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Date: August 23, 2013  
To: Greg Summers, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs  
From: Christopher P. Cirno, Dean of the College of Letters and Science  
Re: Academic Plan Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP

Attached, please find the Academic Plan Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP, prepared by an Ad-hoc committee appointed by you in the fall of 2012. We have addressed the specific charges from your memo dated September 11, 2012 but went beyond the charge in introducing new ideas where we deemed essential. This document is the result of many meetings and sub-committee work by the ad-hoc committee during the spring semester of the 2012-013 academic year. As a response to your charge, we have organized this report into a series of sections, with background research and best practices. The committee consulted with stakeholders and students in the preparation of this plan, and we feel it represents a good inventory of current resources, along with a plan for centralization of function and specific support services. I am available to present a final report to the Academic Affairs Committee or the Faculty Senate with you, subsequent to your approval of a draft which meets your needs.

I want to take a moment to thank the members of the Ad-hoc committee for Distance Education for their time, knowledge, persistence and critical recommendations in helping produce this report. Without their guidance and diligence, this report would not have been possible.

An electronic version of this document allows access to all active hyperlinks referenced.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

Christopher P. Cirno, Ph.D.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher P. Cirno".

Dean of the College of Letters and Science  
Chair of the Ad-hoc Committee for Distance Education

# **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN ACADEMIC PLAN AND GUIDELINES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION AT UWSP**

**August 23, 2013**

## **Members of the Ad-Hoc Committee on Distance Education**

**Christopher P. Cirmo – Dean of the College of Letters and Science (Chair)**  
**John DuPlissis-College of Natural Resources/University Technology Committee**  
**Nisha Fernando-College of Professional Studies**  
**Kristen Floress- College of Natural Resources**  
**Todd Good-Associate Dean, College of Letters and Science**  
**Julie Hellweg-Continuing Education**  
**James Joque-Disability and Assistive Technology Center**  
**Tim Krause- College of Letters and Science**  
**Edward Lee – Registration and Records**  
**Lawrence Leviton- College of Fine Arts and Communication**  
**Mary Mielke-Information Technology**  
**Michael Ritter-College of Letters and Science**  
**Stefan Ruediger – College of Professional Studies**  
**Susan Ruffedt-Coordinator of the First Year Experience**  
**James Sage – Associate Vice Chancellor for Teaching, Learning and Academic Programs**  
**Cathy Scheder-Continuing Education**  
**Andrew Quashnick-Student Government Association/University Technology Committee**  
**Joseph Rohrer-Student Government Association**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to a charge from the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (Greg Summers) in the fall of 2012, an *Ad-hoc Committee for Distance Education* was formed, with Chris Cirimo, Dean of the College of Letters and Sciences, appointed as chair. A cross-section of university unit representatives was chosen to research best practices and present a series of recommendations to the Provost regarding the future of Distance and Online Education for the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP). Meetings of the committee occurred during the spring academic semester of 2013, and what follows is a distillation of those many meetings. This document is not an “academic plan” per se, but represents a compendium of recommendations concerning best practices found in the distance education literature. It also emphasizes the alignment of these recommendations with the University Strategic Plan and Mission. Major findings of this report are set out in each chapter as “recommendations.”

A common thread in this report is the finding that our campus has no coordinated or centralized plan or set of practices for delivering distance education. Current procedures are basically decentralized traditional practices with little coordinated planning or expertise involved in their implementation. Indeed, the major overarching recommendation is the establishment of a centralized unit responsible for all aspects of teaching and learning in the distance education realm. We suggest this unit reside within Academic Affairs under the auspices of the Associate Vice Chancellor for Teaching, Learning and Academic Programs. This recommendation is particularly relevant to our recent conditional admittance into “Bracket 2” by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), allowing us to offer up to 20% of our academic “programs” in a distance format (Section I).

The recommendations from this study are restated below, and found under their appropriate discussion section in the document.

- **Recommendation #1:** Standardize the terminology and definitions used in reference to distance education at UWSP (Section III, page 9).
- **Recommendation #2:** Courses should be coded for timetable management and delivery method, with coding as suggested by UW System standards (Section III, page 10).
- **Recommendation #3:** An inventory of all campus distance resources should be an ongoing and transparent process, and updated as technology and suite of course offerings change. This responsibility will reside within the Office of Academic Affairs, but with input from the Division of Information Technology and the University Technology Committee (Section IV, page 12).
- **Recommendation #4:** Work with UW System *eCampus* and other distance education sites to advance and promote UWSP online and distance education courses and programs (Section V, page 18).
- **Recommendation #5:** Develop a UWSP Distance Education Handbook modeled on best practices currently used at other universities (Section VII, page 22).
- **Recommendation #6:** Create a Distance Education Resource Center (DERC) with the specific charge of coordinating logistics for all distance education initiatives, courses and programs at UWSP. This recommendation includes the appointment of a Director for that Center (Section VIII, page 24).

- **Recommendation #7:** Require faculty delivering distance education courses to use the current Course Management System (CMS) as a foundational platform for the delivery of their courses (Section IX, page 27).
- **Recommendation #8:** Create a common syllabus “template” for distance education courses which includes information about minimum expectations of technological information necessary for course completion, in addition to the usual information found in course syllabi (Section IX, page 28).
- **Recommendation #9:** Assess all distance education courses for student achievement of learning outcomes as is now done for all UWSP courses which contain a curriculum code and course number. Distance education courses should be assessed as part of normal department reviews as for all other curricula (Section X, page 31).
- **Recommendation #10:** Establish clear expectations for appropriate conduct specific to distance education courses, with content in common with student rights and responsibilities at UWSP (Section XI, page 34).
- **Recommendation #11:** Involve students and academic advisors in implementing any new procedures specific to distance education courses and involve students in an advisory capacity with the Distance Education Resources Center (Section XII, page 39).
- **Recommendation #12:** The appointed contact person from Information Technology should be involved in the implementation of any special technologies and strategies used in creating distance education/online courses which meet current online accessibility rules. The Disability and Assistive Technology Center should be informed of any special technologies developed, and inform participating students with disabilities of these technologies (Section XIII, page 41).
- **Recommendation #13:** The university should begin a dialogue on how it wishes to determine the percentage of distance and online courses offered for curricula which are not designated as “fully online.” This discussion will by necessity be disciplinary and major-specific, but should be charged to, and ultimately determined by, the faculty of each department (Section XIV, page 45).

These recommendations are offered to the Provost as guideposts as we move forward with a broader academic plan for all teaching and learning at this university. It is hoped that communication of the broad implications of these recommendations and background to the appropriate Faculty Senate subcommittees (e.g., Academic Affairs Committee, University Technology Committee, and Curriculum Committee) will occur expeditiously within the 2013-14 academic year, with movement toward eventual adoption by the Faculty Senate. It is the committee’s hope that adoption of all or part of our recommendations will result in the establishment of a **Distance Education Resource Center (DERC), including appointment of a Director**. This Center will be the location wherein many of the subsidiary recommendations of this report can be centrally implemented. The adoption of these or an appropriate subset of revised recommendations should also be communicated to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) as we prepare for further accreditation procedures in the future.

*With acceptance of this report, we request that this committee be discharged by the Provost. We also recommend the establishment of a new committee constituted to implement appropriate changes, per Provost and actions taken by the appropriate committees of the Faculty Senate.*

## I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

It is clear that “distance education” in its many forms is a pedagogic format which will thrive and likely grow within all higher-education enterprises in the coming decades (Fishman 2013; Allen and Seaman 2013). This fact is well-documented in the many Sloan Consortium publications, documents from the *Association of American Colleges and Universities* (AAC&U), and from hundreds of other organizations both public and private. As of 2010, some 31.3% of all students in higher education took at least one online course (Allen and Seaman 2013). Indeed, with a rapidly changing student demographic moving toward more time- and place-bound students, the demand is growing for a format of higher education which does not always fit well with the traditional residential 4-year campus designed for an 18-22 year-old cohort. Everyone in higher education should think strategically about the role of distance and online education programs, making it a central part of goal-setting, mission statements, and academic and strategic planning processes. This reality begs the question of how UWSP wishes to position itself in a market which is exploding with need recently leveraged more by the for-profit sector than by traditional private and public institutions. Evidence of this reality is presented weekly in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and in *Inside Higher Education*, with a seemingly endless number of articles, surveys and editorials concerning the role, presentation and effectiveness of distance education strategies. A complete literature review of this topic is beyond the charge or capacity of this committee, but good overviews can be found in recent reports from Fishman (2013), Allen and Seaman (2006, 2008, 2011, 2013), Bichsel (2013), Heller (2013), and in the many reports of the Sloan Consortium of National and Regional Surveys of Online Education (<http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/annual-surveys>) prepared by the Babson Survey Research Group.

The Ad-hoc Committee for Distance Education was charged with addressing a series of issues in this regard, as articulated in the September 11, 2012 memo from Provost Greg Summers (see SharePoint site attachments). We were specifically charged with leading “*a campus-wide conversation about the future of distance education at this institution.*” In considering this charge, the committee was unanimous in their desire that the university

develop a set of guidelines specific to distance education as we move forward with other aspects of our university academic plan. It was agreed that the lack of development of a set of policies would lead to a less effective overall delivery of our academic mission. The series of papers entitled “Online Learning as a Strategic Asset,” (Volumes I and II) sponsored by the American Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) and funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation (<http://www.aplu.org/document.doc?id=1877> and <http://www.aplu.org/document.doc?id=1879>) are particularly relevant in this regard. The many reports of this series highlight the typical initial hesitation inherent in institutions in developing distance education and online courses due to unfounded concerns of a lack of rigor with respect to attaining learning outcomes, or due to trepidation on the part of some about learning a new “platform” to offer their courses.

UWSP already boasts many online courses, programs and non-credit workshops in the “distance education mode” but even a cursory review of our listings makes it clear that there is no centralized management or governance process with which to guide current or future offerings. A number of stand-alone courses exist which have been sanctioned at the department level but have not been developed within any established guidelines from either the department or the institution. Online and distance *Collaborative Degree Programs* (using the resources of a number of different institutions in offering the degree program) have also been established. These include the Collaborative Language Program (CLP), and the online collaborative degrees in Health Information Management and Technology (HIMT) and Health and Wellness Management (HWM). Not only is there little central oversight on the development and delivery of distance education courses, but there is little in the way of student-support services designed to actively engage students who are taking distance education courses at UWSP. Online courses carry unique self-motivational components and expectations which differ substantially from face-to-face courses. This in itself begs additional resources. It is possible that simplistic or monolithic assumptions about student-learning and student receptivity are common with both faculty and students not experienced in such courses.

