An overview of Distance Education at The Ohio State University
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It is certainly the case that a lot of attention is being paid to the delivery of higher education content through distance education approaches. Entire “universities” have been established for this (eg, University of Phoenix). Other universities have established distance education “colleges” or divisions (eg, Penn State’s World Campus).

At Ohio State, our current state execution is spotty, at best. We have had attempts to offer full programs delivered online (eg, the Nontraditional PharmD program in Pharmacy graduated the first 14 students in 2004, to much national fanfare; they feel they have served the market, and our now phasing out this program), and we have offered courses and partial programs in many colleges (our first online course, “Living in the Information Age” was offered in Communications in 1998).

Distance Education Offerings

For Credit Courses: This past quarter, approximately 50 courses designated as “distance education” courses were offered online. While many were fully online, several were actually “hybrid” courses, where a face-to-face meeting of all students and the instructor was required. A sampling of the fully online courses is shown below. It should be noted that in most cases, there was also a traditional (non distance education) section of the course offered.

- ARTEDUC 160 - Art and Music since 1945
- DENTHYG 335 - Clinical Teaching Methodology
- EDUTL 682 - Teaching Mathematics, Science and Culture in 4th and 5th Grades
- HISTORY 111 - Western Civilization: Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century
- NURSING 507 - Health Care Informatics
- POLITSC 101 - Introduction to American Politics
- HCS 100 – Intro to Horticulture

Special note: In the Department of Spanish and Portuguese the interest in distance education stems from a need to develop an outreach program to area high schools interested in offering an intermediate language course in their own campuses. In the autumn of 2000, the distance education course Spanish 104 based on videoconferencing was piloted in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese with the support of the College of Humanities, the Foreign Language Center, and the Department of Technology Enhanced Learning and Research (TELR).
It should be noted that a significant number of FTE enrollments in these on-line courses are students who are resident on the OSU campus, not truly distance-education students. One estimate is that upwards of 75% of the students who are taking these courses are doing so from their dorm room.

The OSU Libraries also has a sequence of courses that they offer in partnership with Arts and Sciences. These courses are ASC 120 - Internet Tools & Research Techniques, ASC 121 - Advanced Online Research, ASC 122 - Online Research Strategies for Career Exploration, and ASC 294 - Online Research in the Sciences. They are 4, 4, 4 and 5 weeks in length and earn 2, 2, 1 and 3 credit hours, respectively. The first two courses also have faculty from the regional campuses participating.

Programs: As mentioned above, Ohio State has several complete or partial programs that can be seen as “distance education” programs. Probably the most extensive and successful is the self titled "Mostly On-Line Masters” degree program in Art Education. This program is a sequence of online courses intended for practicing art teachers and museum educators. It focuses specifically on issues for practicing art educators in schools and community settings and integrates the advantages of the classroom context for experimentation and reflection. It is not a teacher certification/licensure program. The program has the students on campus in an intensive 1 week session each of three consecutive summers, with all courses done online in the sandwiched quarters.

The Fisher College of Business Executive MBA program has an on-line program that, according to their website, comprises approximately 30% of the overall program. They have teamed with a commercial venture, MoreSteam.com to provide web-based training as a more flexible and affordable alternative to traditional classroom training methods. A complete suite of instructor-supported online courses is available, including Six Sigma and Lean Six Sigma Belt Training, Design for Six Sigma (DFSS) and a variety of short courses. All course content is delivered on-demand in a multi-media format including audio, audio slide shows, simulated experiments, interactive practice sessions, online quiz modules and virtual discussion with an instructor. Courses can be started or stopped at any time, offering complete scheduling flexibility in a totally self-paced environment.

The College of Nursing has invested heavily in distance education programming. One component of their program is the RN to BSN degree program. This option is an integrative approach to baccalaureate nursing education for registered nurses (RNs) who are graduates of associate degree or diploma nursing programs. This option is designed so that students can complete their nursing coursework in one year. All of the nursing courses in the program are taught online. Through collaboration with Ohio State’s regional campuses and using Carmen, the RN to BSN option is able to reach beyond central Ohio. This allows students greater flexibility to work, meet family responsibilities, and study while earning a BSN in their local communities. The courses that are a critical part of the program (32 credit hours), Nursing 302D, 390D, 440D, 506D, 507D, 509D, 510D, are also available to other students.
The Non-Traditional Doctor of Pharmacy Program (NTPD) was mentioned above. It provided the opportunity for licensed pharmacists at the baccalaureate level to enhance their ability to provide high quality patient care and obtain a Doctor of Pharmacy degree. Didactic course work in this program is taught solely through distance learning methods. Pharmacy Practice courses are also offered in an undergraduate BSPS program.

**Professional Certificate On-line Programs:** OSU offers several opportunities through distance education to obtain a professional certification.

Sustainable Energy and Going Green program offers a professional certificate in Residential and Commercial Sustainable Practices and a professional certificate in Green Energy Management. These programs are partnerships with San Diego State University, and are 9-months programs that are done totally online. Instructors are actively involved in the students’ online learning experience by responding to any questions or concerns as well as encouraging and motivating students to succeed.

The OSU Sports Turf Management Certificate Program was developed to reach students interested in advancing their knowledge in sports turf management. Introductory in nature, the program consists of five certificates that must be completed in a 10 weeks period:

- Soils & Water
- Grasses
- Field Presentation, Mowing & Nutrition
- IPM, Pests, Diseases & Weeds
- Synthetic Turf

The subject area is broad enough to be applicable to turf conditions globally. The on-line lectures were developed by leading turf-grasses researchers and educators at The Ohio State University specifically for sports turf management.

