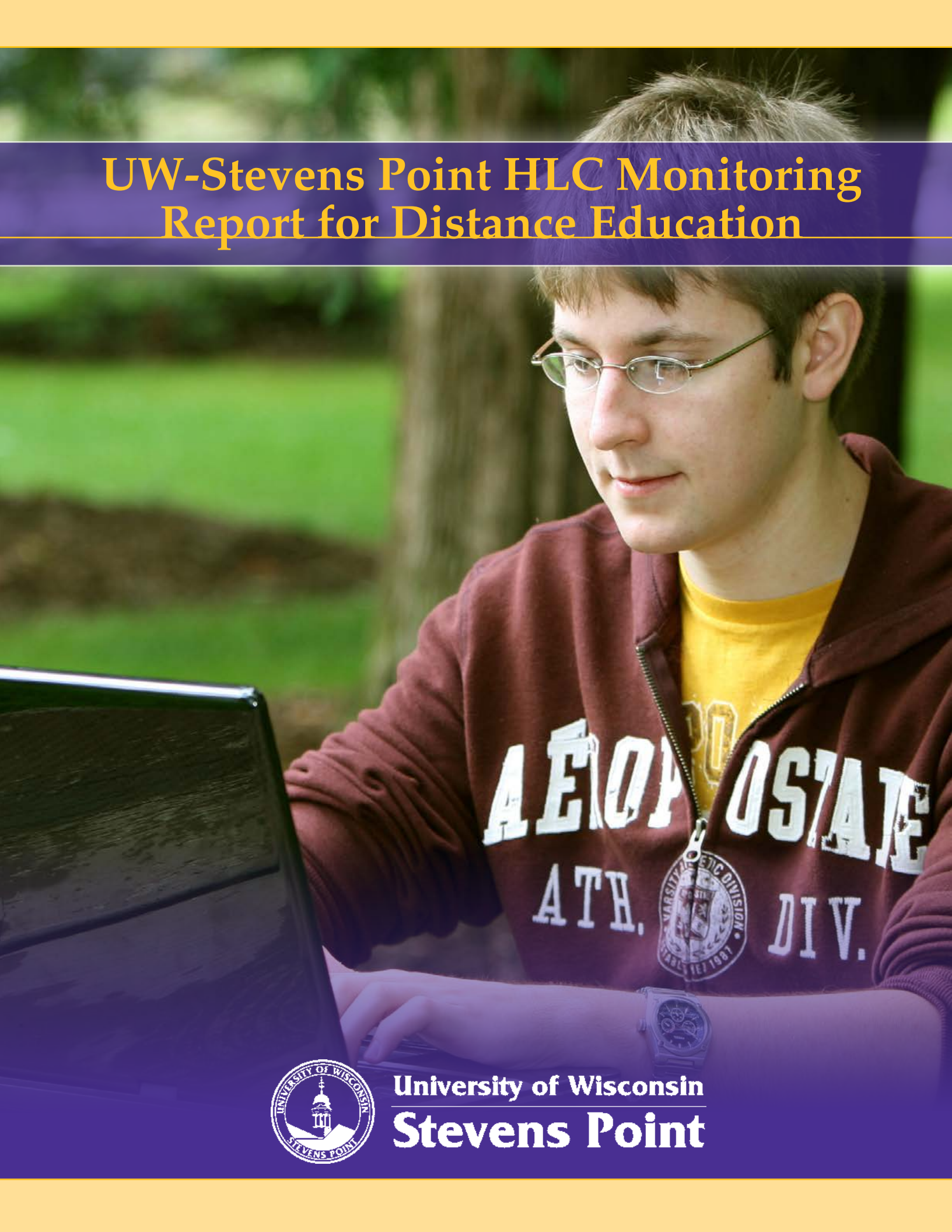# UW-Stevens Point HLC Monitoring Report for Distance Education