A number of new pedagogic formats for course delivery exist, challenging historical perceptions of effective classroom learning. These include the “flipped classroom” idea, and curricula which strive to allow the assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes in a non-traditional manner. Non-traditional students may take skills exams for career placement before completing a bachelor’s degree. UWSP, in collaboration with area technical colleges, is developing the Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS), where students obtain a disciplinary background in a two-year or certificate program, while completing bachelor’s degree expectations on a four-year UW Campus (e.g., completing general education requirements, encountering high-impact practices, specializing in the discipline). Also, the newly developing UW Flexible Degree Program allows students to count life experience (through demonstrated competencies) toward certification and degree goals. It is clear that UWSP, as part of the UW System, needs to collaborate and use the resources of the entire UW System for advertising, promotion and advancement efforts in their distance education strategies. This need is promoted in the recent report by Fishman (2013) entitled “State U Online.” This document contains specific recommendations and strategies for state-run university systems with specific reference to the University of Wisconsin System (UW System) *eCampus*. UW-Stevens Point (and it must be assumed other UW System institutions) has received little guidance in this regard, with no centralized repository of information or promotion within the UW System being clearly recognized and available. Some campuses have developed their own guidelines and handbooks for distance education. With the suggestion that a focused handbook could serve as a model, UWSP could at least begin to centralize some of the information and functionality of distance education making it more accessible and “assessable.”

An outgrowth of the distance learning juggernaut is a relatively new model of online and open distance education referred to as MOOCs (massive open online courses). These courses, offered by one instructor, and open to anyone with a computer and internet connection, challenge the very identity of our colleges, and, as Nathan Heller points out in a recent New Yorker article (2013) “...*the mechanism by which conveyed knowledge blooms into an education is the standard by which MOOCs will either enrich teaching in this country*”

*or deplete it.*” New statistics compiled by Allen and Seaman (2013) also offer an objective view of current trends and views of MOOCs as an effective distance education tool. Whether UWSP wishes to experiment in this kind of offering is a discussion sorely needed and is at the very heart of UWSP’s Institutional Identity. This educational format is relatively untested and not easily assessed, and there are concerns with its potential “depersonalization” of higher-education. This seems particularly true for regional comprehensive public institutions like UWSP, who deliver courses to an increasingly money-strapped public who may not value the face-to-face contact and student “socialization” which come from a traditional on-campus education. Along with MOOCs as expanded and accessible online resources, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation sponsors an open system called *Open Educational Resources*, or OER (<http://www.hewlett.org/programs/education-program/open-educational-resources>) which lists a compendium of teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and many other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge. The stated goals of MOOCs and OER resources are noble in attempting to make online resources available to everyone, but the associated impacts and effectiveness of these practices on the distance education community have only recently been discussed (Allen and Seaman 2013).

In the course of our meetings, a variety of questions were raised: Should faculty evaluation by students in distance education courses be essentially the same as in face-to-face courses? How do departments accomplish course peer-observations for a faculty member who may be offering one or more online courses? Other considerations include whether there should be extra compensation for very large online courses, how online courses count toward a faculty member’s course load. Should the university make special arrangements for faculty who may request a “distance education status” off campus (e.g., the Telecommuting Policy at UWSP) in offering all of their courses online, with no requirements for face-to-face meetings with students at any time? The implication of using

such structures challenges the traditional faculty triad of expectation for teaching, scholarship and service. Could a tenure-line faculty member do everything online, including advising, student mentoring, department and college or university service, and scholarship? Such difficult questions require a framework of consistency across the university and the UW System.

### **Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Findings Related to Distance Education**

As important as these “best practice” questions seem, a more pragmatic problem has been presented to the university in a recent determination from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) in their response to our request for changing our online accreditation status. The university recently submitted a “change application” with a request that we be moved to Bracket 2 status (from Bracket 1), permitting us to offer up to 20% of our total degree programs online. We were finally authorized for Bracket 2 status (letter from HLC to Chancellor Patterson, April 23, 2013). However, the original recommendation by the HLC institutional change panel (Letter to Chancellor Patterson, March 5, 2013) noted the following general concerns, which still exist regarding distance education at UWSP:

1. There is insufficient evidence of dedicated and appropriate support services for distance delivery systems.
2. Distance education policies and procedures are minimal and there is little evidence of dedicated and unique institutional support for distance education delivery.
3. Student support seems minimal except within the programs offered by UW Extension or through Continuing Education.
4. UW-Stevens Point has added a “Rubric for Peer Evaluation” of online courses, but is unclear about its use, with no evidence of other assessment procedures specifically designed for distance education.
5. There is little evidence of campus-wide planning, budgeting and assessment of distance education.
6. There appears to be a need for centralized administrative support and faculty driven quality control of distance learning courses and programs.

These concerns raised by the HLC are reflected in the findings of our Ad-hoc Committee for Distance Education (this report), and, in effect, give us “guideposts” for minimal expectations concerning management of our distance education programs.

## **II. ALIGNMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION WITH THE UWSP STRATEGIC PLAN**

The UWSP Mission Statement emphasizes that “...*through the discovery, dissemination and application of knowledge, UWSP stimulates intellectual growth, provides a liberal education, and prepares students for a diverse and sustainable world.*” The UWSP Strategic Plan focuses on, among other things, identifying comparative advantages of our university that will make the institution stand out while developing tactical initiatives and strong assessment measures. Distance/Online Education will enhance the mission of UWSP by providing assessable educational opportunities in an online environment, which should prepare students to embrace new options of learning and help faculty to use new teaching pedagogies and technologies. It will also create a platform for students to gain access to a wide variety of programs offered on and off campus and to engage directly with expert faculty, regardless of place or time. This is in keeping with one of our critical values at UWSP; “...*to create a student-centered environment and foster lifelong learning.*” At a time when the use of digital technology as a medium for information dissemination is an everyday norm, creating opportunities for both outcomes -based and competency-based online learning is crucial. This is not only attractive but essential and efficient from an institutional resource standpoint. It presents a robust strategy for using limited campus resources to maximize student learning and create successful academic results. The critical test of the alignment of distance learning with the university mission and strategic plan consists of our conscious move from a “*teacher-centered*” teaching model to a “*learning-centered*” teaching model (Weimer 2013), a critical re-alignment which is ongoing in many other aspects of our educational infrastructure (e.g., course scheduling for student needs, the meaning/methods/modes of advising, use of the “flipped classroom” and consideration of “flipped degree” programs).

With a deliberate move toward a workable model for distance education at UWSP, we can create a much more flexible and adaptable institution, with resilience built into our degree offerings for both traditional and non-traditional student learners. It also allows us to explore the many possibilities of enhancing life-long learning, an essential learning outcome of a liberal arts and science education (see AAC&U LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes; <http://www.aacu.org/leap/vision.cfm>). UWSP needs to establish its place among peer institutions through this strategy, as it already has with other programs. Professional preparation for careers across the board will also be fostered by allowing our students to have at least some exposure to the new pedagogic technologies they will likely encounter in their careers. Our conscious move to support and strengthen distance education also brings our university “to our community,” building a *de facto* engagement which we aspire to apply for in aiming toward “Carnegie Engaged Institution” status in the near future and as part of our strategic plan ([http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community\\_engagement.php](http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php)). Distance course offerings also reduce the transportation and energy costs of a “place-bound” education, and bolster our “Thriving Communities Initiative,” a pillar of the Strategic Plan (<http://www.uwsp.edu/acadaff/Pages/thrivingCommunities.aspx>). From the standpoint of the “Sustainable Communities” subset of goals within our University Strategic Plan, the promotion of distance learning is a way of enhancing the “carbon neutrality” of our campus (<http://www.uwsp.edu/sustainability/Documents/Final%20UWSP%20Carbon%20Neutrality%20Plan%202011.pdf>).

### III. **COMMON DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY**

Educational institutions, professional organizations, and accrediting agencies recognize a continuum of course types from the traditional totally *face-to-face* format, to *fully online* formats. Yet, there is no broadly accepted taxonomy or cutoff points that define each one. Unfortunately, definitions currently used by UW System Administration and the Higher Learning Commission do not reflect the full spectrum of course types used in higher education. For example, UW System

Administration currently defines a “partial distance education course” as one that has a minimum of 75% of course time delivered at a distance. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) defines “distance-delivered courses” as “those in which all or the vast majority (typically 75% or more) of the instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence, or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other.” Professional organizations such as *EduCause* and *The Sloan Consortium* define the following four types of courses:

Time online	Course type
None	<b>Traditional</b> face-to-face course with no online technology used; content is delivered in writing or orally.
1 to 29%	<b>Web facilitated</b> course that uses Web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course. Uses a course management system or Web pages to post the syllabus and assignments, for example.
30 - 79%	<b>Blended/hybrid</b> course that blends online and face-to-face delivery. A substantial proportion of the content is delivered online; typically uses online discussions and has some face-to-face meetings.
80 % or more	<b>Online</b> course where most or all content is delivered online. Typically has no face-to-face meetings

Like UWSP, other UW System campuses are in the process of defining categories of distance education courses. **UW-Green Bay, UW-Stout, UW-Whitewater, and UW-River Falls** define distance education and hybrid education as:

Distance Education = 75% or more taught online.

Hybrid = any course less than 75% online that has *any* face-to-face component.

**UW-Eau Claire** defines three categories of courses:

Online Course - Online courses are courses in which 100% of the instruction occurs in an online environment. Online assignments and activities occur synchronously, asynchronously, or both. No face-to-face meetings are required for the course. Instructor provides all materials, course activities, assignments, and discussions in an online environment. If a student orientation is needed

for training with technology, this must occur in an online environment. Course materials should include links to training resources provided by the university or other sources.

Hybrid Course - Hybrid courses are courses in which more than 25% of the course is delivered online in lieu of on-campus meetings. Most materials, course activities, assignments, and discussions should be available in an online environment.

Web-Enhanced Course - Web-enhanced courses are courses in which all instruction occurs in a face-to-face environment and technology is used to enhance the instruction rather than to reduce face-to-face meetings. Face-to-face classes meet as scheduled in a university time-table of courses.

With these practices considered, and with the specific needs of UWSP in mind, we propose the following recommendation for a common set of definitions and terms for distance education at UWSP:

**Recommendation #1:** Standardize the terminology and definitions used in reference to distance education at UWSP.

This will assist us to better align with current practice in higher education, and clearly inform students at the time of registration what kinds of courses are available. We recommend the following definitions:

1. A ***Distance Education Course*** is one where *all or part* of the instruction occurs when students and faculty are physically separated from one another. A distance education course may be either completely or partially conducted at a distance. The use of electronic media and digital communication technologies currently includes audio conferencing, the Internet, one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, and the many wireless communications devices. These technologies will evolve, change, or disappear with time, and we need to be positioned to rapidly respond to those changes.
2. A ***100% Distance Education Course*** is conducted *entirely* at a distance. Communication and interaction occur between faculty and students by one or all of the technologies listed above. All assessment of student work is conducted at a distance, either online or at a proctored testing center.

