

# **eLearning Team Report**

UA Strategic Pathways January 18, 2017

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### Charge

Develop and review options for organizational restructuring including but not limited to further decentralization, consolidation at one campus, or consolidation at SW of functions that support significant enrollment growth and student attainment through outsourcing, automation, intercampus collaboration, process standardization, and other means TBD by the team.

### Scope

Production, marketing, and management of fully online and on-line hybrid classes across the system.

### Goal

Increase access to the university, decrease unnecessary duplication, and increase efficiency.

# **Key Stakeholders**

- Students
- Faculty
- Staff
- Executive Leadership
- Board of Regents
- ► Community Local Governments and Native Corps

- Grantors
- Vendors
- Regulators
- **Employers**
- **Parents**
- Alumni
- Legislators

### **Team Members**

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### **Process Overview**

The eLearning team is one of eight teams in Phase 2 of Strategic Pathways. Phase 2 began in early October 2016 when the teams met for the first time. During that first meeting, Session 1, there was a thorough orientation to the overall effort, and the charge, scope, and goal were refined. Most teams also identified the first iteration of potential Options. In the weeks between Session 1 and the second meeting, Session 2, the eLearning team continued to define the options with weekly teleconferences and virtual collaboration. The Pros and Cons for each Option were developed in Session 2, which was rescheduled from early November to late November due to cancelled flights. Since then the eLearning team has been continually refining the Options, Opportunities, Pros and Cons and writing them into the following document. This report serves as the main source of information for the Presentation to the Summit Team scheduled for January 18, 2017.

In the initial meeting the team asked for, and received, clarification from statewide administration that the assigned task pertained to management and support of eLearning—not to instruction or delivery of eLearning courses. Therefore, under all options presented here, it is understood that faculty/departments/schools/colleges offer courses and programs; none of these options change who offers courses or where programs are located.

The team would like to remind readers that UA has achieved substantial growth in eLearning credit hours and headcount each year. The strategic pathways charge to the eLearning team called for options that would support significant enrollment growth and student attainment. Accordingly, the options presented here focus on accommodating further growth and increasing access to Alaskans rather than making cuts for cost savings. Although the team gave careful consideration to efficiency and elimination of unnecessary duplication, each option requires more investment than the status quo.

The eLearning team wants to stress:

- 1. eLearning is currently defined differently and, to some extent, used for different purposes across the universities.
- 2. UA would benefit from a clear and shared definition of eLearning.
- 3. eLearning is foundational to the success of other curricular aspects of the Strategic Pathways process.
- 4. Bringing new or consolidated programs online anywhere in the system requires extensive coordination, support, and collaboration.
- 5. Reconfiguration of eLearning must be carefully planned and fully supported.

Finally, it is important to recognize that eLearning at UA is currently used to address multiple goals, as depicted in the table below. Restructuring to enhance one goal may diminish or eliminate UA's capacity to address other goals. (See addendum Role of eLearning)

### **Option 1 – Cooperative Decentralization**

### **Narrative Description**

This option would structurally leave the administrative business of eLearning concentrated within each university, but would add a collaborative statewide working group. This would allow each institution to maintain its respective differences while structuring its programs to best serve the needs of its specific student populations. This option would retain parallel services at each university in the system, but best practices within the field of distance education within this option would allow for:

- ▶ Local staff to meet one-on-one with faculty while building new online programs.
- Equitable services for eLearning as well as on-site students as required by NWCCU.
- ▶ Local university-based SARA administration, as required by state authorization guidelines.

### **Key Change Elements**

- ▶ Program/Offering Current operations for the management of eLearning capabilities would remain at each university.
- ▶ Staffing Changes Each university would identify a designated office or point of contact related to eLearning activity at that university (policy, process, development, SARA, accreditation issue, student services, etc.) within the institution, and which would serve as the central eLearning contact for statewide communication and collaboration. Each team should be funded equitably to provide for instructional designers, student service personnel, advisors, marketing and communication specialist. Would involve some reallocation of staff time and responsibilities.
- ▶ Use of Facilities No impact.
- Access for Students No impact anticipated for UAS or UAF. However, if more instructional designers were funded for UAA, more courses could be created.
- ▶ Administration Each university should designate one eLearning/Distance Education administrator and team to enable better cross-campus coordination/collaboration. eLearning representatives from each university would participate in a statewide working group or committee to facilitate inter-campus communication, collaborate on shared initiatives, and serve as a statewide point of contact.
- Front-End Investment Little to none, depending on how above named positions are created/designated.
- ► Community (external) Engagement/Partnerships None, business as usual.
- ► Faculty Opportunities/Impact None, business as usual.
- ▶ Use of Technology None, business as usual.
- ▶ Impact on Student Experience Designated eLearning team at each institution would allow for more equitable student experiences within each institution.
- Student Growth and Attainment Improve attainment.

# Option 1 continued – Cooperative Decentralization

### **Pros and Cons**

#### Pros

- Preserves what we have done well in accommodating growth in eLearning courses and programs; builds on recent successes
- Maintains opportunities for local student and faculty specialized support
- ▶ Likely to garner the most faculty support
- ▶ Easiest to scale up additional instructional and support staff to accommodate growth within programs where it is most needed
- Least disruptive modification of current practice, relative to other
- ▶ Could be an intermediate transition point to any of the other options
- ► Keeps decision-making close to academic program home
- ▶ Keeps support close to academic program/campus
- ▶ Most responsive to individual academic programs/campus needs and concerns, relative to other options
- ▶ More standardized than current practice
- Retains diversity and benefits from local expertise; encourages information sharing
- Can be implemented quickly
- Facilitates shared definitions for eLearning across the system

### Cons

- Provides fewer opportunities for economy of scale relative to other options
- ▶ Continues inconsistent student experiences across system w/nonacademic services (variance in campus practices; procedures; points of contact; IT support)
- ▶ Harder for UA system to go lean with this option
- Most duplication across system relative to other options
- ▶ Least standardized across system, relative to other options

# **Further Analysis Needed**

- What is the statewide eLearning governance structure?
- Who manages/administers academic technology due to the importance of collaborating with
- Who pays for support services? How are eLearning teams funded?

# **Option 2 – Complete Outsourcing to Vendor**

### **Narrative Description**

Under this option, UA would contract with a third-party vendor such as *Pearson Embanet* or Academic Partnerships. The vendor would perform market analysis and subsequently select a handful of programs at UA they deemed desirable for investment. Personnel provided by the vendor would assist UA with all aspects of program development and delivery and would assume some degree of curricular control. Depending on the contract, faculty and academics might retain or relinquish varying degrees of academic freedom and oversight.

With regard to existing online programs in which the vendor wished to invest, the vendor would likely require significant redesign of course materials.

The majority of existing online programs would either remain unaffected by this option or be eliminated, because vendors only agree to contract for specific programs identified as an opportunity for profit. (See OPM addendum)

### **Key Change Elements**

- ▶ Program/Offering Changes Vendor would select some programs to offer. UA could determine whether to continue or discontinue existing online degree programs not picked up by the vendor.
- ▶ Staffing Changes Could be a sizeable reduction in staff, depending on whether UA decided to retain existing online programs and courses outside the vendor partnership.
- ▶ Use of Facilities Would be maintained to support offerings not chosen by the vendor for investment, if UA selected to retain those offerings.
- Access for Students Decreased access for majority of students, unless UA retained other programs. Students might interact with the vendor rather than UA staff for all support services: admissions, registration, orientation, advising, and technical support.
- Administration UA would need to designate a position to manage the vendor contract. Depending on maintenance of online programs outside the outsource agreement, UAF and UAA might each discontinue eLearning team positions.
- ► Front-End Investment
  - o To be determined. Many outsourcing agencies do not require a capital investment up front - instead they collect a significant portion of all tuition revenue generated by the program.
  - o Might require a long-term contract.
  - o Significant investment of faculty time to develop new online courses or redesign existing courses/programs to meet vendor specifications.
- Community (external) Engagement/Partnerships Unclear whether the vendor would be willing to work with employers and funding agencies within the state. Vendor partnerships with local entities seem unlikely.