University of Wisconsin
Stevens Point

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Stevens Point

UW-Stevens Point HLC Monitoring Report for Distance Education

January 15, 2015

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I. Overview

Background

In a letter dated April 23, 2013, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) notified UW-Stevens Point's Chancellor that the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) had reviewed UW-Stevens Point's change application request related to distance delivery. Specifically, UW-Stevens Point requested to be approved in "Bracket 2" which would allow our campus to offer up to 20 percent of our programs via distance delivery. This letter communicated that the IAC modified the original Change Panel's findings, approving UW-Stevens Point for "Bracket 2" status. At the same time, the IAC required UW-Stevens Point to submit a Monitoring Report in conjunction with the Progress Report on our assessment of student learning that is due on January 15, 2015. The details requested in the Monitoring Report were communicated as follows:

> **Monitoring Report.** A Monitoring Report due 1/15/15 on institutional resources and institutional processes regarding the planning, budgeting, and assessment necessary for the delivery of distance education. This monitoring report should be submitted in conjunction with a previously required progress report on assessment and general education due at the same time.

In the text that follows, we submit this Monitoring Report and include updates on our institutional resources and processes related to the planning, budgeting, and assessment of our Distance Education activities. Appendices (B1- B12) referenced within this Monitoring Report are linked in the document and are available in our Monitoring Report Resource Room at: www.uwsp.edu/acadaff/Pages/HLC-2015-Monitoring-Report-Resource-Room.aspx.

II. Introduction

A. Background

On January 11, 2013, UW-Stevens Point submitted a "Confirmation of Institutional Eligibility for Distance Delivery Approval" to the HLC (Appendix B1: UWSP Distance Delivery Confirmation of Eligibility Form; Appendices cited within this report are located here). By submitting this request, UW-Stevens Point sought approval to offer up to 20 percent of our programs through the Distance Education mode of delivery (i.e., "Bracket 2" status). During the subsequent review of our request, the Change Panel forwarded additional questions and requests for clarification regarding the total number of UW-Stevens Point programs available through Distance Education. The panel also requested more information regarding UW-Stevens Point policies and procedures governing the planning and assessment of our Distance Education courses and programs. We provided this requested additional information (Appendix B2: Change Panel Supplemental Questions and Answers), and on April 23, 2013 our campus was approved for Bracket 2 Distance Education delivery. However, our campus was also required to submit a Monitoring Report to document our "… institutional resources and institutional processes regarding the planning, budgeting, and assessment necessary for the delivery of distance education."

The report that follows here provides the information requested by the HLC, and documents our campus' efforts to continue through Distance Education our tradition of excellence in teaching and learning.

B. Our Values, Challenges, and Campus Planning Efforts

Our campus strongly values and pursues excellence in all our undergraduate and graduate education endeavors. We capitalize on our high tenure-track faculty-to-student ratios and close student contact with, and access to, our faculty. As a comprehensive institution within the University of Wisconsin System, we have traditionally served a conventional 18 to 22 year-old student population in on-campus face-to-face classroom settings. More recently, spurred by partnerships (e.g., degree completion programs) with other University of Wisconsin institutions, we have expanded our Distance Education offerings. Our initial Distance Education opportunities were frequently spearheaded by individual faculty members seeking to expand a curriculum to place-bound and increasingly nontraditional student populations. As our campus further explored new Distance Education opportunities, it became evident that we had no coordinated or centralized plan or set of practices for designing, delivering, and ensuring excellence in our Distance Education efforts. Moreover, from a teaching and learning perspective, we failed to provide our instructors with the training and support to address the unique challenges of the Distance Education mode of delivery. Not surprisingly, these factors fostered a rather arbitrary, uncontrolled, and nonstrategic process that not only failed to examine additional opportunities for extensions of our curriculum through Distance Education, but also failed to result in policies and an administrative framework to promote, support, and sustain excellent Distance Education offerings.

To address these challenges, in September of 2012 our provost commissioned a campus committee to examine, evaluate, and recommend campus Distance Education resources and policies. The committee was also charged to research best practices and present a series of recommendations to our campus and specifically identify policies that support the functions of Distance Education within UW-Stevens Point's larger strategic and academic plans (Appendix B3: Provost Charge to Distance Education Committee). The committee was comprised of a comprehensive cross-section of university unit representatives and included administrators, faculty, academic staff, technical support specialists, Continuing Education personnel, and students. The committee met through the 2013 spring semester and communicated its 54-page report and recommendations to the campus in a document entitled: Academic Plan Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP (hereafter Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP (see Appendix B4: Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP).