3. A **Partial Distance Education Course** is defined as a course offering 30 percent or more of its content at a distance using one or all of the technologies listed above. These courses are often referred to as “hybrid” or “blended” courses.

**Recommendation #2:** Courses should be coded for timetable management and delivery method, with coding as suggested by UW System standards.

For publishing in the UWSP Timetable of Courses, the following codes are recommended:

**N: Not distance education** (Traditional face-to-face course, all class meetings are on campus.)

**P: Partial distance education** (i.e., Hybrid, 30% or greater distance delivered)

**T: Total distance education** (100% distance delivered, no face-to-face on-campus meetings)

Due to the differences in definitions, a method for reporting course data to UW System and HLC must be created. *We recommend that an online form be used by departments to report course type and percent time online to UWSP Records and Registration using the following format:*

**Column 1: Course number**

**Column 2: Timetable course code**

**Column 3: Percent time online**

A simple conversion routine could be coded into the reporting form to convert UWSP course information (i.e., Column 3 above) into the appropriate UW System Administration and HLC category. The Timetable of Courses currently identifies a course as being 100% or partial distance education, but the definitions of each are not easily accessible to the student. It is recommended that the descriptors be linked to the definitions above. We provide the following common glossary of distance education terms which are commonly used in the field.

#### **General Glossary of Distance Education and Related Terms**

**Asynchronous learning:** a mode of delivery where students and faculty are not online at the same time. Learners participate in an asynchronous course at different times and days.

**Blended learning:** a learning environment facilitated by combining elements of online and face-to-face learning. Known as blended learning in K-12, in higher education it is more often referred to as “hybrid learning.” The amount of time devoted to online and face-to-face instruction and degree of blending varies across courses.

**Competency-based education:** an educational program in which the assessment of competencies through outcomes assessment rubrics is used for credentialing.

**Correspondence education:** (based on the HLC 2009 definitions;

<http://bartonccc.edu/administration/research/datadictionary/commissiondeffor2011disted.pdf>)

Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. It is generally accepted that *correspondence education is not distance education*. According to the North Central Association and HLC, institutions must properly distinguish between distance and correspondence education using the federal definitions. The key distinction in the federal definition is whether the courses are self-paced and the interaction with faculty is student-initiated. Courses of this nature are correspondence education regardless of whether they are delivered electronically or through any other mechanism. The U.S. Department of Education has informed the HLC that it is looking closely at whether institutions have properly made this identification. There may be Title IV consequences for institutions that have not properly made this distinction.

**Distance-delivered course:** A course in which all or the vast majority (typically 75% or more) of the instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence, or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other (Based on HLC definition).

**Distance-delivered program:** A certificate or degree programs in which 50% or more of the required courses may be taken as distance-delivered courses. (Based on HLC definition).

Distance Education (based on Federal definition 2009) means education that uses one or more of the technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously.

**eLearning:** Asynchronous, synchronous and polysynchronous learning accomplished by electronic means such as the Internet, a computer network, audio/video programs, CDROM, DVD, etc.

**Hybrid Learning:** see Blended Learning.

**Massive Open Online Course (MOOC):** An open, web-based course supporting a large number of participants generally using an asynchronous mode of delivery. Open to anyone who has a computer and internet access, but with restricted credit-bearing status based on payment for the course to the institution or company offering it.

**Polysynchronous learning:** An online course in which synchronous and asynchronous modes of delivery are used.

**Self-Paced Learning:** Learning that occurs on a schedule determined by the student and not considered distance education by the HLC (i.e., correspondence courses).

**Web-facilitated Course:** A face-to-face course using web-based content for learning (e.g., course home page, online lecture outlines, web-based assignments, online video enrichment).

#### **IV. UWSP CAMPUS INVENTORY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION RESOURCES**

At this point in time, there exists no clear and distinct database or inventory of distance education courses on this campus. It is possible to find these courses by doing a search in the course timetable. The Ad-hoc Committee for Distance Education has been tasked with performing a review and inventory of courses, both credit and non-credit, being offered based on the categories established in Section III of this report. We recommend that this inventory be updated on a semester-basis, and should consist of a database in the course catalog, in the Office of Records and Registration, and in all other places where we might promote such offerings on UW System sites. We will also define who will be in charge of maintaining the course inventory and updating it on an academic year basis. This will necessarily entail communications with the *eCampus* portal at UW System (<http://ecampus.wisconsin.edu/>).

**Recommendation #3:** An inventory of all campus distance resources should be an ongoing and transparent process, and updated as technology and course suite of offerings change. This responsibility will reside within the Office of Academic Affairs, but with input from the Division of Information Technology and the University Technology Committee.

This inventory will be in four parts:

1. Request Registration and Records to provide a list of all courses and course sections that are being offered as distance or online courses (as defined in Section III).

2. Request that UWSP Continuing Education provide a list of all courses and course sections that are being offered through UWSP Continuing Education as distance or online courses; both credit and non-credit. To insure that all courses are being inventoried, request that the Continuing Education Program Managers in each College provide a complete listing of any and all courses being offered through UWSP Continuing Education in their College.
3. Request that the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in each College (or other appropriate position charged with curriculum inventory) provide a complete inventory of all courses and course sections that are being offered as distance or online courses including the name of the faculty member teaching the course or course section.
4. Coordinate with the Associate Vice Chancellor for Teaching, Learning and Academic Programs, and compare inventories to insure that all distance and online courses that need to be reviewed have been inventoried (as a part of the U.S. Department of Education's *Program Integrity Regulations*; Section VI of this report).

The inventory described herein shall serve as a baseline line inventory for UWSP. However, this database will need to be updated annually and should be accessible to any and all who might need this information. It is recommended that maintenance and updating of this database be assigned permanently to Academic Affairs, with the responsibility to perform an annual update prior to the start of each academic year. It is recommended that the *Associate Vice Chancellor for Teaching, Learning, and Academic Programs* be charged with this responsibility, with input and communication from the Division of Information Technology, and the University Technology Committee (UTC).

It has also been recognized by this ad-hoc committee that the UTC may need to undergo examination in terms of the expertise needed on the committee. It is clear that if we are to move forward with standardizing expectations of distance education, this committee or its equivalent should have a major role, and the appropriate expertise from faculty and academic staff may not necessarily be served by that committee's current structure.

## V. UW SYSTEM RESOURCES, ADVANCEMENT, AND PROMOTION

The Ad-hoc Committee for Distance Education researched the UW System and its member institutions for models upon which to build, and to determine methods used by the UW System to centralize functions for UW System campuses. The UW System has a centralized portal called the *eCampus* (<http://ecampus.wisconsin.edu/>). The UW *eCampus* system was developed in 2011 and is maintained by UW-Extension on behalf of all of UW System's two and four-year campuses. There is also a subsidiary website which redirects students to the UW *eCampus* and *UWHelp* sites at <http://distancelearning.wisconsin.edu/>. The *eCampus* site also contains information about current online courses, programs and initiatives (<http://ecampus.wisconsin.edu/online-degree-programs/>). The UW System *eCampus* site contains links to “News and Events” (<http://ecampus.wisconsin.edu/about/news-and-events.aspx>) and contains testimonials from students (<http://ecampus.wisconsin.edu/about/testimonials.aspx>) which provide the bulk of what passes for marketing efforts about the distance programs offered. This includes publicity and a somewhat incomplete listing of programs in the UW System through the *UWHelp* pages (<http://uwhelp.wisconsin.edu/majors/distancelearning.aspx>). Recognition of an online program by the UW System requires a formal application to UW System with the assistance of UWSP’s Associate Vice-Chancellor for Teaching, Learning, and Academic Programs.

Included with current links on this site are the following UWSP Programs:

- **The American Studies Collaborative Degree Program**

(<http://www.uwsp.edu/AcadAff/Pages/resources/catalog.aspx>). This link only gives access to the entire UW-Stevens Point Course Catalogue and is not specific to Distance Education Courses. The appropriate link is <http://www.uwsp.edu/cols-ap/CDP/Pages/Programs/default.aspx>.

This is the internet site for the “Collaborative Degree Program (CDP)” within which resides information about the American Studies degree.

- **The Business Administration Collaborative Degree Program**

<http://www.uwsp.edu/AcadAff/Pages/resources/catalog.aspx>. Again, this link leads to the same unrelated generic link noted above, and the entire UW-Stevens Point Course Catalogue, and is not specific to distance education courses. This link should be updated to <http://www.uwsp.edu/busecon/Documents/Advising/FIRE%20Advising%20Guide.pdf>.

- **The Bachelor's Degree in Nursing Completion Program** ("BSN at Home Program"), of which UWSP is a collaborating institution (<http://bsnathome.com/>).
- The **BS in Health and Wellness Management (HWM) Collaborative Degree Program** at <http://hwm.wisconsin.edu/index.aspx>, which then directs the viewer to the UW-Stevens Point Program at <http://hwm.wisconsin.edu/stevenspoint.aspx>.
- The **Health Information Management and Technology (HIMT) BS Program**, a new collaborative degree program directly linked off the *eCampus* portal at <http://himt.wisconsin.edu/>.
- The **Natural Resources MS Program**, which is listed as Distance Education but has a dead end link at <http://uwsp.edu/cnr/AMP/pages/default.aspx>. The proper link is <http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/Pages/graduate.aspx>.

The UW *eCampus* and *UWHelp* listings of Distance Education programs seem to be incomplete, and contain a number of dead end links. With UW Extension being responsible for this listing, it is not clear how this site is updated or how it is maintained. Fishman (2013) uses the UW *eCampus* as an example in her report, stating that, in comparable terms, it is *efficient and acts as a good place for "first-stop shopping" for programs in the UW System*. It is one of the top ten websites of referral for Wisconsin students in their search for distance educational opportunities. As a simple marketing and coordination initiative it offers a single 1-800 number for student questions about programs with links back to the home institution. The Wisconsin Technical College System (WCTS) has recently centralized a listing of online courses and resources for each of its campuses at [http://www.witechcolleges.org/explore\\_careers/online\\_learning.php](http://www.witechcolleges.org/explore_careers/online_learning.php). The UW *eCampus* and the WCTS system and should consider collaborating in offering a *one-stop shop* for Wisconsin Citizens as suggested by Fishman (2013). Although Skype and Live Chat options are available, no specific contact person is listed on the UW System *eCampus* site.