### Option 2 continued – Complete Outsourcing to Vendor

- Faculty Opportunities/Impact To be determined based on vendor negotiation. For example, UA faculty might work with instructional designers provided by the vendor. Faculty might or might not have access to local instructional designers affiliated with UA. Faculty development and support might also be handled by the vendor, in which case on-site assistance would not be available. Course content may be packaged, resulting in inability for faculty to adapt their course material on an as-needed basis (e.g., to address current events).
- Use of Technology To be determined. It is possible that the vendor would not be amenable to developing courses for low bandwidth.
- Impact on Student Experience
  - o With most vendors, students would choose "fully online" through the vendor or "fully on campus" through UA. They would not be able to mix online and classroom courses to fit their schedules. They would not have a local point of contact for assistance.
  - o Student advising might shift to the vendor depending on agreement.
- Student Growth and Attainment Unless UA retained programs not selected by the vendor, access and opportunity would be diminished for the majority of Alaskans.

### **Pros and Cons**

#### Pros

- Provides aggressive marketing and recruitment outside Alaska for vendorselected programs
- Standardizes student services and support within vendor-selected programs
- Relieves UA of operational costs of certain programs
- Zero up-front cost, and potential shortterm profits
- ▶ Depending on vendor SLA's (Service Level Agreements), might increase access to student support
- Market driven student enrollment might mean increased revenue for the programs a vendor elects to deliver

#### Cons

- Allows vendor to cherry pick our best programs with no obligation to offer other programs needed by Alaskans. Vendors offer programs only: individual courses would either continue to be supported by the campus or be discontinued.
- ▶ Diminishes UA's ability to deliver the courses or programs after required long-term contract expires
- Depending upon the contract and vendor, might require UA faculty to teach curriculum they did not create
- ▶ Sends work (and revenue) outside the
- ► Faculty would likely be extremely resistant
- Typically requires course content to be packaged, which may diminish faculty ability to adapt their course material on an as-needed basis

### Option 2 continued – Complete Outsourcing to Vendor

### Cons. continued

- Vendors might not be amenable to working with community partners, native corporations, etc.
- Loss of university control
- ► Typically requires long-term contract
- ▶ No consideration for low-bandwidth constraints of rural students
- ▶ Limits innovation, adaptation, and flexibility (high impact practices)
- ▶ Least likely to increase access for Alaskan students, relative to other options
- ▶ Removes meaningful Alaska context in coursework
- ► Likely requires students to choose "fully online" through the vendor or "fully on campus" through UA. Students would not be able to mix online and classroom courses to fit their schedules. They would not have a local point of contact for assistance. Limiting student choice to "fully online" could result in reduced enrollment by military students due to benefit restrictions.
- ▶ Likely to reduce student retention
- ▶ Puts online programs in competition with local programs
- ▶ Requires UA faculty and staff to work with vendor staff outside Alaska, delaying service response times
- ▶ Depending on vendor SLA's, might limit access to student support
- ► Emphasizes revenue generation rather than pedagogy and student learning
- ▶ Requires UA to maintain eLearning support services (or eliminate non-vendor-selected online courses and programs)
- ▶ Diminishes identification with State of Alaska
- ► Eliminates opportunities for FlexLearning in which students may attend the same class either with on-campus or online meetings

# Option 2 continued – Complete Outsourcing to Vendor

### **Further Analysis Needed**

- Who would negotiate the vendor contract?
- How would the priorities for negotiation be determined?
- What would UA do with existing online programs that the vendor didn't want?
- Would there be any impact on accreditation and state authorization?
- How much revenue would we be able to retain under the agreement?
- Would existing federal grants be affected if administrative services move campuses?
- What rates of success and failure have other universities seen through outsourcing?
- How would the vendor handle areas with low bandwidth?
- What would be the penalties if the contract was not fulfilled?
- Who would oversee the contract?

# Option 3 – Consolidate eLearning Support Services at One University

### **Narrative Description**

This option would consolidate all eLearning support functions at a single university with minimal (or no) parallel support at other universities. A parallel case from the business world might be a centralized call center.

# **Key Change Elements**

- ▶ Program/Offering Changes Should not affect offerings, because they are under faculty control, but would significantly impact support services.
- ▶ Staffing Changes
  - Little net change expected. Some minimal efficiencies might be gained through scale, but staffing needs would likely remain similar to the current situation. Instructional designers and student support staff would become employees of the consolidated University.
  - o Relocation of resources could be significant.
- ▶ Use of Facilities The campus chosen to house the consolidated unit would need to repurpose existing facilities or add new facilities to accommodate the increased support staff. Facilities devoted to eLearning support at other campuses would be freed for other uses. Student fees across the system would need to be refigured to account for the changes.
- ▶ Access for Students Most students would access support services via distance under this option. Students at the consolidated location might have face-to-face access.
- Administration The administrative structure at one campus would need to increase in order to oversee a larger office staff. Many university functions would also be affected because of the differences between universities and/or campuses in advising, admissions, registration, bursar's office, financial aid, tutoring, proctoring and faculty.
- ► Front-End Investment Possibly significant, depending on implementation:
  - o Relocating staff and office space from three campuses to one.
  - o Reconfiguring IT capabilities to create a much larger central office on one campus.
  - Cross-training staff to work with the three different university systems in terms of academics (accreditation themes and learning outcomes) and student services (advising, admissions, registration, bursar's office, financial aid, tutoring, proctoring).
  - Creating new position descriptions for University-wide positions, e.g., marketing and web presence, enrollment management, student and faculty recruitment, quality assurance.
- ► Community (external) Engagement/Partnerships Development of an attractive and well-marketed online and media presence for UA eLearning. Consolidating at one campus would reduce face-to-face presence for the communities and partners at the other campuses.

# Option 3 continued – Consolidate eLearning Support Services at One University

### **Key Change Elements, continued**

- ► Faculty Opportunities/Impact
  - A transparent system would need to be designed to assure that needs of faculty at each university are heard, including those rural areas where student broadband access is narrow.
  - O Development of centralized management of eLearning enrollment that would give faculty everywhere the opportunity to teach more distance classes as needed. For example, if it would be someone's job to monitor what distance courses were oversubscribed and in demand statewide, appropriate faculty from any campus could be recruited to teach.
  - Clearly communicated use of grant funds awarded when grant originator is not a part of university where eLearning support is consolidated.
- Use of Technology
  - o Consolidation under a single university would require that enterprise-level technology (hardware, software, vendors, systems) would be standardized.
  - Significant network/online resources would be centralized at one campus rather than divided among several.
- ▶ Impact on Student Experience The centralized eLearning support services would need to be coupled with the regularization of administrative functions across UA so that students do not have to negotiate multiple administrative systems to take classes (whether fully online or hybrid). Distance students want reliable help with finding online courses, registering, admissions/financial aid, understanding how to take an online course, reaching their professor, navigating technical difficulties, and having exams proctored.
- ▶ Student Growth and Attainment This option could have impact depending on implementation and buy in from other areas.