The report acknowledged the challenges that our campus faced with respect to the planning and delivery of Distance Education, but also concomitantly provided 13 separate recommendations designed to improve and guide our planning and execution of Distance Education offerings. The report, including its recommendations, was discussed by our campus governance committees, and was endorsed by our Faculty Senate on November 20, 2013.

III. Resources and Policies for Planning Distance Education

A. Resources for Planning Distance Education

1. Reorganization and addition of personnel

Our campus has reorganized and added personnel to support the planning, development, and delivery of Distance Education. As a reflection of our commitment to a robust Distance Education program, we created and hired an Assistant Director (AD) of Credit Outreach within our Continuing Education unit. This AD is responsible for coordinating our Distance Education activities and has assisted in the development of campus resources and policies relating to distance education. Additionally, we specifically designed and added two novel full-time positions: an Instructional Support Specialist (ISS) and a Distance Education Program Manager (DEPM). In terms of instructional technology, our campus previously had only a single ISS who supported our learning management system (Desire2Learn). During the summer of 2014, we hired the additional full-time ISS who now assists faculty with the design and development of Distance Education courses, and also conducts the now-required Distance Education instructor training. Additionally, in the spring of 2014, the campus conducted a search for the new DEPM position. While this search failed (for lack of qualified applicants), we renewed our search during the fall of 2014. As of the compilation of this report, we are interviewing three qualified finalists and are optimistic that this key position in our Distance Education campus team will be filled shortly.

In terms of faculty and instructor pedagogical support, we have also augmented our support by reallocating campus resources to create a Director of the Center of Collaborative and Interactive Technologies (CCIT) to assist faculty in using technology and implementing appropriate pedagogies. Specifically, our campus appointed Dr. Kristi Roth as our Director of the CCIT, and Dr. Roth assists faculty in the exploration and incorporation of technology in instruction. Finally, from a faculty and instructional perspective we are in the process of searching for an Instructional Technology Librarian to assist faculty in applying technology and online resources to Distance Education. This position will be housed in our Learning Resources Center (LRC) building.

2. Distance Education Resource Center (DERC)

Our personnel changes have been complemented by our campus commitment of additional physical resources for Distance Education. Acting on a specific recommendation (Recommendation #6) of the Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP, our campus established a Distance Education Resource Center (DERC) in our LRC building that also houses our campus library. The DERC is housed within our Technology for Evolving Curriculum (TEC:hub) facility in the LRC. The DERC is comprised of our two ISS personnel and the (currently being searched) Distance Education Program Manager (DEPM), and serves as a "one-stop" centrally-located resource for faculty, staff, and students for information and support for Distance Education courses. Faculty come to the DERC to work with our ISS team for mandatory training for Distance Education courses, for information on utilizing our learning management system (D2L), for course design support, and for answers to questions about technology. Once hired, the DEPM will assist departments and faculty in exploring and developing courses where learning outcomes are achievable through the Distance Education delivery mode, and where a curriculum can be made accessible to place-bound students. Students also have access to the DERC resource and the Information Technology Help Desk in the LRC.

We submit that through our DERC and mandated training activities, we are providing meaningful, comprehensive, appropriate, and relevant professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. As noted above, the DERC team is responsible for training faculty for Distance Education activities, and providing course design and technical assistance. An outline of our mandatory instructor training is provided in Appendix B5: Outline of DE Instructor Training. The DERC team also provides sample course templates and syllabus templates (see Appendix B6: DE Course Syllabus Template) for use by instructors engaged in Distance Education offerings. Based upon Recommendation #5 in the Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP, the DERC team is engaged in developing a campus Distance Education Handbook. The outline of this user-oriented Distance Education Handbook is located on pages 21-23 of Appendix B4: Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP. During the initial drafting of this handbook, the ISS team and AD for Continuing Education decided it would be desirable to have the DEPM hired and in place before the final version of the handbook was produced. We anticipate this handbook will be finished by the end of May 2015.