In this report, we explored questions of the availability of system resources to support and promote UWSP offerings, as well as the publicity of online offerings, and how we as a UW System institution can better use this marketing for UWSP campus offerings. The UW System procedure for the approval of online courses/certificates/majors/minors is the same as used for other program approvals (local control with UW System approval) and does not (at the time of this report) have a different approval process. We also reviewed how advancement, promotion,

marketing, and publicity are promoted by *eCampus*, including any role that UW System serves in this capacity. The “UW Flex” degree option is a competency-based degree program patterned after the Western Governors University (<http://ecampus.wisconsin.edu/online-degree-programs/flex-option.aspx>). It is unclear at this time how this program might impact UW distance education offerings. As it currently stands within the UW System, each campus is responsible for the coordination and promotion of the Flex degree option. It does not seem that there will be any external crossover in terms of advancement and promotion with other UWSP online and distance education courses. It is, however, a reality that in the pursuit and delivery of the Flex Degree Option, we should consider combining efforts in the promotion of all UWSP online programs and courses, including the UW Flex Degree option which, in strictest terms, is not a “distance education” program. UWSP is currently proposing a GIS Certificate as its contribution to the UW Flex Degree Program.

Current “best-practices” within the UW System are subjective at best, but we do highlight the following institutions and their internal program support, in an effort to find common, efficient and impacting practices we may wish to adopt. Current best practices noted include resources found at UW campuses which have a ***center or specific department/position*** responsible for coordination and promotion of distance education courses, including resources for professional development opportunities for faculty. These campus specific links include:

- **UW-Lacrosse** – Online Programs and the Director of Online Education <http://www.uwlax.edu/online/>. This site also contains an online handbook for faculty <http://www.uwlax.edu/online/handbook.pdf> *which is an excellent model for UWSP* and is a recommended resource cited in Section VII of this report.
- **UW-Oshkosh** – Center for Lifelong Learning and Community Engagement <http://www.uwosh.edu/llce/cnl>.
- **UW-Superior** – Distance Learning Center <http://www.uwsuper.edu/dl/index.cfm>.
- **UW-Stout** – UW Stout Online : Innovative Online and Distance Education (lists programs and degrees, student and instructor support, with a support staff of 13 (<http://www.uwstout.edu/de/deo.cfm>)).

- **UW-Milwaukee** – Site is housed in the School of Continuing Education and lists credit and non-credit, online and blended courses at <http://www4.uwm.edu/sce/disted.cfm>.

*The following campuses can be searched for online offerings and contain more limited resources within a support structure for distance education, or have a less centralized model.*

- **UW-Eau Claire** - <http://www.uwec.edu/online/> which lists all programs, courses and certificates and registration information.
- **UW-Madison** – Housed in Continuing Studies with no specific coordinator at present <http://continuingstudies.wisc.edu/distance.htm>. The campus does, however, have a *Distance Education Professional Development Certificate Program* which is noteworthy in its depth, and to which we will refer to later in this report (<http://depd.wisc.edu/>: see Section VIII).
- **UW-Platteville** – By degrees, program and professional development specific to distance education and a dedicated website with many resources (<http://www.uwplatt.edu/disted/>).
- **UW-Whitewater** – Housed in the Instructional, Communication and Information Technology Department as WisLine (<http://www.uww.edu/icit/instructional/de/>).
- **UW-Green Bay** – Lists distance education services as part of their library services but is specific to library research only, with a series of Distance Education sites not directly centralized as in (<http://www.uwgb.edu/team/distance.asp>).

### **Current Practice for Promotion and Marketing at UW-Stevens Point**

At this time, there is little centralized marketing or publicity of programs from central administration on our campus. A “needs assessment” should be completed, using the recommendations of this section of the current charge. Some faculty promote their courses by posting fliers or sending emails to prospective students about their individual courses. The Office of Continuing Education supports a number of online courses, but does not have a central role in specifically marketing either credit or non-credit online and distance education courses. Currently UWSP has 120 courses listed as distance education (17 offered through our Office of Continuing Education and 103 offered by UW Extension), many offering Continuing Education Units (CEU). As a program to emulate in a possible centralization of our functions at UWSP, the nationally renowned program promotion structure of the Penn State University is noteworthy. A link exists to “Penn State Online” (<http://worldcampus.psu.edu/>) found on the PSU homepage ([www.psu.edu](http://www.psu.edu))

under the “Academics” heading. It includes Banner links to “About Us,” “Degrees and Certificates,” “How Online Learning Works,” “Admissions,” and “Tuition and Financial Aid.” Perhaps most significant from a student perspective is the “Student Support Services” site at <http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/how-online-learning-works/student-services> linked from the Penn State homepage as “How Online Learning Works.” As is common to many of these programs and sites, however, there is no clear leadership contact for the unit, or to any specific physical contact information. All correspondence seems to occur via submission of online forms.

**Recommendation #4:** Work with UW System *eCampus* and other distance education sites to advance and promote UWSP online and distance education courses and programs

UWSP needs to have a viable and integrated marketing and promotion plan as part of all distance education course offerings. A clear “needs assessment” is again imperative, including a specific inventory of what is currently done by individual faculty and departments, and by the Office of Continuing Education. UWSP is encouraged to be cognizant of the major national players in distance education including programs at the University of Maryland, Indiana University, and Penn State University. Each college should work with their marketing personnel to target specific audiences for the courses being offered independently, as a minor, major, graduate degree or professional certification program. The most successful programs in the UW System (in terms of promotion of distance education) are those with dedicated staff and/or departments related specifically to online and distance education support. UWSP should research and review other prominent institutions of higher learning where success has been documented in promotion of their online and distance education programs, and develop a model for marketing based on best practices. The university needs to take better advantage of current online promotion efforts as limited as they may be, through the UW System and UW Extension including the *eCampus* and *UHelp* portals. The UW System and *eCampus* should carefully consider the recommendations of Fishman (2013) and the five steps toward more collaborative practice she suggests.

## **VI. PROGRAM INTEGRITY AND RULES AND REGULATIONS REGARDING DISTANCE EDUCATION**

In response to new rules promulgated by the U.S. Department of Education on October 29, 2010, all institutions of higher education that participate in Title IV student aid programs were

required to comply in writing and through an authorization process to demonstrate that they have met all rules set out under Section 600.9(c). This included all institutions which *“offer postsecondary education through distance learning or correspondence education in a State where the institution is not physically located.”* This also included implementation of a *“quality of education complaint process.”* Each institution must be legally authorized to operate postsecondary education programs in a state where the institution has a physical presence OR offers postsecondary education through distance learning or correspondence education where the institution is not physically located. In short, UWSP’s offering of distance education courses or programs must meet the statutes regulating that offering in any other state in which a student currently resides (residence determined by permanent home address and more loosely in other ways). Under the new rule, Section 600.9(c), a state must also establish a process by which it can receive, review and appropriately act on certain types of complaints concerning postsecondary education, including the enforcement of applicable state laws. This complaint process for postsecondary education offered by UW-Stevens Point is already established and is compliant with the UW System Administration policy. For the complaint process, we refer to UW System Administration’s notification website and Program Integrity Requirements, at <http://www.wisconsin.edu/vpacad/PIR/> and <http://www.wisconsin.edu/vpacad/PIR/PIR.htm>.

These “Program Integrity” rules are being addressed at UWSP through a Provost’s charge to the Office of Continuing Education, and implemented through research and work done by Associate Vice Chancellor James Sage and Continuing Education specialist Julie Hellweg. Research has been done to determine the requirements, costs, and procedures for submitting UWSP programs for approval and for requesting annual renewals for all states, except Hawaii (which has no state approval process at this time). Some states require additional paperwork to be completed by the Provost. These particular state packets have been prepared and submitted to James Sage for administrative completion and the institutional documentation required. As of June 25, 2013, the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point has received 100% approval from 24 of 49 states. Benchmarks for approval from many of these states have included (1) no physical presence in the state; (2) no instructor located in the state; (3) no recruitment or advertising in the state; and/or (4) no required practica, internships or student teaching within the state. The 24 states approved for

UWSP 100% online courses include Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, and Virginia. There are 23 states in which the paperwork is in process and one state (North Dakota) that needs to be revisited after August 1st, 2013 pending new oversight of state regulations.

For the complaint process, we again refer to the UW System Administration notification website and Program Integrity Requirements at <http://www.wisconsin.edu/vpacad/PIR/>. Enforcement actions have been delayed to July 1, 2014, and reciprocity agreements are being worked out with all states individually. A local working group report on Program Integrity Regulations was distributed in March 2011 highlighting the Distance Learning Education portion of those regulations. The Office of Academic Affairs website contains specific updates on our status in Program Integrity at [http://www.uwsp.edu/acadaff/Pages/State\\_Authorizations.aspx](http://www.uwsp.edu/acadaff/Pages/State_Authorizations.aspx).

### **Copyright Compliance Issues**

Interpretation and application of U.S. Copyright Law as it applies to distance education remains ambiguous. In many cases, what is considered fair use in the traditional classroom is considered copyright infringement when delivered online. UWSP currently requires instructors developing and teaching online courses agree not to include third-party copyrighted material unless appropriate approval (in writing) is provided, or royalty fees were paid for such materials. The faculty course developer should identify and disclose to the University the use of all third-party materials. Copies of disclosures and permission forms should be kept on file in the department. If the faculty member provides additional copies of copyright disclosures and forms, there is no current place at UWSP to centralize the function of collecting the information. This is additional impetus to create a "UWSP Distance Education Resources Center" which could work with faculty developing online courses and help determine individual cases of "fair use" of materials. Instructors are currently encouraged to review the Copyright Clearance Center's Campus Guide to Copyright Compliance available at <http://www.copyright.com/Services/copyrightoncampus/basics/index.html>. It is hoped that creation of a center and a director would subsume some of these responsibilities, and provide guidance to faculty in the future.

## **Intellectual Property Issues**

Faculty should be willing to share course content of online courses in the same manner they would share face-to-face course content. If a faculty member terminates employment with UWSP, their course materials are normally made available to others who might teach the course, but this is not mandatory, and is at the discretion of the original instructor of the course. The faculty member may also take with them the content developed for the online course. Further details are available at the UW System Financial Administration Legal site at <http://www.uwsa.edu/fadmin/owner.htm>, which has regulations pertinent to Intellectual Property rights for faculty in the UW System.

## **VII. DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSE AND INSTRUCTOR EXPECTATIONS AND HANDBOOK**

In assessing the needs for UWSP in the creation, and successful implementation of online courses, we need to establish a set of “best practices” as a point of entry for anyone considering moving into the online teaching environment. Other institutions have already devoted considerable time creating handbooks that codify these practices and serve as a roadmap for faculty in the planning and development of distance education. What follows is an outline which borrows some of the best features from existing Distance and Online Teaching Handbooks. These ideas were modeled after distance education handbooks from **UW-La Crosse**, the **University of Massachusetts** and **Southern Oregon University**. The UWSP handbook should also include UWSP-specific guidelines and recommendations. Important questions of *Course Ownership, Copyright and Intellectual Property* are specifically addressed in the Southern Oregon University Handbook (page 9) and should be referenced and expanded upon in the UWSP document (see Section VI of this report). The UWSP handbook should also organize the assessment process, both for student course evaluations and faculty peer review. Online course assessments have been somewhat unevenly applied across our campus and this is an area that will be addressed in the recommendations for our UWSP Handbook. Where possible there are hyperlinks to the documents that are cited in this outline.

