

A Vision for Online Learning at OHIO

Ohio University (OHIO) has experienced rapid growth in fully online learning at both degree completion and graduate/professional level courses and programs. However, OHIO cannot effectively sustain or grow online programs without a substantial restructuring of its operations and the budget model that supports it. For OHIO to build on its current success in an increasingly competitive space—for OHIO to move to a mature operation with essential and appropriately aligned services that will position us for the future—we address critical questions and challenges by offering the following principles and recommendations:

Guiding Principles

P1: Online learning should be thought of as a modality, like a classroom option, that is available at the course and program level.

Fundamentally, online learning is not a distinct thing wholly or even largely removed from traditional educational models. It is a delivery option, a learning environment that is on a continuum with the variety of modalities already in play on our campuses—office hours, seminar rooms, lecture halls, active learning classrooms, labs, internships and so on. Place-based, campus-centric programs for undergraduate education especially, will remain our primary means of engaging learners, but blended and fully online courses and programs will weave through the entire curriculum, extending into the high schools and through lifelong engagement. We should see an increase in hybrid classes and programs at every level. The greatest opportunity for growth in fully or largely online programs will be at the graduate and professional level, and in certificate (non-degree) programs and “stackable” certificate-to-degree programs. Evidence is overwhelming that when properly designed and facilitated, online learning can be highly effective. By expanding our online programming, we will be able to extend the reach and value of OHIO to learners who otherwise would be unable to access our programs.

P2: Online learning should be treated, to the greatest degree possible, in the same way traditional academic operations are treated.

In other words, online learning should be managed operationally by having like needs integrated into operations that are already in place to support traditional learning modalities. For instance, student recruitment, marketing and enrollment management for online programs should be the responsibility of the same unit that manages this for place-based programs. There are, however, unique needs that arise in the context of fully online learning (e.g., instructional design, web

development, remote proctoring) that need to be acknowledged and made available to support instructors.

P3: Students enrolled in wholly or largely online programs should experience a high quality of care and made to feel a part of the OHIO community.

OHIO’s distinctive ability to cultivate an attachment to place and community is one of its most powerful and unique advantages. This culture should be extended to our online community: they are part of the OHIO family. Moreover, online programs occupy an increasingly competitive space. A well branded, high quality, high care, community-building environment will be a competitive advantage offering a distinctive value proposition. A student concierge service for online students, which does not currently exist at OHIO, will be a crucial area for investment. Obviously, this notion will need to be developed in greater detail, but it is in part what a high functioning 24x7 student support service can provide when properly connected to various support functions.

Service Alignment Recommendations

Given the above principles, the following identified services and functions are assigned to responsible units in a way that is built upon a reconceptualization of eLearning as a service unit as opposed to a revenue center. Our belief is that this approach will more effectively incentivize collegiate-driven growth, enable seamless integration of distance delivery and place-based delivery experiences, equip us to rationalize services across this continuum in response to enrollment changes, and more. This next generation eLearning unit will be primarily responsible for leadership, project management, administrative support, student support, and coordination across many units which need to be engaged for successful online learning operations. The vision is for an online success team that supports both a turnkey operation from the perspective of academic units, faculty and administrative staff, and a seamless high touch enrolled student experience (i.e., many units involved, but coordinated by project management and service center within the online team).

Service/Function	Description	Responsible Unit
Academic program lead and instructors	Program initiator, academic lead and manager of program, and recruitment of instructors responsible for courses	As is with traditional operation (Academic Unit)
Seed funding for program startup	Funds to support initial environmental scan and preliminary market analysis, project planning, and associated start up costs	SVPII

Market analysis	Preliminary analysis to determine whether and what kind of market there is for a proposed program	Enrollment management
Budget plan for new programs	Up front planning to estimate launch and ongoing costs, anticipated revenue, and distribution to cover resource needs	SVPII (of course, this will involve working closely with academic units, budget and finance, and other support units)
Enrollment planning	Managing the student recruitment funnel from lead generation to the point of program enrollment	As is with traditional operation (Enrollment management)
Marketing and recruitment	Executing the enrollment plan, including search optimization and other digital first messaging strategies to attract student interest from lead generation to the point of program registration	Enrollment management
Enrollment and registration	Ensuring smooth handoff from recruitment to facilitate student matriculation	As is with traditional matriculation (program manager, advisors in academic unit, registrar's office, perhaps with high volume call center triage in eLearning?)
Student orientation online	Ensure smooth handoff from enrollment, successful registration, community building and readiness for online learning	As is with traditional engagement. (Instructional designers and OIT specialists may also help in the development of this.)
Faculty/facilitator support and development	Support faculty and instructor success in online environment	SVPII
Instructional design/course development	Support effective course design and implementation	SVPII
Program assessment	Continuous improvement, accreditation processes	Academic unit, in collaboration with IR and SVPII
Course production	The creation and	This is a proposed new

	management of media rich learning environments within the learning management system.	service, and should be managed in OIT with oversight and guidance from SVPII instructional designers.
Vendor management	Contract and relationship management, strategic sourcing	SVPII (with business unit involvement as appropriate)
Alumni relations	Maintain and cultivate relationship with online learning program alumni	As is with traditional engagement (Alumni organization, foundation)
Student engagement	Virtual community building, creating connection to OHIO, student development	SVPII leads and engages academic and support units as partners.
Unique billing needs	Management of special fees, variable tuition, associated with courses and programs online	As is with traditional engagement (Bursar, in coordination with academic unit)
Community partnership management	Development and relationship management of strategic partnerships with a priority on enrollment pathways with the possibility of internships and other engagements with private partners	Enrollment management (Of course, academic units will need to be engaged.)
Student retention	Ensuring students persist, support through challenges, student monitoring, early alert response, etc	SVPII is accountable, and will need to work with academic and support units to develop effective and efficient response and proactive retention efforts.
Forecasting and managing course and program portfolio and scheduling	Minimize internal competition within semester to maximize course enrollments, sequence program development in line with resource constraints across units	SVPII will manage the portfolio, working closely with academic leadership, enrollment management and support units.
Student advising	Support student success through mentoring and	???

