

**Chapter XIII**

A Case Study in Managing a Distance Education Consortium

Vicky A. Seehusen

Colorado Electronic Community College, USA

This chapter describes the unique distance education consortium called CCCOnline developed by the Community Colleges of Colorado System (CC of C). CC of C is comprised of 14 Colorado Community Colleges and delivers courses, certificates and degrees to more than 250,000 students per year. The CCCOnline consortium, managed by the Colorado Electronic Community College (CECC), provides centralized management of faculty and curriculum and the consortial member colleges provide most of the student services to their students enrolled in the program.

This chapter traces the organizational evolution of CCCOnline. CCCOnline was very much a “top-down” creation. It was also built very quickly. The creators of CCCOnline believed that speed was necessary to get educational offerings online and that internal relationships could be dealt with later. Neuhauser, Bender, and Stromberg (2000) echo this belief. They state that adding an e-business to traditional business creates a parallel culture. Furthermore, they believe that, at present, many consumers seem to accept that new products will have a few bugs and that the key is to figure out how to deliver speed and quality over the long run.

At the time CCCOnline was created, there was little information about designing online distance education consortia. Witherspoon (1996) had compiled a planner’s casebook that included real world experiences of a

number of universities and colleges that had created distance education courses or programs. Dixon (1996) had compiled a guide for students that includes chapters on quality in distance education and what to expect in a virtual classroom. Porter (1997) had endeavored to give practical advice on putting together effective programs and courses, including a checklist for course design and evaluation. All of these books were useful but only barely prepared CECC for issues, challenges, problems and confrontations to come.

In retrospect, CECC's lack of knowledge of the potential difficulties might have been a good thing, because the management team proceeded without fear of the difficulties ahead.

CECC staff didn't plan for every contingency and consequently development was not stalled. The CECC staff plugged along, without complete awareness of the difficulties of trying to merge the instructional and student services policies of 14 colleges. CECC didn't even know how to go about improving its awareness and how to best work with the colleges. Every activity the CECC management team undertook to educate these colleges about the workings of the centralized management team and the program policies and procedures became an activity that educated the management team. CECC soon recognized that each college, while part of the same system, still had individual policies and processes that had to be taken into account.

Over time, intra and intercollegiate teams and committees have been created to facilitate governance and management of the program and to deliver high-quality instructional and student services. These committees and teams allow all the member colleges to have a voice in guiding program management and the future direction. The committees and teams strive to be inclusive and often call upon subject matter experts from other parts of the college(s) to solve problems or create new online educational approaches. These teams and committees act as connecting agents back to their college constituents and improve information flow between the constituents and the management team.

A CASE STUDY IN MANAGING A DISTANCE EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

CCOnline is a unique consortial approach to distance education created in September 1997 by the Community Colleges of Colorado (hereinafter referred to as "CC of C"). CC of C oversees 13 NCA-accredited Colorado community colleges and one nonaccredited community college called Colorado Electronic Community College (CECC). Together, these colleges serve almost 250,000 Colorado students annually.

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