The model handbooks for this discussion are found for the three institutions, as follows:

**University of Massachusetts:**

[http://www.umass.edu/oapa/oapa/publications/online\\_handbooks/Teaching\\_and\\_Learning\\_Online\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.umass.edu/oapa/oapa/publications/online_handbooks/Teaching_and_Learning_Online_Handbook.pdf).

**Southern Oregon University:**

<http://www.sou.edu/distancelearning/pdf/DE-Handbook.pdf>

**UW-LaCrosse:**

<http://www.uwlax.edu/online/handbook.pdf>.

**Recommendation #5:** Develop a UWSP Distance Education Handbook modeled on best practices currently used at other universities

What follows is an outline of important topics which should be included in a UWSP Handbook for Distance Education. These topics are based on sections common to many similar handbooks, with specific material modeled after the three institutions referenced above.

**Chapter 1: Teaching in Online Learning Environments: Overview (from Univ. of Mass Handbook)**

- *What is Online Learning?*
- *Advantages of Learning Online*
- *Advantages of Teaching Online*
- *Challenges of Teaching Online*
- *Common Questions*
- *Common Terms*

**Chapter 2: Teaching an Online Course**

- *Preparing to Teach Online*
- *Preparing Students to Learn Online*  
(Example-From Southern Oregon University Handbook)  
<http://www.sou.edu/distancelearning/students/requisites.html>

*Common Questions*

- *How Do I Plan My Course?*
- *What Support Will I Need?*
- *How Do I Determine the Ideal Enrollment For My Course?*
- *Addressing Copyright and Intellectual Property*
- *Course Ownership Issues*

(Here **UMass** defines and explains best practices of Communication including: "Netiquette," use of email, attachments, chat rooms, spam, discussion strategies, etc.)

**Chapter 3: Teaching and Learning Challenges**

- *Structuring an Online Course*
- *Course Organization*
- *Detailed Syllabus*
- *Communication*
- *Student Guide to Conventions of Online Communication*
- *Course Architecture*

- *Course Enrollments*
- *General Course Preparation Tips*
- *One Week Before the Course Starts*
- *Students with Disabilities (Accessibility) Link to Southern Oregon University Disability Resources Page at <http://www.sou.edu/access/dss/>. (also, see Section VIII of this report).*
- *Time Releasing*
- *Welcome Email*
  1. *Creating Community . . .*
  2. *Student-to-Student Interaction*
  3. *Faculty-to-Student interaction*
  4. *Tone*
- *Pedagogical Focus: Facilitating Discussions*
- *Rubrics from Southern Oregon University*
- *Icebreakers*
- *Asking the right questions*
- *Opportunities for Interaction*

#### **Chapter 4: Assessing Student Learning**

- *What is Assessment?*
- *Evaluating Student Performance for Grading Purposes*
- *Assessing Whether the Course is “Working”*
- *Instructor and Student Feedback*
- *Grading Policies*
- *Preventing Cheating*
- *Online Course Evaluation Guidelines*

**NOTE:** (the **UWSP Course Peer Evaluation Rubric** has been established, and is available at: <http://www.uwsp.edu/AcadAff/Documents/Rubric%20for%20Peer-Evaluation%20of%20Online%20and%20Hybrid%20Teaching.pdf>.)

### **VIII. FACULTY DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING, AND CREDENTIALING**

The Ad-hoc Committee for Distance Education was also charged with determining recommendations related to how we would like to see our faculty prepared for the delivery of distance education courses. Currently, and once again due to a lack of centralized resources, the University does not support specific programs aimed at faculty training and credentialing in online and distance course development or delivery. The now inactive Center for Academic Excellence and Student Engagement Center (CAESE, at <http://www.uwsp.edu/Caese/Pages/staff.aspx>) alludes to the design of online courses through the Quality Matters site (<http://www.uwsp.edu/Caese/Pages/Designing-Online-Courses.aspx>), but has no links to active on-campus resources currently supporting distance education topics. After a review of the

literature and best practices determined from model campuses, we make the following recommendations:

**Recommendation #6:** Create a Distance Education Resource Center (DERC) with the specific charge of coordinating logistics for all distance education initiatives, courses and programs at UWSP. This recommendation includes the appointment of a Director for that Center.

We recommend that the University invest in a **UWSP Distance Education Resources Center (the “Center” or DERC)** which is inclusive of all distance education courses, programs and faculty in a comprehensive effort to create a cohesive and uniform campus-wide learning environment. Specifically, the Center would be a locus for integration of the training and credentialing of faculty in all distance education courses. It is critical that instructional and course design support be available to ALL faculty from novice to advanced, in regards to Distance Education. Ideally, the Center should include individuals with higher education experience in instructional design and pedagogy within all major course delivery formats. A foundational and applied understanding of learning outcomes and assessment (including strategies which ensure student accountability) should be considered essential qualities of all Center staff, in an effort to facilitate and ensure continuity and quality within the UW-Stevens Point brand. The Center should also have an advisory committee, which would include faculty, staff, administrators and students. We also see the Center as perhaps part of the rejuvenation of a larger Center for Teaching and Learning (as was CAESE) for all campus course delivery formats.

Structurally the Center should provide consultation and apportion staff expertise and resources to departments, programs or faculty (e.g., instructional design, assessment, technology support and innovation) in alignment with our campus mission and in consideration of UW-Stevens Point’s Strategic Plan and the UW-System’s Growth Agenda (<http://www.wisconsin.edu/growthagenda/>). The center should also have an appointed director, as either 0.5 or 1.0 FTE. This person can come from the current tenure-line faculty pool or from academic staff, or the university may wish to seek someone from outside the campus. Again, this might be part of a larger Center focusing on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) for all curricula, distance or face-to-face.

The Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning at Indiana University is useful for an overall concept of how this center might look for UWSP (<http://citl.indiana.edu/>). This kind of center

structure would allow for support that is equitable across programs, departments and colleges and would be supportive of UWSP long-term goals. The Center would carry with it the strength of knowledge-transfer and facilitate problem-solving between close working staff. The Center would be a continually updated “repository” for sound teaching and learning practices campus-wide, inherently providing consistency across all UW-Stevens Point courses in terms of learning outcomes, assessment, and delivery. This center should concentrate part of its effort on new and innovative techniques and methodologies specific to distance teaching and learning. In addition, the Center Director would be specifically charged with working on collaborations and promotion of UWSP distance education through the UW System *eCampus*.

The new Distance Education Resource Center (DERC) should develop a set of UWSP online/hybrid course development and instructor *preparation/training guidelines*, as part of its charge to develop the Distance Education Handbook. The *Distance Education Professional Development Certificate Program* at UW-Madison is particularly noteworthy in its depth, and its tracks in instruction and instructional design (<http://depd.wisc.edu/>). It is recommended that our Center look into this certificate program at least for its “trainers.” These guidelines should be inclusive of the following topics, and would be part of a *Handbook for Distance Education* included as Recommendation #6 of this report. These guidelines should include the following:

- Course Planning and Course Structure/Development
- Faculty Training Requirements
- Creating Measurable Learning Outcomes
- Course Assessment and Evaluation

In addition, the new Distance Education Resource Center should develop a strategy, including a common set of desired outcomes, for implementing these guidelines. This strategy should be made public and designed for measuring the success and value (durability) of implementing our distance education guidelines developed as part of the UWSP Distance Education Handbook. The new Center, as a unit of the Office of Academic Affairs, and through cooperation with the individual departments and programs, should actively request information and track whether adjuncts (academic staff) hired to teach distance education courses have previously taught hybrid and/or online and where and if they received training. Additionally, the Center should request that they

provide sample syllabi that will be kept on file. We further recommend that existing hybrid and fully online courses be evaluated and revised as necessary to be consistent with the guidelines and training requirements developed by the Center. Some faculty who have a long history of distance education at this university might be requested to present their course materials in lieu of any specific training or credentialing done at the Center. In all cases however, faculty will be held to the same standards used in our face-to-face courses, with nuances specific to distance education added to address the unique needs of that pedagogic format.

### **Other Subcommittee Recommendations Regarding Faculty Development, Training and Credentialing**

- That course and training requirements for presenting a distance course will meet this minimum credentialing process for all faculty, regardless of their tenure or promotional status.
- Departments and instructors should establish incentives collaboratively for commonly taught courses for consistency in learning outcomes. It is not clear what these incentives might entail and whether they be monetary or simply be encouraged for inclusion as evidence of being versed in the **Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)**, which is now used consistently in the evaluation of the dossier of all faculty requesting retention, promotion and tenure.
- Develop a step-by-step process for converting a traditional face-to-face course to a hybrid or an online course. Additional parameters need to be developed in the creation of new hybrid or online courses, as well as a process for approval on the UWSP Campus and through the UW System.
- Departments should be charged with, and in cooperation with the new DERC, determine the most appropriate mix of face-to-face and distance education courses appropriate for their curriculum. For example, recent studies have shown that the social sciences and natural sciences fare better in the distance education format than humanities and arts, which focus more on “non-consensus building” formats and much more face-to-face discussion between students (Jones 2012).

## **IX. RECOMMENDED PLATFORM FOR DELIVERY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

This section of the report addresses the issues of recommended platform for presentation of distance and online education on this campus, along with minimal syllabi expectations and

facilitation on that platform. The standard foundation platform used by faculty on this campus is Desire-2-Learn (D2L), accessible at <http://www.uwsp.edu/d2l/Pages/default.aspx>. It is recommended that whenever a faculty member wishes to offer a course through distance education, that at minimum, it will be founded and supported upon this platform, or the current platform supported by the campus at that time.

**Recommendation #7:** Require faculty delivering distance education courses to use the current Course Management System (CMS) as a foundational platform for the delivery of their courses. Faculty teaching distance and online courses should use computers which meet the minimum requirements set forth by the Division of Information Technology at the DoIT Help Desk (<https://kb.wisc.edu/helpdesk/page.php?id=3210>).

The rationale behind this recommendation is that students may take and transfer in classes from other campuses. Instructors (in particular, adjuncts or academic staff) may teach for several campuses at one time. Each change in platform means learning a new interface which can detract from focusing on teaching and learning course content. Use of the current CMS thus minimizes confusion for administrators, students and faculty alike.

**Exceptions to using our campus standard CMS:**

Should a different platform be adopted by a department or sub group, we recommend that a written request including justification/rationale be provided to the University Technology Committee (UTC) and the new DERC outlining what the new platform can do that our campus standard CMS cannot. The Division of Information Technology would also have a larger role in this determination. Included in this written justification should be:

- Funding source (if applicable).
- What university systems (e.g., databases) will this platform need to access.
- Who will act as administrator/manager of this additional platform.
- Who will be responsible for faculty training/support within this new system.
- Who will be responsible for student training/support within this new system.
- Who will be using this new system. What university department(s)/group(s). Also, will people from outside of UWSP be accessing this new system.