B. Policies for Planning Distance Education

As a member of the University of Wisconsin System, our campus operates under UW System policies regarding program-level planning for Distance Education. Additionally, we have adopted several campus-level policies to facilitate and support planning our Distance Education programs and courses. Our adopted policies are based upon our campus' Recommendations for Distance Education at UW-Stevens Point (Appendix B4: Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP) and best practices recommendations from the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, the HLC's Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning), and the AAUP Statement on Distance Education. These policies were constructed and enacted to support and facilitate excellent campus Distance Education offerings.

1. UW System program planning policies

As an institution within the University of Wisconsin System, at the program level two policies govern our planning of Distance Education programs (i.e., those with over 50 percent of courses available by Distance Education). The first policy governs conversion of an existing degree program to be available by Distance Education. This process is governed by University of Wisconsin System Policy ACIS-1.0 Academic Planning and Program Review. This policy dictates that we are required to request approval by UW System for conversion of existing programs to availability through Distance Education.

This process is described and the forms are located at:
www.wisconsin.edu/program-planning/download/Request%20for%20Distance%20Delivery.pdf.

Additionally, the planning of a novel degree program intended to be offered through Distance Education is also governed by the same ACIS-1.0 policy whereby we are required to specify our mode of delivery and demonstrate our ability to support a novel program through Distance Education. (See: www.wisconsin.edu/program-planning/download/Revised%20Process%20for%20Program%20Planning.pdf.)

We submit that these UW System policies, and the additional campus Curriculum Committee approval policies we have crafted and describe below, ensure that our Distance Education courses and degree programs reflect our institutional priorities and advance the mission of the university, comply with UW System requirements, and uphold the standards expected by the HLC.

2. Campus course planning and delivery policies

At the scale of individual course offerings available through Distance Education, our campus has articulated specific policies related to the planning and provision of Distance Education courses. These policies were recently approved by our Faculty Senate and are stated in our *University Handbook*, Chapter 5, Section 15. These policies are also provided here as Appendix B7: Policies Pertaining to the Provision of Distance Education. Our local policies clearly specify UW-Stevens Point administrative roles in providing support for Distance Education courses, as well as describe specific policies regarding course definitions and timetable coding, mandated instructor training, course approvals and evaluation, and instructor qualifications and responsibilities. These policies represent our coordinated effort to plan and execute Distance Education courses and programs and assure the same quality and excellence we provide with our face-to-face offerings.

a. Distance Education course coding and definitions

As a campus, we have adopted uniform course coding and definitions, consistent with the University of Wisconsin System definitions and these are now transparent to students viewing our Timetable (see Recommendations #1 & #2 of Appendix B4: Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP).

b. Distance Education instructor training

We have mandated instructor training for first-time instructors offering a course via the Distance Education mode of delivery (see p. 4 of Appendix B7: Policies Pertaining to the Provision of Distance Education). As previously noted, an outline of our instructor training is given in Appendix B5: Outline of DE Instructor Training. While this training is currently being offered in person by our ISS staff in the DERC, we plan that by the end of spring 2015, this training will also be available to our Distance Education instructors through online training modules. The goal of this mandated training is to provide instructors essential information regarding federal and university policies regarding student information (e.g., FERPA requirements) and how these policies specifically are affected by Distance Education (e.g., FERPA and the cloud). We also mandated this training to ensure instructors are mindful of the accessibility requirements of Distance Education courses (see Recommendation #12 of Appendix B4: Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP). Finally, this training provides instructors with important information regarding how to use our course management system (D2L), how to utilize other instructional technology tools (e.g., Blackboard Collaborate, Kaltura, Google Apps for Education, Swivls, etc…), and how to incorporate methodologies and pedagogies appropriate for Distance Education offerings.

c. Distance Education course and instructor evaluations

At the level of our individual courses offered via Distance Education, we have reiterated in our *University Handbook*, Chapter 5, Section 15 Policies Pertaining to the Provision of Distance Education our campus policy that all UW-Stevens Point Distance Education courses will be evaluated by students with respect to instructor performance, and by faculty with respect to faculty performance and the assessment of student learning (see p. 3 of Appendix B7: Policies Pertaining to the Provision

of Distance Education). The form for student evaluation of online instruction is available in our *University Handbook*, Chapter 4D, Section 15 and provided here as Appendix B8: Student Evaluation of Online Instruction. Similarly, the campus instrument for peer evaluation of online instruction is provided here as Appendix B9: Rubric for Peer-Evaluation of Online and Hybrid Teaching. Additionally, we have also reiterated our requirement that all courses offered through Distance Education modes be assessed and evaluated for student learning. Our assessment policies are specified in our *University Handbook*, Chapter 7, Section 2. Finally, our campus Progress Report submitted to the HLC simultaneously with this Monitoring Report also details our recent results of the direct assessment of student learning, and some Distance Education offerings are included in the program assessment results summarized in the accompanying report. The Progress Report and its appendices can be accessed here.