### **Pros and Cons**

#### Pros

- ► Facilitates statewide marketing opportunities
- Decreases duplicative services across system
- Streamlines management of vendor services
- Supports strategic enrollment management discussions
- ► Might allow for use of services/workload across the system

#### Cons

- Produces disruptive transition for staff, faculty and current students
- ► Generates potential for negative perceptions - perception of decreased services by students, faculty and staff; favoritism for home university; policy discussion without user governance
- Support becomes potentially more removed from the academic department offering the program

# Option 3 continued - Consolidate eLearning Support Services at One University

### Pros. continued

- Centralizes market analysis and data collection; could help identify opportunities for launch of shared degree programs
- Easier to scale back in case of major enrollment decline
- Creates opportunities for policy consistency
- Student access to support might be increased
- Creates opportunity for standardization of distance learning fee
- Creates a central point of contact for eLearning (e.g., for strategic enrollment management discussions system wide)

### Cons

- ➤ Some grant programs available at small campuses that currently fund instructional design and eLearning support would not transfer to a central location, requiring additional general fund monies to offer comparable services
- ► Costly to implement
- ► May meet faculty resistance
- Numerous questions about implementation
- Change in structure may negatively impact morale
- ► Potentially diminishes diversity in teaching/learning approaches
- ► Requires substantial staff relocation and/or layoff and rehiring
- ► Potential decline in quality of student access to support
- Difficult to maintain neutrality if you are host school for services
- At some point likely to create bottlenecks in course development and innovation
- ► Implementation requires a long transition timeline

# **Further Analysis Needed**

- ▶ What would be the potential impacts on accreditation and state authorization?
- ▶ What would be the implication for tuition revenue sharing? Funding?
- ▶ What would be the statewide eLearning governance structure?
- ▶ Who would manage/administer academic technology and relationship with Statewide and OIT for collaboration?
- ▶ What would be common definitions of "eLearning support" moving forward?
- ▶ Would existing federal grants be affected if administrative services move campuses?
- ► How would the transition period be managed for current degree-seeking students, as coursework and support would need to continue through the transition?

# Option 4 - Centralization at UA Statewide

### **Narrative Description**

Under this option, eLearning support would be centralized at UA Statewide. The centralized unit would be responsible for instructional design and course development, faculty development, student and faculty support, as well as student recruitment, advising, and retention. Similar to Option 3 (consolidation of eLearning support services at a single university), this option may be compared to a statewide call center, but with services delivered through the UA Statewide Office rather than from a single university.

### **Key Change Elements**

- ▶ Program/Offering Changes To be determined.
- Staffing Changes
  - Little net change expected. Some minimal efficiencies might be gained through scale, but staffing needs would likely remain similar to the current situation. Instructional designers and student support staff would become statewide employees.
  - o Relocation of resources could be significant.
- ▶ Use of Facilities Office space would shift—with a need for more office space at statewide and less at individual campuses. Each campus might still need a proctoring/exam center.
- Access for Students Little net change expected. Online students would benefit from a more consistent interface and more consistent support services, but consistency across online offerings might create inconsistencies with a local campus. For example, a student enrolled in a face-to-face program who took some degree requirements online might encounter inconsistencies between the face-to-face program and the online course.
- ▶ Administration Director positions could be eliminated at UAF and UAA. Statewide would need to hire a director. Net change: reduction of one position. Statewide is unable to offer courses, so close relationships between Statewide support and local campuses would need to be developed.
- ► Front-End Investment Large. UA Statewide does not currently employ the positions necessary to support online programs and courses (instructional designers, advisors, proctors, etc.). The investment to hire, train, and/or relocate staff to meet these needs could be considerable though the net number of employees would remain the same.
- ► Community (external) Engagement/ Partnerships Unclear.
- ► Faculty Opportunities/Impact Faculty might not have local on-site access to instructional designers.
- ▶ Use of Technology Use of enterprise software could streamline the student experience. Careful consideration would need to be given to standardization decisions, so as not to limit the diversity of technologies faculty use in support of their learning outcomes.

# Option 4 continued – Centralization at UA Statewide

### **Key Change Elements, continued**

- ▶ Impact on Student Experience As previously mentioned, students who mix online and classroom courses might encounter inconsistencies in everything from registration to financial aid to course support.
- ▶ Student Growth and Attainment Yes, could have impact depending on implementation and buy in from other areas.

### **Pros and Cons**

#### Pros

- Facilitates statewide marketing opportunities
- Decreases duplicative services across the system
- Streamlines management of vendor services
- Supports strategic enrollment management discussions
- Might allow for use of services/workload across the system
- Centralizes market analysis and data collection; could help identify opportunities for launch of shared degree programs
- Provides nonpartisan support of all campuses
- Creates opportunities for economy of scale
- Creates more regularized student support services
- Easier to scale back in case of major enrollment decline
- ► Centralizes decision making/processes
- Student access to support might increase
- Creates opportunity for standardization of distance learning fees
- Elevates eLearning importance / strategic role within Statewide organization

#### Cons

- ► Represents a departure from the stated function of UA statewide as an administrative and policy office to becoming an operational service provider; increased risk of mission drift
- Creates risk of policy discussions without user governance resulting from the central point of contact for statewide eLearning
- Produces a disruptive transition for staff, faculty and current students
- Costly to implement (rehiring/training staff and chain of command), as no structure for these functions currently exists at statewide
- Potentially diminishes diversity in teaching/learning approaches
- ► Increases distance between support functions and academic departments, increases distance between support functions and students
- ▶ Likely to meet faculty resistance
- Generates potential for negative perceptions - perception of decreased services by students, faculty and staff; policy discussion without user governance
- ➤ Some grant programs available at small campuses that currently fund instructional design and eLearning support would not transfer to a central location, requiring additional general fund monies to offer comparable services
- ▶ Numerous questions about implementation

# Option 4 continued – Centralization at UA Statewide

### Cons, continued

- ► Change in structure may negatively impact morale
- Requires substantial staff relocation and/or layoff and rehiring
- Potential decline in quality of student access to support
- Perceived favoritism for UAF because of Statewide's Fairbanks location
- ► At some point likely to create bottlenecks in course development and innovation
- ► Risk of increased public concern about the size of UA statewide office staff
- ► Implementation requires a long transition timeline

### **Further Analysis Needed**

- ▶ What would be the potential impacts on accreditation and state authorization?
- ▶ What would be the implication for tuition revenue sharing?
- ▶ How would the office be funded?
- ▶ What would be the statewide eLearning governance structure?
- ▶ Who would manage/administer academic technology and relationship with OIT for collaboration?
- ▶ What would be the common definitions of "eLearning support" moving forward?
- ▶ Would existing federal grants be affected if administrative services move campuses?
- ▶ How would the transition period be managed for current students, as coursework and support would need to continue through the transition?
- ▶ What would be the implications of adding operational services to current administrative services?

# **Option 5 – eLearning Inter-University Consortium**

### **Narrative Description**

The consortium model would be a formal partnership of the universities, each member with a vested interest in delivering a high-quality eLearning experience. All university members represented in the consortium would work together to act as a single body. As with Option 1 Collaborative model, this option would create a standing work group of eLearning representatives from each university, but with an articulated policy, governance structure, and opportunity for formal relationships with key stakeholders.

The consortium members would engage holistically in enrollment management - viewing course and program offerings across the state, tracking enrollment changes and trends, and maximizing opportunities to coordinate course offerings.

Instructors could take advantage of shared resources, as well as collaborative and local instructional design assistance. This model would require an articulation agreement with all of the parties; membership would come with responsibilities and commitments.

### **Key Change Elements**

- Program/Offering Changes Might facilitate launch of additional online degree programs and/or joint degrees by academic units. Increased communication and planning of online offerings; increased access to online learning opportunities which could result in increased enrollments.
- ▶ Staffing Changes Would require new staff to oversee consortium. Would require identification and/or clarification of staff administration to work within the consortium. Identification of staff at each university and campus that would be the key member of consortium.
- ▶ Use of Facilities Space needed for meeting and administration support. Might require a consortium office at each university.
- ► Access for Students
  - o Increased communication about online offerings; increased access to online learning opportunities which could result in increased enrollments.
  - o Single website for eLearning opportunities.
  - The consortium advisory group would explore streamlining access to online resources for students.
  - o Could expand flexibility and choices in the courses selected.
  - o More efficient routing of students to academic advisors.
  - o University consortium offices could be a point-of-contact for recruitment and marketing of Alaskan students with some college but no degree.
  - Streamline approvals necessary for students to enroll in courses outside their home campus.

