Distance Education Planning Guide

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Building a Business Case for Your Distance Education Program

The success of a new program in a competitive market requires a clear understanding of the costs and benefits associated with the development of the program. These questions are intended as a guide to developing an initial business case. They should be regarded as an opportunity for you to present the case for investment in such a way that someone (e.g., a dean) reading your ‘prospectus’ would say, “Yes! I would invest in that.”

1. **Program/Course Definition**
   In one compelling paragraph, describe the program.

2. **Strategic Intent**
   What is this program intended to do? Make money? Enhance the school’s reputation? Attract students to traditional programs? By what measures will you know if the program is successful?

3. **Intended Audience**
   Who would sign up for this program, and why?

4. **Delivery Mechanism**
   How will the program/course be delivered (e.g., face-to-face, online, hybrid)?

5. **Investments**
   What will be required to make this program a reality in terms of money, people, and management attention?

6. **Business Model**
   What revenues can be expected relative to costs, and when? At what point will the program start to see a return on its investment (however that is measured)?

7. **Institutional Benefit**
   Why is this program important to the university and the school?
Planning Workbook

1. Program or Course Description

2. Institutional Context and Commitment

   Mission congruence
   - What is the evidence that the program/course is consistent with the role and mission of the university, including its goals with regard to student access?
   - What is the mission of your academic unit, and how does this program support that mission?

   Support for Program
   - What administrative support (deans, department chairs, committees) do you have for the program/course at this time?
   - What faculty support do you have for the program/course at this time?

   Program Challenges
   - What challenges do you anticipate at this time for the implementation of this program/course?
   - What strategies have been developed to meet these challenges at this time?

   Funding
   - How will the initial design, development, and marketing of the program/course be funded?
   - Will the program/course be included in the overall budget structure of the school?
   - Do you anticipate that the program/course will be self-supporting? If so, how do you anticipate this being accomplished?
   - What types of internal and external financial support do you anticipate seeking?

   Risk
   - What are the financial ramifications of program/course failure to draw sufficient students to support funding?
   - How would the market perceive failure?
   - What potential liability issues are there in offering this program/course at a distance?
3. Demand and Marketing

**Need**
- How was the need for the program/course determined?
- Who are the target learners, and why would they need this course/program offered at a distance?
- What is your estimate of the potential market size?

**Competition**
- What comparable programs, if any, already exist? How successful are they?
- How would this program differ from and be competitive against these other programs?
- What partnerships might you engage in?

**Marketing**
- How will students be notified of the existence of the program/course?
- Will marketing the program/course be done by the school, by the university, or through another source?
- What is the likely impact of offering this program/course on the Tufts University or the school’s brand?

4. Course Design, Development & Delivery

**Instructional Methodologies**
- What pedagogical or educational approach will be used to guide the design of the instruction?
- What methodologies for ongoing assessment and evaluation will be used in the design of the instruction?

**Faculty Support**
- What support services will instructors need in the design and development of the courses?

  - Project management assistance
  - Instructional design assistance
  - Graphic design assistance
  - Media assistance
  - Programming assistance
  - Digital Library assistance
  - Orientation to best practices in teaching online
  - Technical training

- Will the assistance be provided through the school or centrally through the university?
Faculty Issues
- What will be the criteria used for faculty workload and compensation in designing a distance course?
- How will the issue of intellectual property or ownership of course content be addressed?
- How will the design and delivery of this program/course affect the reward/tenure system for faculty?

Development of Instructional Materials
- What criteria will be used for deciding the media and technologies to be used for instructional materials?
- What procedure will be undertaken concerning compliance with copyright law and fair use guidelines?

Library and Research Issues
- Are the resources needed to meet course or program learning objectives readily available to distance students through the university library?
- What provisions will be made for appropriate levels of instruction and orientation to using these library resources (databases, online reserve, searching) from a distance?

Technical Requirements
- What will be the technical requirements (hardware, software, skills) for students in the course?

