Penn State's World Campus©:
Mainstreaming a Virtual Campus Initiative

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INTRODUCTION

Pennsylvania State University's World Campus**©** enrolled its first students in January 1998. The World Campus is one of several "virtual campus" initiatives within higher education in the United States and abroad. Penn State built the World Campus as its 25th campus, fully integrating it into the mainstream of the University's academic life as part of an institution-wide web of innovation. It completed its first full year of operation in June 1999, initially offering courses in 10 credit and noncredit certificate and degree programs in some of Penn State's most highly regarded disciplines. At that time, the World Campus had admitted 861 students and generated 896 individual course enrollments. It had also attracted national attention as a "bellwether institution" in the emerging online learning field.

The idea of a "virtual university" has moved distance education into the mainstream of higher education. The creation of the World Campus illustrates the complexity of planning a significant technology-based innovation directed at positioning a major comprehensive university to meet the need for lifelong education in an information society. This case study provides a detailed examination of the strategies used in the development of a distance education campus and the lessons learned in the first year of World Campus operation.

> ## CASE QUESTIONS
> - How does a major, comprehensive university create a community of interest to launch and sustain a large-scale innovation in online learning?
> - How can the business practices and academic policies of the institution be adapted to facilitate the full integration of technology-based distance education?
> - How can use of technology to serve off-campus students be developed in a way that stimulates use of technology throughout the academic program?

CASE NARRATIVE

Background

The Pennsylvania State University has been a pioneer in distance education since 1892 when it was one of three American universities that initiated collegiate-level correspon-

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dence study in response to the development of Rural Free Delivery. In the century that followed, Penn State experimented with many new technologies. The basic correspondence study model evolved into a multiple-media system with the addition of audio and video cassettes, CD-ROM, computer software as new media for delivering course content, and the use of broadcast and cable television to reach new audiences at home. The fax and email, which now complement "snail mail" in the delivery of lessons and assignments, greatly improve the speed and effectiveness of instructional feedback. At the same time, the University has been a pioneer in other kinds of telecommunications-based distance education. As early as the 1960s, the University used an internal television cable system to deliver accounting and engineering classes to multiple classrooms. In the 1980s, it joined the Appalachian Educational Satellite Program and was a founding member of the National University Teleconferencing Network which experimented with the use of satellite and, later, telephone-based interactive video in order to reach students at distant locations and to distribute courses to multiple campuses.

By the 1990s, there were two distinctly different approaches to distance education. Correspondence study offered students significant flexibility and control over the time, place, and pace of instruction. At the same time, it did not allow students to interact with each other. The "distributed classroom," which used satellite and other technologies to extend the classroom to distant sites, gave students the ability to interact spontaneously with their instructor and other students, but it limited their control over the time, place, and pace of study. Correspondence study had become an accepted means for universities to extend undergraduate courses; on the other hand, the distributed classroom was generally used for professional graduate study, especially in engineering. These appeared to be diverging methods. The development of the World Wide Web was to change the direction of distance education. The Web promised not only to give the student the flexibility associated with correspondence study but also, at the same time, access to a highly interactive learning community.

In 1992, a University-wide task force reviewed the status of Penn State's distance education programs and recommended that the distance education function be moved into the mainstream of the University's academic life. Citing changes in society's need for education as a result of the impact of technology on the workplace, William Kelly, associate professor of theater and integrative arts and chair of the task force, noted:

> It was astounding how clearly the task force believed that distance education must become one of the central strategies in the University's future plan, if the University is to seriously hold on to its national and international preeminence in teaching, research, and service.

The task force recommended six actions that would permit Penn State to:

> […] advance and support the use of distance education across the full range of academic pursuits and endeavors and move rapidly and aggressively to develop programs of the highest academic quality within each of its constituent units.

As a result of the task force report, the existing distance education program was organized into a larger Department of Distance Education under the Vice President for Outreach and Cooperative Extension. A University-wide Distance Education Advisory

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