concern and that solution will impact the remaining recommendations, such as the need for “single student sign-on for system-wide access” (aka, single identity) and improved faculty training and technical support.

In addition to making it difficult to analyze and report on distance education efforts, UA’s current working “Definition – Coding” system makes it challenging to accurately and completely populate the UA Distance Education Gateway. UA students are not presented with a correct picture of the distance courses available to them. UA’s inability to accurately report on DE sections taught or students enrolled in DE sections interferes
with the accountability of those who are responsible for DE initiatives, the reporting of current use and forecasted growth, and establishing performance metrics to permit evaluation of specific DE initiatives.

With appropriate DE definition and coding of courses, designed to provide accessible and comparable data for all system courses, reasonable decisions could be made about the availability of courses, applicability to specific educational circumstances, costs of delivery, effectiveness of technologies and methods, and impacts on faculty, students and communities served. Until those data are reliable and acceptable to the units delivering these courses and programs, there will be little confidence in decisions or incentives to make adjustments based on the available evidence.

The Definition – Coding problem stems from lack of a clear, operational definition of DE (and other co-called “Session types”), deficiencies in current Banner configuration which do not permit a user to explicitly code a section as DE or assign required descriptive attributes to the section, and the lack of consistent, inter-MAU workflow process that is used to code course sections. Resolution of these issues cannot be accomplished by solely dealing with any one – resolution of the definition issue “informs” the work on resolution of the coding issue which in turn “informs” the work on resolution of the workflow issue.

Attempts to solve this problem by attacking any one issue in isolation will result in failure. Teams working on individual issues must collaborate extensively to ensure success. The Definition – Coding problem may be addressed by considering the following:

- DE course sections must be operationally distinguishable from other types of course sections offered each semester. To achieve this, two key results are required. First, a set of mutually-exclusive categories must be identified (one of which is DE) that are accepted by UA’s academic community as being accurate depictions of how instruction can be delivered. Second, each of the categories must be defined in such a manner as to have acceptable content validity and reliability so that high reliabilities will result when applied by users in a section-coding process.

- The following mutually-exclusive categories could be considered: Traditional classroom, Hybrid instruction, and Distance education. Other values may be included in this set but it may be argued that their addition would only serve to complicate the process of developing operational definitions for each. For example, addition of “Technology enhanced” as a value immediately evokes confusion as to how it is distinguished from the other values. Developing definitions for each value in this category set must take into primary consideration the needs of students who wish to register for courses (sections) in a semester that permit them flexibility (measured in meeting times, places and how instruction takes place). Definitions must also demonstrate content validity and reliability as mentioned above so that section-coding is accurate.

- Today, Banner has four fields which identify different aspects of a given course section in a semester. These fields, Session, Instructional Method, Attendance Method, and Meeting Type, each have multiple values but only one value may be assigned to individual field. That is, while there may be 9 potential Session types, 16 potential Instructional Methods, 49 potential Attendance Methods and 12 potential Meeting Types, a user may only code four discrete values. Attempts have been made to assign “Distance Education” or some derivative term as potential values in several of these fields. Using this scheme, analysts have attempted to employ complex business rules (e.g., if Session Type is ... and Attendance Method is ... or ...) to derive those sections which are DE. Accuracy is dependent upon individual users who will code sections differently due largely to the fact that field values are not mutually-exclusive and that fields only permit a single value to be assigned. The result is an over-complicated process that, while well-meaning, lacks both content validity and reliability when reporting which course sections are DE.

- The coding process is also flawed in that designers use coding categories which have not been vetted within the academic community and which lack practical meaning and separation. For example, the Session Type field currently provides users with (among others) the following three options: Distance –
Group Meeting, Distance – Independent, and Distance Permission Required. Due to the fact that these options are not mutually-exclusive and may conflict with other potential values of the Session Type field, there is a high probability that users will be confused by the options and miscode the field and therefore misrepresent a potential DE course section.