# Option 5 continued – ELearning Inter-University Consortium

### **Key Change Elements, continued**

- Members could share projected course offerings semesters/years in advance, resulting in improved enrollment management.
- Administration Administration at each university might need to expand oversight to consortium agreements and participating staff. Might need clarification of staff administration to work within the consortium, and the authority of that role. Definition and upholding of policies and procedures would occur through the consortium.
- ► Front-End Investment Moderate. Staff time to build and maintain consortium model. General Counsel time on consortium agreement. A jointly-supported, robust website and shared marketing outreach would need to be funded. Potential investment in the front-end website
- ➤ Community (external) Engagement/Partnerships Provides the opportunity to work with other agencies in the state. The consortium model would provide a more consistent structure for community partners to work with, as well as the opportunity for a community partner to work with the entire eLearning community as opposed to a single campus. Increased community partnerships would provide additional resources to the university, potentially facilitating cost savings.
- ► Faculty Opportunities/Impact Access to expanded resources and more consistent support for faculty and staff. Shared information would identify areas of need across the state where campuses could provide additional offerings.
- ▶ Use of Technology Excellence in technology support. Members could collaborate on large-scale technology purchases.
- ► Impact on Student Experience
  - Students would learn of available courses earlier. Greater efficiency in enrolling in courses outside their home campus.
  - o Consortium model would facilitate more online tools being available to instructors.
  - Easier online enrolling experience could bring opportunity for more returning online students
- ▶ Student Growth and Attainment Positive growth and attainment with shared marketing and expanded offerings due to coordination.

# Option 5 continued – E-learning Inter-University Consortium

### **Pros and Cons**

#### Pros

- Formalizes the intent to increase quality of student experience
- Capitalizes on institutional strengths
- Keeps support for faculty and students close to academic program/campus
- Remains highly responsive to individual program/campus needs & concerns
- Maintains potential for academic programs to scale up individually
- Supports the possibility for shared enrollment management strategy in high demand courses and programs
- ► Facilitates the creation of shared definitions for eLearning terminology
- ► Facilitates a more consistent online student experience across the system
- Might facilitate launch of shared degree programs available through distance
- ► Formalizes processes, procedures, and decision making across system
- Provides a structure that could be used for governance and management agreements
- Provides opportunity for economies of scale and for members to access resources licensed by consortium
- ► Honors the diverse voices and strengths of each university in an egalitarian way
- ► Keeps student support local
- Preserves what UA has done well in accommodating growth in eLearning courses and programs; builds on recent successes
- Keeps many/most decisions close to the academic program home

### Cons

- ► Might create more bureaucracy with potential additional steps to the decision making process
- ➤ Requires additional staff at Statewide/Universities to coordinate/manage consortium
- Requires greater due diligence on design, therefore longer time for design process
- ► Less opportunities for economy of scale relative to other options
- Requires careful planning and scaling up
- Continues inconsistent student cost (different fees for different programs/campus)
- Requires formal agreements

# Option 5 continued – E-learning Inter-University Consortium

### Pros, continued

- Retains diversity and benefits from local expertise; allows shared information
- ► Likely to garner faculty support
- Creates wide opportunities to scale up and down easily (flexible)
- ▶ Reduces some redundancy
- ► Allows campuses to offer complimentary services
- ► Helps to retain cultural identities of campuses
- Promotes sharing of tools and design amongst universities

### **Further Analysis Needed**

- ▶ What would the consortium's role? What services would they offer? What would be their purpose?
- ▶ Who does the consortium report to?
- ▶ What authority does this group have?
- ▶ Who would sign consortium agreement?
- ► How would the consortium be funded?
- ▶ Who would manage/administer academic technology and relationship with OIT for collaboration?
- ▶ Who would be the representatives? Who would be at the table?
- ▶ What would the relationship between the consortium and the procurement office?
- ▶ How would we handle disagreement at the consortium level?
- ▶ What would be needed to create a consortium agreement? legal?

# **Other Opportunities for Change**

- Centralized marketing
- ▶ In anticipation of continued growth in eLearning across the UA system, faculty should have continued and/or improved access to instructional designers, development opportunities, and support for and from the following examples:
  - o Design
  - Facilitation of online course
  - o IT (how to use)
  - o Faculty development- (why is the tool used)
  - o Blackboard/CMS
  - Troubleshooting
  - Exam proctoring
  - Communication to support eLearning
  - o Intervention to non-responsive students
- Online student access to services should be enhanced to ensure it is equivalent to service provided to on-site students
- ► Common website providing an easily navigable list of all online learning offerings
- ▶ Support programs intended for onboarding non-traditional students, including the 115K Alaskans with some college, no degree (e.g. the UAS Finish College Alaska Initiative)
- ▶ Increasing the online availability of courses required by majors
- ► Facilitate launch of additional degrees that are fully available online
- ▶ Partner with Student and Academic Affairs to ensure that eLearning is used to support other administrative retention goals/programs.
- Shared vocabulary for eLearning
- ► Facilitate two-way communication between statewide and universities with regard to eLearning issues
- ▶ Reevaluate and further standardize coding and reporting (i.e., Banner)
- ▶ Develop a well-produced Student Orientation to Online Learning. Currently, the student online orientation is being recreated at several campuses.
- ▶ Provide additional tools for Advisors across the system to ensure they are aware of all online offerings.
- ▶ Working through Institutional Research, invest in data analytic systems to identify at-risk students and identify online areas of concern.
- ▶ Continue to monitor emerging best practices and national standards for excellence in online education through currently-available tools, comparison against similar online programs in other states, continual assessment of the UA online technology ecosystem, and establishing a long-term vision for the UA student online experience.
- ► Hold a system-wide eLearning summit to discuss issues, identify goals, and plan collaborative efforts.

### **Addendums**

- ▶ Role of eLearning
- ▶ eLearning Pathways Report Preface
- ► Online Program Managers (OPM)
- ► Course Exchange: The Intended Consequences, California Community Campus System (You Tube Video)
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DdlaIZYiDI&feature=youtu.be
- Definitions related to eLearning at the University of Alaska
- ► Regents4 eLearning task force report

# Role of eLearning

	v	Vill the role be add	lressed efficientl	y through this optio	n?
What is eLearning's role at UA? (what problem does it solve?)	Decentralized	Outsource	Centralized at one University	Centralized at Statewide	Consortium
Expand access: Target non-traditional Alaskan students	maybe	no	yes	yes	yes
Attract students from outside Alaska	maybe	yes	maybe	maybe	maybe
Facilitate seamless experience for multi-campus students	maybe	no	yes	yes	yes
Improve recruitment and retention of campus-based students	yes	no	no	no	yes
Reduce time-to-degree for campus-based students	yes	no	maybe	maybe	yes
Improve recruitment and retention of online degree students	maybe	maybe	yes	yes	yes

### **eLearning Pathways Report Preface**

The nature of higher education has changed. Nowhere is this more readily seen than in the area of technology-enhanced teaching and learning. With rapid advances in technology, institutions must change the way they do business. It is no longer enough for a professor to upload a syllabus and PowerPoint slides or to record a live class with a shaky home video camera and post the video in Blackboard. Today's students have many available choices and, with the rising costs of higher education across the nation, they are more selective in finding the right class, for the right price, to meet their specific needs.