- Sign off by all stakeholders involved once the above has been established. An example would be sign off by Information Technology's CIO.
- Sign off by the UW-Stevens Point Information Security Office.

**Recommendation #8:** Create a common syllabus “template” for distance education courses which includes information about minimum expectations of technological information necessary for course completion, in addition to the usual information found in course syllabi.

We should consider creating a syllabus “template” for use by instructors teaching online and hybrid courses outlining the following key sections which may not normally be easily available to students taking the course at a distance:

- Computer requirements
- Course Learning Outcomes
- Academic Dishonesty policy
- Accessibility statement
- Office Hours (or the online equivalent)
- Course Structure / Desire2Learn (CMS) Tools (see grid in La Crosse handbook)
- “Netiquette” statement and link (<http://www.albion.com/netiquette/>)
- Where to find technical support
- How to back up work
- Library resources
- Tutoring Services

Other considerations include the type of formats used for instructor communication with students (e.g., email, “news area” in the Course Management System, etc.), the timeframe within which a student can expect a response to a question, and the frequency with which students are expected to check for communications from their instructor. As part of this overall syllabus recommendation, the instructor should clearly indicate in the syllabus, and in the course timetable, the minimum computer/hardware requirements and internet expectations.

## **X. DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM AND COURSE EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT**

Ensuring the quality of online courses and programs, and equivalency to their face-to-face counterparts, have been of concern to administrators and faculty member since such courses and programs began to be offered (Allen and Seaman 2006; Seaman 2009). This brief overview focuses on student learning and assessment and specifics germane to our charge on Distance Education at UWSP.

### **Student Learning and Student Satisfaction.**

The Sloan Consortium's Five Pillars of Quality (<http://sloanconsortium.org/5pillars>) include Learning Effectiveness, a pillar ensuring that online education provided by an institution is equivalent (in terms of assessable learning outcomes) to that provided by face-to-face instruction. While a comprehensive literature review of experimental or quasi-experimental studies comparing this equivalency was not conducted, online and blended learning approaches have been found to be equal to or greater than the face-to-face experience (Larson and Sung 2009). A meta-analysis comparing the different modes of instruction revealed that online learning was more effective in teaching declarative knowledge (the main variable examined in most studies) than face-to-face courses and blended learning were more effective than either face-to-face or online alone (Sitzman et. al. 2006). Arbaugh (2001) found that students are more highly satisfied with courses when professors were actively engaged with students, and Shea et. al. (2006) examined learning and online community development. They identified two factors impacting student perceptions of teaching presence; a) instructional design and organization, and b) directed facilitation emphasizing the importance of instructor presence. Additional ideas for ensuring distance education quality are recommended in the recent "A Guide to Quality in Online Learning" (Uvalic-Trumbic and Daniel, 2013).

### **Program Assessment**

While there is a large body of literature addressing individual course evaluations, student satisfaction with courses, and the comparability of courses in various delivery formats, there is relatively less literature on actual specific "assessment" of online and distance offered programs and courses. One study examining three online programs at a Midwestern University found that *the levels of assessment* between face-to-face and online programs were not comparable, and that

higher levels of learning were assessed in face-to-face programs (Kim et. al. 2008). However, the authors note that only three programs were assessed, and their findings may not be representative of the array of programs available (see <http://www.westga.edu/~distance/oidla/spring111/kim111.html>).

### **Best Practices**

The Sloan Consortium of Colleges and Universities is by far the most well-known professional organization in the distance learning field. Through a variety of studies and publications, they have developed a set of *Quality Indicators* for administrating online programs. Course development quality indicators include, among other items, that “*courses are designed so that students develop the necessary knowledge and skills to meet learning objectives at the course and program level*” (Shelton 2010). Evaluation and assessment suggestions include that a) programs be assessed through a process applying specific standards, b) a variety of data are used to evaluate program effectiveness and guide change, and c) learning outcomes at course and program levels are regularly reviewed. The ***Sloan Consortium Quality Scorecard suggests the following for Evaluation and Assessment:***

- The program is assessed through an evaluation process that applies specific established standards.
- A variety of data (academic and administrative information) are used to regularly and frequently evaluate program effectiveness and to guide changes toward continual improvement.
- Intended learning outcomes at the course and program level are reviewed regularly to ensure clarity, utility, and appropriateness.
- A process is in place for the assessment of support services for faculty and students.
- Course and program retention is assessed.
- Recruitment and retention are examined and reviewed.
- Program demonstrates compliance and review of accessibility standards.
- Course evaluations are examined in relation to faculty performance evaluations.
- Faculty performance is regularly assessed.
- Alignment of learning outcomes from course to course exists.

- Course evaluations collect student feedback on quality of content and effectiveness of instruction.

### **Current Practices at UWSP**

Online course evaluations should be administered by either the department ADA or through Continuing Education. Individual programs are assessed according to program or department standards – this may be changing as programs and departments develop and report on more rigorous assessment plans, specifically as regards the guidelines of the Department Review Subcommittee, and the new Evaluation Metrics used for the new UWSP General Education Program. Currently, the University Handbook contains statements regarding the frequency of administration of course evaluations. From the Student Evaluation of Course Instruction Interim Subcommittee Report (April 1 2002), the following sections of the Handbook are cited:

- Handbook 4B sec 3 pg19, “PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES (CRITERIA) FOR EVALUATING FACULTY”.
- UWSP Handbook 4D Page 37: “STUDENT EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTION – EVALUATIVE FORM” 4D (see <http://www.uwsp.edu/AcadAff/Handbook/CH4D%2012-13.pdf>.)
- UWSP Handbook 4D Page 38: “STUDENT EVALUATION OF ONLINE INSTRUCTION – EVALUATIVE FORM (http://www.uwsp.edu/AcadAff/Handbook/CH4D%2012-13.pdf).
- UWSP Handbook 4D bottom Page 40: bank of optional questions.

**Recommendation #9:** Assess all distance education courses for student achievement of learning outcomes as is now done for all UWSP courses which contain a curriculum code and course number (Section. Distance education courses should be assessed as part of normal department reviews as for all other curricula.

Online/distance courses are (or should be) treated like any other academic course, especially with respect to conducting student evaluations, peer evaluations, assessment of student learning, and so forth. It is expected that distance education courses might require some adjustments to ensure this is meaningful, but the basic assumption remains: *if the course carries a UWSP curriculum code and course number (e.g., EDUC 205, PHIL 101, NR 250) then it is a full-fledged course and whether offered face-to-face or distance, an assessment of the achievement of the learning outcomes set out by the course should be documented.* Beyond that, the university might

consider adopting some formal standards/expectations for online/distance courses, such as those developed by the Sloan Consortium. Likewise, the university should also consider developing comprehensive support resources for faculty, staff, and students (e.g., with support from the proposed Distance Education Resources Center and its director). Finally, the university should also expect that online/distance courses (and entirely online degree programs) reflect institutional priorities, comply with UW System requirements, uphold the standards expected by the Higher Learning Commission, and advance the mission of the university.

#### **Student Course Evaluations:**

- Ensure students enrolled in online/distance delivery courses fill out course evaluations (i.e., evaluate the course/instructor). The current version of that form is found at: <http://www.uwsp.edu/AcadAff/Documents/Rubric%20for%20Peer-Evaluation%20of%20Online%20and%20Hybrid%20Teaching.pdf>. It is not clear that all faculty teaching online are using this form, and it is important that department chairs and ADAs work with faculty to be sure this form is used and the results used in evaluation. Instructors are oftentimes unaware that there is an online student course evaluation and the process of having their online course evaluating. UWSP must create and maintain a consistent process to regularly communicate to departments and online instructors expectations for online student course evaluations.
- UW-Stevens Point should revisit the question set used for online course evaluations and create a version for hybrid courses. In the UWSP Handbook 4D bottom (Page 40) there is a bank of optional questions that can be added to a course evaluation addition to the mandated questions. That these questions exist should be communicated and their use promoted within departments and colleges for all course formats.
- Many administrative department associates (ADAs) have access to and have been trained to create and send out student evaluations. However, evaluations are not done consistently for online courses in some areas; in particular for continuing education classes. Administrators of these departments must be aware that the department is responsible for administration of distance education courses, including student evaluation documents. It is recommended that for course sections offering continuing education units (CEU), that the

department ADA distribute and collect results for student course evaluations, in cooperation with the Office of Continuing Education.

- A statement regarding which party(s) is(are) assigned oversight and responsibility for distributing and collecting online course survey data should be added to the UWSP University Handbook.

#### **Peer Course Evaluations and Observations**

- Ensure that peers (other faculty and teaching staff, preferably within the unit offering the course or discipline) have the opportunity to evaluate the course and instructor (i.e., as part of the retention/tenure/promotion process). For academic staff and adjuncts, a method of peer observation should be promoted and included as part of the retention, promotion and retention dossier of that individual.
- Instructors are oftentimes unaware that there is an online course peer evaluation form, and the process of having their course evaluated by a peer in their discipline. Create a consistent process to regularly communicate to departments and online instructors expectations for online course peer evaluations.

#### **Distance Education Program Assessment**

- Ensure we evaluate the effectiveness of the course within the context of the academic program(s) of the General Education Program, the Department or Unit offering the course, and the university as a whole (i.e., evaluate the success of the course to advance larger educational goals) and be ready to report those findings to the appropriate accreditation agencies (e.g., HLC).

### **XI. DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSE CODE OF CONDUCT AND “NETIQUETTE”**

UWSP currently has the following links to its Code of Conduct for Students:

#### **Rights & Responsibilities:**

- <http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Pages/rightsandresponsibilities.aspx>
- UWS-14: [http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin\\_code/uws/14](http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/uws/14)
- UWS-17: <http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/SRR-2010/rightsChap17.pdf>

**Observations:**

Academic misconduct policies and procedures (as laid out in UWS-14) were not explicitly written with online/distance education in mind. However, these policies have been used for cases of online/distance misconduct (using modifications such as telephone, Skype, etc.). In many distance education contexts, the ideas laid out and referred to by many universities for online code-of-conduct include what is referred to as “*Netiquette*” (<http://www.albion.com/netiquette/>) which include explicit guidelines and expectations not addressed in University of Wisconsin Codes (UWS-14 or UWS-17). UWSP should adopt and refer to the “*Netiquette*” site in all of its distance education offerings as an expectation of conduct by both students and professors.

**Recommendation #10:** Establish clear expectations for appropriate conduct specific to distance education courses, with content in common with student rights and responsibilities at UWSP

To accomplish the goals of this recommendation, we suggest the following issues be addressed:

- Modify UWS-14 (locally) to address online/distance education scenarios (academic misconduct).
- Modify the Community Rights & Responsibilities document to include references to online/distance education (academic misconduct and netiquette).
- Make it a required expectation that online course syllabi include standard statements and references to specific issues regarding civility and etiquette in the distance education “environment.”
- Follow all FERPA guidelines involving student privacy issues as normally done for all face-to-face rules and regulations.

