November 2002 Review of Outcomes

Distance & Distributed Learning

Institutional Goals

- Plan and create distance learning environments that encourage and support excellence in a personal environment.
- Maintain the human and technical resources and network infrastructure necessary to successfully support and deliver distance and distributed learning.
- Ensure that academic and student services are appropriate to meet the needs of distance and distributed learners.
- Conduct continuous evaluation of distance and distributed learning and support services to ensure the advancement of the university's mission and adherence to quality standards.
- Support research, scholarship, and creative endeavors which promote knowledge of distance learning.

These goals are reviewed annually in March, by the Distance and Distributed Education Steering Committee, and revised as appropriate.

Departmental Statement of Outcomes, Processes to Assess These Outcomes, and Assessment Results Where Appropriate

Goal 1. Plan and create distance learning environments that encourage and support excellence in a personal environment. Accomplishing this goal will ensure that:

- Student and faculty satisfaction with distance and distributed education courses is high.
  - Summer 2002 evaluations showed that 88% of distance students agreed that their attitude toward online learning was positive at the end of the term. 82% agreed in Spring 2002.
  - 80% of students (Summer 2002) said they'd like to take more courses in future mostly online. (Spring 2002 - 71%).
  - 60% (Summer 2002) said they'd like to take courses in future completely online. (Spring - 59%)
  - 97% (Summer 2002) said that their instructor was positive about the online component of their course. (81% in Spring 2002).
  - The number of faculty using distance technologies continues to increase. FY02 totals were 265 faculty, compared to 208 in FY01, and 167 in FY00.

- Student retention in distance and distributed education is comparable to that of traditional courses.
  - Spring 2002 retention for Distance students was 87.6% compared to 88.3% for non-Distance students. Fall 2001 retention for Distance students was 90.3% compared to 88.5%

- Students enrolled in distance courses have access to student services.
  - The UWG Online Connection (http://www.westga.edu/~online/) provides easy web access for distance students to access student services.
  - Spring 2002 Focus Group indicated overall satisfaction with availability of student services for distance students.

- Student learning outcomes are comparable to those in traditional courses. (ex. http://coe.westga.edu/mit/outcomes/index.html)
  - These are generally the same as traditional, and are evaluated on a departmental basis.

- Interaction among student-faculty, and student-student are at least as high as in a traditional course.
  - Open-ended responses from written surveys Spring 2002 and Summer 2002 surveys indicate that students appreciate the ability to interact at flexible times with faculty and other students.
  - Fall 2002 Focus group - "All students noted that the level of interaction was high, and that their instructors were easy to reach and quick to respond."

- Faculty demonstrate competence in developing distance courses whose academic standards and student learning are the same as those for other courses delivered.
  - All faculty MUST complete technical and pedagogical training prior to teaching a distance course.
  - Academic standards and student learning are evaluated on a departmental basis. The DDEC reviews student surveys, class by class, to assure that overall student satisfaction with the faculty and the course are adequate. Since 1998, there have only been two cases in which the faculty competence seemed questionable based on student complaints. These were referred to the appropriate department head and dean. Both faculty members have since left the institution.

- The number of courses developed and offered through distance media meets the demand of the region’s students.
• Probably not - several departments and the DDEC receive many phone and emails from students requesting more distance courses.
• The phone survey of February 2003 indicates that more than 50% of distance students believe there are not enough distance courses. (Data added February 2003).

Assessment methods: Written student surveys at end of each term, annual focus group with distance students, informal discussions with Distance Learning Steering Committee and distance faculty. Student learning outcomes are assessed by academic units offering instruction. See: http://www.westga.edu/~distance/sacs/eval/

Goal 2. Maintain the human and technical resources and network infrastructure necessary to successfully support and deliver distance and distributed learning. Accomplishing this goal will ensure that:

• Faculty are trained and prepared to teach distance and distributed courses.
  • All faculty MUST complete technical and pedagogical training prior to teaching a distance course.
• Students are able to receive immediate technical assistance through telephone or email.
  • The DDEC staff provide immediate response to technical questions from students weekdays from 8 am until 8 pm weekdays. Students may contact a statewide support line after hours.
  • Helpline satisfaction surveys indicate that all students in January 2003 ranked the amount of time it took them to get help at least an 8 on a scale of 1 to 10. (The Helpline software was added in January 2003, and this data was added in February 2003.)
• Students and faculty are able to receive assistance through a central point-of-contact.
  • The DDEC provides a central point of contact for support for all UWG distance courses.
• A variety of delivery methods are available.
  • In addition to the primary online mode of WebCT, distance courses may also utilize GSAMS two-way videoconferencing, and Horizon Live for synchronous or archived delivery of lectures featuring voice and visuals.
• Distance courses are easily accessible to a growing number of students and potential students.
  • All faculty MUST complete technical and pedagogical training prior to teaching a distance course.
• Downtime for courses is non-existent or minimal, with backup plans in place and utilized as needed.
  • Except for scheduled maintenance, the WebCT system has functioned without interruption since January 2002. Faculty use WebCT and Horizon Live as a backup to GSAMS.