The eLearning Strategic Pathways team struggled at length to agree on a single definition for eLearning. Some of the disparity is captured in the addendum on definitions. In the end, the team chose to focus on distance (non-location-based) courses. But it is important to realize that almost all courses within the UA system use technology-enhanced resources to some degree. For example, the majority of UA courses include a Blackboard component. According to the definition of eLearning used by some team members, that moves almost all UA courses into an eLearning category. So, while the emphasis of this report is on distance courses, any changes to eLearning will have implications for courses taught by other modes of delivery. The options presented primarily address eLearning support services that create a cohesive experience for distance students, but the team advocates that the support provided to online faculty (such as instructional design and professional development opportunities), should remain available to all instructors, including those teaching traditional face-to-face courses.

We all agree that any eLearning program must be rooted in the mission of its university and meet both accreditation standards and state and field-specific authorization guidelines. However, a successful online program must also be supported by the institution and provide equal access to institutional services for distance students. Quality Matters, a nationally recognized online design standard, breaks the distance course into the following components: design, delivery, content, LMS, Institutional infrastructure, faculty readiness, and student readiness. The Online Learning Consortium defines quality programs by examining: Institutional Support, Technology Support, Course Development/Instructional Design, Course Structure, Teaching & Learning, Social and Student Engagement, Faculty Support, Student Support, and Evaluations & Assessment. Other national programs examine other items, but in practical terms this means that all students and faculty within UA distance program should have access to the following services:

- **Help Desk Information** to provide immediate response to technical challenges.
- Educational Technology and Equipment to support the creation and delivery of instruction (Blackboard, Collaborate, VoiceThread, video, and more).
- Faculty Services, including:
  - Educational technology training
  - o **Professional development** opportunities related to pedagogy
  - Support in terms of time, funding and services to develop a well-designed online course.
  - Course creation assistance, including:
    - Instructional Designers
    - Videographers

- Educational/Instructional Technologists
- Librarians
- ADA specialists
- Quality assurance process or design standards to ensure our distance courses are
  of the highest quality
- Student Services, including:
  - Orientation materials
  - Textbook purchasing
  - Advising
  - Exam proctoring
  - Online tutoring to provide just-in-time support for students struggling with course content
  - Disability support
  - o Communication, marketing, and recruiting that is responsive to both current students and prospective students

As a preface to the eLearning Strategic Pathways report, the team wishes to remind readers that focusing on production, marketing and management in isolation could negatively impact many other factors that are critical to success. The delivery of quality eLearning is an endeavor that must be entered into collectively by the entire institution.

### **Online Program Managers (OPM)**

Online Program Management (OPM) Industry

Option 2 of the eLearning Team Report is titled "Complete Outsourcing to Vendor." In order to understand the parameters the team used to develop the option, it is important to understand the rapid evolution of the Online Program Management (OPM) industry. This addendum provides a brief summary, with links for additional information. The team was further informed by team members who had discussions with various OPM providers over the past eighteen months.

The OPM industry is relatively new. In the last 3-5 years it has become one of the fastest growing markets in higher education technology. OPM providers are almost exclusively forprofit businesses. They typically bundle a number of services (e.g., market research, lead generation, recruitment, enrollment management, curriculum development, course design, student retention support, career services, technology hosting, student support, and faculty support) and offer those bundled services to nonprofit higher-ed institutions in exchange for a long-term contract and a sizeable share of tuition revenue. According to various reports, the average tuition surrendered to the OPM is 50%.

The e-Literate article dated June 2016 (link below) provides a brief but comprehensive overview of the industry. Inside Higher Ed (September 2015) highlights key players in the market. Among the links below, two high-profile cases are notable in which large university systems partnered with an OPM but later dissolved the deal: see the report from Inside Higher Ed on University of Florida's cancellation of a multi-million deal with Pearson (October 2015) and the e-Literate article regarding Cal State (July 2014).

The Atlantic, June 7, 2016: How Companies Profit Off Education at Nonprofit Schools. <a href="http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/06/for-profit-companies-nonprofit-colleges/485930/">http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/06/for-profit-companies-nonprofit-colleges/485930/</a>

e-Literate, July 19, 2014: It's the End of Cal State Online as we Know it. <a href="http://mfeldstein.com/end-of-cal-state-online-as-we-know-it/">http://mfeldstein.com/end-of-cal-state-online-as-we-know-it/</a>

e-Literate, June 8, 2016: Online Program Management: A view of the market landscape. http://mfeldstein.com/online-enablers-a-landscape-view-of-the-market-for-higher-education/

Inside Higher Ed, May 31, 2013: The New For-Profits. https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2013/05/31/nonprofit-colleges-should-be-wary-new-breed-profit-players-essay

Inside Higher Ed, September 11, 2015: A Market Enabled. <a href="https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/09/11/online-program-management-providers-now-billion-dollar-industry-look-ahead">https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/09/11/online-program-management-providers-now-billion-dollar-industry-look-ahead</a>

Inside Higher Ed, October 22, 2015: U of Florida Cancels Huge Pearson Contract. <a href="https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2015/10/22/u-florida-cancels-huge-pearson-contract">https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2015/10/22/u-florida-cancels-huge-pearson-contract</a>

Inside Higher Ed, November 15, 2016: Florida's Online Plan for Online Education. <a href="https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/11/15/u-florida-online-looks-ahead-after-canceling-deal-pearson">https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/11/15/u-florida-online-looks-ahead-after-canceling-deal-pearson</a>

Learning House, June 23,2016: The Value of the Online Program Management Industry. (Note that this is written by an OPM provider.)

 $\underline{http://www.uncompromisingedu.com/2016/06/23/the-value-of-the-online-program-management-industry/}$ 

### Definitions related to eLearning at the University of Alaska

This document highlights some common definitions which may or may not be consistent across the UA system. It is the recommendation of the team that the universities develop a common vocabulary to be utilized by all.

Accessibility: The inclusive practice of designing content to be usable for people with

disabilities.

Accommodation: The practice of retrofitting existing content to make it accessible.

Asynchronous: Without a specific meeting time. In an asynchronous online course, students

work on course material at a time of their choosing, within constraints provided by the instructor. For example, a threaded discussion might take

place over the course of a week.

Audioconference: Meeting together by means of telephone.

Distance course: Without requirement to meet in a specific location. (According to UA coding

guidelines, "distance" courses have 0% requirement for meeting in a specified location. By contrast, "distance-based" courses may require meeting at a

specific location for 1-20% of the course).

Distance program: A degree program that may be completed without the requirement to attend

classes at a specific location. (Caveat: some programs may require a short onsite intensive or a practicum. Students should be advised of this requirement

prior to admission.)

eLearning: Within this Strategic Pathways team, some use the term to denote technology-

enhanced teaching and learning; others use it as a synonym for online

delivery.

In 2011, UA began using this as an umbrella term for all forms of distance courses and programs. This is inconsistent with other universities; most

consider e-learning a subset of distance education.

Across higher ed, eLearning is sometimes defined as electronically-enhanced learning incorporated into a course, regardless of delivery mode of the course.

In other cases, the term eLearning is used interchangeably with online

courses.

UAF eLearning: The unit at UAF that supports asynchronous online courses.

UAA Academic Innovations & eLearning: The unit at UAA that supports computer-enhanced

teaching and learning.

FlexLearning: The practice of stacking a traditional course with an online course so that

students may choose to attend the same meeting either in the classroom or via

web conference.

Flipped course: A traditional, hybrid, or web-enhanced course in which students are required

to watch lecture material via video before coming to class. Class time is then

reserved for problem solving, discussion, and other activities traditionally

viewed as homework.

Hybrid course: With the requirement to attend some meetings in the classroom and to

complete some part of the coursework online.