**Some Additional “Netiquette” Resources:**

- <http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/promoting-netiquette-in-the-classroom/7239>
- <http://chronicle.com/article/Mobile-Apps-Blackboards-New/129509/>

**Examples of Netiquette Best Practices:**

- UW Colleges Online Site: <http://online.uwc.edu/technology/onletiquette.asp>
- Core Rules of Netiquette at Albion: <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>
- University of Hawaii at Hilo: <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/academics/dl/netetiquette.php>
- Lake Superior College: <http://blogs.lsc.edu/expectations/netiquette-guidelines/>

- Lawrence Technological University: <http://www.ltu.edu/ltuonline/netiquette.asp>
- The Sakai Project: <https://ecn.walsh.edu/access/content/group/039f69aa-f786-412b-933c-defe7eb3f4c1/Netiquette.htm>
- Colorado State University: <http://teaching.colostate.edu/tips/tip.cfm?tipid=128>

## **XII. STUDENT AND ADVISOR CONCERNS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION**

As part of this study, we asked students and one administrator responsible for student affairs to comment on what they believe are the major student concerns regarding online courses and distance education. We asked them to consider issues like academic support, cheating, cost, inconsistencies in grading policies, accessibility to professors, and how they feel about development of more online courses and majors. Students used online resources, a student survey of both traditional and non-traditional students, and The Stevens Point Academic Advising Association responses (SPACADA). What follows are mostly condensed responses written and summarized by academic advisors and student members of the Ad-hoc Committee on Distance Education.

### **A. UWSP Academic Advisor Comments**

**Concerns About Freshmen and Distance Education:** Unfortunately, the students who are least likely to succeed in an online class are the students that are being forced into those sections because either on-campus sections are closed (bottleneck issues) or are offered at times that conflict with their schedules. Could we focus more on the 200 level or higher instead? First-year students are not yet exposed to the kinds of hard and fast deadlines faced by college students. The immediate availability of an instructor may not be realistic in the higher-education situation, and students are likely to be more comfortable with face-to-face courses. Often, such students lack the appropriate time management skills (such as a dedicated schedule and time for work) for them to be successful in distance education courses, and new residential students are dealing with life issues beyond the classroom.

- Distance Education courses are often the last classes left open at the end of new student Orientation.
- Distance Education does not always take into account different learning styles.

- Students want tutoring for online courses, but tutors often have not taken the course or have not taken it as a distance education course.

**Concerns about Cheating:** With the growing popularity of online courses, our advisors are concerned that tech-savvy students are finding ways to cheat that let them score high in online courses with minimal effort, in ways that are difficult to detect.

- Students mentioned to advisors that cheating in online classes is too easy. Without a professor providing supervision over quizzes and exams, students can easily search the internet for answers. Students also mentioned that this leads to lower retention and application of knowledge. In some cases, online learning is less engaging because it is very easy to copy and paste questions into search engines, and the answers are available with little effort. As a result, students who engage in this misconduct (whether detected or not) experience reduced meaningful learning within the course and with the instructor which reduces student retention.
- Students can very easily group together and if the test for an online course is timed, students have the ability to work together for one person's test. They then know a subset or all of the questions being asked. They Students can then write down the answers and complete the test separately, not as a group, thus breaking D2L's timestamp and location stamp data. This was seen as a way of fooling an instructor that they did not work "together" on an assignment.

**Cost Issues:** Robert J. Sternberg (2013) stated *"...a degree from a top-rated German university costs a small fraction of what a comparable degree would cost in the United States. But typically the German institution would have no university-sponsored athletic teams or facilities, fraternities, sororities, student clubs, dormitories, meal plans, or other accouterments that many students take for granted in the United States."* There continue to be issues in student's minds about comparable costs. Our own questions on cost include:

- With a decentralized Continuing Education structure, are there inconsistencies in pay and fees?
- The use of campus text rental has been a recent addition and the students have appreciated this benefit.

**Effects of Distance Education on the Learning Style of Students:** Is there training for instructors on just what constitutes best design, particularly taking into account different learning styles? Instructors should anticipate, when we design our courses, that not all students are equally

motivated and are sometimes not prepared to put in the time for the reading and weekly activities. This is not dissimilar to face-to-face courses except that in the latter, the opportunity for student/faculty interaction can be a determining factor. Issues noted by students included:

- Some students appreciate and prefer an opportunity for face-to-face interaction.
- Online courses lessen the opportunities available for faculty modeling of student civility and appropriate professional behavior. Students have indicated that while taking an online course, they appreciate a visit to campus and to see/speak with a real adviser and/or meet with the instructor.
- Lack of consistent instructor feedback is very unsatisfying for some students. They feel that in a classroom, the professor would reply/respond with more than just text. Body language and learning how to engage in discourse are lost in such environments.
- A complete and thorough syllabus is not always available, and it behooves our faculty to work carefully to complete course syllabi to the standards set by the DERC.

**B. Student Survey Results: (paraphrased comments from students)**

According to an interview in the Chronicle of Higher Education, “By placing all the lectures online this allowed for students to get twice as much exposure to the material. The students would attend the in-class lecture and then watch the lecture again at home while studying or completing homework ( <http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/san-jose-state-u-says-replacing-live-lectures-with-videos-increased-test-scores/40470>).”

- A student had to buy a manual and CDs and take a test. A professor created no original content; all content was created by the software company. The CD cost about \$60; a student thought this was too much. Student felt the class was a joke. Student thought it was too easy to cheat.
- Forcing students to buy software or material online not from the University Store. Students complained software was very bad and not well put together. Student was unaware of additional costs for online homework and materials at time of registration. Student suggested such information should be made available on the registration time table.
- How will segregated fees and differential tuition apply in distance education courses? Do they cost the same and where do the fees go?

- Multiple students asked in conversation, what is it worth to our university? How much profit can our university make? Is the university making more money with online classes?

**C. Student Interview Results: (paraphrased comments from interviews)**

- Students complained that teachers in full online classes would start discussion groups and do nothing to guide the discussion.
- Students felt that professors used D2L discussions as a prop instead of actually teaching.
- Some students feel that hybrid courses work the best. Having the professor discuss and answer questions in a traditional setting is definitely still needed. By teaching them the information and challenging them to be responsible and to further the points they learn by writing an exploring the web as a valuable resource.
- Some students stated that professors would conduct YouTube lectures and all seemed that this was a positive part of the course.
- Students reported that too many links sometimes leads to confusion.
- One student enjoyed taking an online class because they did not need to attend class, but admitted they wished there were more formal explanations on specific topics.
- For class X, there were two class periods a week with one not meeting, and with only online assignments. This student enjoyed this aspect of the class since there was no lecture and the assignments emphasized points discussed in the book.
- Students did not have complaints about the course but thought it was more difficult to contact the instructor when they had specific questions.
- Students had difficulty with course material and felt that if the professor had been more available to answer questions about course material and homework, the learning experience would have been better.
- Student complained that professor did not respond to e-mails concerning key dates and deadlines in a timely manner.
- Student didn't have many complaints about the course; the only main complaints were that when the student couldn't understand something, directly contacting the professor was a much more difficult process than asking questions in person.

### **Suggestions for Increasing Student Success Rates and Academic Support:**

- 1) Every distance education or online course should have a D2L training component. Students must sign off that they have had the training or already have the necessary skills required for an online class. Limit traditional freshman from taking online or hybrid classes. Non-traditional students should become familiar with the Tutoring-Learning-Center to help understand good practices and how to use the technology effectively. Freshman should have a session or course possibly within the “First-Year Experience” that teaches them how to effectively use D2L. It would help to hire an academic advisor for certain online courses and provide training for all academic advisors in strategies and common student problems found in online courses.
- 2) Cheating: Make sure all classes address the UWSP Plagiarism / Cheating statement.
- 3) Cost: All software and books should be bought through the University Store or other vendors approved by the University. There should be the same pricing structure for all degree granting courses across the University.
- 4) Inconsistencies in grading policies: Make sure that all UWSP degree granting courses follow the same records and registration policies.
- 5) Faculty/Course Development: Provide training for all faculty who teach online courses. In addition, provide several templates for faculty to use as guidelines as they develop their courses.
- 6) Accessibility to professors: Students should have remote access to professors, either through video and/or chat. Professors should set online office hours that they are available for if they teach an online class.
- 7) Development of more programs: Work in conjunction with other Universities to provide a greater list of shared courses in all majors and minors to assist students in taking courses needed in alternative locations and modes in collaborative degree programs.

**Recommendation #11:** Involve students and academic advisors in implementing any new procedures specific to distance education courses and involve students in an advisory capacity with the Distance Education Resources Center

### **XIII. DISABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION DELIVERY**

All new policies for online/distance education and completion of degree programs will impact students with disabilities, as well as disability services, assistive technology and online accessibility. The following are some concerns relative to the growing online education programming at UWSP and the impact on students with disabilities and online accessibility. With the growth of UWSP online courses and online degree programs, it is essential that faculty and program directors/chairs be cognizant of Section 508-the online accessibility law (<http://www.hhs.gov/web/508/index.html>), and implement best practices associated with online access when teaching online courses. Note that online access means readability should be universal so that everyone can access the online information, even if they have a *learning, sensory, physical or other disability*.

UWSP currently has an Online Accessibility Policy and Implementation Plan that spells out the policies currently in place (<http://www4.uwsp.edu/IT/about/policies/policiesaccessibilityfsv.aspx>). This policy and plan need updating, a process which may fall under the collaboration of the University Technology Committee, the Director of the Disability and Assistive Technology Center, with all technological changes being developed and implemented by the Division of Information Technology, working with the Associate Vice Chancellor for Teaching, Learning and Academic Programs, and the Director of the Distance Education Resource Center. Also, for use in determining need in this area, the Disability and Assistive Technology Center puts out an annual report which contains a breakdown of reported disabilities by category, a useful place to start in the inventory of just what is done for students in these categories and a place where the question of disability access to distance education can begin to be asked.

With the growth of UWSP online courses and collaborative degree programs, the following situations should be taken into account as they relate to students with disabilities:

- Informing online students – that if they have a disability, how they can connect with disability services through the Disability and Assistive Technology Center (such as stating so on an online syllabus); (<http://www.uwsp.edu/disability/Pages/default.aspx>)

- Creating a means of communication relative to accommodations and services, between students (qualified as having a disability), online instructors/professors and Disability and Assistive Technology Center staff;
- Creating a means for online students (qualified as having a disability) to secure and learn how to utilize assistive technology and its services;
- Determining which university in a collaborative online degree program is responsible for online disability-related service; and which university pays for such accommodation services should there be a cost;
- Writing a procedure for online courses/degrees that addresses the above (and more) as it relates to students with disabilities taking online courses and online accessibility.