Course Delivery
- Is the technology to be used to deliver the program/course reliable and secure?
- What provisions will be made for keeping the course delivery technology reasonably up-to-date?
- What provisions will be made for testing security and student identity, if applicable?
- What additional staffing requirements may be necessary to administer this program/course?

Program/Course Evaluation
- How will the program/course be evaluated for its effectiveness in meeting the needs of the target students and achieving intended learning outcomes?
- What provisions will be made for incorporating evaluative feedback into revising the program/course?
5. Student Administration

Admission & Registration
· If applicable, what criteria will be used for admitting students into the program?
· How will distance students be admitted into the program if they are not currently enrolled at Tufts?
· Will financial aid assistance be available to these distance students?

Student Issues
· How will the student acquire the textbook and course materials (coursepacks, videos, software)?
· Will students have realistic access to a technical help desk during hours when it will be most needed (evenings, weekends)?
· Will any university counseling or student advisement support be available to distance students?
Online Articles and Resources

The following list of articles and resources are not meant to be comprehensive but rather a selective list to help guide your thinking on the following distance education issues.

Accreditation Issues

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) Monographs on Quality Assurance and Distance Learning
http://www.chea.org/Research/index.cfm#qualityassurance

Accreditation and Assuring Quality in Distance Learning
http://www.chea.org/Research/Accred-Distance-5-9-02.pdf?pubID=246

“This report describes the scope and impact of distance learning on higher education today. It identifies the primary challenges that distance learning poses for accreditation and describes the thoughtful and comprehensive response to date of the accrediting community to assure quality in distance learning”.

Distance Learning: Academic and Political Challenges for Higher Education Accreditation

“The focus of this monograph is how distance learning challenges some fundamentals of the academic work and the politics of American higher education—thereby challenging some related features of quality assurance and self-regulation that are at the heart of national, regional, and specialized accreditation”.

Copyright Policies

Tufts University Policy On Fair Use of Copyrighted Materials
http://www.library.tufts.edu/fairuse/

Information about online materials can be found in the FAQ section
http://www.library.tufts.edu/fairuse/faqIndex.html

CopyOwn: A resource on copyright ownership for the higher education community

Information on the site states that, “This Web site and the underlying research is devoted to understanding the emerging conflicts over copyright ownership within the higher education community and seek to find appropriate solutions that everyone can live with”.

Costing Distance Education

*Determining the Costs of Online Courses*
http://webpages.marshall.edu/~morgan16/onlinecosts/

This is an interactive web site that was developed at Marshall University “to aid in revealing those areas that must be considered and those costs involved” in offering online courses.

*Is Distance Learning Worth It? Helping to Determine the Costs of Online Courses*

This is Brian Morgan’s capstone paper that led to developing the *Determining the Costs* web site. 125 pgs

Institutional Leadership

*Institutional Readiness*

*Distance Education Readiness Checklist*
http://www.adec.edu/ideal/iric-d_checklist.html

The answers to these questions can help institutions determine how prepared they are to develop and deliver distance education.

*Distributed Learning and Institutional Restructuring*

This 1999 Educause Review article by Brian L. Hawkins, then President of EDUCAUSE, asserts, “Before an institution pursues the development of a distance learning or distributed learning program, it needs to make a number of decisions regarding the marketplace and to define a clear business plan and strategy”.

Intellectual Policy

*Intellectual Property Policies for a New Learning Environment*
http://www.center.rpi.edu/PewSym/mono2.html

This monograph from the Pew Learning and Technology Program reports on a Pew Symposium that brought together a group of fourteen higher education leaders to discuss this topic. The focus for the discussion was on the development and ownership of online courses and course materials. At the symposium, participants discussed four cases, each chosen to raise awareness of the issues and to stimulate discussion.
Market Segment

The Changing Landscape of Distance Education: What micro-market segment is right for you?
http://www.syllabus.com/article.asp?id=6474

This article was sent to all symposium attendees to read prior to the event. Judith Boettcher, the Executive Director for the Corporation for Research and Educational Networking (CREN), provides an overview of which distance learning initiatives have been successful and which have faded in the current Web-based environment.