Hybrid program: More than 50% of courses required for the degree are available without

coming to a specific location. May be reported to federal and accrediting

agencies as "distance programs."

Individual experience: Courses that are coded as distance but completed in an independent manner

under the supervision of a faculty member. Examples include thesis credits,

directed study, individual study, and internships.

Online course: A course that is completed via the Internet, usually with well-developed

course content and structured interaction. Synchronous online courses require meeting attendance (often via web conference). Asynchronous online courses do not require meeting attendance but typically require students to interact

with classmates and the instructor via the Internet.

Online program: A degree program that may be completed via the Internet without the

requirement to attend courses in a specific location. (Caveat: some programs may require a short on-site intensive or a practicum. Students should be

advised of this requirement prior to admission.)

Online proctor: An approved web-based proctoring solution, usually involving web camera

and microphones, that records and verifies student identity and monitors

student completion of a secure exam.

Proctor: An approved individual who verifies student identity and monitors student

completion of a secure exam.

Statewide Authorization: Related to consumer protections laws, U.S. colleges and universities that offer

courses to students outside the home state of the institution must gain

permission of the student's home state. State laws vary greatly with regard to

the application process and fees. Statewide Authorization Reciprocity

Agreements (SARA) facilitates this permission through reciprocal consent of participating members. The Alaska portal agency for SARA is the Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE). UAF, UAS, and UAA are all SARA members. Annual membership fees and reporting are required.

Synchronous: At the same time. Synchronous courses require attendance in scheduled class

meetings (e.g., via audioconference, desktop videoconference, or web

conference).

Traditional course: A class with scheduled meeting times in a specific location.

Traditional program: A degree program that requires students to attend courses at a specific

location.

Videoconference: Meeting together by means of a video connection. Point-to-point video

requires students to participate from a designated site (e.g., UAF classroom,

UAS classroom, or UAA classroom) and therefore should not be coded as distance because a specific location is required. By contrast, a course using desktop video (e.g., Google Hangout, Zoom) allows student participation from

any location and therefore should be coded as distance.

Web conference: An audio or video meeting conducted via Internet technology (e.g.,

Blackboard Collaborate, Adobe Connect). May include tools such as chat, polling, whiteboard, screen sharing, and break-out rooms for small-group

discussion.

Web-enhanced: A traditional or distance course that relies primarily on synchronous meetings

for instruction, but provides resource materials via the Internet.

**Coding Matrix** 

	Banner coding for location	Banner coding for meeting
Asynchronous distance or asynchronous online course	0% location-based	N/A
Audioconference	0% location-based	Dates/Time
Distance-based (Recommend change)	1-20% location-based	Dates/Time
Blended course (Recommend name Change to hybrid)	21-50% location-based	Dates/Time
* Individual experience	0% location-based	N/A
Synchronous distance or synchronous online course	0% location-based	Dates/Time
Traditional course	> 50% location-based	Dates/Time
Point-to-point Videoconference	> 50% location-based	Dates/Time
Desktop videoconference	0% location-based	Dates/Time
Web conference	0% location-based	Dates/Time
Web-enhanced	> 50% location-based	Dates/Time

<sup>\*</sup> Individual experience courses may skew the perception of class section sizes and credit hours since they are often reported as distance but inherently include a single student.

UA Regents' Task Force on E-Learning, March 2016

#### Introduction

A task force was convened in November 2015 to examine e-learning at UA. Representatives from UAA, UAF, and UAS carried out this collaborative investigation over a three-month period<sup>1</sup>. This report summarizes the results of our analysis, including goals of UA e-learning, strengths and weaknesses of the current state, future opportunities, and potential dangers. The report concludes with a list of recommendations to help UA seize opportunities, minimize threats, and achieve its goals.

#### 1. Purpose and Goals

The purpose of e-learning at UA is to expand access and increase higher education attainment in a manner relevant to the current market and the needs of Alaskans. Specific goals and related sub-goals:

- Expand access
  - o expand access to higher education to diverse Alaska populations, especially those that are place committed
  - o expand opportunities for Alaska high-school students
  - o provide choice for current UA students
- Increase attainment
  - o provide flexible options for timely degree completion
  - o relieve bottlenecks in general education requirements
  - o provide completion options for students who move out of state
  - o provide completion options for military personnel and dependents
- Provide UA with another revenue source
  - reach new audiences
  - o meet changes in market demand

#### 2. Environmental Scan

Prior to analysis of e-learning at UA we researched national trends, explored the activity of other state university systems, and evaluated e-learning at peer institutions.

Since 2003, the Babson Research Group has conducted an annual survey of U.S. institutions of higher education regarding their implementation of online education. Their latest report, released in February 2016, documented continued enrollment growth in distance education, despite declining enrollment in higher education overall. Babson also reported that, in fall 2015, more than 60% of Provosts and Chief Academic Officers agreed online learning is critical to their long-term institutional strategy. For the full report, see: <a href="https://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/highered.html">www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/highered.html</a>

The New Media Consortium has produced an annual report since 2003 as part of a forward-looking research project dubbed "The Horizon Project." The 2016 Horizon Report identified six key trends, six significant challenges, and six important developments in educational technology for higher education. Among the trends, taskforce members noted advancing culture of innovation, shift to deeper learning approaches, redesigning learning spaces, and increasing use of blended learning designs. Our group particularly discussed blended learning designs, which may take many forms in higher education. The full Horizon Report is available at: <a href="https://www.nmc.org/publication/nmc-horizon-report-2016-higher-education-edition-edition-edition-edition-edition-edition-edition-edition-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-education-educ

The committee's review of other state university systems revealed a wide range of differences in implementation, coordination, and promotion of online programs and degrees. Table 1 provides a summary comparison. Of particular note, the Montana University System (MUS) and the State University of New York (SUNY) each provided a prominent link to online learning from the front page of their system web site, making information readily available to students.

<sup>1</sup> Task force members: Carol Gering (Director of eLearning, UAF), Maren Haavig (Assistant Professor of Accounting and Faculty Senate President, UAS), Pete Pinney (Executive Dean of CRCD, UAF), John Stalvey (Dean of College of Arts and Sciences, UAA), Gary Turner (Director of Kenai Peninsula College, UAA), Vickie Williams (Dean of School of Management, UAS), and William Urquhart (Assistant Professor of Sociology, UAS).

Table 1. Review of e-learning at other university systems

University System	Number of Universities/ Campuses	e-leaming coordination	URL	e-learning linked from front page?
Indiana University	2 core campuses 6 other campuses	One employee reported some central support, but no formal coordination     Second source said a system-wide office helps coordinate joint online degree efforts	http://www.iu.edu	No Link A search revealed: http://online.iu.edu
Montana University System	2 flagship universities 4 regional universities 10 2-yr colleges	• No information	http://www.mus.edu	Yes: link to http://mus.edu/online/
Penn State System of Higher Education	14 universities	• All online courses and programs must be delivered by Penn State World Campus (see below). Exception: online courses (not programs) designed and delivered strictly for resident students at a given campus.	http://www.passhe.edu/	No Link A search revealed: http://www.pauniversitiesonline.edu/
Penn State World Campus	online only	Complete coordination     All major services (marketing, market research, faculty development, advising, bursar) come through the World Campus	http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/	Web site relates exclusively to online courses/programs
Southern Illinois University System	2 universities	No information	http://www.siusystem.edu	No link
State University of New York (SUNY)	64 campuses (from community colleges to research universities)	System portal (Open SUNY)     Online programs at individual campuses are vetted and ranked by Open SUNY	http://www.suny.edu	Yes: link to http://open.suny.edu
University of Alaska	3 universities 17 campus locations	Online programs listed at http://distance.alaska.edu     BUT, link doesn't appear in a search of the main UA     website	http://www.alaska.edu	No Link Search did not produce a link to the list of online programs
University of Illinois	3 core campuses 3 regional campuses	System portal: coordination for recruiting students and for promoting online programs offered through individual campuses Coordination for training and reporting Formerly tried a "Global Campus" approach, but it dissolved after two years	https://www.uillinois.edu	Yes: link to online catalog at http://www.online.uillinois.edu
University of Wisconsin System	13 4-yr universities 13 2-yr universities	System portal (eCampus) - central web site funnels inquiries to the campus that offers the program New programs are approved by central unit (proposals to the central unit address market summary and uniqueness of the program) No prohibition on duplicate programs if demand warrants	https://www.wisconsin.edu/	No Link A search revealed: http://www.ecampus.wisconsin.edu