d. Course development and approval

With respect to course development and approvals, we have instituted a campus policy requiring departments petitioning for new course approvals, or for revisions of existing courses, to clearly specify the mode(s) of delivery, and be approved for Distance Education delivery. Notably, Distance Education courses must be approved by both the faculty of the sponsoring academic department and the university Curriculum Committee. The course approval form, developed and managed by our university Curriculum Committee, is provided here in Appendix B10: Curriculum Committee New Course or Course Revision Form. Additionally, when departments request a course be approved for distance delivery, the department is required to affirm by vote that the learning outcomes can be met through the distance delivery mode. The department also is required to affirm its review and acknowledgment of our Guide for Approval or Revision of Courses with Online Components that is located on our university Curriculum Committee forms website and this guide is provided here as Appendix B11: Guide for Approval or Revision of Courses with Online Components. We submit that this policy effectively harmonizes the necessities of administrative and faculty oversight of Distance Education offerings with our statutory requirement that faculty exercise specific purview over curricular matters.

IV. Resources and Policies for Budgeting Distance Education

At the campus level, we have budgeted resources to support our Distance Education activities including augmenting our personnel and facilities (as described above) through the establishment of our Distance Education Resource Center (DERC). The additions of our ISS staff member, DEPM (currently being searched), and our Director for our CCIT, have all been funded by an internal reallocation of funds. This reallocation of funds has been made possible by a new entrepreneurial revenue model whereby a portion of tuition revenue is returned to units administratively involved in supporting these courses. For example, units such as Information Technology (IT), Admissions, the Financial Aid Office, and student services such as the Tutoring-Learning Center are augmented by a portion of the revenue collected from our Distance Education courses. Colleges and departments benefit from this revenue and this model encourages faculty and units to extend curricular offerings to place-bound students.

In terms of budgeting and pricing policies for courses and programs, we are broadly governed by the pricing policy of the University of Wisconsin System as it applies to Distance Education offerings. Specifically, the last section of the UW System ACIS 5.4 (Programming for the Non-Traditional Market in the University of Wisconsin System) articulates the policies for pricing for Distance Education credit courses, degree and certificate programs.

We have reproduced this statement here as our Appendix B12: UW System Principles for Pricing Distance Education. The full text of ACIS 5.4 is available at: www.wisconsin.edu/program-planning/download/Programming%20for%20the%20Non-Traditional%20Market%20in%20the%20UW%20System.pdf. General policies for UW System Tuition and Fee Policies for Credit Instruction are also located here: www.wisconsin.edu/financial-administration/financial-administrative-policies-procedures/fppp/f44-tuition-and-fee-policies-for-credit-instruction/.

We continue to develop a fully-articulated university Distance Education pricing policy and intend to have this policy in place by May, 2015. In crafting this policy, we are working with campus constituencies (e.g., governance, students, and administrative units) to determine a more consistent, transparent, and sustainable cost for credit programming designed for nontraditional audiences. We are establishing our pricing policy and financial model so that specialized pricing for UW-Stevens Point online offerings will serve to support quality programming, necessary technology and delivery methods, student assistance, and administrative costs.

Through our recent experience as a partner in the development of UW System and UW-Extension collaborative degree programs, a fixed, fully inclusive tuition rate was established based on significant input from prospective nontraditional students. As we move forward in the development and implementation of new offerings for nontraditional students, we seek to standardize tuition rates that position these credit offerings as competitive, attractive, and self-supporting. This will likely include the elimination of multiple tuition rates and fees associated with course participation, including segregated fees and non-resident tuition. In the interest of better supporting our Distance Education operations, it is also likely that we will offer these courses outside of the credit plateau model (where 1-11 credits are charged on a per credit cost, but 12-18 credits are charged at a uniform or "plateau" cost). Many of our UW System partners, and other public and private institutions around the country, have eliminated these types of fees for many, if not all, of their non-traditional student offerings and have opted instead to establish and advertise a single fixed tuition rate per credit. As UW-Stevens Point moves forward in the development of new, innovative and accessible online offerings, it is likely that we will follow suit and eliminate non-resident tuition and segregated fees for online courses and programs, especially in light of expanding interest in our courses from out-of-state students and our expanding collaborative partnerships.