Online Student Services

Guide to Developing Online Student Services
http://www.wiche.edu/telecom/resources/publications/guide/guide.htm

The Guide to Developing Online Student Services is designed to help higher education institutions develop effective online approaches for delivering student support services. It includes:

· General tips for designing effective online student services
· Brief discussions on a range of student support services, especially the needs of online and distant learners
· Guidelines for basic good practice in delivering these services via the Internet
· Examples of some institutions that use the Internet to offer students a variety of opportunities for self-help and customized services in addition to providing information and electronic forms online

Quality Principles and Best Practices in Online Learning

Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs

The eight regional accrediting commissions collectively, through their national organization the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC), contracted with the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET) to develop Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs, which “provides a comprehensive and demanding expression of what is considered current best practice”.

You can read it on the web at http://www.accjc.org/best_practicesforelectronically_.htm

Or download Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs (55K) in PDF format:
http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/resources/electronic_degrees/

American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC) Guiding Principles for Distance Learning
http://www.adec.edu/admin/papers/distance-learning_principles.html

The ADEC provides 4 basic principles for the development of distance learning with suggestions for implementation.
Principles of Good Practice for Electronically Offered Academic Degree and Certificate Programs -- Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications project
http://www.wiche.edu/telecom/projects/balancing/principles.htm

These Principles are the product of a Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WECT) project, Balancing Quality and Access: Reducing State Policy Barriers to Electronically Delivered Higher Education Programs. WECT is a program at WICHE, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.

The three-year project, supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), is designed to foster an interstate environment that encourages the electronic provision of quality higher education programs across state lines.

Good Teaching is Good Teaching: An emerging set of guiding principles and practices for the design and development of distance education – Larry Ragan

This 1999 article that appeared in Cause/Effect was written by Larry Ragan, Director of Instructional Design and Development for Penn State's distance learning program and World Campus initiative. Ragan, one of the presenters at the Distance Education Symposium, describes a set of principles and practices developed by faculty from three universities who were involved in designing distance education programs.

Teaching at an Internet Distance: the Pedagogy of Online Teaching and Learning
Report from a 1998-1999 University of Illinois Faculty Seminar

In response to faculty concern about the implementation of technology for teaching, a year-long faculty seminar was convened during the 1998-99 academic year at the University of Illinois. The seminar group met throughout 1998-99 to “study the pedagogy of online learning, to examine what made teaching to be good teaching, whether in the classroom or online, and to suggest how online teaching and learning can be done with high quality at the University of Illinois”.

Quality On The Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-Based Distance Education

This report, commissioned by the National Education Association, the nation's largest professional association of higher education faculty, and Blackboard Inc., a leading Internet education company, examines case studies of six colleges and universities that provide Internet-based degree programs.

The Benchmarks cover the following topics:

- Institutional Support
- Course Development
- Teaching/Learning
- Course Structure
- Student Support
- Faculty Support
- Evaluation & Assessment

Download the PDF document here: http://www.ihep.com/Pubs/PDF/Quality.pdf
Research on Distance Education and Online Learning

What's the Difference? A Review of Contemporary Research on the Effectiveness of Distance Learning in Higher Education

This highly critical 1999 Institute for Higher Education Policy report on the credibility of research on the effectiveness of distance learning was commissioned by the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association.

Download the 48 page PDF report here:  http://www.ihep.com/Pubs/PDF/Difference.pdf

The Difference Frenzy and Matching Buckshot with Buckshot
http://ts.mivu.org/default.asp?show=article&id=459

This criticism of the findings of the What's the Difference? report asserts: “By failing to unpack the real questions embedded in their assertion, their fundamental premise for evaluating the research on distance education seems overly simplistic.”

Teaching in a Web Based Distance Learning Environment: An Evaluation Summary Based on Four Courses
http://crlt.indiana.edu/workpapers.html

The Center for Research on Learning and Technology at Indiana University conducted an evaluation of four online courses offered by an academic school at another major university. This report represents a summary of general findings and recommendations from the course evaluations. The primary criteria used for evaluating the courses were the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) which guide teaching and learning in the School.