Assessment methods: Written student surveys at end of each term, annual focus group with distance students, informal discussions with Distance Learning Steering Committee and distance faculty, departmental annual self-review. See: http://www.westga.edu/~distance/sacs/eval/

Goal 3. Ensure that academic and student services are appropriate to meet the needs of distance and distributed learners. Accomplishing this goal will ensure that:

• Each distance course or program provides students with clear, complete and timely information on the curriculum, course and degree requirements, nature of faculty/student interaction, prerequisite technology competencies, technical requirements, availability of academic support service, financial aid resources and costs and payment policies. See: http://www.westga.edu/~distance/handbook.html
  • Information available on web and syllabi for all distance courses and programs.
  • Information also available in online student handbook, and others online points of access for students.
• Students express satisfaction with the level of academic and student services received when taking distance and distributed courses.
  • Spring Focus Group students express general satisfaction. Some students suggested more orientation sessions. Other complaints had to do with courses being closed when registering.
• Students are aware of and utilize online resources available to them for academic and student support.
  • According to Spring 2002 and Summer 2002, most students were either satisfied with support services, or said "did not apply." "Did not apply" usually referred to financial aid or career services, which are not needed by a large percentage of students.
  • Sixty percent (Summer 2002) reported that they used library services, but 46% (summer 2002) said they were unaware of library services available specifically for distance students.
• Enrolled students have reasonable and adequate access to the range of student services and resources appropriate to support their learning.
Distance students have access to the range of student services and resources that traditional students do, and also special services such as support from the DDEC, and special services from the library. Information regarding services is available at www.westga.edu/online.

Assessment methods: Written student surveys at end of each term, annual focus group with distance students, informal discussions with Distance Learning Steering Committee and distance faculty, departmental annual self-review. See: http://www.westga.edu/~distance/sacs/eval/

Goal 4. Conduct continuous evaluation of distance learning and support services to ensure the advancement of the university's mission. Accomplishing this goal will ensure that:

- Faculty use results of evaluations to improve courses.
  - All distance faculty must complete the Distance Evaluation Summary form, documenting what changes they will make in future distance courses based on their student surveys.
- Distance learning staff uses results of evaluations to improve programs and services as a whole.
  - The DDEC staff reviews evaluations and completes an annual effectiveness evaluation each June. A staff retreat is also held each December to assess staff quality standards, issues and plan for the next year.
- The technologies selected are appropriate to meet course or program objectives.
  - The DDESC selects technologies for campus use and support based on student need, recommendations from other institutions, and cost-benefit.
  - Individual departments and instructors select from combinations of the various institutional technologies (WebCT, GSAMS, Horizon Live) based on the program and course objectives.
- Documentation of evaluations for each course and the overall distance program is available and accessible.
  - Overall evaluations for student written surveys, focus groups, phone surveys, retention and other data is available at the DDEC website (www.westga.edu/~distance).
  - Raw survey data is also maintained by the DDEC and each department offering distance courses.

Assessment methods: Faculty summary of evaluations each term, written student surveys at end of each term, annual focus group with distance students, informal discussions with Distance Learning Steering Committee and distance faculty, departmental annual self-review. See: http://www.westga.edu/~distance/sacs/eval/

Goal 5. Support research, scholarship, and creative endeavors which promote knowledge of distance learning: Accomplishing this goal will ensure that:

- Our journal, conference, and certificate programs maintain excellent reputations among distance learning administrators in the United States and worldwide.
  - The journal is required reading for many institutional programs, including University of Nebraska's doctoral program in Higher Education, and is referenced in many papers and books.
  - The conference attracts a growing international audience of practitioners in the field.
- Our Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration continues to increase in readership.
  - The average edition had 12,000 hits in 2002, up from 8,000 in 2001, and 3,500 in 2000.
- UWG faculty conduct research to enhance distance courses at UWG and to provide scholarly information to their field.
  - UWG faculty and staff regularly present research at the DLA Conference and other conferences, including SITE, Educause, and other professional meetings. Many UWG faculty articles and books on distance learning are linked from the distance website.

Assessment methods: Certificate program and conference evaluations, readership data of journal, feedback from readers and participants.