V. Resources and Policies for Assessing Distance Education

Our campus has made significant progress in cultivating a culture of assessment of student learning. As described in our accompanying Progress Report on General Education and program assessment activities at UW-Stevens Point, we have formalized our assessment processes and made more resources available to our faculty and departments (see our HLC Progress Report and materials here). We have funded a half-time Assessment Coordinator who is responsible for assisting our departments and instructors in conducting our mandated assessment activities. University learning assessment resources and information can be found at www.uwsp.edu/acadaff/Pages/assessmentLearning.aspx and our DERC also provides assessment resources and techniques particularly relevant to the Distance Education mode of delivery. However, we submit that while the Distance Education endeavors present unique challenges for instructors and learners (e.g., assuring student engagement or instructor availability and timeliness of feedback to students), the assessment of learning outcomes is not materially different from the assessment of those learning outcomes in traditional classroom settings. Various assessment techniques, both formative and summative, can be applied to Distance Education courses. Our DERC provides examples to our instructors of impactful course assessment techniques such as: background knowledge probes, misconception/preconception checks, minute paper exercises, one sentence summary assignments, and student-generated test questions.

Our policies regarding assessment have also progressed on several levels. We now ensure that students enrolled in online and distance delivery courses complete course evaluations to evaluate both the course and instructor (see p. 3 of Appendix B7: Policies Pertaining to the Provision of Distance Education and Recommendation #9 of Appendix B4: Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP). Additionally, we ensure that peers (other faculty and teaching staff) have the opportunity to evaluate the Distance Education course and instructor as part of our retention/tenure/promotion process. We ensure that we evaluate the academic effectiveness of the course, assessing student learning by collecting data on direct measures of student learning with respect to our program learning outcomes. Specifically, we ensure that we evaluate the effectiveness of the course within the context of the academic program learning outcomes, (if applicable) the General Education Program, and the university as a whole, evaluating the success of the course to advance larger institutional goals.

At the program level, evaluation of resources and assessment of overall program effectiveness takes place on a recently revised ten-year schedule. As part of this program review, academic departments are now required to incorporate the assessment of student learning into their analysis of overall success. They are also required to undergo an external review (see the Department-Level Program Assessment policy in our *University Handbook*, Chapter 7, Section 2, p. 22). These policies apply to all academic programs, including those engaged in Distance Education.

VI. Conclusions and the Steps Ahead

We submit our campus has made great progress in supporting our Distance Education activities. Specifically, by reflecting upon and acknowledging our deficiencies with respect to planning and supporting our Distance Education endeavors, we have significantly improved our support for our instructors and learners. We have acted on recommendations of best practices and formed a DERC with personnel dedicated to supporting our Distance Education offerings. Concomitantly, by revising our budgeting allocations, we now have a flexible funding model designed to not only finance units sponsoring courses, but also provide funding to units related to supporting those instructors and students.

As we move ahead, our campus will continue to implement remaining recommendations from our Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP (Appendix B4: Recommendations for Distance Education at UWSP). Specifically, we will seek to work more closely with UW System eCampus to more fully promote UW-Stevens Point Distance Education courses and programs (see Recommendation #4). Similarly, with the anticipated hire of our DEPM, by the end of May, 2015, we will complete our outlined Distance Education Handbook as a resource for faculty and students engaged in Distance Education teaching and learning (see Recommendation #5). We also will continue our work on discussing and determining, at the department and college level, what percentages of courses are appropriate for partial Distance Education components (see Recommendation #13). This process will begin as an Academic Affairs Committee agenda item for the spring 2015 semester and guidelines for departments will be discussed and determined.

UW-Stevens Point HLC Monitoring
Report for Distance Education

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