With the development of **collaborative online degree programs** with other universities (e.g., HWM, HIMT) communication between the universities involved (through their disability services programs) must assure that everyone involved in the degree program is on the same page, including disability services directors, degree program directors, faculty and students in those programs.

**Recommendation #12:** The appointed contact person from Information Technology should be involved in the implementation of any special technologies and strategies used in creating distance education/online courses which meet current online accessibility rules. The Disability and Assistive Technology Center should be informed of any special technologies developed, and inform participating students with disabilities of these technologies.

The current UWSP Accommodation and Disability Services Statement can be found at: <http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/ADA/rightsWebAccess.pdf> with an official policy found at <http://www4.uwsp.edu/it/about/policies/policiesaccessibilityfsv.aspx>. A UW System Board of Regents Resolution from 2000, found under “*Standards for academic and student support services in distance education credit courses, degree and certificate programs: guidelines for distance education credit program array and approval,*” briefly addresses the needs of individuals with disabilities (<http://www.uwsa.edu/acss/acis/destandards.pdf>). Regarding the UW System Policy Section 508, UWSP should consider the following in implementing an appropriate disabilities and accessibility procedure which abides by those guidelines, including:

- The 508 online accessibility law: (although the law is required for Federal employees, it has been adopted for use in higher education as a recommended policies and procedure) <http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?fuseAction=1998Amend> (section 508 homepage) <http://www.hhs.gov/web/508/index.html>); and other related laws [http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?fuseAction=Laws2\\_OtherRelevant](http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?fuseAction=Laws2_OtherRelevant)
- Section 508 implementation (here is a UW System site that identifies specific ways to implement Section 508) <https://apply.wisconsin.edu/Accessibility.aspx>

**In constructing an appropriate response and procedure document for UWSP, we highlight the following sites which seem to have considered the concerns articulated here:**

- UW-Extension’s “Work Wide Web Accessibility and Internet program Delivery Systems” <http://inclusion.uwex.uwc.edu/sites/inclusion.uwex.uwc.edu/files/EOP7a.pdf>; Sample of UW-Madison’s “Policy Governing World Wide Web Accessibility at UW Madison” <http://www.wisc.edu/policies/wwwap.php>
- UW System 14-10 Nondiscrimination on Basis of Disability Policy Statement (although online access is not mentioned here; the policy is relevant as it relates to disabilities and ADA & Section 504): <http://www.uwsa.edu/bor/policies/rpd/rpd14-10.htm>
- Sample lawsuit – Penn State: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/penn-state-accused-of-discriminating-against-blind-students/28154>; results: <http://accessibility.psu.edu/nfbpsusettlement>.
- The US Department of Education put out a report entitled “Advisory Commission on Accessible Instructional Materials in Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities” found at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/aim/publications.html>. This report is timely and lays out expectations in a more general way regarding the accessibility requirements for classes.

#### **XIV. REVIEW OF FINDINGS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

The most consistent finding of the Ad-hoc Committee for Distance Education was the lack of centralization of information, expectations, delivery platforms and evaluation which should be standard for all distance education on this campus. Of the recommendations offered from the various subcommittees, the most often cited is the need for uniform expectations of syllabi,

training and credentialing of faculty, better communications with UW System administration of sites and duplication of effort, and concerns over the appropriate tools needed for proper student, faculty, course and program evaluation and assessment. The theme most often referenced is one of a sense of lack of coordination of effort in communicating in a single voice to our students, and a lack of academic rigor and uniformity in establishing disciplinary expectations as to how much of this new pedagogy, both as an institution and for individual disciplines, is appropriate for UWSP.

By far the most solid and consistent recommendation is that *we establish a center for centralization of resources where both students and faculty can go for advice in teaching and learning in this type of pedagogy. It is also recommended that this Center needs a single director charged with coordinating all efforts in distance education for this campus.*

The UWSP Distance Education Resource Center (DERC) should offer instructional design support and technology training to UWSP instructors creating and teaching online courses. Instructional design support includes outlining the course development process, providing recommendations for engaging online learners, creating study guides and other course materials, providing access to a course template, producing multimedia, and researching online resources. Instructors are encouraged to utilize the skills and expertise of the Distance Education Resource Center staff, as needed. The University Technology Committee of the Faculty Senate has recommended at UWSP needs a larger center with a broader goal of supporting teaching and learning. *It is emphasized that an integral part of that recommendation is the need for distance education support, as the principal role of this center.*

#### **Suggestions for Staff Expertise at the UWSP Distance Education Resources Center**

- Distance Education Coordinator (minimum 0.5FTE assignment or reassignment)
- Distance Education Training and Instructional Support Specialist
- D2L Training, Instructional Support Specialist and Multimedia Assistance
- Online Advisory Group-Mentors
- Text Rental Advice and Oversight
- Online Instructor Training/Credentialing
- Summer Training/Interim training options

The overarching need for centralization and standardization of expectations is the critical priority determined by this committee. This need was also clearly articulated to UWSP in its application for a “Bracket 2” status accreditation by the HLC, to allow us to offer up to 20% of our academic programs in a distance and online format. I encourage the Provost and his staff to carefully consider these recommendations, and make the case that the need a center with a director and support staff may be critical if we are to move forward in being competitive in distance education.

Faculty and administrators involved in distance education on this campus should also consider becoming involved with the *United States Distance Learning Association* (USDLA; <http://www.usdla.org/>) which organizes an annual conference and offers a “Quality Standards Certification Process” which the university might adopt as a standard credentialing for our faculty, as well as assisting us in our program and course assessment ([http://www.usdla.org/assets/pdf\\_files/October%202012%20Flyer%20Quality%20Standards%20Certification.pdf](http://www.usdla.org/assets/pdf_files/October%202012%20Flyer%20Quality%20Standards%20Certification.pdf)). The USDLA stated on its website: *The goal of USDLA/Quality Standards is three-fold. First, the program informs and protects the growing number of educational consumers who are considering distance learning. Second, USDLA/ QS offers to distance learning providers both the tools and a framework for continuous improvement. Third, effective self-regulation fosters a climate more conducive to public support and continued growth.* An investment in membership in this organization may help in all aspects of our distance education programming.

**Final Recommendation/Concern:**

This committee, by charge, focused on the implementation, standardization, and logistics of delivery, faculty expertise, and assessment of distance education on this campus. A question begged by the report is more fundamental to the actual distribution and frequency of offerings within each major. Department faculty, program coordinators and deans must determine within the cultures of their own disciplines a “reasonable percentage” of distance courses which are permissible for each of their existing majors, and just what rubrics and methods they should use which might have a record of success as best practices for that determination. ***A major question coming out of this study, but not directly addressed, is just what methods and resources should be used by each major to determine the percentage of credits a particular major should consider***

***a maximum for that particular degree?*** The Distance Education Resource Center may assist departments and units in determining best practices and findings within each discipline, and suggest ways of using those best practices, to determine how appropriate the online format is for first-year students or for the curriculum as a whole. UWSP needs to address the proliferation of distance and online courses as a strategic issue for each department and unit. As administrators, chairs and deans begin to encourage distance education courses within their departments, there will be both supporters and detractors within that department and discipline. What are the proven methods to be used within the structure of a distance course for a particular discipline (e.g., findings of the differences between disciplines like Philosophy or Geography?), and what courses have been shown to be less effective in the distance format than others? Are there pedagogic rationales encouraged in the determination of whether a course should be offered in the distance format? ***Recommendations to departments regarding this general concern are beyond the scope of this report, but will become a very real issue as departments begin to grapple with more and more faculty wishing to offer courses in this format.***

**Recommendation #13:** The university should begin a dialogue on how it wishes to determine the percentage of distance and online courses offered for curricula which are not designated as “fully online.” This discussion will by necessity be disciplinary and major-specific, but should be charged to, and ultimately determined by, the faculty of each department.

***We ask that this ad-hoc committee be discharged from its duties, as per Provost approval of this document, and encourage the review by the appropriate offices and the Faculty Senate, as determined by the Provost.***

## XV. REFERENCES

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## **XVI. OTHER DOCUMENTS ON THE AD-HOC COMMITTEE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION SHAREPOINT SITE**

<https://campus.uwsp.edu/sites/cols/collaboration/Distance%20and%20Online%20Education%20Committee/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>.

### **(Password Required for Access)**

1. HLC Change Panel Letter to the Provost March 5 2013
2. HLC Distance Delivery Background Information 2
3. HLC IAC report April 16 2013
4. What Do Unsuccessful Online Students Want us to Know
5. Student Evaluation of Online Instructor – Los Angeles Community College District
6. University of Colorado Credit/Non-Credit Courses and Policies
7. UW-Milwaukee Handbook for Peer Evaluation of Online and Blended Courses
8. Teaching and Learning Online/Communication/Community/Assessment – University of Massachusetts
9. Southern Oregon University Distance Education Handbook
10. Making Online Course Sites Accessible for Students With Disabilities
11. UWSP Student Online Course Evaluation
12. UWSP Student Online Course Evaluation Approval From Faculty Senate
13. History of Senate Resolutions of Faculty/Instructor Evaluations
14. UWSP Handbook Sections for Course Evaluations
15. UWSP Handbook of Evaluation By Students and Peers
16. Norris and Conn: Investigating Strategies for Increasing Student Response Rates to Online-Delivered Course Evaluations.
17. Wode and Kaiser: Online Course Evaluation Literature Review and Findings/Columbia College Chicago
18. UWSP Online Course Evaluation Content Analysis
19. Peer Evaluation-Online Course Content Analysis SP09
20. Draft of Introductory Material for Rubrics – Peer Evaluation of Online Teaching
21. UWSP Supplementary Technology Pre-Evaluation Checklist
22. Update Status Report January 2013
23. Response Provost’s Charge University Technology Committee
24. Draft Recommendation Distance and Online Inventory
25. ECAR 2012 Student Survey Dashboard v3
26. ECARS Students and Technology Summary
27. Online Course Evaluation Questions
28. Evaluation of Evidence Based Practice in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies
29. Instructors and Students Technology Use, Engagement and Learning Outcomes
30. Twenty Years of Research on the Academic Performance Differences Between Traditional and Distance Learning: Summative Meta-Analysis and Trend Examination: Schacher and Neumann.
31. Summary Program Integrity Regulations
32. Working Group Report on Program Integrity Regulations –UW System Administration
33. Online Course Evaluation Document background UWSP

34. Understanding the MOOC Trend
35. The Western Governor's University
36. 6.7 Million Students Taking Online Courses
37. University of LaCrosse – Online Handbook
38. Ad-hoc Committee for Distance Education – Charge from the Provost Fall 2012
39. Response Provost's Charge to the University Technology Committee