Task fonce members also reviewed these individual universities: Eastern Oregon University, Oregon State University, Washington State University, University of South Dakota, Dakota State University, and University of Maryland University College

### 3. Strengths

Consistent with national trends reported by the Babson Research Group, e-learning at UA has sustained growth trends in student head count and credit hours each year over the past five years. As we evaluated the current state of e-learning in our system, we identified strengths that result from diversity as well as commonality. We concluded our list of strengths with results of a UAF case study on cost efficiency.

#### Diversity

E-learning across the UA system has evolved to address unique needs of Alaska students, unique programmatic needs of academic degrees, and a variety of student learning styles. Although course offerings are often categorized simply as "distance" or "traditional," in reality they are delivered in a wide variety of formats.

Distance delivery options can broadly be divided into synchronous and asynchronous formats. Synchronous courses feature regularly scheduled meetings (through web interface or phone), with multidirectional real-time communication between the instructor and students. Web-based interfaces afford a wide variety of electronic instructional tools, including the use of instructor and student webcams. By contrast, asynchronous formats do not require real-time meetings, but facilitate student interaction in way that provides maximum schedule flexibility. Locally developed courses and programs with high-touch, place-based student service characterize the online student experience at UA. Unlike correspondence courses, MOOCs, and other self-paced modes of instruction, the large majority of distance courses in the UA system, whether synchronous or asynchronous, are instructor-paced classes with a high level of interaction between local instructors and students.

Consistent with national trends reported by the Horizon Report, UA courses may also be delivered in a *hybrid* (sometimes called *blended*) format—requiring a specified combination of classroom attendance and online work. Further, some UA instructors have begun offering stacked versions of courses in which a synchronous course is conducted online, but from a brick-and-mortar classroom. Thus, students may attend either in the classroom or online. During taskforce meetings, the group began referring to these courses as *FlexLearning*.

The task force believes a rich variety in course offerings maximizes access opportunities and broadens the student experience. Separately accredited programs at the three universities emphasize each university's distinctive strengths and culture. Online courses at UA are unique learning communities shaped by a combination of delivery location, subject matter, instructor methods, and perspectives of geographically distributed students.

Providing a variety of options supports the goal of increasing educational attainment. Online courses at UA are not "walled off" from traditional students. A growing number of traditional students elect to take one or more online courses to address schedule conflicts, to match their learning style, or to speed progress toward graduation. Students admitted to one UA university can also select online courses from another UA university.

#### Commonality

UA has a number of commonalities in place that provide structure for overall consistency.

- A legislative audit in 2009 resulted in a system-wide definition for distance education and a common coding manual for course-related fields in the Banner information system.
- Students use a common interface for registering for courses (UAOnline)
- All three universities use a version of Blackboard Learn for learning management.
- UA maintains a portal with links for online programs (<a href="https://distance.alaska.edu/programs/">https://distance.alaska.edu/programs/</a>)

With regard to academic oversight and quality, UA's standards demand equal rigor, quality, and outcomes regardless of when, where, or how a course is delivered. All instructors in the UA system, whether they teach some, all, or none of their classes online, go through the same approval processes. They belong to the same unions and participate in the same tenure and promotion process. Likewise, all new courses at UA are approved through the same curricular processes: whether destined for delivery in the classroom or online, new courses are subjected to the same faculty governance oversight. End-of-course student evaluations are completed for both classroom and online courses. In addition to these parallel standards, all three universities offer optional peer review processes for online courses, with examples that include Quality Matters and comparable peer review processes developed and implemented internally.

### Cost Efficiency

Diversity of course formats and options enables UA to expand access and increase attainment. We understand, however, that variety could be prone to unnecessary duplication and under-enrolled sections. To evaluate that possibility, one committee member analyzed fall course data from all three campuses over the last three years. His analysis indicated that low-enrollment courses tend to be upper division, regardless of campus locus or mode of delivery. Duplication in lower-division courses does not appear to be a problem at this time.

All three universities use available mechanisms to mitigate instructional costs of low-enrollment distance courses. Courses subject to low-enrollment are cross-listed or stacked when appropriate (e.g., PSY F330 and SOC F330 at UAF, which share a common course title and description.) Also, the Adjunct Collective Bargaining Agreement allows universities to offer adjuncts a reduced rate, in lieu of cancellation, for low enrollment distance courses.

Early in January 2016, UAF conducted a case study, analyzing instructional costs for courses delivered through UAF eLearning & Distance Education. The analysis confirmed that UAF's cost per eLearning SCH is much less than its average cost per SCH for all types of instruction. The eLearning average cost of \$114/SCH to \$143/SCH is less than tuition; UAF eLearning operates at close to self-support, with a distance fee providing additional resources for student support. Details of the case study are included in Appendix 1.

#### 4. Weaknesses

The task force identified three primary areas of weakness. In several cases, the documented weaknesses point directly back to identified strengths. In these cases, UA has made important strides but needs to go further with implementation.

#### Information and Marketing

A key observation from our review of peer institutions was the presence (or absence) of online learning on other university web sites. As previously mentioned, MUS and SUNY each provide a prominent link to online learning from their front page. The UA web site (<a href="https://www.alaska.edu">www.alaska.edu</a>) does not provide such a link. The button for UAOnline (which potential students might mistake for a link to online programs) does not provide any information regarding online degree programs. This is truly a missed opportunity!

Although UA maintains a portal for online programs (https://distance.alaska.edu/programs/), it is not linked from the front page of the UA web site, nor does it show up in a search of the web site.

#### Consistency and Ease of Access

As previously described, UA students have a broad range of choices in online delivery formats. However, the absence of student-friendly definitions limits students' ability to make informed choices from among those options. Similar vocabulary is sometimes used with different meanings among campuses. Common system-wide distance terms should be developed (mutually agreed upon by all campuses). Students need clear, consistent information prior to registration. We include a graphic—as a straw man representation for further discussion among stakeholders—in Appendix 2.

Despite the common use of Blackboard Learn at all three universities, when students take online courses through more than one institution, they must log in to separate instances of Blackboard. Anecdotally, students view this as an inconvenience and a barrier to easy access.

#### Coding, Reporting, and Data Analysis

Despite the common coding manual for Banner listed in the last section, there are practical ambiguities. Thesis and Masters credits are often coded as distance because they don't require attendance on campus. These aren't *distance courses* with regard to the usual characteristics of online content and structured interaction. The same is true for independent study, directed study, internships, and practicums. As a result, the reported number of e-learning courses is skewed by credit hours that are essentially individual learning experiences rather than courses.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> It is important to note that this method, while a good estimate, may not lead to strictly comparable costs across campuses. For a thorough cost/revenue analysis, additional factors to consider include: the proportion of lower division, upper division, and graduate credits; the proportion of adjunct, term, tenured, and tenure-track faculty; and subject areas of the courses/programs.

Reporting also presents challenges at the program level. When more than 50% of the courses in a program are available by distance, UA reports it as a hybrid program. The fact that GERs can be completed by distance means virtually all UA Bachelor of Arts degrees are categorized as hybrid (50% distance)—even if none of the major program requirements are available by distance. This is misleading for potential students.

