Distance Education Task Force appointed in February 2012

Charge: "How can we use distance education and our role as a System to better serve students and the state?"

Elements include:

1. Serving our students better including providing access in ways that allow flexibility in time and location.
2. Assisting adult learners, military, and non-traditional students in pursuing a college education and earning degrees.
3. Helping the eight institutions that are involved in consolidation planning in finding ways to use distance education to enhance their offerings.
4. Incorporating distance education into the Complete College Georgia Plans.
5. Coordinating efforts more consistently across the University System of GA.
6. Leveraging the advantages of being a university system to provide distance education more effectively.
7. Competing more effectively with proprietary institutions, whose distance education offerings are often more robust, comprehensive and service-oriented than those in the USG.
8. Responding to public and governmental interest in how the USG is taking a leadership role in utilizing distance education to serve students and the state.

Every USG institution should be providing students with access to distance education opportunities.

By not providing at every institution we constrain students options and encourage for profit and out of state competitors to fill the void.

Estimates put the value of the US on-line education market at 60.5 billion in 2010 up 24% over the previous year.

Ensure that all USG students have access to the core curriculum by distance education as well as selected major degree programs. This is an important strategy in the Complete College Georgia agenda especially in reaching military and adult learners.

Two major areas of opportunity identified by the DETF: 1) Improving the quality and availability of data for assessment and planning and 2) removing barriers to providing on-line educational opportunities for all students in Georgia.

Opportunity 1: Improve the Quality and Availability of Data for Assessment and Planning

USG and individual institutions collect abundant data about online education but it has not been collected consistently or in formats easily accessible. As a result the system has been challenged to understand and articulate the current status of DE which limits our ability to plan effectively for the future.
A variety of institutional data about online education in the USG was accessed and TF reached 3 conclusions:

- Distance educations is a lot more important and pervasive than anyone realized
- Institutional data are available in a wide variety of details and formats and are not very useful for comparison or system-wide summaries.
- Data collected at the System Office have not been reliably consistent

**Recommendation 1:** The System Office can play a critical role in defining, collecting and reporting the most useful data for the USG including a consistent, shared definition of online learning, hybrid or blended instruction, converged instruction or technology supported instruction.

**Opportunity 2:** Remove Barriers to providing online educational opportunities for all students in GA

**Addressing Barriers to access:** Removing barriers is critical to making the USG competitive with for-profit and out of state institutions. We must provide access to both the core curriculum and degree programs. As of May 2012 eight institutions participated in eCore and others offer the core via distance education on their own. Some institutions are doing neither. As a System we must ensure that the core curriculum is available online at all USG institutions. For schools not currently offering the core online, joining eCore is the most efficient and cost-effective approach to providing this opportunity to students.

Currently eCore has one missing course which is an institutional option that is often specific to a student’s major requirements (i.e. Area F) DEFT recommends developing and offering online courses that meet that one remaining core requirement so that students will be able to pursue associates and bachelors degrees online. Courses can be developed as part of the existing eCore or by the individual institutions.

**Recommendation 2:** Provide ready access to the core curriculum in the online format for students at every USG institution by

- Participating in eCore, accepting eCore courses or aligning with a USG institution that has developed a separate online core curriculum and
- Developing one or more online courses to be offered through eCore or individual institutions that fulfill the Area F requirement in the core curriculum

**Addressing barriers to student choice:** Currently the system has a limited number of programs available entirely online. These limited options create barriers for students to complete degrees. We can be more competitive and serve students better by providing more options especially at the bachelors level.

**Recommendation 3:** Increase options for student choice including

- Increasing number of degree programs that can be completed entirely via distance learning.
- Simplifying the USG’s processes and requirements for institutional collaboration for online degrees
c) Ensuring transferability of all USG courses taken online to all other system institutions

Addressing barriers of awareness and access

Recommendation 4: Remove barriers to awareness and access through:

a) Increasing System-level branding and marketing to increase awareness of USG offerings esp to adult learners and military and their families.

b) Enhancing websites about DE for the USG and Georgia ONmyLINE to be clear, concise and user friendly. (easy to find, easy to use, complete application and registration easily) Need a single portal that serves ALL students

c) Identifying and eliminating processes and policies that create obstacles to students seeking distance education and that keep the USG from competing successfully against for profits and out of state entities. (examples, inflexible class scheduling, complex application and registration procedures, insufficient staffing for student support, archaic financial aid and business-office procedures and inadequate technology)

Addressing barriers to transparency

Recommendation 5: Remove barriers to transparency in operations by

a) Institutions can increase understanding about how any differential tuition is used to support faculty, staff and students in online programs

b) System can help with clarifying expectations and providing resources to help institutions comply with requirements by the state, federal government and accrediting agencies to distance education.

Addressing barriers to faculty engagement

Strong DE programs require commitment of faculty who teach in them. Faculty reticence centers around the perceived quality (of lack of quality), lack of experience with technology and pedagogies needed for online instruction and issues of intellectual property. The availability of accurate metrics and consistent reporting as noted in recommendation 1 have proven valuable in addressing concerns about academic quality regarding eCore and other online programs.

Recommendation 6: System office and individual institutions need to provide faculty training in appropriate pedagogies and the use of technology for effective online instruction.

Recommendation 7: System policies regarding ownership and management of intellectual property created in conjunction with online courses. This is important to faculty and is most effectively addressed at the system level rather than institutionally.

Addressing barriers to access and affordability
USG institutions currently charge online tuition rates that are slightly higher than regular in-state rates, the increased cost to students can be more than offset by savings in travel time and ability to adjust to a work schedule.

**Recommendation 8:** In marketing online education the USG, individual institutions and collaborations like eCore will highlight the cost effectiveness of online education.

USG can take a leadership role in developing open-source textbooks. These “eBooks” could be developed as works for hire for contracted faculty and be available at no cost to students.

**Recommendation 9:** USG to explore developing open-source textbooks for key courses that will compensate authors and provide free instructional materials to students

**Next Steps:**

Draft – shared below for Chancellor Huckaby with our recommendations

August – Report if finalized and submitted to chancellor Huckaby by Sept 1.

Presentation at the October Board Meeting

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