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How E-Learning Services Are Provided and Organized

For the past six years, the University of Iowa has worked to balance the provision of e-learning services at the central and local levels. When efficiency is needed, we try to centralize services (e.g., enterprise systems like the CMS, lecture capture, wiki, and collaboration tools). However, when innovation is of paramount importance, it is sometimes better to partner with decentralized providers to create local projects that might eventually be scaled to the enterprise. A few of our individual colleges (particularly professional schools) support and develop some of their own e-learning initiatives tailored to their needs. Many have local IT staff/course designers. Communication between ITS and local programs helps flesh out whether services are better provided locally or centrally.

How E-Learning Is Incorporated into the Business Model

Currently, e-learning tools and pedagogies are used in all classes, to a greater or lesser extent. The business model has not yet been impacted by our e-learning initiatives. The Division of Continuing Education was at the forefront of establishing standards for distance/online/hybrid courses, and it uses a separate funding model from all other divisions. There is some discussion and concern around the need to identify ways to transform large courses using e-learning technology in preparation for potential competition by large e-learning vendors and other institutional e-learning initiatives. We participate in a consortium that shares some small courses between schools, but so far there has been no sharing of large courses or MOOCs.

How We Support Faculty Transitioning into E-Learning

A growing number of our faculty want to try online teaching and have expressed an interest in MOOCs. As interest grows, we need to ensure that we have robust and appropriate infrastructure for e-learning. There is still resistance, however, among some faculty who believe that the traditional method of lecturing provides valuable learning experiences that cannot be duplicated with e-learning courses. The focus of ITS is on early adopters who want to pursue or experiment with e-learning courses. There is no forced transfer to e-learning modalities. Rather, the focus is on communicating that new forms of pedagogy involving technology are available to enhance teaching and reengage students. MOOC hype is helping convey the importance of technology to faculty, and demand for faculty development in e-learning is starting to outpace the number of spaces available.

How the Educational Impact of E-Learning Is Assessed

In 2004, there was a campus-wide e-learning assessment that brought the campus together to develop a more strategic approach to e-learning, such as centralizing the campus CMS. The impact of e-texts has also been recently assessed, and there has just been a new hire for

instructional technology assessment, which includes emerging e-learning tools as well as traditional classroom and instructional technologies. Some professional schools assess e-learning courses with standards provided by accrediting bodies. The CIO enthusiastically supports future assessment for e-learning, as does a new assessment office created by the provost.

The Future of E-Learning at the University of Iowa

Distance/online learning is not viewed as a core competency at the University of Iowa, which is still positioned as a primarily residential campus. However, as more e-learning and online teaching takes place in our residential courses, the gap will close between how online and face-to-face courses are taught. More discussions about e-learning priorities and strategies are needed. Is the priority greater access to more distance students? Is it to enhance the courses already taught to traditional students? Is it to enter new markets with strategies such as MOOCs? A new pilot program is rebuilding some large lecture courses to incorporate more e-learning technology. The University of Iowa approach to e-learning is not to jump in first but to carefully review options in order to optimize our available resources. The university recognizes the need to:

- Leverage technologies that are stable now to provide greater efficiency in e-learning services in the future
- Provide more analytics to improve faculty performance and student decision making
- Ensure that technologies are used to improve learning rather than constituting a barrier

Wish List for E-Learning

- More instructional designers
- More support staff, particularly for creating digital media objects and content and to handle pilots of potential new vended or cloud-provided instructional technologies
- Better CMS/LMS that handles more than course content management and creates a more comprehensive online learning environment
- Improved integration of e-learning systems so that faculty can more easily experiment with “add-on” types of features and provide better analytics