Perhaps stemming largely from these problems with coding and reporting, accurate data is not readily available to support strategic decision-making across the system.

### 5. Opportunities

#### Streamlined Student Access

UA can provide a more student-friendly interface by developing:

- Common vocabulary to describe delivery options and requirements.
- A single sign-on portal allowing students to seamlessly access and move between courses at any of the three
  universities.

### Consistency and Quality

High-quality courses are essential to the long-term success of the universities. We should:

- · Continue to expand our use of Quality Matters and other validated standards of quality.
- Encourage course design that leverages learning opportunities uniquely possible in online courses, and consider how such course design could enhance blended courses in the future.

UA can improve consistency across campuses by fostering collaborative conversations:

- Instructional designers from the three universities have a history of sharing resources and maintaining collegial relationships; they should be encouraged to build on these previously established relationships.
- Faculty should be encouraged to collaborate across campuses and universities in finding and developing
  pedagogies that support student interaction, "technology-rich learning spaces," adaptive learning, and hybrid
  methods such as flipped classrooms.

#### Increased Efficiency

Enrollment management is an important aspect of efficiency. Improved communication between campuses could help to:

- Prevent bottlenecks from too few seats in high-demand courses.
- Reduce empty seats in multiple sections of high-demand courses.
- Coordinate under-subscribed courses to form a single, fully enrolled section.
- Rotate traditionally low-enrollment, upper division courses.

UA could implement data dashboards to better support decision-making for enrollment management.

#### Expanded Audience

UA has opportunity to reach an expanded audience by improving the visibility of e-learning on statewide and university web sites. Highlighting fully online programs could expand our market outside the state of Alaska.

#### 6. Threats

#### Competition from Other Universities

Contrary to anecdotal reports of competition from private for-profit online schools, Babson reports that public institutions—not private—serve the highest number of distance students. Distance education enrollments in private for-profit institutions declined from 2012-13 to 2013-14. Nevertheless, competition remains a significant threat for UA as public universities continue to expand their offerings.

### Reliance on Oversimplified Solutions

We support opportunities for increased collaboration as described in the previous section. However, the committee believes oversimplification could pose specific threats:

• E-learning is a cost-effective option, but it is not the primary answer to UA's budget constraints. We believe it would be shortsighted to rely on e-learning as a replacement for on-the-ground local programs.

- Well-intentioned changes to limit offerings for the sake of efficiency could be counterproductive. Course
  offerings originating from multiple campuses provide enrichment: broader choice, additional schedule options,
  variety of specialization, and focused attention on different demographic segments of the population. These
  options serve students well.
- Radical focus on efficiency could undermine quality by creating high-enrollment courses with minimal instructor-to-student relationship.

#### Bandwidth

In certain areas of the state, bandwidth continues to be an issue for some students who would avail themselves of elearning opportunities. This is especially true for delivery formats that emphasize video connections.

#### 7. Recommendations

The committee sees rich opportunity to provide students with expanded access to high-quality university courses and programs through a well-coordinated e-learning experience. Through shared commitment and collaboration, we can integrate the strengths and uniqueness of each university to provide enhanced learning opportunities. The committee offers five specific recommendations:

#### 1. Emphasize quality

- > Resist changes in the name of efficiency that would undermine quality
- Expand use of Quality Matters and other peer evaluation methods
- > Foster collaborative conversations among instructional designers
- > Encourage faculty communication across campuses
- > Continue to explore emerging pedagogies and technologies

#### 2. Improve the student experience

- > Use common vocabulary across the system
- > Create a single sign-on portal
- > Explore cloud-hosting as a means to support learning management and facilitate a consistent interface

#### 3. Expand marketing reach

- > Include distance education in UA's strategic mission
- > Improve web-site promotion
- Highlight and market fully online programs
- Market e-learning as a flexible and practical choice (FlexLearning)

#### 4. Increase efficiency through enrollment management

- Provide administrators with data dashboards
- Provide opportunities to coordinate under-subscribed courses

#### 5. Improve coding and reporting

- > Identify coding practices for non-course credits such as thesis
- > Disaggregate hybrid from distance when reporting on courses
- Re-evaluate reporting practices for 50% online programs
- > Create system-wide dashboards for more informed decision-making

### Appendix 1 - Instructional Cost Case Study

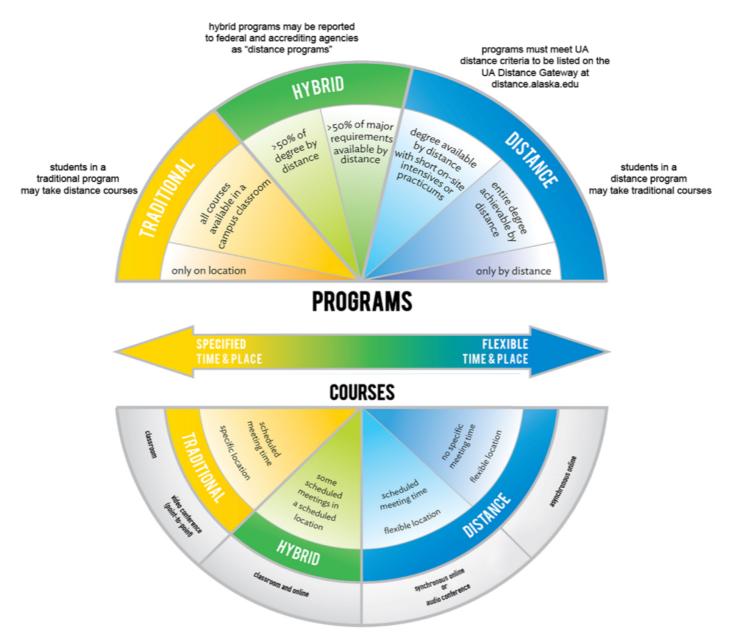
Early in January 2016, UAF conducted a case study, analyzing instructional costs for one segment of their distance education offerings. The study focused on UAF eLearning & Distance Education (all asynchronous online instruction at UAF has been centralized in that unit). Instructional cost per student credit hour (SCH) was calculated using the salary and benefit cost for each instructor and each course taught through UAF eLearning in FY15, along with enrollment data for the same courses. The range for the estimated average cost was \$114/SCH to \$143/SCH. For adjunct faculty, their total compensation (including benefits) was included in the cost. For regular faculty, the low estimate included only the costs of the workload assigned to eLearning instruction. The high estimate included their eLearning instructional workload plus the service and research workload normally assigned to faculty in their academic unit.

This analysis confirmed that UAF's cost per eLearning SCH is much less than its average cost per SCH for all types of instruction. There are several reasons for that, but the two simplest are:

- 1. Small course sections are less likely in UAF eLearning courses. Many of UAF's small sections are in science and engineering graduate programs that are not taught by distance. Additionally, eLearning courses draw from a larger population base because they are not restricted to a single geographic location.
- UAF eLearning courses are more likely to be taught by adjuncts than the 'average' UAF course. Also,
  adjuncts can be paid a reduced rate for low enrollment eLearning courses, according to their Collective
  Bargaining Agreement.

The eLearning average cost of \$114/SCH to \$143/SCH is less than tuition; UAF eLearning operates at close to self-support, with a distance fee providing additional resources for student support. It is important to note that this method, while a good estimate, may not lead to strictly comparable costs across campuses. For a thorough cost/revenue analysis, additional factors to consider include: the proportion of lower division, upper division, and graduate credits; the proportion of adjunct, term, tenured, and tenure-track faculty; and subject areas of the courses/programs.

Appendix 2 - Proposed Distance Vocabulary



FlexLearning courses are stacked: they may be taken online or in the classroom.