Chapter 12

Managing Growth of an Online Program through Policy and Mainstreaming: A Case Study

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At a time when higher education is struggling to provide educational services to students on traditional campuses, many institutions are experiencing growth in the online degree programs that they provide. This case study looks at one institution’s effort to deal with rapid growth in online education while maintaining academic integrity and quality in program delivery; managing program growth through the development and use of policy and procedures.

BACKGROUND

Troy University is a multi-campus university established in 1887. The decade of the 1950s developed the University’s long relationship with the United States Military, as extension courses were offered on nearby bases, first at Fort Rucker, near Dothan, and later at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery. A separate Troy State College teaching center was established at Fort Rucker in 1961, which evolved into the present-day Dothan Campus. A similar center, begun at Maxwell Air Force Base in 1965, led to the creation of the present-day Montgomery Campus. These programs were the forerunners of the Troy University’s Global Campus now with more than 60 sites and programs in 14 U.S. states and 25 countries. Distance education programs started developing on the Alabama campuses and within the regions of Global campus in 1998. When Troy State University merged into Troy University in 2005 one of the strategic decisions was to establish the eCampus to merge the online programs under one unit.

Troy University’s eCampus has experienced a 47% enrollment increase since being stood up in Fall of 2006. It is critical to manage program growth to ensure the quality of education the students receive. Growing too fast without improving procedures, developing appropriate policy, and managing quality of the program, students educational success cannot
be assured. An administrator must be aware of the issues and environment surrounding distance education program. This chapter reviews the circumstances which provide for managed growth of a distance education program, based on policy and supported by literature.

**SETTING THE STAGE**

This case is about how one University has worked to manage the growth of a large online program. The Troy University eCampus offers 21 online degree programs and in the three years since its establishment, eCampus has integrated all the online program delivery across Troy University and worked to develop student services and quality assurance of the program.

eCampus is based on five functional units: student services, academics, educational technology, instructional design and educational resources, and quality assurance. Within these functional units is where all best practices are met.

Student services assists students from admission through graduation and within the unit students have access to professional counselors, administrative counselors and faculty advisors to work with throughout their programs. Once admitted to Troy University online learner student services are decentralized throughout Global Campus. There are over 60 sites throughout the United States and internationally where students can go to directly to see student services support staff, if desired. Students are assigned to a home location by their address and then assigned to a Troy University Global Campus site based on that home location. This provides a more student-centered and personal touch to student services.

Academics is the unit which works with the Colleges of the university and the faculty. The Director of Academics works as a liaison, facilitator, mediator, ombudsman and initiator with the academic units of University. As developed in best practices, the academic units have control over the programs offered online to make sure the breadth, depth, and rigor of the online programs match that of the programs in the traditional classroom. Another key function is working with the academic units to certify faculty for teaching in the online programs. Other functions within Academics include workflow for scheduling, textbooks, and testing.

Educational technology includes the planning, implementation, and contract oversight for all educational technology initiatives with workflows in Blackboard and Securexam remote proctor systems. The unit is also responsible for web page design and online student service forms. All student and faculty technical support comes from Educational Technology staff and for faculty from staff within Instructional Design and Educational Resources.

Instructional Design and Educational Resources (ID&ER) is where technology and training meet. Faculty development training is conducted within this unit. All faculty members teaching online must go through training for the LMS and basic instruction design, known as TOP I (Teaching Online Proficiency). There is other training available to faculty, TOP II and specialized software training. The faculty development coordinator sets up training modules online for students to learn how to use the LMS and software. ID&ER is responsible for coordinating the eCourse redesign project where courses are redesigned for online delivery.

Quality Assurance is an ongoing process responsible for review, analysis, and implementation for improving the quality of online education meeting best practices and standards. Quality works across all units and the quality review of courses is now conducted on a regular basis.

How did eCampus work to establish a quality program that can manage growth? Through the development of policies and procedures; this case is based on a review of literature to support the work that eCampus has completed over three years.
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