- What is needed is a Banner coding scheme that is “informed” by those working on an operational definition of “Distance Education”. Designers must at a minimum take the mutually-exclusive categories that definitions are based upon and reserve a single Banner field to permit users to code one value for each course section. The other three Banner fields can then be used to add additional attributes, such as technology used/required, so that the course section is adequately described both for a potential student as well as an analyst attempting to produce reports on DE performance. This approach will be difficult however as the four fields mentioned have over the years been used for a multitude of purposes by Statewide and individual MAUs. For example, certain fields have had values added to facilitate accounting, billing or enrollment management purposes. Any attempt to re-purpose fields will jeopardize the uses that certain organizations have designed into these fields.

The “Definition – Coding” problem is critical to solve within a very short period of time. Our desire to respond positively to Audit recommendations in advance of the State Legislature returning to session after the first of the year places a very short fuse on resolution of a problem that has taken years to fully develop. If this document delivers no other value, it should point out the fact that this problem cannot be solved in isolation. It should also clearly imply that the academic community must participate in the definition-building process. Not by fait accompli, but rather by rapid engagement.

Priority Action 2: Faculty Development and Support – This action is appropriately addressed individually by each MAU. Structural and mission differences indicate that the processes that are adopted would be best tailored to the characteristics of the MAU or college delivering the content.

The Audit captured only a fraction of all faculty development and support activities currently in place across UA. This is because structures, resources and processes that promote the development of capabilities within the faculties, and that support distance delivery of courses and programs are distributed among the colleges in each MAU. Methods and outcomes respond to individual missions and priorities. Nonetheless, all agree that additional investment in development of faculty capabilities and overall effectiveness of delivery is both important and appropriate.

Each Provost should begin to collect descriptions of training and support provided for faculty within each unit of each MAU. Much is currently being done but effort and outcomes are not necessarily being recorded or analyzed, and the success of students in distance courses is uneven. Units within each MAU should evaluate training programs and support mechanisms and adopt those most effective for their purposes. System and MAU investments in these programs and mechanisms can help to expand their reach and ensure their success. Provosts, individually and as a council can direct deans to ensure that minimum capabilities and support are in place prior to launching new courses or programs that are heavily dependent on technology.

Priority Action 3: Collaboration – Development of effective and sustainable collaborations should begin with a clear understanding of the contributions of each campus of each MAU to the success of students in their local areas, and the issues they face in supporting students enrolled in distance courses - regardless of the source of course or program delivery. Once determined by each MAU, a systemwide workgroup can review those contributions and issues and collect and evaluate existing and potential methods of collaboration.

Methods should be evaluated against an established set of principles and their potential effectiveness in fulfilling institutional and unit missions. Recommendations submitted to SAC should result in the adoption of
system principles and the embracing of one or more formal methods for collaboration. The following should be considered:

- **Adopt WICHE ICE course sharing model** – Teaching institution is different from enrolling institution. Students always enrolled at their home institution with an established method of sharing costs, revenue. Clear arrangements in place for application of academic and administrative policies. This is well defined and working on a very small scale. [http://www.wiche.edu/ice]

- **Local support for courses delivered by non-local units** – Need to define types of support provided. Examples might include (a) career and program advising, (b) health or disability support, (c) career services support, (d) tutoring in general (reading, writing, ESoL.) or disciplinary areas, (e) proctoring of exams, (f) sports and recreation, (g) clubs and governance, etc. Should begin by recording these for students who would not otherwise be eligible for these services.

- **Collaborative programs** – where institutions pool their expertise and expand their offerings or present to a wider audience. Examples include UA Social Work programs [See Oct. 19 letter from Prof. Sirles to Chancellor Rogers and Chancellor Rogers’s response of Oct. 28] and Health programs [See draft Health Distance Education Plan distributed to SAC via e-mail on Oct.27]

- **Others defined or discovered by the workgroup**

Analyze costs of these services and determine how they fit into funding and revenue schemes. Provide for fair distributions of $ and recognition for effort. This effort requires the engagement of academic leadership and the building of faculty relationships on a college, department and disciplinary level.