	course registration to reach degree objectives	
IR Support	Provide timely reports to all units to inform decision making, program assessment	As is with traditional engagement (IR)
Student support services	ADA, tutoring, career services, library, financial aid, bookstore, counseling services, advising...	As is with traditional engagement (multiple units), coordinated by SVPII
State authorization and licensing service	Ensure full access to engage with students in other states in a variety of ways (online learning, on prem learning experiences, professional licensure alignment....)	SVPII
Academic Technology Tools	The selection, curation and maintenance of portfolio of technology tools that support teaching and learning	OIT
IT services (infrastructure and support)	Traditional commodity IT services including networking, web services etc.	OIT
Proctored testing	Ensure secure testing for high stakes learning assessment	SVPII is accountable for specifying the need and managing testing procedures (e.g., arranging for proctoring); OIT is accountable for the testing infrastructure
IP/copyright management	Manage policy issues around IP and copyright as it relates to online learning course development and delivery	Libraries
Project management at course, program and portfolio level	Support turnkey experience and effective management of resources across units involved in program development and delivery from idea to	SVPII

	implementation	
Coordination and relationship management across academic unit and partners involved in development and delivery of courses and programs online	Ensure satisfaction of all engaged units, identify opportunities for process improvement, explore opportunities for course and program expansion	SVPII
Strategic leadership	Advance online learning strategy on an annual basis, set and achieve measurable goals, manage institutional awareness of trends in online learning and recommend changes accordingly, provide annual performance reports for operation, manage staff within eLearning unit, recommend resource investments in consultation with partner units	SVPII in ongoing consultation with academic units
Standardized presence/branding	Ensure consistent look and feel of online environment, prominence of OU brand across courses and online services and within marketing/outreach operation	UCM
Chunk capacity management	Ensure resource needs across all involved units are prioritized and in place as online learning programs and enrollments fluctuate	ELearning, in close consultation with academic and support units as new programs and courses are considered for development, and annually in response to data and reporting

Outstanding Issues

Graduate vs. undergraduate operations

Currently, graduate and undergraduate operations are separate to a significant degree. Enrollment management, online program development and delivery, and other functions are not aligned. Should they be aligned in part or in whole with respect to major functions required for on ground and online programs?

AthensOnline vs. ECAM vs. RHE Online

Currently we have three domains within which courses and programs are developed, presented to, and registered for by students. Each domain has its own rule sets for price points and enrollment qualification, and academic units maintain independent ownership. Our current environment unintentionally creates internal competition, with identical courses being offered from multiple units with varying prices. Can we move to a single price point and delivery point? Can we minimize (through single price point, scheduling management, curriculum committee oversight) direct competition for students for the same course offered from different campuses/academic units? Is there an opportunity for clarification, rationalization and consistency?

Business models

A mature online learning operation as presented here will require investment across administrative units (Enrollment, eLearning, IT, and many others) that will increase as online learning grows. Academic units may pursue and require support for online learning operations more or less aggressively than other units. Therefore, it is recommended that the budgeting model for eLearning be reclassified as a service center (horizontal) in the RCM model. This will require the development of a satisfactory model, or weighting factor in RCM, to account for a fair and adequate allocation and service management. We might consider implementing a base funding across all units to support a standard level of service, with additional service fee model options. For example, the Scripps College might provide additional funds to get a premium level of service for online learning to promote growth across programs. Using a transparent methodology, eLearning would cover costs of providing premium service across support units as functional needs demand (e.g., the Pearson analysis from a few years ago).

Change Management

This proposal will mean a great deal of change not only for the eLearning group and for many other units that will need to build online learning capacity into their operations. This may be an unwelcome change for some units or possibly further discourage those that have been slow-starters into the online environment. We will need to establish or reinforce authentic commitment to partnership, service level management, demonstrated effectiveness, measurable outcomes, and continuous improvement processes. Realizing the vision presented here is a substantial project that will require a multi-year plan. An important early next step will be for us to develop a clear understanding of the financial costs of the transition, and a thorough (phased) project plan to ensure funding and staff are in place where needed across units as the transition unfolds. Some immediate improvements can be achieved in

the next academic year, such as shifting enrollment planning, marketing, and student recruitment to the sole responsibility of enrollment management, and realignment of strategic partnerships to enrollment management in partnership with academic units.

Next Steps

- Revise this high level document based on feedback from stakeholders
- Develop cost analysis and budget model for transition and beyond
- Create comprehensive phased project plan to move successfully from current state to mature implementation that identifies quick wins and milestones
- Enact immediate improvements as quickly as possible
- Gain approval of project plan and budget model
- Build project team and assign roles
- Launch project