A similar program is the Golf Course Management Program. This certificate was developed to reach students interested in advancing their knowledge in golf course management. Introductory in nature, 7 modules covering cool and warm season turf-grasses, cultural management practices and turf-grass pests comprise the certificate program.

Ohio State University’s Department of Food Science and Technology offers an online series of five courses leading to a Certificate of Proficiency in Food Science. Jeff Culbertson, professor of Food Science, teaches the courses in addition to the classes he teaches on campus.

**CEU based courses:** Several OSU programs are offering courses in a distance education format to provide professionals to earn CEUs in their specific professions. The College of Food, Agricultural, And Environmental Sciences offers two such courses, *Plant Diseases: Their Impact and History* in the Department of Plant Pathology and *Sick Plants and a Hungry World*. Dentistry offers a *Local Anesthesia*
course. The Knowlton School of Architecture and City and Regional Planning offers several courses that can earn AIA or AICP CEUs.

**Continuing Education and Extension:** A number of courses are offered in these areas. Examples include PLNTPTH 201 Plant Disease and History, several dozen courses in Veterinary Medicine, such as *Neonatal Physiology and Pathophysiology*, *Internal Medicine*, *Cytology of Skin Masses*, *Greyhound Anesthesia and Analgesia*, and *Feline Cardiomyopathy*.

The Center for Public Health practice will be adding an online learning platform to enhance the experience of public health practitioners and others who rely on the Center for training, best practices, and program development. The College of Optometry Online CE program provides practicing optometrists with up-to-date information to better care for their patients; funding from this sequence is used to build an endowment for optometry student scholarships in the college. Courses include *Systemic Antibiotic and Steroid Prescribing for Ohio Optometrists* and *Pathophysiology and Treatment of Glaucomatous Optic Neuropathy*.

**Other courses:** The Nisonger Center E-Mentoring Program is a contemporary and innovative program that matches students with disabilities with mentors who have college and/or career experience. Students and mentors communicate through e-mail in this program. The students complete an online course that helps prepare them for their transition to work and/or college.

Training programs such as those in Organization and Human Resource Consulting are available in a distance education or online format. These include courses in Business Responsibilities, Internal Controls, Understanding & Preventing Fraud, and Business Expenditures.

**Institutional Efforts for the development of a strategy for distance learning**

The Provost established a committee to define an eLearning strategy and implementation recommendations which included distance learning; the work was accepted and published in FY2009. The implementation committee was initiated this fall, with four Vice Provosts acting as the working sponsors.

**Issues identified:** The first issue is confusing terminology. When one mentions “distance learning” within our organization, it could describe a class that uses technology to enable remote participation by as much as 100% to something much less. There is not a consistent definition.

The approach to distance learning at OSU has been decentralized. Each college/organization has purchased tools, established processes and tuition/fees structures independently.
Culturally, there is resistance to investing time and effort into using technology with teaching. Faculty cite promotion and tenure biases toward research (and therefore against teaching and technology) within departments. They also express concern over the limited education and support available to them.

**Progress toward a better way:** the committee is bringing diverse principles together to encourage changes in policies and processes to develop clarity around distance learning.

The terminology issue is being addressed with a simple course framework that articulates the dimensions of eLearning of which distance learning is a part. The framework will be used to define the technology attributes of a given class within the catalogue. For example, a class may be described as a “Distance - High” or DH class. This means that it is a distance ("D" = 100% remote) class that will use a high ("H"= significant) amount of interactive technology versus a distance class that is offered without interactive capabilities (DL). The same framework will also be used as a basis for the development of an effective tuition model.

To address the current decentralized and unique approaches to distance learning, the committee is sharing experiences and establishing university recommendations around tools, support structures and the adoption of the framework.

Communications from the OAA addressing the promotion and tenure concerns have been clear. However, we recognize that it will take some time to change the climate of departmental committees in this regard. The topic will continue to be a focus of energy. A plan for comprehensive faculty training programs in digital literacy and ongoing support is important and will be addressed.

**What is the role of distance learning?**

It is important to note that while the committee scope includes distance learning, the most effective teaching is not “distance” (100% remote) learning but “hybrid” (specifically, the use of interactive technology integrated with on-site learning) learning.

A strategy for distance learning needs to be developed: To develop the strategy we will need to answer key questions about our organization’s role.

**Do we want to compete in the same market as University of Phoenix?** As was mentioned previously, the University of Phoenix has created a program to respond to U.S. Military personnel that are deployed overseas, who are interested in keeping up with their post-secondary education, and those who are preparing to be discharged and return to college in the U.S. We are engaging in conversations with the U.S. Army in Europe that may result in a similar program here at OSU.
Is there an opportunity for professional masters programs? Professional masters programs are a potentially lucrative market for OSU enrollment, and as Fisher have learned, distance education programs are an important part of a successful degree program.

How do we reach students who, for a variety of reasons (economic, lack of time, geography) cannot be involved in a conventional campus based learning experience? This is especially true of students where demand for higher education outstrips supply, such as the emerging economies of South East Asia and South America and other developing countries. We also should look at the largely untapped market of both U.S. and overseas students who cannot find (or do not feel comfortable finding) their places in traditional universities.